Question: Where to start? Well, SLU-Madrid is not a conventional destination for one’s degree, even as we check all the boxes and then some as educators here. So, what was your trajectory to Madrid—what were the pushes and pulls that propelled you here?

Abi: Everyone thought I was crazy going to school in Madrid. After spending a summer in Peru as a 16-year-old, I knew that I wanted to pursue my bachelor’s degree outside of the United States. I was craving something different, and SLU Madrid was the answer. I met a former student who told me that SLU Madrid would check all my boxes – top-notch educators, diverse degree programs, international classmates, a campus in the heart of Madrid – and he was right. It was a difficult
decision to leave my family and friends in the United States, but I was ready for a real adventure and immediately knew I made the right choice.

**Question:** Graduating college is quite difficult for most people—what is one supposed to do, likely the first time outside of the structures of school? However, you have handled this transition with aplomb: So, tell us, what are you doing now?

**Abi:** Graduating college is a big change and was not easy for me. The thought of returning to the United States, reestablishing my social network, and starting a career was very overwhelming. When I returned home to Connecticut, I immediately started searching and applying for jobs. I cast a wide net – I wanted to see what opportunities were out there for a Communications and International Studies double major who was fluent in Spanish and had a passion for Latin America.

Four months and many interviews later, I landed my dream job at AmeriCares, a Connecticut-based emergency response and global health nonprofit organization that works to improve health outcomes in communities with limited resources around the world. For the first two years, I worked as an Associate on the Institutional Relations team, which is responsible for securing financial resources to support AmeriCares humanitarian assistance work. About a year ago, I was promoted to a Senior Associate on the Latin American and Caribbean Partnerships team. In this position, I travel about 40-percent of my time to Latin America and the Caribbean, where I coordinate with local partners to deliver in-kind medical aid, as well as design and implement emergency management and public health programs.

**Question:** What are some of the upsides of working in the Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) sector?

**Abi:** There are a lot of benefits of working in the NGO sector. The first, and most important thing for me, is the amount of personal fulfilment I get from my job. I am passionate about the people and communities I
work for, and I work very closely with local health providers in these countries. Whether I am in a rural health outpost in Honduras or at my desk in Connecticut, I can confidently say I love my job. The second thing I love about working in the NGO sector is the amount of responsibility and independence you are given as a young professional. I realized very early on that the amount of responsibility and ownership of projects I had at my job far exceeded that of my friends at for-profit institutions. The sector encourages you to be resourceful and creative, and I love that.

**Question:** We are fond of touting a COMM degree as liberal arts immersion that prepares and enables a person to do many things (and not just with respect to employment) through making all knowledge one’s province (to paraphrase Francis Bacon). Can you think of particular ways that the substance of the COMM degree has helped you?

**Abi:** I totally agree. I have my COMM degree to thank for my diverse background and interests that brought me to where I am today—both professionally and personally. Like many people, when I started college, I wasn’t sure what I wanted to do or what field I wanted to work in. I wanted a degree with flexibility and I knew a COMM degree would be a great foundation for a wide variety of careers and industries. My classes and experiences at SLU Madrid taught me a truly priceless skill—how to be a good communicator. I communicate confidently, thoughtfully and clearly. I am comfortable with public speaking and I am sensitive of my audience and the potential roadblocks between us. I have a keen eye towards media and what messages are being sent. Although it may sound small, being an effective communicator is an invaluable skill. In job interviews, contract negotiations, project pitches and board meetings, communication is everything!
Question: We always assume that being located in Madrid is one of our distinct advantages. How did you see location as making a difference in your education—either as it was happening or in retrospect?

Abi: Madrid was the backdrop to some of the happiest years of my life. I loved the small streets, the cafes, the plazas, the museums and the bookstores—the million places you could lose yourself for an entire afternoon. Like many, I found history and culture on every corner in Madrid. I connected the lessons from my classes to the people I met and places I travelled to. More than anything, the life and energy of Madrid transcended into my own personal life. I became more passionate about life itself, more serious about my education and the time I dedicate to it, and much more interested society as a whole.