

## Pierce on the Camino

*By Prof. Douglas Challenger*

**M**artin Buber said, "All journeys have secret destinations of which the traveler is unaware." This beautifully describes the many profound and unanticipated lessons students learn from travel and studying abroad.

At Franklin Pierce, students have available an even more transformative study abroad experience in the Camino program that began in 2011. That is when my partner Laurie Stamell and I led the first group of students on a semester-long 800-mile walk on the ancient European pilgrimage trail known as the Camino de Santiago. The program now runs every other year; we will lead a second trip during the fall semester of 2013.

Before the walking part of the program begins, students study Spanish and French intensively and take a seminar on the history of the Camino, the anthropology of pilgrimage, and the sociological reasons

for its modern renaissance. This year, these courses will take place in August in the heart of the Basque country of Spain in the city of San Sebastian. Then, for two and half months we become pilgrims, walking from Cahors, France, through some of the most beautiful medieval villages of France, over the Pyrenees Mountains into Spain, and across the entire northern part of the Iberian Peninsula to the Atlantic Ocean, ending at an outcropping that ancient people thought was "the end of the earth" – today's seaport town of Finisterre.

When students return home, they write an extensive essay on their travels and the pilgrimage experience. They receive a semester's worth of credit toward their Franklin Pierce degree for their successful participation in the program.

Semester-long walks in Europe have been a part of Franklin Pierce since 1969, two of which I helped lead in 2005 and 2006. Inspired by the transformative experiences



of these walks, I found the Camino and walked it myself in 2007. Based on that experience, I began to create a new walk/study abroad program for Franklin Pierce.

Only two years old, the Camino program is unique in the study abroad landscape of higher education in America and has already attracted external funding. Inspired by the depth and ambition of this innovative curricular offering, FairPoint Communications has provided a significant financial gift to help support Camino student scholarships and faculty development in 2013.

In this short, award-winning video, Franklin Pierce students describe the unexpected "secret destinations" that the Camino journey provided them in 2011:

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=NVsvdtxsj2A](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NVsvdtxsj2A).

