

Intern WALL OF FAME



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My internship experience in Quito, Ecuador was one of the best experiences of my youth. I encourage any FSU student considering following in my footsteps to do an internship abroad or semester abroad. Traveling and living abroad are two life experiences that will greatly affect you. They will help you grow and mature as a person. They are real world experiences that will help you become more independent and help you find out more about who you are; develop and discover more of your identity. These are not experiences that you are meant to merely survive or get by. These are not like, what I call, the anxious college life trap. Unfortunately in my college experience I have seen more than a few of my fellow classmates fall into this anxiety trap; surviving college class-to-class, homework-to-homework, exam-to-exam; excessively stressing over it all. Traveling and living abroad are experiences to thrive on, to excel at, and to live to the fullest free of this anxiety. Take advantage of any such opportunities. You will not regret it, I promise you.

I learned many things from my internship at el CEntro de la Niña Trabajadora (CENIT), meaning the Center of the Working Girl (check out their website: <http://cenitecuador.org/>). Principally, I worked on developing my fluency in speaking and writing Spanish. Also, a part of my learning goals was to develop an understanding of Ecuadorian culture and of the value system of the children with whom I was working.

My internship experience took place in one of the more dangerous neighborhoods of southern Quito. I worked in CENIT's Street Outreach program with other volunteers from all over the world. The main idea of this program is for groups of volunteers to go out into the markets and work with children (ages 4-11 roughly). I worked in a group of six volunteers in Camal Market. Because of their financial situations, these children work with their parents in the markets selling whatever they have to sell. Our job was to corral these children away from their parents for a few hours every day for songs, dances, games, and educational activities. The idea is to give the children a break from working so they can be kids and play and have fun with other Camal kids.

The first thing we always did when we got all the kids together in a group was wash our hands with soap and water. The second we did was brush everyone's teeth. These are meant to get the kids into a routine of cleanliness. Only after completing these would we then begin the activities planned for the day. We would usually begin by getting everyone in a big circle for dances, songs, and games, usually outside. Then we would go inside for the educational activity of the day, which usually followed a general weekly theme. The kids love to do anything that involves drawing, coloring, painting, cutting and pasting etc. Consequently, we usually went home messy and with glue in our hair.

One of the best parts of this experience was meeting other young volunteers from all over the world. Although, more than half the volunteers were from Germany; many of them doing an entire year of social service with CENIT. They were an awesome group of people. Every weekend or holiday we would have

some kind of party or celebration, mostly just to enjoy life with good company and good food. Everyone would bring their own dish to pass around, usually unique to his or her country and heritage. Depending on what festivity we were planning, everyone would bring a unique bread (for panfest), salad (for saladfest), dessert (for dessertfest) or something the like for a barbeque. Those were great times and great memories.

There were also volunteers from Holland, England, Scotland, Ireland, Chile, Sweden, Denmark, Austria, Mexico, Argentina and Switzerland (to name a few). Most Americans at CENIT came from California and there were also a few Canadians from right across the bridge in Toronto. Many of the South American and European volunteers did not speak much English. This forced me to use Spanish every day with almost everyone. I kept up my writing fluency by keeping a journal entirely in Spanish, writing almost daily.

Working with children, you learn fast. Your speaking skills pick up especially quick. Picking up on their value system takes a great deal longer and much more effort. I must admit that even after a full semester I still don't get it all. One thing I did get was that family means everything. Also national pride, and especially Quiteño pride (that is, Quito pride), are very important to the kids. Every kid I worked with in Camal knew the Ecuadorian national anthem, the national colors plus the Quito flag colors and lyrical rhymes to remember both sets.

As far as this experience goes with helping me reach my careers goals, I have discovered that I prefer to work with older children. I've known that I want to teach for years. This experience has shown me that I prefer intellectual interaction from older and more mature kids. Also, I discovered that I would not mind teaching in a bilingual setting.

This internship experience definitely gets 12 out of 10. I highly recommend this experience to any students looking for a Latin American travel experience. It's not just a travel experience; it's a living abroad experience. The travel experience is important for students to have for personal growth; to get out and see the world for a more full life experience. Living abroad, settling down in one place for a longer while, getting to know a city well, getting to know locals well, developing a relationship with the people of a community; all this is an even more fulfilling experience than general travel. You will grow so much as an individual and as a person.

My advice for any students considering a similar experience to mine (semester abroad etc.) is this: keep an open mind and be adventurous. Explore your surrounding in your free time; get a feel for the neighborhood. Get to know a local family, it's awesome. Also, do a lot of writing. If you're experiencing a lot, a journal can really help you keep track of things. In your later years you will really appreciate keeping a journal now. Another variation of the same idea, take lots of pictures and write small captions for them, a photo journal.

Take part in local festivities; learn to dance (so glad I learned salsa). In the house where I lived (called Casa Oriente), I did an exchange of English lessons for salsa lessons with the owners oldest son Rubén. The lessons started out with just Rubén, my fiancé and I. Over the weeks, other travelers in the house joined the lessons. The house has over a dozen apartments, mostly for travelers, with a minimum stay of a couples months. Eventually we developed a small salsa community, and on occasion we would test our skills in one of Quito's many salsatecs or clubs. Upon leaving, Rubén said that he would continue to do the lessons every week with the Casa Oriente community. Happy accidents like this are priceless. These can't be planned or intended to happen, they're just too good. For me, something like this is the icing on the cake, making for a priceless experience and memories and friendships that never fade.

- Al Palmquist