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## Thanks for Reading Our First Newsletter!

As we write this, it is very hot in Managua. Although it is usually not excessively hot here until Easter time, the Nicaraguan families with whom we have been living since January 30 have also been complaining about the heat! Our first two weeks in Nicaragua have been eye opening. We've settled in with our families, seen some of Nicaragua, decided which service sites the students will work at, and hit the books for class. In this newsletter, Frances, Holly, Krista, and Andrea describe some of the excitement that each of these new experiences has brought.

There have also been some real challenges. Our host families are very generous, but adapting to new food (lots of it!) has not been easy on our stomachs. We've found that our Nicaraguan community partners don't always make clear their expectations for the students at their service sites. The course work is also demanding; the students have completed lengthy reading assignments and handed in several papers, with more to come. And our lively *barrio* is noisy at times, with the sounds of hens and roosters; early-morning fruit vendors; mangos dropping onto tin roofs; and our host families navigating their own hectic schedules. In short, although all of us have found that moments for quiet, personal reflection can be hard to come by, we're having a great semester in Nicaragua!

--By Julia O'Hara, Trip Leader

### **Program participants**

Holly Banner  
Andrea Barbour  
Jeffrey R. Dorr  
Daniel Goodstein  
Frances Harty  
Kaitlyn Kramer  
Krista Kutz  
Matthew Mellon  
Jaclyn Stenger  
Amy Wetterau

### **Faculty Trip Leader**

Dr. Julia O'Hara



## Living with Nicaraguan Host Families: A First Impression



*Holly lives with Blanca and Martin and her new Nicaraguan brother Kenneth (pictured above) and her new Nicaraguan sister shown below (L) with Holly and new friend Edda Dávila (R) at the welcome party (Bienvenida) in the Barrio Catorce de Junio (La Luz) where the group will spend most of the semester.*

As I approached the place I was destined to live for the next three months, a variety of emotions flowed through me. I looked around the *microbus* and I could see my feelings displayed on the faces of the other students as well. Many questions were racing through our minds such as: I wonder what my family is like? What if they do not like me? What happens if we have trouble communicating? All of these fears seemed to drain away the moment we met our families, though. They were radiant with excitement and joy. As soon as I stepped up to the door of my home, my new little brother, Kenneth, threw his arms around me. It was an amazing feeling of acceptance. All of the families have taken us in as one of their own.

It seems that we have all made wonderful connections with our

families up to this point. Each one of us has found a sense of commonality in one aspect or another with our families. There are many significant differences amongst the families as well that will surely give each of us a unique experience. Some of them are related to others, some are better off than others, some have large families, others have small, and so on. This was interesting for some of us in the beginning, as we did not necessarily know who was actually a member of our family and who actually lived in our house, since people are constantly coming in and out. It was an exciting beginning to the adventure lying ahead of us!

--By Holly Banner

Holly is living with Blanca and Martin, Kenia and Kenneth.

### Where are the others living (& not living) this year?

- Andrea is with Dna. Norma;
- Jeff is with Humberto and Ivania;
- Frances is with Dna. Marcia;
- Katilyn is with Dna. Marta;
- Jackie is with Dna. Nieves;
- Matt is with Dna. Adilia Gutierrez;
- Amy is with Dna. Elba Tapia;
- Dan is with Dna. Coco;
- Krista with Dna. Cristobalina;
- Jackie is with Dna. Nieves;
- Matt with Dna. Adilia Gutierrez;
- Dr. Julia O'Hara is with Dna. Francisca.

Dna. Mercedes is working in Italy





### In the ASLS-Nicaragua, the “A” is for “Academic”

We are learning a great amount through our experiences in Nicaragua, and our classes are helping us to understand what and why we are experiencing the things we are. Our Service Learning class, taught by Dr. O'Hara, is helping us understand the importance of doing service in the Third World. This includes readings on the subject as well as the actual service we do weekday mornings. Central American History, taught by Dr. O'Hara as well, begins by looking at recent and current events that are now affecting the region and we will work backwards in history to the independence era. Our semester-long project will include the use of oral history in studying our research topics. Fr. Joe Mulligan is team-teaching our Liberation Theology class with Dr. Mike Gable.

In this class we examine faith from the perspective of the economically disadvantaged. Our Spanish class, taught by two native Nicaraguans (who do not speak English), involves four different sections into which we have been placed based on our individual skill level. This allows us to have personalized attention in working towards improving our Spanish speaking and comprehension skills. The Central American Culture and Society class, team-taught by Dr. Irene Hodgson and Rosa Woods, a Nicaraguan from the Atlantic Coast, teaches us about the various aspects of the culture we are living in currently. All in all, we will be kept very busy by the classes alone this semester.

--By Frances Harty



**Theology class with Fr. Joe Mulligan, S.J.**

### Learning through Service

One of the main parts of our experience here is to perform social service. Therefore, in Managua, in addition to adapting to the language barriers, temperature change, and adjusting to being away from home, we immediately got our hands dirty in the service part of service learning. Many scholars consider this type of learning a waste of time or a semester vacation, but it is far from that. Our service sites have led us to ask questions concerning social justice and what constitutes acceptable treatment of human beings, fair trade compared to free trade issues, health care concerns that are severely needed, government and political issues concerning democracy, neo-liberalism, and American foreign policy.

The four service sites that the Xavier University students are serving at this semester

are Pajarito Azul, Olla de la Soya: San Rafael, Olla de la Soya: Georgino Andrade, and La Mascota. Pajarito Azul is a community for persons with mental and/or physical disabilities and serves about one hundred patients in the Managua area. Olla de la Soya: San Rafael and Olla de la Soya: Georgino Andrade, located in two different communities, are nutrition projects that serve healthy meals to children as well as provide a pre-school program. La Masocta is a children's hospital that serves the entire country of Nicaragua. We have just gotten started at our service sites and are already learning and experiencing so much, and we are looking forward to integrating this experience into our academic work in Nicaragua.

--By Andrea Barbour

*Our semester-long project will include the use of oral history in studying our research topics.*

### Who's Where?

**Pajarito Azul**  
Jeff and Andrea

**Olla de la Soya, San Rafael**  
Krista and Holly

**Olla Georgino Andrade**  
Matt, Kaitlyn and Amy

**La Mascota**  
Dan, Frances and Jackie



### Are We There Yet?

The energy that carries us through a busy week of service and classes does not stop when the weekend comes. Each armed with a pen, notebook and camera, we board the minibus for our journey beyond the city limits of Managua. We are discovering how integral our weekend excursions are to the service-learning program because in the cities we visit, we can see that the issues we study in the classroom are relevant to all Nicaraguans.

So far, we have traveled to Masaya and, most recently, Granada. In Masaya, we saw for ourselves why Nicaragua's nickname is "Land of Lakes and Volcanoes," as we took in the breathtaking view at *La Laguna de Apoyo*. The breeze of the high

altitude was a welcomed break from the Managua heat. In Granada, we not only toured the historic buildings of downtown, but we also were surprised with the chance to shake hands with Ernesto Cardenal, one of the most renowned poets in all of Latin America, and to attend a concert by the legendary Carlos Mejía Godoy. Two figures we have been studying since last semester came to life for us! Our Granada and Masaya excursions enabled us to gain a broader view of Central American culture and society and whet our appetites for our upcoming travels to Ometepe & Ocotal!

--By Krista Kutz

*We are discovering how integral our weekend excursions are to the service-learning program*

#### Academic Service Learning Semester in Nicaragua

Dr. Julia O'Hara  
ohara@xavier.edu

For more information on Xavier's Academic Service Learning Semesters in Nicaragua, Ghana, India and Urban Cincinnati, contact:

Dr. Irene B. Hodgson,  
Interim Director  
513-745-3541  
hodgson@xavier.edu

[http://www.xu.edu/  
service\\_learning/](http://www.xu.edu/service_learning/)



**Group just before departure from the Cincinnati airport, January 29, 2007**