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Up-close View of University of Navarra

Intrigued by "The Newman Guide to Choosing a Catholic College" recommendation of this university for Americans, journalist Adam Wilson recently visited it and gives his impressions.

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By Adam Wilson

The latest edition of *The Newman Guide to Choosing a Catholic College*

recommends two universities for the first time: University of Navarra in Pamplona, Spain, and Holy Angel University in Angeles City, Philippines. Both institutions offer faithfully Catholic international experiences and are accessible to students who only speak English.

Over the past year, we visited both campuses, conducted many interviews with university staff and professors, and analyzed the universities' dedication to Catholic identity. We were highly impressed with these institutions and are pleased to recommend them to Catholic families. In this essay, we'll give the inside scoop on the University of Navarra.

A corporate work of Opus Dei, the University of Navarra started in 1952 as a law school with 48 students and four professors. It has expanded over the years into a contemporary

institution offering dozens of majors to more than 10,000 students, and yet still remains moored to its founding principles. Sixty percent of professors are Opus Dei members, and 85 percent are practicing Catholics—remarkable numbers for a university of its size.

But University of Navarra offers a diverse array of majors. And, increasingly, the University is attracting students from all over the world.

Americans seeking a solid Catholic education overseas will find University of Navarra an attractive option. Students who don't speak of a word of Spanish can take courses taught in English for the first two years in the University's schools of economics, humanities and social sciences, communication, sciences, and engineering.

The University had 25 American students enrolled in spring 2016, and it is hoping to attract many more in the coming years. The American students I spoke with had high praise for the University and its Catholic identity. And they said transitioning to life on this international campus was fairly easy.

As we shared tapas one evening during my visit, some students spoke frankly about their impressions of the University. One theme they touched on repeatedly was Navarra's dedication to forming students to become excellent professionals. They explained how Opus Dei's mission for Christians to sanctify their work informs the University's focus on quality career formation. The benefits of graduating from college with fluency in Spanish and substantial international experience are huge draws for students preparing to enter today's career

force. Still, the University would argue that its high-caliber academic programs are the main attraction.

Academic formation for all students begins with two year-long “Catholic Worldview” courses in ethics and anthropology as part of the core curriculum. The courses study Christianity, faith and reason, and the necessity of God from a philosophical perspective. Students also choose two “Cultural Keys” courses from a variety of options, such as Church History, Recent Papal Thought and Biblical Literature.

There are several academic opportunities available at Navarra that students won’t find at every Catholic university. For instance, pre-medicine students can gain first-hand experience at the University’s state-of-the-art research hospital. Communications students can obtain the most highly ranked journalism

and audio-visual communications degrees in Spain. And theology and philosophy students can take courses from a Vatican-approved ecclesiastical faculty.

The University attracts a wide variety of students. Many attend because of Navarra's academic prestige within Spain rather than because of its mission. Because on-campus housing is available for only about 15 percent of students, the majority live in the many flats and apartments surrounding campus. Outside of class it is common to find many students taking advantage of the nightlife in Pamplona rather than the many cultural opportunities available on campus.

However, for those students who choose to live on campus, the experience provides a well-rounded formation. Each residence provides students with a host of spiritual,

social, and cultural activities. The *colegios* host academic debates, classical concerts and art exhibitions on a regular basis.

Meals taken in the *colegios* always begin and end with prayer. Following lunch — which is the main meal of the day and taken around 2 p.m. — students make their way as a group to the chapel for a few moments of prayer. Many students who live off campus are drawn to this vibrant community life and frequently take part in the many opportunities in the*colegios*.

One student jokingly told me that there's a Mass said at every hour of the day. It's barely an exaggeration, though, as every residence and nearly every building on campus has its own chapel. The University even offers several spiritual opportunities for English-speakers, including

weekly Mass and Confession, Theology on Tap, and other activities.

The group of American students I spoke with seemed very happy with their decision to study at University of Navarra. They were interested in their majors and appeared well engaged in campus life.

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