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Ecuador
Summer 2009

Working with WorldTeach has been an experience that I will treasure for the rest of my life. I was able to develop my teaching skills, interact with Ecuadorians and learn about a new culture. I have been given the opportunity to cultivate my teaching abilities and to explore new teaching techniques.

I was the first volunteer from WorldTeach to teach at UNIDEC (Universidad Interamericana Del Ecuador). I believe that I left a good impression on the university and that they will welcome new WorldTeach volunteers to teach in their establishment in the future. My last day of teaching, the president of the university, Dr. Luis Coloma, presented me with a certificate to prove my teaching experience in Ecuador. In addition, I was given a gift and the university staff threw a *despedida* (farewell party) for me. I felt that I made an impact on the university and hope that UNIDEC will look to WorldTeach for more volunteers in the future.

Working for UNIDEC has taught me how to relate with my students and the other faculty members, a skill I hope to use when I pursue a career at a university teaching English literature. I learned that asking the students what they want to learn and how they like to learn works best because the students remain interested in the class work since the material is chosen by them.

While I was in Ecuador, I learned quite a bit about the culture there. There is a custom in the markets where it is expected of the customer to bargain and haggle with the vendor. Usually, if you did not bargain, the vendor took it as an insult. I found the market place to be an exciting atmosphere, in which I could explore and practice my Spanish speaking skills. Surprisingly, bargaining was not only limited to the market place. Even established stores would expect

customers to bargain for a lower price. This was so different from what I knew in the United States, yet it was interesting to learn as I traveled the country.

Another part of Ecuadorian culture that I learned about while teaching is that in Ecuador there is a feel of tranquility, “*tranquilo*,” as my host mom described it. This atmosphere of relaxation and calmness results in laidback time management in students and constant tardiness. I explained to my students that arriving an hour and a half late to a two hour class was disrespectful to the teacher and that they were limiting the material that they would learn in class. Though it took a few weeks, I taught my students to value their time and to show respect by arriving to class on time.

Being in Ecuador surrounded by Spanish speakers was an experience in itself. Taking introductory Spanish in college was nothing like being thrown into a culture that only speaks Spanish. I arrived in Ecuador with a timid view of speaking Spanish. My host family did not speak any English, so I had to learn to be confident when I spoke, or not speak at all. I am a talker, so I forced myself to try and communicate with my family, as well as the staff at the University. My family was understanding and was patient with me as I thought through sentences in my mind. I was petrified of making mistakes, but I learned fast that the people there were willing to help me learn from my errors and I developed a confidence when I spoke Spanish that I did not have before. By the time I left Riobamba, I was unafraid of making mistakes as I spoke Spanish.

The majority of my experiences with Ecuadorian culture happened as I traveled with the other volunteers on the weekends. Seeing the different regions in Ecuador and visiting multiple cities gave me a better sense of the country as a whole. The accent on the coast is completely different from the sierra, and even the accents from these two regions are different from the

accent found in the Amazon. I spent most of my time in the sierra, so I was able to hear the variations in accents that are used in the south versus the north. I feel that what I have seen and heard in Ecuador will help me to learn more about my own culture and how to express myself.

The success that I had with the WorldTeach program varied from student to student. The first week of class, I gave my students a placement exam to see how much English they knew. I had three students who received zero points on the exam. Most of my students received around seven out of ten points. One of the three who received zero points dropped the class half way through due to financial stress. However, I worked with the other two students, Stefanie and Alexander, outside of class times and helped them improve their conversational English. By the end of the term, Stefanie received one of the top grades of the class and Alexander, who was not as enthused about studying English, passed the class and could hold a ten minute conversation with me. I feel that the impact that I had on these students will help them advance to the next level English class and make them better English conversationalists.

Before I left for Ecuador, I had never traveled alone nor left the United States of America. I was extremely nervous about flying by myself to a foreign country that I knew little about. Upon arrival, I realized what I could learn and take back with me. I have been given the opportunity to expand my independence and create a network of friends in a foreign country. Some of my students occasionally send me emails, in English and Spanish, asking me for assistance in their new English class. I believe that I made a difference in these students' lives, such that they look to me for advice. I also learned pieces of the culture. My host mother taught me how to cook a few traditional Ecuadorian dishes and I cannot wait to make them here and share them with my friends and family. I am so glad I was able to have this wonderful and eye opening experience.