

1/3/2014

My day started off early, and cold. It has been amazing how quickly the time has passed since I applied to this Service Trip early in the semester. The day was one I did not particularly look forward to but understood it was a means to an end. To all day of Yars will result in the realization of the trip that I have been looking forward to all break. I therefore had to entertain myself. I did this through reading and sleeping but the anticipation of the start of the trip makes the time go by slow. We are about to board from El Salvador and I hope to get to Ecuador with a hitch and as quickly as possible.

-Sean

1/3/2014

Today went by very quickly! It's most likely because I slept a lot in the car and plane. It's crazy that we still have another plane ride and car ride before we arrive. I got antsy on the plane because they had to defrost it for almost 3 hours before take off...but other than that it's been a solid day. I'm nervous that I can't talk to anyone from home for 2 weeks! More than that, I am excited to see where we will stay and what we will do. The coolest thing so far was the view from the plane before landing. I was scared we were going to land on the water, actually. Looking forward to an awesome rest of the trip!

-Rachael

1/4/2014

Dear Diary,

Today we traveled from our hotel. Sleeping in was awesome, just what I needed. After breakfast we went into the Iguana Park across the street. The church looked like Notre Dame, and the iguanas were massive! The weather had heated up, and I was beginning to wonder if I'd ever stop sweating profusely on this trip. We headed on to a bus, which was air conditioned (Hallelujah!) The bus ride was long for some people, but for me it was pretty relaxing. Looking out the window, I saw a South America I'd occasionally seen in textbooks. A little unreal to see the banana plantations and the mountains covered in clouds and fog. A few stops aside, we made good time to the hotel. Walking in, it was unreal to see how nice the Hotel is. Kelly and I ran around lime madmen (woman in Kelly's case) trying to keep track of everybody. A quick orientation and a fun dinner, and we held our first trip reflection meeting. We laid down some rules, did some reflection and all our smarties scattered to the wind, ending our first day in Ecuador.

-Jordan

1/5/2014

Right now I'm sitting on the bus leaving the very magical place of Macienda Uzhu pod. It was one of the most peaceful and beautiful places I've ever been. I was truly so grateful and felt so blessed to be able to stay there. From the pool, to the pond, to the stables it was literally the lap of luxury. It's making me more motivated than ever to give back to others and to do service now. Orientation was great because we got to learn about Cuencan culture. Some interesting things I learned about was machismo and how family oriented society is here. I can't wait to use more of my Spanish and see what the rest of the day will bring!

-Maddie Chandler

1/6/2014

Today was our first full day in Cuenca and it was definitely a very full day! We finally saw CEDEL, unpacked our suitcases and got our sleeping situations sorted out – a very big accomplishment I think. We went to the Panama hat factory on the edge of old Cuenca (Cuenca vieja) and I made my first souvenir purchase of the trip! Even though I was feeling a bit ill most of the day, I had so much fun. I truly enjoy all of the people on this trip and every day we have more fun together. I also get more comfortable with my Spanish and interacting with Cuencans every day. Rachael and I were talking last night about how we are a little uncomfortable calling this a “service trip” considering how little we feel like we're working, but then again this is my first trip of this kind. I think every expectation I had for this trip no longer stands, except one: I'm having an amazing time. Part of me really enjoys having all of my expectations be completely wrong. I want to stop having so many plans in my life in general, and this trip is a great step towards that. Tomorrow is our first day at the school and we are all excited to get our hands dirty. We're eager to start helping the Cuenca community and feel like we're finally doing what we came here to do. I can't wait to see what the day brings!

-Jessica K.

1/07/2014

Today was our first day working at the school. Everybody had a truly excellent experience. Personally, I felt considerably nervous upon arrival. Yet the moment I saw how excited and genuinely happy the children were just to have us around them, I felt a powerful energy that has lasted until this very moment. The day was full of hard work and constant rewards. However, there was one moment in particular that will stand out in my mind forever. As I walked back to the campus with Jamel and one of the teachers (having just carried an enormous weight a long distance), the teacher said to me "you will all have pure and wonderful lives because of what you are doing here." That is the greatest reward we could have asked for.

-Sam

1/08/2014

The second day of volunteer work proved to provide significantly different changes than the first. The first day of volunteering, excitement, nervousness, and anticipation had now passed. We now had an understanding of the work we would do and the goals at hand. I started my day laying tile with about 5 other people. It was a fulfilling task because I could tangibly see the progress that had been made on our work. I had time to play with the children during the mid day break and lunch. I learned two things. One I am awful at soccer and two my high school Spanish classes did not take so I was reduced to hand signals and broken words. However, sports and smiles and finger painting no matter how limited made for another amazing day.

-Sean

1/09/2014

This week has just been amazing. Play with kids at the school was fun of course, but I have also had a great time working with the group. Everyone has been bringing positive vibes to the table, which takes my mind off of how tiring this work can be. Also, within just a few days I have made great connections with the kids. At the end of the day, they come up to me and say "Hasta mañana." However, it will be sad when (tomorrow) I can no longer tell them that I will see them the next day. Yeah pretty sad right? But I know that they will remember me and remember the Wu-Tang sign that I taught them. I will remember them by the epic picture that we all took throwing up the Wu-Tang.

"Wu-Tang es por los niños."

-Erik

1/10/2014

Wow! First week of service officially over today. Such a beautiful way to end a great experience. I will always cherish the immense love and acceptance the students and faculty at school gave to us. Of course I cried, but hey what's new? Especially with my emotional self. I was glad to have seen how much progress was made with the tile project and paint. I would have liked to complete it, design the area, and cleaned and set up the chairs and tables, but there was a time constraint and I understood. We did what we can where we can; and we were enough. Also we did a pretty damn good job. To God be the glory for the work we are doing here in Ecuador. Words can't express how grateful I am to have this opportunity...This is only half way through our trip! I look forward to making many more memories here in South America.

-FAB

1/11/2014

Today we had the chance to explore Cajas National Park. Amazingly, the lakes in this park function as the water supply for all of Cuenca and provide the cleanest water in all of Ecuador. This was the first time we have had a chance to see the natural world in depth here in Ecuador. As our guide told us, this country is referred to as "el pais verde" (green country) because it harbors so much life. Seeing the natural beauty of Ecuador give me further insight into the pride people bear for this country. It is a marvelous part of the world and we are so lucky to be here.

-Sam

1/12/2014

Today we went to Ingapirca and it was amazing. The ancient Incan architecture was incredible to see. It amazed me that the people native to Ecuador have been conquered many times by many different people. First, the Canary people were submissive to the Inca. The Inca were submissive to the Europeans, who changed the whole culture of the people who inhabit this area. NOW, it seems like North America and Europe are in control of a significant amount of the culture of these people, as they provide resources that Ecuadorians can obtain. Also, with the native populations becoming less desirable, a certain amount of attention is on the "Western" culture, and how this foreign culture is more appealing to the Ecuadorians. There is no pride in being Ecuadorian because so much emphasis is on other cultures and traditions.

-Madison

Jan. 4, 2014: So today was a day of travel, but it was nice to finally have a few hours in once place to truly begin to process where we are, the beautiful people and places that surrounded

us. For me personally all of today was a bit reminiscent of my time abroad in Costa Rica and arriving at this beautiful hotel in Uzhupud has called to my attention yet again how privileged we are to have the opportunities that we have and share in these experiences together.

I am really excited to be a part of all this. It has been over a year since my last service trip and already I am feeling the thing that I have been missing. I am so excited to watch us all grow as individuals and as a family during our time here. Everyone has a fire and passion for things unknown and new so I am now there in much more to experience ahead.

Jan. 5, 2014: Disclaimer: This is not a poem, just a list of observations

1. The Andres mountains mean sombreros made of clouds.
2. The guinea pigs here may be untrusting of pet owners.
3. The rain in Ecuador is not sad.
4. Graffiti and political messages/satire coats the streets of Cuenca.
5. Our bus driver is one hell of a driver.
6. Sitting next to someone on the bus is sometimes better than sitting alone.
7. People get wacky when they are tired.
8. All juice in Ecuador is delicious!
9. Sean is currently the tallest guy in Cuenca.
10. Felip-POW!
11. It is harder for some people to be themselves and silly and careless—than it is for them to discuss politics. Never discuss politics.
12. “Chendo,” is a favorite Cuencanism but how many of us actually know a joke in Spanish?!
13. Kaitlin kills flies!
14. It is difficult to go to bed but easy to wake up—maybe this is excitement in Cuenca, Ecuador.

Buenas Noches

Jan 6, 2014: Most of all, I'd say I'm excited to meet the youth we'll be working with. I've always been good with kids but I'm anticipating so much more than my usual interactions. This is a beautiful place with genuinely beautiful people, but if that is the case, why am I so worried about acceptance? If I were to tell some of these folks that I too have experienced a level of economic stress that they could relate to, then I fear they'll dismiss my claim with a “mentiroso.” Or that the message would be misinterpreted as though I was faking the funk. Gringo or not, I'm here to help because I know. I know the despair, the apprehension, the struggle of having less. I also know what it's like to smile through it all. I hope that within the universal language of people and the smile I will always provide, that a connection is made, that the stereotype of the affluent American is case aside and life lessons are learned. My fear of rejection here is novel because I feel very much within my element. Hopefully the smile I carry with me will lead the way to a level of understanding that could never have been foreseen.

Jan. 8, 2014: Wow! Six days in Ecuador, which provided a plethora of challenges that I feel like will continue to develop me as the whole group. My amateur Spanish has forced me to limit my ability to truly be myself, which in talking and socializing with people. However, I've learned to utilize context and body language that is a universal language anywhere. I feel like I have learned Spanish better in Ecuador while I am fully immersed in the Ecuadorian culture, instead of a classroom. After visiting El Museo de Pumpango, I have re-fueled my interest in learning Spanish so I could some day hopefully in the near future visit the coast of Ecuador, where Afro-Ecuadorian are found. Former African slaves of Spaniards made Ecuador their home and incorporated African culture with Ecuadorian culture. I would love to meet them and study/research their experience with other African peoples who are settled across the world.

Jan. 9, 2014: First thing this morning I was struck by the terrible feeling that after 21 years I may finally be developing an addiction to coffee. Kelly laughed in my face when I shared my terrible revelation, but Dom was sympathetic as always. After boarding a questionable bus to the school, we arrived and got to work. Jess, Kendra and myself went about clearing a drainage ditch (I was using a machete, like a boss). We worked pretty hard and ended up clearing the ditch around noon, and although we missed a chance to play with the children, it was probably for the best seeing how we were covered in mud and poo. The girls had the great idea of going to the river to wash up. The river was freezing cold, but it was really refreshing and woke me up. We went back up and started working on mixing more cement to lay on a section near the cafeteria. After we'd finished about 2/3 of the project, we braked for lunch. After that we met with some of the kids, and finished up most of the projects we had and went back to the hostel. After a shower, Sean, Sam and I set out to find the legendary Cuban Cigars. After asking directions from a policewoman, a street vendor, and a random old man, we finally found them being sold by a random man along the street. Finally, Sam, Jahmel, Sean and I set down to our well-deserved cigars. All in all a pretty good day.

Jan. 10, 2014: Por Los Niños

Today was our last day at the school which was bittersweet but we have left them with many memories, our service, and kindness and we have gotten that in return! I hope we left an impression on the students especially. I love seeing the smile on their faces and I have never been hugged so much in my life! I am so thankful to be a part of the change we created for them. After the school, we relaxed and went to a dance class which was awesome! We also got a view of the city from the roof top of CEDEI. I can't believe we have been here for a week already. Time really does fly by. Everyone seems tired tonight, but I am excited for our adventure tomorrow to Cajas! I love hiking and I never imagined I would be doing it in Ecuador. I am looking forward to working in our next school and creating even more memories.

Jan. 11, 2014: Mis-understanding, are another seems to have been a driving force behind many of the hidden issues behind our group's dynamic. That is, up until this point, misunderstanding each other was a driving force. After 3 enlightening conversations I've come to the realization that we simply don't know where one another is coming from or the motives behind certain

behaviors. But now that I see this I'm avidly searching for opportunities to get to know my colleagues on a more personal level. I think it's a marvel that simple conversations have drastically altered my attitude. In order to rebuild a nature community, we must simultaneously develop our own Dickinson community. I'm beyond excited for the next 6 days, hopefully I'll make lifetime memories with these 16 fantastic loving people.

Jan. 12, 2014: WE had a great day at the Incan ruins of Ingapirca today. I'm not sure I've been so stunned repeatedly by the beauty of one region, but the drive to the ruins had me breathless at every turn. The colors were so green and lush, and usually I don't use that many descriptive words but that's how amazing it was. The ruins were also incredible, and like Donna said, it felt like we were on top of the world. I had a lot of fun taking photos of everyone when they weren't looking. We really are a good looking group! I loved how involved everyone was in celebrating Rachael's birthday and I think she had a really great time. Thinking about leaving Cuenca is such a sad thought! I hope it never comes!

Jan. 13, 2014: Today we went to the new school. There were clear differences from the other school. Morale was a bit low at first but we still did a considerable amount of work. Having dinner at Donna's friend's house was fantastic. We learned a lot about Ecuador from people who know it from the inside. Finally I understand some graffiti here. I am looking forward to finishing this fence project. It's tough but we can do it. I am also very sunburnt and tired but that can be reminded with sheep! Hopefully tomorrow goes well, I am certain it will.