When I began planning this project I didn't know what to expect. I had not read Don Quixote and I had not been to Spain; thus, I had little knowledge of the subjects I intended to spend two weeks investigating. My thesis, that Don Quixote was a novel about Spain, was inspired in part by critical works I had looked into and in part by mere suspicion as to the book's apparent universal appeal. I set out to uncover the novel's other side, well aware that a good deal of my energy would be spent first on introducing myself to the subject.

In this sense, the focus of my Freshman Monroe Project was on my personal edification. All three of the objectives I'd stated in my proposal showed this focus. As I wrote then, I'd intended to practice my Spanish and introduce myself to an important piece of literature both personally and academically. I had little idea what to expect from the academic and practical sides of the project. Reflecting now, I can say that I overestimated my Spanish skills and the strength of the connections I would find between Don Quixote and La Mancha. I had too much confidence in government-sponsored route. One might say that I was optimistic and naive.

Perhaps my attitude was appropriate. The methodology was neither fixed nor scientific and was not constrained by my original expectations. My investigation took the form of a journey, and as such I had to constantly adapt my plans to my circumstances and new knowledge; the project grew with me. The original plan, as reported in my proposal, was to spend only six days traveling and to use the rest of the time for reading, preparation, and analyzing results. I was to set out from Seville, where I would be returning to study in September. Although I had not specified in writing, I had expected to travel mostly on foot.

The methodology itself was, in principle, quite simple. I would read Don Quixote in Spanish and critical works on the subject and prepare a set of questions to keep in mind while traveling. On the ground I would take notes (also in Spanish) on my observations
with an eye to the previously prepared questions. My notes, and the original text, would then be analyzed to write an essay on whether Spain—or what I had seen of it—could be considered a subject of the novel.

My plans had changed significantly by the time the project began and continued to change during the project. I set out on August 26th from Toledo and headed east on the first section of the "Ruta de Don Quijote." I spent ten days traveling by bicycle or on foot (when I had a flat tire), on both the Route and on highways; one day in Villacañas, and one day traveling by bus. On September 3rd I planned to spend only one more day with my bike, heading west, but I ran into a Don Quixote expert who advised me to visit the lakes of Ruidera and Villanueva de los Infantes to the east. I took his advice, set out the next morning in the opposite direction, and added 74 kilometers to my route.

I kept my pre-prepared questions in mind, but spent more time reading than I had intended and used this re-reading of the novel to form the basis of my investigation. I took notes on anything in the novel which seemed to be a comment about Spain, and on anything I saw which could be related to the novel. I also took general notes on Spain—what people wore, how they lived, or anything that seemed different or interesting. I supplemented my notes with photographs. I processed my notes into lists of comments about Spain which I had confirmed and episodes in the book which I had learned to read, allegorically or otherwise, as commentaries on Spain. I used these lists as the basis for an essay, in Spanish, arguing that Don Quixote can be read as a national novel.

In the introduction to my essay, I stated (in Spanish): "Although Don Quixote says much about human nature, it also deals with Spanish identity and the state of the empire and shows a deep understanding of the Spanish people and landscape." In this sense, my results were positive; I did not change the direction of my thesis, although I had changed
some details. I had not expected to deal as much as I did with the history of Spain; I had
imagined that the type of people and the physical geography I encountered, along with the
experience of traveling, would be the whole of the argument. I found that the novel was,
after all, very psychological.

In another sense, the "results" of a journey are the story and the impact on the
traveler. I've had a number of rare experiences and have grown in confidence and my
understanding and knowledge of Spain. I am more familiar with Don Quixote and with
myself. My experiences of crossing cultural and linguistic barriers to interact with
Spaniards have, I believe, intrinsic value and could thus be considered results in of
themselves. As an additional result, this time along a more academic bent, I ended up
publishing a collection of 27 photographs related to Don Quixote in the REALIA Project.

One final result of this project, "La Ruta de don Quijote: Cervantes and Castilla-La
Mancha," has been to lay the foundation for a future project, should the opportunity to
undertake it arise. While traveling through Spain I encountered a surprising number of
portrayals of don Quixote and other elements of the novel in statues and flat metalwork,
paintings, quotes, museums and other attractions, and conversations with Spaniards. It
would be interesting to analyze these portrayals and comment on their characteristics, their
particular distortions or focuses or views, and to use them as a window on modern Spain
and its various cultural producers.