

Summer 2015

Natalia Mocciano Goldberg Journal Summer 2015

Natalia Mocciano

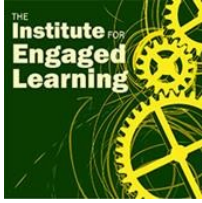
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Glen S. Goldberg Scholarship Winner Natalia Mocciaro – Summer 2015 Shares her Internship

WEEKLY JOURNAL

Week One

These first four days in Costa Rica have been challenging in many unexpected ways.



When I first arrived Friday night I remember feeling afraid and nervous once I



saw what the city of San José is like outside my car window. It looks a lot like what I remember the Dominican Republic looked like when I was there. Lots of poor areas, stray dogs, and the houses are all gated up. This worried me because I remember feeling afraid at times in Dominican Republic, but I was always with a big group of people, so the fear there was nothing compared to what I felt when I realized I'd have to find my way to and from work every day by myself. But now that I've taken the bus alone many times I feel way more confident. I'm happy because I'm starting to recognize different areas of the city and I remember which ways to go based off of what Patricia, our Director, taught us when she took us around. At first, I couldn't help but compare the beginning of this experience to my experience in Chile last fall semester. I know I can't do that, every trip is unique and will teach me different things and I promised myself I wouldn't compare them anymore. But I'd be lying if I said that I don't miss the pretty beach town of Viña del Mar. I guess what has really gotten me so far is the lack of other international students. I feel so lonely at times because it's just me and the two other Brockport students. It's a big change from having over 100 international friends when I was in Chile, so naturally I can't help but feel a little sad sometimes. I think my culture shock in Costa Rica has been the worst I've ever experienced also, but I don't mean to say that it's unbearable, just very big changes. This internship requires a lot of independence from me which will help me

grow so much. Although I absolutely love the morals and vision of Fundación para la Paz y la Democracia, I can't help but feel intimidated at times by the organization. The professional world in general is intimidating and this is my first time actually entering it and the fact that everything is in Spanish makes it much more challenging. The one thing I need to keep reminding myself when the internship becomes more difficult is that it's only going to make me improve. I wanted to cry after my introduction visit on Monday to FUNPADEM because I didn't understand anything that was said to me. I met my boss Hazel and she explained to me how the company works and what different projects they are currently working on. She spoke so incredibly fast and I just could not keep up, which made me think that I was in for a rude awakening at this job. However, I'm beginning to understand more and more and the more I spend time around Hazel the more I'm inspired by her. She's an incredibly diligent worker and motivates herself to get everything done because she's genuinely passionate about the work that she does. Today she was showing us the flyers she made for a new project being launched that encourages kids to exercise and play sports in order to prevent them from drinking or doing drugs. I hope one day to be as smart and professional as her. The other programs that FUNPADEM is currently working on are things like Manos a la Costa which mainly educates the public about how to "live green" and protect the planet. Another one of my favorites is called Futuros Brillantes which means bright futures, and it mostly works on regulating the labor laws in Honduras and keeping children out of child labor. Although I'm still having a rough time understanding everything, especially all of the technical stuff, I'm excited to learn about the ways this company significantly improves communities everywhere. Today I just began to translate a document from Spanish to English and it hasn't been so bad. I really like the relaxed environment there; I can listen to music while I work and I can take lunch whenever I'd like. There are two other young girls working as interns there as well. Both of them are French and I believe they both plan to stay as long as I do. My host family is unbelievably sweet and amazing, I love my host mom. I'd say for now everything is going very well, just a matter of getting adjusted.

A lot has happened since the last time I wrote! This entry won't be very well organized because it's late and I need to go to bed but I have two new roommates! Two 15-year-old girls from California that are here on a mission's trip. It's so nice to have girls around; I've been going crazy with just the presence of Dan and David. Thursday was a very interesting day of work. Hazel and my other boss Sara invited me to sit in on a conference that FUNPADEM was hosting to talk with many different representatives in Costa Rica from the police force and the judicial system in order to finalize what steps to take in order to prevent the use of fire arms in the communities. This goes for other countries as well such as Nicaragua and Panama, not just Costa Rica. It was very interesting! I unfortunately didn't understand much because everyone spoke unbelievably fast and the topics were very technical. They spoke about Costa Rican law, the Ministry of Public Security, Police Administration, as well as Forensic Science. It was a 5 hour, very complicated debate. A lot of it went over my head but I'm still so pumped that I got to be in there and listen to everything. There were about 4 different presentations, and people asked questions such as: Who is using the fire arms? How are they obtaining them? What are they mainly being used for? Police representatives were talking about the way they confiscate weapons. It was interesting because at one point they were discussing how it is necessary for the authorities to carry fire arms, although they wished to create a world in which nobody had any

type of gun or weapon. Moving forward, this weekend was probably the most adventurous weekend of my entire life. We packed up and headed out to the Rain Forest of Monteverde. I knew I was going to fall in love with it. It's incredibly vast and growing freely without the harmful hand of man in the way. We saw beautiful birds and the views from when we were ziplining above the trees were breathtaking. I didn't want to leave! Ziplining was so exhilarating and nerve-wracking. You're several hundreds of feet up in the air hanging by a rope and flying through the sky at what feels like 50 mph. I couldn't believe how high up I was! I think that's the most dangerous thing I've ever done, but I'm so glad I did it. We did a huge rope swing afterwards and I tried chickening out several times but was eventually forced into it. Even when I was strapped in and ready to go I tried chickening out! One of the guys that worked there goes "on three ok ready three!" and shoves me off the platform. I actually hated the rope swing I'm not a fan of falling but I would've been disappointed in myself if I didn't do it. I need to maintain this adventurous attitude about everything I experience here, even when I'm in the city. This morning we woke up at 7:00 am and went rappelling down ropes through waterfalls. That was so tiring but amazing! One of the waterfalls was 132 feet, and it felt like an eternity to climb down it. I didn't look down the entire time and then was shocked once I finally felt the ground. We made friends with the tour guides because they were such fun people and we made plans to go out in San Pedro this weekend. I hope the next adventures to come are just as exhilarating.

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Week Two

It's Tuesday night and I just finished eating dinner. I had chalupas for the first time, which are basically just open-faced tacos but they were phenomenal, as is everything my host mom makes for me. I played with her grandson Daniel afterwards for a while. That's what I look forward to so much while I'm at work; coming home and playing hide and seek and tossing a ball back and forth with one of the cutest little boys I've ever met. He's only 3 years old and his birthday party is coming up on June 21st. I have to make sure I'm not traveling anywhere that day because I really want to see how happy he is on that day. Daniel is always off-the-walls happy every single day, and it fills my heart with so much love. I can only imagine what he will be like at his 4th birthday party. After this action-packed weekend in Monteverde, going back to work this week has seemed to drag on a bit. However, I learn more and more everyday about FUNPADEM and I love absolutely everything I learn. I really want to work for a company like this one day, but ideally do more out in the community as opposed to staying in the office. Right now I just keep translating and proofreading documents, which can get pretty boring. But it's definitely okay because reading the documents makes me really support the projects that this company does more and more. Today I finished up editing a report about the different steps that they took to regulate the labor laws in Honduras by designating supervisors to ensure a safe work environment and training employees to work as a team among many other things. Once I fine-tuned that report and sent it to my co-worker Sara, my boss Hazel gave me another document to proofread. This one is about the plan of action FUNPADEM desires to take in order to abolish child labor in Panama. It's incredible that they do this type of work every day. In my eyes they're

superheroes. It really makes me wish that every company out there had the same genuine passion to make the world a better place as opposed to just make a profit. I knew I made the right choice when I picked to work for Fundación para la Paz y la Democracia. I thought I already knew a lot about the corruption and poverty that existed in Latin America but my awareness is being raised every single day here. That's so important, especially since what I want to do in life is work for a non-profit organization that works to improve the communities in Latin America. I must first understand the specific problems that each region is experiencing and although it's a lot of information to take in, this is a really solid first step. Every Monday we have meetings and take a look at news articles about what's going on in Latin American countries in regards to social movements, labor laws (preventing child labor), prevention of fire arms, projects to improve the environment, and much more. Then we decide which articles to focus on and which to put aside for a later date, and we maintain these lists in order to aid us in our programs as well as inspire our research. That's what I'm going to start doing next week: research. And although it will be more challenging I think I'm going to be shocked and inspired by the things I find.



I just returned back home from our trip to Tamarindo. We had a really great weekend and I'm so happy we got to see the California girls we met in Monteverde last weekend. They're awesome friends. We went surfing and explored the beaches a little bit. The scenery there is gorgeous and the people there remind me of what I picture Californians to be like. Everyone is incredibly laidback, always walking around barefoot, super tan, usually



surfboard glued to their hips and a lot of them have dreadlocks. I loved witnessing it a lot but I'm glad we only went for two days. The bugs there are so brutal and I'm having some kind of allergic reaction to the bug bites on my legs...it's absolutely killing me. They're so painful and I'm really hoping that the Benadryl I take heals them up because I can't miss work tomorrow. The bus ride back was such a challenge for me to try and focus on absolutely anything besides my throbbing, itchy legs. However, things like this usually happen to me so I'm at least used to this kind of luck! The plus side is that I was able to buy a lot of gifts for my family and friends in Tamarindo, such as coffee beans, t-shirts, decorations, and I even bought seeds of different Costa Rican flowers to bring back for my mom so hopefully she can plant those. I hope they don't give me any trouble going through security when I return to the U.S. I know I've only been here for 2 weeks but I'm already a little homesick. It's felt more like 2 months instead of 2 weeks. It's the little things that really make me miss home. I just miss my family and my mom's cooking and I miss taking a shower without constantly worrying about

what kinds of bugs are all over the walls. Don't get me wrong, I absolutely love Costa Rica and I'm so happy to be here because every day I grow so much. I've learned so much at work already, I've made worthwhile relationships with my host family, and I've gotten the chance to do some pretty exciting things so far. One thing that happened this weekend that I'm so incredibly grateful for is that I met new girlfriends. I always complain to my friends back at home that I never get to be around any girls here in Costa Rica and that's really been hard for



me. All I have is Daniel and David, and I just have wanted friends my age who



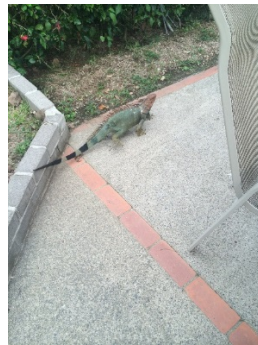
are girls. That's mainly what motivated me to go to Tamarindo this weekend in the first place; so I could reunite with the California girls. But guess what! I met a group of about six girls on the bus ride there who are from Buffalo area and one of them even graduated from Brockport a couple years ago! Isn't that amazing? They're here for 3 more weeks, just like me, and they live not too far from where I live! They've been volunteering here and teaching English to little kids. I'm so happy I found them because I think I'll be texting them on the weekends which will be so nice to be around girls for a change. I couldn't believe my luck. Hopefully, I can get to know them better in these last 3 weeks.

WEEKLY JOURNAL

Week Three

Not much has happened in the past couple days. My legs still hurt but the plus side is that the bumps are getting smaller. Little by little they're healing. However, I keep them covered up at all times just because it looks pretty scary! My host family is phenomenal as usual, everyone is very sweet. I hang out with them out in the living room every day after work for about two hours. We laugh a lot, mostly at the things little Danny says and does. He's the only child in the family so he gets all kinds of love and attention, but I can't even deny that he deserves every ounce of attention. He's quite the character. I wish I could've been as funny as him at three years old...on second thought, I wish I could be as funny as him now. He dropped his cookies on the floor yesterday and instead of crying about it he sang his own rendition of a nursery rhyme that is apparently pretty popular here. The song is supposed to say "estrellita, estrellita, dónde está? Dónde está?" It means "little star, little star, where are you?" This little comedian changed "estrellita" to "galletita" (little cookie) and sang loud and heartfelt about how they were on the floor. His facial expressions are also a huge component in the delivery of his jokes; they make

everything even funnier. I had never heard my host mom laugh so hard. It's been really nice and therapeutic to share in those moments of loud laughter with my host family. For a few minutes, I completely forget about the language barrier between us and the cultural differences we have completely vanish. Danny's good at making things like that happen. He knocked on my door a couple hours ago and personally handed me an invitation to his infamous birthday party on Sunday. I had the biggest smile on my face as he was describing the piñata that he's going to have and the cake! The invitation has the main characters from Pixar's *Cars*, which seems fitting seeing that he absolutely loves cars in general. Needless to say, I'm so excited for this party. Tomorrow at work we are moving into the building across the street. I don't really understand why, but I know that it's a very sudden surprise to everybody. We have been sharing our current building with a clinic, and I think that the boss (Randall Arias) has always wanted to move and have their own separate building. But from what I understood from the story, there was a minor conflict between the clinic and FUNPADEM, and the clinic ended up buying the rest of the building. Therefore, tomorrow will be a tough physical labor day, seeing that we need to somehow move every last bit of our materials into the building across the street. But that's okay. We need a change of pace. Hopefully the new building is nice, but I will give an update about that in my next journal.



Things have been going great! To at least pick up where I left off, we moved into our new building. It's so small and I feel bad because I know that my co-workers are not very happy there. I'm thinking that this move will be only temporary. Right now we have about 4 people in each office because there just simply isn't enough room for everyone. Nonetheless, we're still doing the best we can do and everyone is a pleasure to be around. This weekend was filled with so much fun from start to finish, it was amazing! On Friday our program director, Patricia, took us to a beach called Jaco.



It's about an hour and a half from here and she was sweet enough to drive us in her car. We had a lot of fun traveling there and back with each other, and we shared a lot of laughs. Patricia is so fun to be around and easy to talk to about anything. The way I chat with her reminds me a lot of the way I chat with my mom and my aunts; it's very nice company. Jaco was

gorgeous too! The beach we went to was pretty much completely empty and the boys and I had so much fun swimming in the ocean. It was sunny all day, we got to play on an empty beach, and



we ate so well! The quesadilla I had for lunch was phenomenal, I still daydream about it. The town of Jaco was really cute too and I got some more souvenirs to bring back to my



family. The next day, we woke up at 5:00 am and took a bus to Puntarenas. Patricia didn't come this time because she's gone to the island a lot. But she drove us to the bus stop and picked us up as well later on that night. What an incredible trip Saturday was though. When Patricia told us that we were going to take a bus for 2 hours and then a boat for another 2 hours out to a remote island, I was thinking that we were going to take a small rinky-dink boat and there weren't going to be many people. I was so wrong. The boat we took was beautiful and it was filled with so many fun travelers! It had two floors, a POOL in the middle of it, a bar, a dance floor, and even karaoke. It was a party all day long. When we finally got to the island I felt like I was somewhere in the Virgin Islands, if you took all the tall buildings and resorts off the Virgin Islands and just left the white sand, crystal blue water, and free-flowing nature. We hung out with a bunch of people from Texas, Canada, and even Ithaca! The snorkeling was indescribably beautiful and the fish come right up to you. We played volleyball on the beach, and swam for hours. Then we had another party for 2 hours on our way back to Puntarenas. It was probably one of my favorite days of this entire trip. Then today we had a birthday party for our favorite little boy, Daniel. He turned 4 years old on Thursday. Although, he really didn't understand that Thursday was his birthday since there was no party! For a couple days he thought he was still 3 years old, but I'm glad that now that we had the party he's officially caught up on his age. It was such a nice time and their family is so big! It was a 5 hour fiesta of clowns, face paint, music, food, games, and more. Everyone was so happy and it was a beautiful event to be a part of. I'm so glad I got to witness it. I truly felt like part of the family; I'm really lucky to have them.

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Week Four

Things this week have slowed down a bit. Everyone has officially adjusted to the new building and moved in all their stuff. It's been quiet in the office but it's the nice kind of quiet. It

has given me the time to do a lot of research on what's been happening in the news (in Central America). It's funny because my friends and I at Brockport really love doing free research to learn about other countries and to stay up to date on current issues, and I get to do that at my internship. This week a few of the articles I picked out were interesting enough to be published into FUNPADEM's "Mirador." That's basically like their online newspaper. They normally post articles that have to do with environmental sustainability, the prevention of violence, democratic news, or stories of justice. Today Hazel told me that she wants me to write two entries for their blog. I thought that was pretty cool and also intimidating! I read the other workers' entries and they're so well-researched, usually involving topics such as gun control, women's rights, labor laws, or topics of world peace. Hazel gave me a topic to write about for my first entry because I think she could tell I was a little overwhelmed with choosing. She sent me the link of a website called "Vision of Humanity." I had never heard of the website but I'm so glad she showed it to me because it's really interesting! It shows you a world map with a color code of the most peaceful countries and the most violent countries. You can change the categories in which countries are ranked such as how much political terrorism exists, how many homicides have there been, or how many international conflicts have they been in (just to name a few). Central America is one of the most violent regions of the world, so I decided to write about that and continue to research why exactly there's so much violence here. Honestly, it has a lot to do with drug trafficking, sex trade, and gang violence that exists here. So many gangs in Central America it's unbelievable! It makes me sad because I know a lot of people back home can't think about Latin American without instantly thinking about the danger and poverty that exists here. But I don't think that's fair, or any way to think at all. I can't say I've traveled anywhere else in the world yet besides Latin America but I've seen some of the most beautiful deserts, mountains, volcanoes, beaches, and cities that exist on Earth here. And I've met more beautiful people in Latin America than most of the people I know back in the states. It just kills me that Latin America gets such a bad reputation for the danger here, but I think anyone who never ends up seeing any parts of this region is severely missing out on one of the most breathtaking experiences they could possibly have. I don't know... Maybe it's because I'm a Spanish major or I just like non-mainstream travel but Latin America will have my heart forever. It calls to me every time I'm not exploring it. My life goal is to explore and experience every country in Latin America. I started my journey a year ago when I went to Chile, and since then I've added on Argentina, the Dominican Republic, and Costa Rica. Not bad at all for only a year's worth of traveling! Thinking of adding more to the list gives me so much to look forward to in my life.

This was my last weekend in Costa Rica. I'm officially going home this Saturday and I have mixed feelings about leaving. Part of me is really sad to see my journey come to an end because I feel like I could keep exploring this country all summer. There's so much to see here and I also really don't want to leave my host family. That will be so hard to do. I especially don't want to say goodbye to my little best friend Danny. I'm going to miss having someone to play tag with and color with. I know he'll miss me too, but we will both be ok. I'll write my host mom emails and check on them from time to time. However, another part of me is really proud and satisfied with everything I learned and accomplished in the short time I was here. First of all, I explored a new place every single weekend! I did not waste any time and made sure I visited everywhere that I could. In just one month I saw the rainforests of Monteverde and went

ziplining, I saw the beautiful beaches of Tamarindo, Jaco, and Isla Tortuga, I went surfing and snorkeling, and I visited Manuel Antonio National Park and saw so many monkeys! I was even "lucky" enough to be stung by a jellyfish. That's something most people can't say they've done! Manuel Antonio was so beautiful and we met a lot of really fun people there. We made friends with two girls from Switzerland who were so adventurous and told us all kinds of things about Europe. One of them had spent 4 months in Italy working as a nanny and she told me that the topic of conversation over there was always food. I thought it was hilarious because she said if you ran into a friend in the street you would say "Hi, how are you? What did you eat for lunch?" Eating is so important over there, just like they say in the movies! I want to see for myself one day. We saw some people in the park get their bags/food stolen by the monkeys. This was kind of funny for us but at the same time made us nervous and we were constantly guarding our bags. On the beach there were surprisingly so many monkeys that would just hang out about 2 feet away from you. It was pretty awesome! Dan was brave enough to shake a monkey's hand, I caught that on video. The other animals that we had to guard our stuff from are the raccoons. They were really on a hunt for food! We saw them take so many people's stuff, rummaging through their bags, throwing what they could find in their mouths and running away. They were kind of cute but definitely annoying. Since David can't swim, he was originally on guard duty but once a jellyfish stung my hand pretty good, I was too afraid to go back in the water so I took on guard duty. It hurt so badly for about 30 minutes and I was pretty worried about what I should do, but after a half hour passed it started to go down and I felt calm. Now I have a really cool, tribal looking mark on my hand and I kind of like it! It's just a line of dots running from my knuckle down to my wrist and it looks pretty sweet. We also ate really good food this weekend. We had really delicious Mexican food and I had a calamari plate for dinner. Also, can't forget to mention that while I was walking through the street I slipped in this green, algae-like sewage and was covered in muck from head to toe.... I was so upset! It was right after I showered too. Everywhere we walked in town everybody would stare at me and either laugh or give me a look showing me they felt bad for me. I was a pity party. I ran into the nearest clothing store and these ladies that worked there helped me clean off. I threw my other clothes away and bought a dress from them. At least now every time I wear that dress I have a funny story to go along with it.

Reflection Paper

Now that my internship is officially over and I'm back in the United States, I can confidently say that I learned the most and grew the most this summer than any other summer before. My feelings have been so mixed ever since my last day in Costa Rica up until now, a full week after coming home. I've been sad for the reason that I miss my host family so much and I also wish I was still hiking through a trail in the rainforest and encountering all kinds of creatures. I've also been very glad to be back home with my real family and away from all those scary bugs! As I've written before, the nature in Costa Rica is captivating and I felt so small in it, but in a really humbling kind of way. I found the nature and wildlife there powerful, exotic, and so vast. It was overwhelmingly liberating to run along the pacific coast and dive into the crystal clear waves, as well as fly high over the trees of the rainforest on a zip line. I truly believe that it

was the moments in which I was surrounded by Costa Rican nature and wildlife where I was capable of realizing how far away from home I was and how free of any burdens I was while I was there. I didn't just go to Costa Rica to escape but also to discover.

I believe that travel has everything to do with self-discovery and even sometimes a renaissance of the person you are emotionally, spiritually, and/or mentally. I discovered so much about the "tico" culture and as I observed my surroundings I was able to take everything for what it was and reflect on how I feel about it. For example, every time I saw the way people demonstrated the utmost respect for senior citizens, such as the way they quickly give up their bus seats for them or help them go up or down a set of stairs, it would look so beautiful in my eyes. It made me realize that every culture should treat seniors this way, and not because they're weak but because they've been through more and overcome more than any of us ever have. They deserve the special treatment. In such a short five weeks I experienced so much. It wasn't always easy and fun; there were several obstacles I faced in the work place, at home, and out on adventures. An early obstacle was that I had to adjust to the dialect in Costa Rica and try my best to pick up on all of the common phrases they used on a daily basis. They normally include religious sayings in everyday conversation such as "I'm doing very well, thanks to God," or "See you later, may the Lord accompany you!" Costa Ricans are very open about their beliefs, no matter what setting they're in. One cool part of their dialect is that nobody says "de nada" to say "you're welcome." When you tell somebody "gracias" you will hear the response "con mucho gusto" every single time. That translates to "with much pleasure" and I thought this was beautiful that it was culture to be pleased to help one another, and it was a saying that I made sure I picked up on. Another huge obstacle I faced challenged my already weak sense of directions: the fact that Costa Ricans don't establish addresses for anything and they give directions based on how many meters away from a landmark something is located. If I needed to go to the bus station, people would tell me to go 300 meters north and then 200 meters west. Luckily, I learned a really cool trick that helped a lot. Since religion is so important there, all of the churches are built with the front door facing the east, so everyone can use it as a reference point once they've lost their bearings. I thought that was so cool. However, these obstacles are just scratching the surface in comparison to what my overall struggles were like.

When I had first stepped foot in this new country, I had no idea what it was going to look like. I think I was a little spoiled when I went abroad for a semester in Chile. There were only a few poor areas and none of them were anywhere near me so I never really felt like the social class difference was something very predominant in Chilean society. I guess, without realizing it, I expected Costa Rica to be the same. I had always heard everyone talk to me about how beautiful of a country Costa Rica is and how many Americans travel there for vacation every year. In fact, there are several American communities in Costa Rica in which people only speak English because it is such a popular place for people to retire to. I figured that I wouldn't find much there that would scare me or make me uncomfortable or even shock me. I ended up being wrong, but for reasons that I appreciate very much because those were the moments that stick in my mind as learning experiences and made me more globally aware. I would've never known how important the wild animals and bugs are to the people or how dangerous some of the coastal cities can be.

There ended up being a lot of poor areas near my neighborhood, which I truthfully needed to see. The first night I arrived I was so afraid and even though I felt like I was used to traveling (after visiting Chile, Argentina, and the Dominican Republic), it had felt like my first time ever leaving the country and on the inside I was panicking. A big reason why I felt like an idiot was because my job at Brockport as a global ambassador is to give advice to students who want to travel and try and make them as comfortable as possible with the idea of being in a foreign country. I felt a little frustrated with myself for being so nervous when all I preach about to my fellow Brockport students is how crucial it is to get out of your comfort zone in order to really learn about the person you are and the world around you. And there I was, far out of my comfort zone, in a house filled with a family that lived so much simpler than I was used to, located in the middle of the chaotic and mildly dangerous city of San Jose. Man was I scared. I was “roughing it” much more than I planned on doing. The showers were always cold, the bed took some getting used to, and the food would occasionally upset my stomach. I wondered how I was going to get through five weeks of living in such conditions so foreign to the way I normally live. I was fond of my family and we could at least converse very often because my Spanish was at a level in which I could understand them and usually respond in a clear way. We would talk about religion, politics, food, culture, and pretty much anything you could think of. I learned very early on that my host mother in particular had a beautiful heart. My entire host family consisted of generous and loving people that accepted me with open arms and gave a whole new meaning of family values to my life, but I found my host mother to be the most gentle human being with a humble desire to take care of everybody at all times of the day. She works very hard to keep the house clean and everyone’s stomachs full as well as our bodies healthy. This was at least a great environment for me to be in while adjusting to the way of life in Costa Rica during my first week. However, my anxiety was through the roof thinking about my first day of work.

I had no idea what to expect and our program director, Patricia, made it seem that our internships would be highly professional and we needed to look perfect head-to-toe every day. I got all dressed up for my interview and kept practicing conversations in my head in Spanish so I would know what to say ahead of time. As I got to know my co-workers and the environment at Foundation for Peace and Democracy (FUNPADEM), it was much more laidback than I had originally expected. I had learned that instead of some prestigious, political organization as FUNPADEM first seemed like, they were actually just a group of everyday heroes, working together creatively to fix the problems that keep them up at night about their region of the world. I admired everyone that I worked with, and although I was making friends with the adults at my internship, I couldn’t help but wish that I could also have friends outside of work. David, Dan, and I ended up being a funny group of friends, but all three of us did admit to feeling lonely in Costa Rica. The program at Escuela de Idiomas is so small that we didn’t get a chance to meet any other students. Luckily, we were able to meet people from other cultures during the weekends while we were traveling, and that taught us so much. We met a couple girls from Germany and exchanged all kinds of facts about our lives back home. They were so funny. I learned that in Germany, you can only receive a scholarship for academic purposes and not for a sport or a performing art. You also can buy beer in Germany once you turn sixteen years old! They thought it was so cool that we have fraternities and sororities back home, because I guess most of the world only sees stuff like that in the movies. One of the German girls, Paulina, had spent 4 months working in Italy as a nanny. She was making me laugh because she told me that it’s culture there to spend about fifteen minutes talking about the meal you just ate, with your

friends that you run into on the street. She said they want to know everything about what you ate and how it was prepared, because food is really important over there.

As far as my professional growth, I'm much more than satisfied. I finally did my first internship and it was in an environment in which nobody spoke my first language. I'm so proud of myself! If I can do that, I can do anything. It was an incredible first step to my career path. Ideally, what I hope to do with my life is use my language skills to help those in need in Latin American communities. I've always had my eyes on this one non-profit organization called World Vision, which does humanitarian services in third-world countries such as providing food to those who are starving, building water wells, building schools, providing health care to those in need, and bringing those communities to a state of self-sufficiency. To me, that is the dream... Just a lifetime of reaching out to others, transforming their lives and being transformed during the process as well. The areas in the world that are overlooked, call to me the most. At FUNPADEM, I got to witness the ways that the organization plans and implements new projects in order to regulate labor laws, prevent the use of fire arms, help aspiring students receive education, as well as keep the environment clean and much more. While I was translating documents, it reinforced my desire to *interpret* as opposed to translate. Interpreting is face to face communication, which is much more up my alley because my two majors are Spanish and communication. Translating, as I already knew, is all text and can be very boring. However, all in all, I loved doing it because I was completely on board with the mission and values of FUNPADEM, which promote for peace and equality among all people and seeks to resolve conflicts between borders in Central America. That was a great cause to work for and only reassured me that's the type of work I want to be doing. I want to help people. Hopefully in the future I will have a position that is more interactive with the people we're helping because ideally I would want to be out in the field. One major reason I have to thank my boss, Randall, is when he opened my eyes to a huge part of who I am that I never realized before. People always ask what my weaknesses are and I feel like I make up things, not because I don't have any weaknesses but because I've never been tested to figure out what they really are. When I wrote a blog entry for the company's website, they told me I could pick any topic that I want as long as it was relevant to Central America. A lot of people wrote about gun violence, sexual harassment and gender roles in society, religion, etc. I chose to write about the indigenous people of Latin America and their rights because I have always been intrigued and enchanted by these groups of natives. I researched laws that are intended to protect the rights of the indigenous groups and referenced cases in which these laws were violated. The following week when I went into work, my boss Randall approached me and told me he really liked my piece. However, his criticism is something that truly stuck with me. He told me that there is also corruption that exists in the leaders of the native people and he said that they aren't as innocent as I picture them to be, but I still made a good argument. What opened my eyes most is when he said "You have a very romantic view of saving the world." Wow, how about that. I'm sure you've noticed that about me after reading my journals. I never knew, until he said that. I meditated on that thought all week. A romantic view of saving the world is another way of saying that I'm a dreamer, but this has its pros and cons. My heart is in the right place and I have enough determination to accomplish my dreams but I lack any systematic approach to "saving the world." I just have always wanted to get out there in poor countries and use my Spanish to make a difference but it takes so much more than that. I guess that moment and the entire internship overall made me realize that I need to continue raising my own awareness of the laws in Latin America, the

corruption, the problems in society, the lack of resources, what the communities need and how to provide those things to them. It requires knowledge of politics, science, law, and so much more. I won't be able to do this on my own, but I would also never want to try to do it alone. I'm glad Randall told me that though, because it brought me down to earth and put things in perspective that sometimes I do romanticize this mission of making the world a better place.

Two areas in which I improved during my internship were definitely in my Spanish speaking skills as well as my communication skills through social media. When I first started working there, I had a lot of trouble with the subjunctive tense as well as using verbs like *gustar*. It seemed so complicated at first and I never knew how to properly utilize either. As time went on I learned to use the subjunctive by copying what I heard my co-workers and family members say, and it ended up being really useful when asking others for help or asking if somebody wanted me to do something. I got the hang of verbs like *gustar* and started using them all the time, especially when I told my host mother's grandson that he scared me or he hurt me or he made me laugh. Being in charge of the company's Facebook page and Twitter page was really cool because it gave me an opportunity to see the kind of message that they are communicating. They wanted me to constantly post news articles and current events to keep the public informed on what's going on in Central America and what the real problems are. It was interesting because social media work is pretty much considered the public relations branch of communication which I wasn't fond of in the classroom but actually ended up enjoying a lot once I started doing it on my own in the work place. Costa Rica was an amazing experience for me filled with self-growth, self-discovery, and adventure. A couple goals that I have set for myself is to completely gain fluency in Spanish within this upcoming year (my senior year of college) and to find a way to get in contact with World Vision and other humanitarian organizations in order to find out for myself if interpreting in this setting is something I'd truly like to do for the rest of my life. I feel great about this journey I went on this summer and I know that I will carry all that I learned with me for the rest of my life.

As far as my recommendations go for future Goldberg interns, I would really stress the importance of keeping an open mind. You never know what kind of culture you will find in the workplace, so don't go in with specific expectations. Also, don't be afraid to branch out and take on tasks that might not have much to do with your major but are also very interesting. Everything is worth a try, you might end up liking it! Don't ever get frustrated with yourself if you're having a hard time. You're already incredibly brave and unique for the adventure that you're going on because most students don't have those kind of guts. Be patient with yourself if at first you don't understand something and proud of yourself for all the hard work you've done to get there.