Summer Internship Report 2017

Ben Cabrera, C’20
Hometown: Silver Spring, Maryland

Haciendo El Refugio
Ecuador

(Ben is on the right)

Provide an overview of the organization/research project and a summary of your responsibilities, tasks, and/or projects.

I worked at El Refugio for the summer, and I did something different every week. But my roles could be summarized into three categories: I helped the construction crew on projects, facilitated outdoor activities for groups, and took classes on leadership and discipleship. El Refugio allowed me to do something different every day. We built a 300 yard water system for base camp, four trash cans, and a camp hut. However, we also climbed a 16,000 foot volcano and learned that some of the biggest lessons in our life could be in the process and not at the summit.

During your internship, what did you accomplish or how did you make a difference? In what ways did you grow in your professional and technical skills?

I accomplished building a 300 yard water system, helped start up a disposal system, and facilitated outdoor adventure activities for over 200 students. However, I learned to trust others. It was tough to get feedback or hear someone's advice. But they wanted the best for me and the team, and they were the experts. Thus, I learned to let go of my ego and trust others - that is the only way the best work can be done. Also, I learned to be proactive rather than reactive. I was not able to lead an entire debrief at times or preach. However, I was able to have conversations with kids on hikes, lead by example, and answer tough questions. It's the small things that can make a big difference and complaining for a better circumstance does not help with anything. Finally, I learned to choose joy when I did not get along with somebody or had to walk up the giant hill to my house or when we had no water for a week.
Describe a problem that you helped to solve at your internship. What skills or knowledge from your education at Sewanee helped you address the problem?

I helped translate all the time for my peers, and Sewanee has allowed me to grow in my Spanish in the classroom and with the Springbreak trip in Costa Rica. This allowed me to bridge the gap between construction workers and interns. One of my best memories was having dinner at one of the construction workers house. So I helped break down language barriers every day.

In what way were your teamwork skills strengthened?

Mainly in embracing diversity and understanding different leadership traits. Another intern was a very Type A personality and another one was very direct. And I learned that they are not better or worse, they are simply different. And once I learned to understand them, we were then able to make a better team and create a closer community.

How did your internship affect your career plans?

It affirmed that I want to go into law. I had several conversations with workers. One guy asked me, "What is riding in a plane like?" and "What is America like?". It taught me that many times we take things for granted and even though law is tough, at least I have the opportunity to study something I love. I would also see 80 year old ladies walking with 40 to 50 pounds of corn sacks on their back in order to make one day’s pay. So it taught me to appreciate my education.

In what ways did your internship cause you to encounter people of different backgrounds from your own? What steps did you take to communicate effectively with such persons? What did you learn from such persons' perspectives?

I was in another country and got exposed to so many Ecuadorians and missionaries. Also, in my internship cohort I was with three people from different parts of the US. Thus, I was just aware of different people's personalities and accepted them for who they were. But I was also just very curious and asked people questions. We cannot expect for people to talk to us. And I learned that we learn nothing when we just talk about ourselves. I also learned not to judge a person. We are all more similar than different. One of my mentors had the same thoughts as me when he was my age. It is very easy to assume, but I had to catch myself and learn to appreciate and respect others.

Words of advice for future interns (housing, transportation, etc.)?

Take sugary cereals, candy, and practice some spanish.

Words of thanks to your internship funding donors:

Your gift has not only benefited me but hundreds of other Ecuadorians and Americans who visited our camp. But, most importantly, I learned some of the most important lessons of my life this summer at my internship at my Christian ministry in Ecuador. On a backpacking trip in Cotopaxi National park, I climbed a 16,000 foot volcano. But I had to prepare by acclimating, taking proper clothing, and preparing food. This has taught me that to achieve a goal, or to give back like you want in the future, one must prepare. Otherwise, we are just beating against water. We are punching air. This was one of of the plethora of lessons I learned. However, it humbles me and motivates me to know that people like you are there for me and other Sewanee students. YSR!