PHOTO JOURNAL

Service Learning Trip May 30th - June 7th 2015
En el primer día de excursión, nosotras fuimos al Lago de Atitlán. Esta foto muestra los barcos que montamos a través del lago. Los volcanes y montañas en el fondo eran bonitos. El lago es un lugar muy popular para los turistas a visitar. Sin embargo, aprendimos la contaminación del lago ha causado problemas como la pobreza y la enfermedad para la comunidad, San Juan.

Riding across the lake was a wonderful experience. Since it was the beginning of the week, I was still blown away by taking in all of the scenery. On this first day, I certainly felt more like a tourist while getting accustomed to being in Guatemala. I enjoyed the beautiful boat ride which is an activity many tourists take part in when visiting Guatemala. In class, we learned that tourism is an important source of income for many people in the surrounding San Juan community. We witnessed this when the vendors were desperately coming up to our boats trying to sell us their products before we left.

While learning about the lake in class, we learned about the issue of water contamination in Guatemala. The water becomes contaminated through ways like human waste, oil pollution, and agricultural run-off. This makes it dangerous to swim in or drink the water. I certainly had to adjust to filling up my water bottle to make sure I had purified water and using my water bottle to brush my teeth. I realized how much I take having access to clean water for granted. Hopefully, the Guatemalan government continues efforts to purify water and improve waste management systems.
We went to markets multiple times throughout the trip. The first time we went I felt very overwhelmed by all of the items that were piled into the individual vendor's booth. The further I kept walking into the market made me feel like I was getting sucked in even deeper. The market was another time when I felt extremely like a tourist. The vendors knew we were tourists and kept approaching us to buy things. I was happy with myself that I did barter with the vendors and tried to use some Spanish when I did want to buy items. In class, we learned vendors will often double the price of their items when they see tourists. However, I tried to be cautious of this, and I enjoyed looking around at the beautiful goods from Guatemala.

The market was definitely a cultural experience as well. I remembered reading in Glittenberg's novel for class how many people find the market as an opportunity to socialize (1994). The market was crowded with people talking with each, and I even saw people sitting and watching a soccer game together in one of the markets. The food definitely smells fresher compared to the food we buy in grocery stores in the U.S. I saw raw meat just hanging that people would come up, buy, and take home to cook. In the U.S., grocery stores are much more sterile and don't provide nearly the same sensory experience that the market in Guatemala does. It was interesting to see and compare how different the experiences are.
Abrigo y Bienestar Integral (ABI) era mi lugar de servicio para la semana. Esta foto tiene un chico que le dimos una nueva silla de ruedas. El primer día de servicio le ayudamos a levantarse de su silla de ruedas. A mí me gustaba trabajar en ABI pero era difícil.

On the first day at ABI, I was very surprised by the facility. While taking a tour, I saw much more painted walls and murals, like the one in this photo, than I was expecting. Also, there was an amazing sensory room installed. This was a great improvement from what the group saw last year. The environment was much more stimulating, but there was still a significant amount of work to be done with the kids. ABI does its best with the limited funding received from the government for resources and staff, but it definitely appreciates collaborating with outside help. I really enjoyed working hands on with this boy in the picture on the first day. I learned the proper way to help him stand up from his wheelchair and reposition him. It was amazing to see the transformation that occurred in him by the last day.

I found that I was able to communicate some with the children and staff at ABI on the service days. I’m glad I tried to understand what the tías were saying and then use Dayana, our interpreter, to fill in the rest. Having Jackie as the therapist I worked with encouraged me to communicate as well. She knows some Spanish, and she just jumped right in and started trying to speak. We knew we weren’t getting all of the tenses and words right, but we tried to include Spanish when we could.
Esta es mi nueva amiga Pau Chajon en esta foto. Conocimos a la cena con los estudiantes de terapia ocupacional de la Universidad Rafael Landívar. Era muy simpática y hablaba un poco inglés. Después de la cena que hicimos unas herramientas de terapia.

The dinner with the Guatemalan students, after the second day of service, was very interesting. Pau Chajon and I ended up sitting at a table by ourselves. She said she spoke a little English, and I thought she did very well. I tried to speak some Spanish to her as well, when I could, to make the conversation flow more smoothly. Together, I was surprised we were able to communicate pretty decently. I'm always amazed in other countries how often people will speak another language, but the importance is stressed much less in the United States.

I certainly felt like a sojourner at dinner as I learned a lot about Pau Chajon’s life and some cultural information about Guatemala. I learned she likes to hang out with friends and family as well as stay active by running in her free time which I found very similar to myself. Additionally, she enjoys playing the marimba, a traditional instrument in Guatemala. When we created and used the therapy tools, we were sharing a common experience together which stood out to me as being more characteristic of a sojourner versus a tourist.
El segundo día de excursión, nosotros vamos a la Escuela de La Vega. Los estudiantes de la escuela hicieron una actuación para nosotros donde bailaron y tocaron la marimba. También ellos nos enseñaron sobre la celebración de Corpus Christi. En esta foto, hay chicas se visten en la ropa típica de la cultura Maya.

I felt like I got to learn a lot about the culture of Guatemala from the visit to the La Vega School. The students and teachers had worked hard to prepare for us to come and see traditions of the celebration of Corpus Christi. They made these beautiful carpets or alfombres out of sand that they would walk on during the celebration. I loved seeing the colors and different patterns in each of the classrooms we visited. Also, I really like how the school included us in their performance. It made me feel more like a sojourner when we were escorted in by the students and could learn about their culture. It was nice that we were able to give them some supplies after they taught us so much.

I enjoy this photo, because it shows elements of the traditional Mayan dress including the huipil (blouse), corte (skirt), and faja (belt). I found all of the different patterns and colors of the clothing to be quite beautiful. In class, we saw that women weave their traje (clothing) using a backstrop loom. This process is very time consuming, and one must be strong and attentive to detail to make the beautiful garments.
When we got to Iximché, we went into what was like a small museum displaying original pottery and tools recovered from the Mayan civilization. Additionally, there was an aerial view of the ruins which was really interesting to see. I really liked this picture because the vibrant colors of the grass and sky stood out to me against the earthy tones of the stone at the historic site.

On the day we visited the Mayan Ruins, I felt very much like a tourist again. There were tour guides at the beginning of the site who wanted to lead us on a tour. Since tourism is very important to the Guatemalan economy, Iximché was another place where money could be made giving tours to visitors. However, I really enjoyed the tour, because our guide was very knowledgeable. I was surprised to find out he had to go to school to learn all of the facts and information he shared with our group. One of the facts I found interesting was that the steps are so narrow, because the Mayan people went up and down them diagonally to prevent their back from facing the sun.
El Último Día de Servicio

The final day of service at ABI was a wonderful day. We wrapped up our time by presenting the care plans to the tías and also training them so they would understand our ideas for the children. I was happy we were able to put together little bags, filled with toys and tools for each child, that when along with the care plans we provided. We were all surprised when some of the residents put on a show where they danced for us. I was so touched by the gratitude the entire facility showed toward us for our work on the service days.

I really felt like a sojourner on this last day at ABI. I think throughout the week we really got to see what the daily life is like for the staff members and residents. I think this was really important in order to make our care plans meaningful. By witnessing both the happy moments and struggles of the staff and residents, we built a strong connection with the facility.

I was absolutely blown away by Amor del Niño. I could tell that the children in the home are under such good care. I have never seen so many cribs, bouncers, or special feeding tables like that in one place. It was wonderful to see such a colorful and stimulating environment that Steve and Shyrel have created in which the children can develop. In class, we learned that international adoption is now closed in Guatemala due to corruption within the system. Currently, children must be adopted by Guatemalan families within the country. However, I was also happy to hear that many children from Amor del Niño get reunited with their mothers after they receive some support and parenting classes.

One moment that was really special to me was when I got to sit in on a therapy session with one of the children with whom Shyrel was concerned. I thought it was really interesting to see two of our therapists play with the young boy and hear their thoughts on what might be concerns for his development. I was so amazed by how much Shyrel emphasized doing as much as she could for each child in order to meet his or her needs. Early intervention is very important for children with disabilities. Since many children in Guatemala don’t receive treatment early, it was nice to see that the young children in this home were receiving the care they needed. The home is filled with love which was evident from the smiles on the kids’ faces.
En el final día, hicimos una excursión del Volcán Pacaya. Era muy divertido pero también un poco difícil. Utilizamos palitos para ayudarnos a caminar. En la cima del volcán, había una tienda, y me compré pendientes hecha de la piedra del volcán. Mientras caminábamos por el volcán, empezó a llover.

I thought hiking the volcano was a great way to end the trip. It was nice to see the entire group supporting and encouraging each other as we were hiking. I liked this photo, because it shows not only the ashy rock from the volcano, but also the green trees and plants. I was surprised to see so much vegetation as well as so many animals while hiking up the volcano.

I found it funny when the guide would tell us it would only be ten minutes to the top. By this point in the trip, we all knew to most likely double what he told us. The Guatemalan people don’t live nearly as close to the clock as we do in the United States. I learned we had to be very flexible with schedules in order to adapt to the Guatemalan lifestyle. Although I typically like to be very structured, I found it nice to go with the flow and be a little more relaxed in regards to sticking to a schedule.
I interviewed Dayana about her experiences as a single mother in Guatemala. There are a variety of reasons why women in Guatemala become single mothers from fathers dealing with alcoholism to fathers having been killed in the Civil War. Dayana is the proud mother of two teenage boys. She works multiple jobs as an interpreter and also with a group of other single moms who make purses, pants, and other accessories. In this photo, she is wearing a pair of pants made by the group with whom she works. The items our group purchased from Dayana serve as a piece of the visible culture of Guatemala. Dayana informed us that the products the group makes are from patterns and fabric that are similar to traditional Mayan clothing.

Dayana remarked that after she would leave our group, which could often be very late in the evenings, she would go home to cook dinner, make sure her boys had finished their homework, and prepare for the next early morning. However, she never complained and even came early to help us translate our care plans as well as taking special orders from our group to have additional items made. Dayana has such a kind heart and stated that she is so grateful for the work that she does. Not all single mothers in Guatemala have the same opportunities as Dayana, but she serves as an excellent role model to the struggling single mothers trying to provide for their families.

Dayana exemplifies aspects of the invisible culture and common humanity from the Iceberg model as well. She demonstrated that she values having a good work ethic. Additionally, I could tell that she seeks meaning in her life through her work and being able to provide for her family. She showed Maura and I a picture of her and her two boys. Family is an important aspect of her life which is characteristic of the people in the Guatemalan culture.