

Before I boarded my flight to Ecuador last August, I sat next to gate D3 in the Hartsfield-Jackson airport in Atlanta and wrote down every question that was buzzing around in my head. I wanted to know about my host family, the school I would be going to, the weather, what sort of people would be in my internship, if they had nutella in Ecuador, but mostly I wanted to know about me. Who was going to walk off that plane at the end of March? Little did I know just how drastic the change would be: thinking back to the day I wrote in my journal, I can hardly even recognize myself.

My first day was similar to any other first day; I spent about two hours getting ready and darting around my apartment, trying to ensure that I was 100% prepared for whatever it was I would encounter. I had my white coat ironed and even spritzed with lavender. Everything I could possibly control I had.

In the morning I worked with Dr. Andrade in a government clinic. I sat in a chair next to the doctor's desk as she called in patient after patient (mostly small children coming in for check ups and women for pre-natal care). I was taught how to perform a general physical exam for both babies and children and allowed to listen to each patient's heart and lungs. Surprisingly, I was able to understand the majority of the Spanish that was flying back and forth around me. In the afternoon I had four hours of one on one Spanish class and boy when they say these classes are intensive they aren't kidding; after five hours of clinic and four hours of Spanish I was exhausted and ready to head home.

The first four weeks were similar to my first day. I had clinic in the mornings and Spanish classes in the afternoon. The fifth week I traveled to Puyo where I had rotations

during the entire day. In Puyo, the program focuses more on community medicine as opposed to hospital centered services so I was able to work on projects with diabetes groups, give lectures on dengue and malaria, and visit a group of indigenous Shuar in the interior of the Amazon jungle. My last week was spent in Quito shadowing surgeons in the military hospital.

Laid out on paper the schedule seems straight forward but one of the most challenging aspects of the internship for me was organizing my time and contacting the right people in order to receive the rotations I wanted. The program in Ecuador is set up in such a way that the intern has to be extremely proactive otherwise no one takes responsibility for rotation schedules and Monday comes around with no particular agenda. I received little support from campus advisors or professors at OSU and worked mainly with the medical director of the Quito program to arrange schedules and discuss issues I was having. I learned to be pushy while remaining polite and honest about what I wanted without offending. As it turns out, the loose structure of the internship was a challenge but also benefited me professionally by helping me to develop communication and organizational skills.

The biggest challenge of my internship, however, was accepting that I was only shadowing physicians and for the great part would not be accepting responsibilities, which made it difficult for me to maintain my commitment to the program for the entire two months. While my first week I was able to work with patients and have small responsibilities, in the majority of the clinics I worked in I was only allowed to observe and my preceptors were often reluctant to even explain to me what was going on. After a few weeks my days began to seem repetitious and I became frustrated with the way I was

treated by those around me and the lack of respect my preceptors often showed by showing up late or leaving abruptly without telling me where they were going and what was expected of me..

The fact that I was merely a student, having to deal with preceptors who often ignored me completely and the abundance of patients complaining of a cough made for some discouraging and frankly boring days. Regardless, I learned a great deal about myself from these challenges. I realized that my attitude holds me back, that I need to constantly push myself to remain positive, attempt to make the best of what is around me, and consequently get the most out of the situation. I've learned that I often hold myself back because I get stuck on things like "my gosh, this is the seventh patient with a cough today", I withdraw and just do whatever is required to finish up the day and as a result gain nothing. In short, I have learned a great deal about my weaknesses as well as my strengths through my experiences in Ecuador which is the first step to improving oneself.

Instead of concentrating on how the internship was falling short of my expectations, I focused on what opportunities were available to me, such as an amazing chance to improve my Spanish, learn about other people and cultures, and act as an ambassador for the states. So if I found my mind straying from the events in the clinic I would start conversations with patients. As a result, my conversational Spanish has improved by leaps and bounds, I feel confident in my language abilities for any situation as I now have solid language base to work with, and I feel I have in some way made a contribution as a positive presence in the CFHI program. Please don't get the impression that I was continuously disappointed with the medical aspect of the internship, I merely

want to communicate how some days were challenging for me and how I responded to those challenges.

All challenges aside, I consider myself incredibly lucky to have spent seven months in Ecuador learning its different colors and characteristics. Before I started the internship I had studied abroad at what is considered to be the best university in Ecuador and consequently where the upper echelons of Ecuadorian society send their kids to school. At the beginning of the internship I had a jaded view of Ecuador: from spending the majority of my time at the elite university I found it hard to shake off the image of Ecuador as a country gripped by social inequality, racism, and a corrupt upper class that had constructed a society that searched to abandon its own unique nature for a society modeled after American standards and American culture. But by the end of the internship after countless opportunities to talk with people from all walks of life in Ecuador I was staggered by the diversity of thought and opinion and have gained an appreciation of Ecuador's social and political situation. The ferocity with which many Ecuadorians have fought to gain a country run in the way they choose is truly amazing. Indigenous groups have an incredible amount of political sway and sense of self in Ecuador. Bi-lingual education is more and more common, several groups have won legal battles to maintain their ancestral land rights, and the public in general is deeply devoted to traditional values and progress simultaneously.

Looking back on my internship, there are some things I would change and the prospective intern should know. First, the CFHI program is probably best suited for students who have completed their first two years of medical school and preferably the first three. Preceptors have little patience for students who have limited knowledge of

medicine and if you are a medical student, especially a medical student with clinical experience, you will be able to participate in patient care and treatment to an extent that an undergrad who, even though they may have experience working in clinics, would not be able to. The CFHI experience is invaluable for students of all levels, but I would recommend the shortened four week program for those who have not yet started medical school.

Second, I can't stress enough how important it is for the intern to take advantage of the numerous shadowing opportunities that are offered in and around Quito. If you are not happy with your placement, don't hesitate to tell the director and change sites. You will find that the program is happy to work with you to find the rotation sites that fit your interests.

On a more general level, make sure you enter the country equipped with plenty of "suelto" (coins or one dollar bills) as vendors will often not have change and won't accept larger bills. The country code to call the states is 001: dial the code, then the area code (without one) and then the number. This took me while to find out because saving face seems to be very important in Ecuador; if people don't know the answer to your question they will often guess or make one up, be wary. People will also tell you that the city is extremely dangerous. Take this with a grain of salt; Quito is just like any other large city: you wouldn't walk alone at night with your backpack down a dark deserted alley, but it is fine to walk alone to the grocery store at dusk and tote your groceries home along main streets.

Along as you keep your wits about you and are proactive you will undoubtedly have momentous experience with CFHI. This internship changed me in ways I could

never have imagined, was terrifying and painful at times, fascinating and inspiring at others, but without a doubt was a priceless experience.