SPANISH PORTFOLIO

By: Kelly Westerkamp
Lago Atitlàn

Cruzamos el Lago Atitlàn para visitar Santiago para el día.
Día de excursión a lago Atitlán

The excursion day to Lake Atitlán was the first full day of the entire trip. We all woke up really early in the morning and took a three hour bus ride to the lake. Along the way we stopped for breakfast at a restaurant called Tecpan. It was a great traditional Guatemalan meal with tortillas, guacamole, boiled plantains, and eggs. After filling up with delicious foods we continued our journey to the lake. We swayed back and forth on the bouncy bus as the driver drove us through the mountains. According to a Guatemalan Journey, “the usual tourist route followed the Pan-American from Antigua to Lake Atitlán, an exhilarating sixty-mile drive of sharp curves and steep grades that required two hours to negotiate” (Benz, 1996). This was definitely true after experiencing the bus ride. I kept my head on a swivel taking in all the beautiful scenery that surrounded us. Upon arriving at the lake we boarded a little boat that would take us across the lake. I was surprised at the lengthy trip across the lake because we could almost see our destination from the start. Once we arrived we found ourselves in a little town called Santiago. I learned that this town was home to a peace park, and also to where the mudslides had killed many Guatemalans and devastated others, not so many years ago. After learning about the peace park and the place of the mudslides we went back to the boats to cross the lake again. The trip back across the lake was much more interesting because we were caught in a rain storm. The boat rocked back and forth and rain poured into the windows on the sides. It was actually quite adventurous. We finally made it back to where we began and hopped back on the bus again to head to the Mayan ruins.
Before the trip began we had learned that the lake had a layer of scum that went as far as 100 feet deep. We learned of the toxic bacteria that caused the contamination of the lake. This makes it very difficult for Guatemalans to obtain safe water for cooking, drinking, and bathing. My initial reaction to the lake was that it would be filthy, unsightly, and smelly. However, after taking the boat ride I did not smell anything out of the ordinary, or see anything that looked like bacteria. I was pleasantly surprised at the beauty of the lake. I chose the picture in the previous slide because I thought it embodied the beauty of such an amazing part of the country. Not only is the lake represented in the picture, but one of the three volcanoes that surrounds the lake is also in the picture. It is one of my favorite photos that I took of Lake Atitlán.

This day was hard for me to communicate with the local Guatemalans because I was really nervous about my limited Spanish abilities. I used polite words such as “gracias” and “por favor”. Despite my communication troubles, I was still able to learn a lot about the culture in Guatemala. Through the experience at breakfast, the trip across the lake, and the stop at the peace park, I learned about traditional meals, the limited water supply, and the mudslide that occurred in Guatemala. The lack of access to clean, safe water in Guatemala is a social issue of concern. It is not convenient that many of the indigenous Guatemalans have to walk hours to find water. Learning about the importance of water and the difficulties that Guatemalans have obtaining fresh, clean water really made me grateful for my water supply in the United States. We can go almost anywhere in our communities and find a fresh source of water. I will not be taking my easily accessible water source for granted anymore!
Este es un cuadro de las ruinas de mayan antiguas y el tribunal de pelota.
Día de excursión a las Ruinas de Mayan

The excursion to the Mayan Ruins provided an interesting cultural experience for me. We arrived at the ruins just as the entry gates were closing, but Steve Osborn was able to talk his way in which allowed us to see the ancient ruins. I was really excited that we were able to get through the gates to see the ball courts and place of sacrifices because the experience created a realistic picture of the material we learned in the class prior to the trip. Kate Aronson presented the topic of the Iximche ruins to us in class, describing the ball courts, site for rituals and sacrifices, and the conflicting perceptions of the ruins today. As we walked through the ruins Kate explained to us what we were looking at, and how the Indigenous Guatemalans used the land for rituals.

I learned a lot about the Indigenous people and how they used the land. The ball courts were used for a traditional ball game in which the captain of the winning team was honorably put to death back in the day. The sacrificial site is located further back and a path from the ball courts leads to where sacrifices are made. Today some people view the Mayan ruins as a significant symbol to the Indigenous people, but others view the ruins as a sad resemblance of the Mayan people. They connect the ruins to the trauma experienced during the civil war in Guatemala. I thought it was truly amazing that these ancient ruins are still used today to make sacrifices. As we walked back further to the sacrificial site we saw a candle lit with remnants of a sacrifice that must have been performed earlier that day.

I chose the picture on the previous slide of the Mayan ruins because I thought it was a good illustration of one of the ball courts that the Indigenous Guatemalan people used so many years ago. Participating in the traditional ball game was considered an honor so I felt obligated to choose a picture that had a lot of history within it, and one that I respected greatly. My reactions as I walked through the ruins fluctuated between amazement and sadness as I talked about before. I was amazed that I was walking on such sacred grounds, but also saddened and reminded of the civil war that occurred and carries connections to the ruins.
Volcano Pacaya

Este era una zona de peligro. La tierra estaba realmente caliente.
Día de excursión a Volcán Pacaya

The excursion day to Volcano Pacaya was one of my favorite excursion days because it involved a challenge. We began our journey really early in the morning and drove to the bottom of the volcano. We met up with Felix, our guide for the hike, and he issued each of us a walking stick to use during the trek up the side of the mountain. The walking sticks were very beneficial on the steep parts of the mountain because they provided some support to hold on to. After about an hour of hiking upward we reached one of the highest points that we could on the volcano, and we had to descend down an extremely steep incline to the hot spots. The picture that I chose depicts the molten rock with steam and fog rising from it. I chose this picture to share because I think it highlights the most exciting part of the excursion – the final destination and where we could roast marshmallows if we wanted to! I also think that the picture looks very eerie and mysterious. It makes an audience want to hear about the place that it was taken.

Prior to the trip we learned that volcanoes are very prevalent in Guatemala and are geographical landmarks significant to the Guatemalan region. While on the trip, I learned that volcano Pacaya is very popular volcano that many people hike every day. It stands at an altitude of 2,500 meters, and it last erupted in 2010. My reactions throughout the journey up the volcano mountain shifted many times. At first I was thinking that it was going to be a really long, tough trip, but then we would stop to look at scenery and I was amazed at the beautiful landscape and views. Once we reached our final destination I was just thrilled at the site of molten rock and hot steam rising before our eyes. I was also pretty impressed that everyone who started the hike made it the destination without any trouble.

This experience has changed the way I view the world that I live in because I now understand the positive and negative effects of living in a region where volcanoes are prevalent. It is an adventure to hike up the volcanoes and to experience the beauty that they have to offer, but it is also dangerous when the volcanoes erupt so close to where Guatemalans live. In To the Mountain and Back, Jody Glittenberg describes the devastating effects of the volcano eruptions. Ash covered rooftops and caused people to lose their homes; people had to wear face masks to prevent severe illnesses from breathing in the ash (Glittenberg, 1994).
ABI, Institución del gobierno

Los residentes esperan actividades a hacer.
Día de servicio en ABI

The picture that I have chosen in the previous slide depicts the physical building of where my service site was located and what it looked like on the inside. It was taken on the first day of service. I chose this picture because it illustrates the horrendous circumstances that the residents at ABI live in on a day to day basis. The bars around the doors, windows, and entry ways make the place look like a jail. The lack of color and sensory integration limits the development of the residents, and it is clear from the picture that the residents are unhappy as they stick their heads through the bars trying to escape. Although the conditions of the building were not prime, the Guatemalan therapists were knowledgeable and did the best they could with the supplies that they had, as well as the limited number of staff that they had to work with. I learned a lot about ABI on that first day. I learned that the staff understood the major lack of resources and had tried to gain more, but the government would not give them anything else to work with. I also learned that on the weekends the residents are put into a “holding room” as they called it, where a limited number of staff could watch them all at once. ABI gave me a really good idea about how government institutions in Guatemala are run.

I also could not help but to think about the shame that is associated with individuals that have disabilities in Guatemala. These individuals are hidden from the community and occupationally marginalized because they are not given the same opportunities as abled-bodied individuals. This social issue regarding individuals with disabilities is very different from the United States because in the United States individuals with disabilities are accepted into society more often. Although there is still a stigma in the United States, it is evident that those with disabilities in the United States are seen more in society and given more opportunities to succeed than in Guatemala.
My initial reactions as I walked into the smelly, grimy, jail-like building were of terror. My heart was pounding out of my chest, and I was saddened by the living conditions of the residents. I also had to adapt from the way that I live in the United States to the conditions of ABI. What I mean by this is that I always have fresh water to drink, and for the most part clean bathrooms to use in the United States. However, at ABI the water was not safe for us to drink and the bathrooms were not sanitary. Reflecting back on this I feel very selfish as an American because we take for granted the luxuries that we have that other places do not have, but I will be completely honest as I reflect that I definitely needed to adapt while I was living in Guatemala.

I was concerned about my abilities to communicate with the Guatemalan therapists. This made me really nervous because I wanted to learn as much as I possibly could, as well as serve the residents at ABI as best I could. In order to reach my full potential I would need to use my Spanish skills to communicate. That first day I was able to understand a lot of what the therapists were talking about; however, I was not as sharp with expressing my own thoughts back to them. This is where the interpreters were extremely helpful. Darvy, my interpreter, was so patient and kind which allowed me to feel more comfortable in the situation.

This experience at ABI gave me a deeper appreciation for the life style that I have in the United States. It was heartbreaking to see how these individuals with disabilities lived. I now am able to put the hardships in my life into perspective much easier then before experiencing this service trip. The culture in the United States thrives off of achieving the next big and better material item. Seeing the major lack of resources that the residents at ABI have makes me want to do more to change the culture in the United States from such a wasteful society because some countries would do anything for the bare necessities.
El grupo ABI

Nos divertimos presentando nuestros objetos sensoriales a los residentes.
Día de servicio en ABI

The picture on the previous slide depicts some of my group members at ABI on the second day of service. The night before this day we decided to make a sensory object called a pressure coat. This was the first time that I had heard of a pressure coat or how to make one. It was a learning experience for all of the students. We made them out of sweatshirts and beans. We put the beans in the sleeves of the sweatshirts and tied the sleeves off with zip ties so that the beans wouldn’t fall out of the sweatshirt sleeves. When an individual puts on the pressure coat the weight from the beans applies a lot of pressure which ultimately is supposed to calm down the individual if they are anxious. The objective of a pressure coat is to calm down an individual who has trouble taking in too much sensory integration. The pressure coat also provides a sense of proprioception to the individual.

I chose to share this picture because of many reasons. The first reason is that everyone is having a great time in the picture posing as superheroes with capes. I felt that it truly resembled how everyone was enthusiastic about serving at ABI. Second, I chose this picture to share because I wanted to represent some of the creative resources that we were able to make from simple materials. The pressure coats are truly great and can help to make a difference for the residents at ABI. Third, I chose this picture because the people and resources in it add an element of brightness and cheeriness within a dreary building. I felt that it was one of the best pictures from the service days because we were able to bring smiling faces and bright colors to the building, which hopefully rubbed off on the residents to cheer things up around the place a little bit. Lastly, I was able to learn so much from the therapists throughout the whole trip and this picture shows just one of the many things that I learned from them. The pressure coats are a very useful and practical occupational therapy tool that I will use in my future. I feel that I was exposed to so many different occupational therapy skills, tools, and techniques on the trip that will allow me to succeed in my future career.
My reaction on this day as I was taking this picture was enthusiastic. I was so thrilled that relationships were being formed, lives were being changed, and smiles were lighting up the room. I was on cloud nine to be a part of something so special and worth while. This picture reminds me each time I look at it of the sheer generosity of all the people involved in this service learning trip including the therapists who gave up their time from work to come with us, the interpreters who graciously helped us communicate as well as became our friends, the residents who seemed to enjoy the presence of outsiders, and the students who were eager to learn and serve a population in need.

On this service day I was able to communicate better with the Guatemalan therapists because I became more familiar with them and my interpreters. It was much easier for me to understand what they were saying by listening for key words that I knew than it was for me to speak the Spanish language in thorough sentences to the Guatemalans. On this day I learned that Guatemalan culture places a greater emphasis on physical therapy then on occupational therapy because the physical therapists were able to see their patients individually, whereas the occupational therapists were not given that opportunity. It was interesting to see the higher value placed on one profession over the other because in the United States there seems to be a pretty equal importance for both professions.
Hicimos uniones en Centre Capacidad Occupacionale. El grupo Xavier realiza una conexión de ABI en CCO.
On the third service day we toured another government institution in Guatemala City called Centre Capacidad Occupacionale (CCO). We decided to visit CCO to gain a second perspective of the way a government institution is run. This institution was meant to help individuals ages 13-18 with mild disabilities. It was set up like a school so that the children would go to special classes that taught them different skills. For example, they each attended a math class to learn basic math skills and how to pay for items. They also had a basic activities of daily living class where they learned to do the necessities involved in each day such as making the bed, getting dressed, brushing teeth, etc. independently. Along with these classes the children were able to choose a specific trade that they could perfect so that eventually one day they could hold a job in that specific area. CCO offered wood working, janitorial skills, baking, cooking, and gardening classes, each in a different room. The children also learned choreographed dances to put on a show at the end of the year for their parents. It was truly a blessing to see such a beneficial and sustainable facility for individuals with disabilities. This day was really a turning point in our ability to make an impact at ABI. As a Xavier group we gained so many insights and ideas that would enable us to create some positive changes at ABI.

I chose this picture to share because it reminds me of the day that I felt my presence in Guatemala was truly making a difference in the lives of those with disabilities. At the end of our tour around CCO we met with the director of the center and discussed the possibility of connecting with ABI. We offered suggestions in which CCO could help ABI. One of the main suggestions was to have the wood work class make wooden benches, puzzles, birdhouses, mail boxes, etc. for the residents at ABI. The residents at ABI lacked occupations to help them find meaning, and if they received resources that could allow them to participate in occupations that provided them with a purpose in life they could find meaning. Our suggestion would provide CCO students with a final project in their wood working class and it would help the ABI residents find meaning by feeding the birds with the birdhouses, or sorting the mail in the mail boxes, etc. The instant that we made this huge connection and CCO agreed that our suggestions were possible my heart leaped with happiness. At that precise moment I knew that if we could not help in any other way, we had at least given ABI a valuable resource in the same City.
As I have reflected on before in previous descriptions of my chosen pictures, my communication abilities in Guatemala were still lacking. However, on this service day I found a whole knew way of communicating with individuals that speak a different language. During our tour around CCO we stopped in the gymnasium for a dance show that some of the students wanted to present to us. After they finished dancing they walked over to us, stretched their arms out, and motioned us to dance with them. It was one of the most fun interactions that I had the entire trip because it didn’t matter that neither of us could speak the other persons language. We just danced and laughed together, and it was the best form of communication for that moment.

From this experience at CCO I learned that everything has a way of working itself out. We felt hopeless, unhelpful, and incapable of making a difference when we initially stepping into ABI, but in the least expected way we were able to pull through to make a huge difference. I also learned all about a new institution in Guatemala City that serves individuals with disabilities by enabling them to succeed in a field of their interest, and offering them many occupations to find meaning within.
¡Una iglesia en la Antigua!

Esta es una iglesia que pasamos en antique en nuestro camino hacia el mercado. La iglesia es muy bonita.
La religión es muy importante en Guatemala.

As I was walking through the elegant streets of Antigua I couldn’t help but to notice all the ancient buildings that stood so beautifully among the hustle and bustle. Many of them were churches and others I wouldn’t even venture to guess what was inside. I felt that it was important to document one of the churches, as Guatemalan culture has historically been known to be faithful and to value religious traditions. It was only appropriate that I snap a few pictures of the brilliantly designed church to reflect on the religious quality of Guatemala. One day while walking back from the market I saw a newly wed couple walking down the stairs of the church pictured in the previous slide!

I chose this picture to represent the religious aspects of Guatemala because just as religion is so important to Guatemalans, sharing the significant aspects of Guatemala is important to me. As we learned in To the Mountain and Back, Corpus Christi is one of the largest religious celebrations in Guatemala. It is a tradition to make alfombras in the streets and process through them as the celebration begins (Glittenberg, 1994). This is very different from religious celebrations in the United States. Although many people in the United States are religious as well, we do not have a major celebration as large as Corpus Christi in Guatemala.

Unfortunately we missed the big celebration of Corpus Christi, but we were able to see a small representation at La Vega. The students at La Vega in Patzún made a miniature replica of the celebration and put it on display for us to see. It was really neat to see all the brightly colored alfombras. I really enjoyed learning about the significance of religion in Guatemala.
Mi grupo de servicio en volcán Pacaya

Cuatro estudiantes en volcán Pacaya. Estuvimos excitados que subimos el volcán.
¡Amistad!

The picture on the previous slide is of my service group in Guatemala. I felt that it was very important to include a picture of the three amazing students that I had the privilege of working with at ABI. The friendships that we formed through this trip are life-long, and I am so blessed to have them in my life. Although we all have very different personalities we were each able to share our own contribution to the group to make the biggest possible change at ABI. Whether it was Katie’s organizational skills, Lindsey’s creative ideas, Colleen’s humor, or my very own Mary Poppins book bag (I carried a backpack with anything and everything that the group could possibly need from wet ones and toilet paper to a detailed binder of all the important trip information and week long schedule) we had it covered and made a well-rounded group! It was amazing how well we worked together.

As the trip continued I began to notice friendship as a cultural norm in Guatemala. Not only were our interpreters all very good friends that had worked together for many years, but they could not have been more friendly and welcoming to the entire Xavier group. They instantly made friends with all of us and I felt totally comfortable with each Guatemalan interpreter. We shared stories, laughed about the funny moments on the trip, ate our meals together, and chatted on the long car rides to different excursions or service sites. As Muhammad Ali once said, “Friendship is the hardest thing in the world to explain. It's not something you learn in school. But if you haven't learned the meaning of friendship, you really haven't learned anything” (Ali) If Muhammad Ali’s words are true then Guatemalan’s are the smartest people because they value true friendship and live the life of a true friend. Their friendliness and generosity inspired me to think about the way I treat my friends and the way I lead my life every day in the United States. I want to make it a goal to befriend someone new each week at Xavier because the Guatemalan people have influenced me to be a better friend.
Amor Del Niño

Jugamos con bebés en el amor del niño.
Los bebés eran preciosos
Amor Del Niño

Love the child is a great organization started by Steve Osborn and his wife. The orphanage houses many children, primarily babies, that are found on the streets or given to the orphanage from mothers who don’t feel that they can adequately take care of their children. Steve’s Orphanage brings hope back into these small children’s lives for a better future. They are cared for, fed, sheltered, and loved at this orphanage, and we had the opportunity to hang out with some of the children and babies.

The picture in the previous slide is a picture of me holding a baby that was found on the streets just two days prior. The baby was recovering from an episode of convulsions, but seemed to be doing much better. In *Guatemalan Journey*, Stephen Benz explains the tremendous amount of street children that linger in the city. “...you’d see these kids huddled in doorways, the smaller ones – as young at six, seven – curled like kittens in cast-off cardboard boxes” (Benz, 1996). Amor Del Niño provides an outlet from this terrible future for some Guatemalan children.

I chose this picture to include in my portfolio because it represents not only the social issue of poverty in Guatemala, but the kindness and love that some people have to fight the current issues affecting such a beautiful country. When I look at the picture of the baby it reminds me of the love and care that Amor Del Niño provides for her and many other babies.

Although the United States unfortunately has many homeless people, it is rare to walk down the streets of a city and find many children or even babies left in cardboard boxes all alone. This social issue results from extreme poverty and was really eye opening for me to hear and learn about. Thank goodness for people like Steve and his wife that help to find solutions to some of the social problems faced in Guatemala. Even though they are unable to help all the children in Guatemala they have helped so many children escape the cycle of poverty.
Darvy con un perro vago

Darvy, nuestro intérprete, rescata perros vagos.
Entrevista con Darvy

One of the first things I noticed as I walked through the streets of Antigua and Guatemala City was the multitude of stray dogs wandering around. I probably saw at least fifteen stray dogs each time we went out of Santa Ana (our hotel). The dogs were clearly hungry and sick. Physically, they were too thin and scraggly looking. It was such a shock for me to see this because in the United States it is rare to see that many stray dogs each day, and people in the United States adore dogs.

Although there are many other problems affecting Guatemala I figured that most people would not reflect on this specific one. I thought I would talk to Darvy about the problem to understand more about the reasons why Guatemala has so many stray dogs and how it affects the people. Darvy was able to give me some really good information because of his experiences related to the issue.

Darvy talked extensively about the reason that so many stray dogs wander around Guatemala. He said that dogs are not well-liked in Guatemala as they are in other places of the world. Guatemalan people do not view them as pets or friends like we think of dogs. Therefore, they are abandoned to fend for themselves on the streets. It is a problem because they carry diseases and fleas and they eventually become pests to Guatemalans. This leads to rising rates of abuse to the animals because they are not wanted.

Darvy holds a special place in his heart for dogs, and it bothers him that so many go hungry, and are suffering on the streets. He decided that he would do something to help the situation even if it only made a small impact. Darvy rescues some of the stray dogs on the streets to “fix” them so that they cannot reproduce more. He nurtures them and feeds them while they regain their strength. Darvy has even kept some of them as pets so that he can care for them rather then sending them back out on the streets. Although it may not seem that he is making a huge difference to help the issue of stray dogs in Guatemala, he has made a difference in the lives of the dogs that he has cared for.
References


¡El Fin!