

Alpha Sigma Summer Enrichment Fund

Final Report

Describe your experience, the educational value of this experience and your total estimated expenses for the summer.

This summer with the help of the Alpha Sigma Summer Enrichment Fund I spent eight weeks working in a health clinic in Rurrenabaque, Bolivia. It was truly the most amazing experience of my life, and also the hardest. The largest obstacle that I faced in my time in Rurre was definitely the language barrier, which was significant, as my previous Spanish experience all came from a five-week class I took during the first session of summer school (and which ended five days before I left for my trip). The first week was the most terrifying of my entire life, as I was working in the clinic all day every day, and only one of the eight other workers spoke any English at all (and that was minimal at best). I really wasn't sure how I was going to make it for eight weeks, but as time passed it was as if a switch had flipped somewhere in my head, and the whole world started to make sense. The next six weeks passed in what seemed like no time at all. I spent the weekdays working in the clinic in a number of different roles, from running tests in the lab, to dispensing medications in the pharmacy, and sitting in on patient consultations with the doctors. I also spent a lot of time working on the main side project of the foundation which was the construction of bio-sand water filters which provide clean drinking water for people in the town and also in the surrounding communities, many of which are much more isolated than Rurrenabaque. I learned so much in my time in Bolivia, in both a practical nature, but also I learned a lot about myself, as a good portion of my free time I spent on my own. I learned a lot from all the different members of the clinic team and gained knowledge on myriad topics, including lab testing, taking vitals, doctor-patient interactions, clinic

operations, and even concrete construction. I also gained irreplaceable experience with the Spanish language, and became much closer to being fluent. This was also probably the scariest part of my time in Bolivia, because my previous Spanish experience, as I said before, was quite limited. From a quantitative standpoint, I saw over two hundred patients in my time at the clinic, dealing with a wide variety of ages (from a few weeks old to very elderly) and an ever wider variety of illnesses. I also built roughly forty bio-sand water filters and subsequently installed them in surrounding communities. An interesting part of my time working with the foundation was about a one-week span where there was an American team with Engineers Without Borders that came to train at the clinic to learn how to build the bio-sand water filters. During this time (which was towards the end of my stay) I was essentially in charge of this group of engineers because their lack of Spanish skills made it necessary for me to translate and give them direction. At this point I had already built enough filters that I knew the process like the back of my hand, and so I coached them all through it, which was an unbelievable experience. Not only was I working in a foreign country, but I was also a team leader for the project.

My experience this past summer was truly amazing and I grew so much both intellectually and emotionally. The work I did helped me solidify my drive to go on to medical school and become a doctor, and also opened up a whole world of new desires and intellectual pursuits such as becoming fluent in Spanish and travelling more extensively.

Expenses:

1. Flights: \$1200
2. Room and Program Expenses: \$900
3. Food: \$600
4. Miscellaneous: \$100

Total = \$2800



The clinic and the foundation's logo



The team from Engineers Without Borders working on bio-sand filter production



Some team members and I delivering filters to the community of Ascension



Preparing a bio-sand water filter on site



En route to deliver filters to neighboring communities



The clinic team on August 6 - Bolivian Independence Day