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## Greetings from Nicaragua!

Since we wrote our first newsletter, the time has gone quickly. We have all really begun to feel at home in Managua and with our host families. The students have taken on larger roles at their service sites, the pace of our traveling has picked up, and the large number of still-to-be-graded essays that I have in front of me tells me that the course work for the semester is picking up as well. In short, we have been busy.

One of the highlights of the past few weeks has been the arrival of Assistant Trip Leader Dawn Mahi, whose travel experience, excellent Spanish-language skills, and warm personality have been a welcome addition to our group. Another highlight has been our opportunity to travel. We have visited, among other places, the island of Ometepe, the northern city of Ocotal, the historic city of León, and the Atlantic Coast. We were also thrilled to have visitors. John Dorr; Hannah and Abby Goodstein; Mary and Kaitlyn Stenger; and Lonnie and Mildred Barbour visited the program. Dr. John Fairfield, chair of Xavier's Department of History, also visited us, and even brought along his daughter, Mary Frances. Fran, Kaitlyn, and Abby, along with the ten ASLS students, all did a terrific job of guiding and interpreting for our visitors! Dr. Irene Hodgson visited as well. As the only visitor who wasn't in Nicaragua for the first time, Dr. Hodgson not only helped keep things running smoothly, she also got a chance to get reacquainted with the Nicaraguans who miss her so much. To have so many friends, family members, and colleagues visit and share their first experience in Nicaragua was a great joy that we will all, I believe, remember for a long time to come.

--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

### Assistant Trip Leader

Dawn Mahi

### Faculty Trip Leader

Dr. Julia O'Hara



## Oh My, Ometepe!



*Amy Wetterau celebrates reaching the tree line of Volcán Concepción, on the Island of Ometepe, after a two-hour vertical hike.*

Ometepe is an island in Lake Nicaragua, one of the largest lakes in North America, and the home to the only freshwater sharks in the World. The island has two volcanoes, Volcan Maderas, the dormant one and Volcan Concepción, the active one. Ometepe is a two and a half hour drive plus a one hour ferry ride away from Managua. We arrived on the island on Saturday morning and met our two fabulous tour guides. We started the trip with a tour of Moyogalpa, one of the two cities on the island. We visited an interesting museum that talked about the history of the volcanoes as well as the history of the indigenous people before the arrival of the Spanish. After lunch we went and swam at a beach famous for the beautiful view. Here we watched the sunset. The last thing we did on Saturday after dinner at our hotel was attend a concert. It was raising awareness for the archeological heritage of Ometepe.

Sunday we split up. Half of us climbed 1000 meters up Volcan Concepción. We could only go up that far, the tree line, because of the gasses the volcano was emitting. It was a five hour hike with at least two hours straight up hill. The other part of the group went to the other half of the island to visit a coffee farm called Finca Magdeleña. It was rumored that the house belonged to the Somoza family before the revolution in 1979. At Finca Magdalena, they learned about and looked at petroglyphs. After that they visited and swam in a natural warm-water spring called Ojo de Agua. According to Kaitlyn, "It was beautiful!" After this busy morning, we ate lunch and headed home to Managua Sunday afternoon. Ometepe was unforgettable. I am very thankful there were no volcanic eruptions while we were there, as that would have caused some trouble.

—By Amy Wetterau

## Nicaragua Bloopers!

Match the Xavier Students & Professors with the mishaps that follow:

- Amy Wetterau
- Dan Goodstein
- Holly Banner
- Andrea Barbour
- Krista Kutz
- Dr. John Fairfield
- Dr. Julia O'Hara

1. Told his/her family that s/he prefers omelettes made with ojos (eyes).
2. Face-planted in the mud while trying to dislodge the minibus.
3. Accidentally dyed all of his/her laundry pink.
4. Missed the bus stop and had to hike 20 minutes uphill to get home.
5. Told host father "Soy el baño!" (translation: "I *am* the bathroom," not "I am *in* the bathroom.")
6. Made tons of Nica friends despite knowing only two phrases in Spanish.

(Answers on next page)



*Andrea Barbour and Frances Harty find their sea legs aboard the ferry to Ometepe island.*



## A Sign that I'm Part of the Family

"Tia, Tia!" my three year old niece, Alicia, screams upon arriving at my house most mornings. Because "tia" - my 20 year old sister Raquel - and I are usually in our room sleeping or getting ready for the day, Raquel often doesn't answer. In the past Alicia would switch to "abuelo" or "mama" after not receiving a response from Raquel. However, in the past few weeks a timid "Kaylin!" has followed the unanswered call. Kaylin, Alicia's version of Kaitlyn, has followed as I have become a fixture in the family. While I don't enjoy being woken up by a screaming three year-old, I can't help but to smile at the sign that I'm part of the family! There has never been a doubt in my mind that I am a part of Doña Marta's family, as they have opened their doors and their hearts to make me feel at home. I especially love the conversations that I have with my sister, Raquel. As we are almost the same age, it has been really amazing to talk about anything and everything

with her, as I would with my siblings in the United States. It's difficult to have conversations about politics or social issues, or even just gossip in Spanish, but it has been the very thing that has helped to forge my friendship with Raquel. As close as I am to my family in the United States, I was fearful of coming to Nicaragua and living with a family very different from my own. But living here has



shown me the love and care of Doña Marta and her family that is much like my family in the United States. I am forever asking if it is okay to do this

or that, and Doña Marta has consistently told me: "Don't worry this is your house, and we are here for you." In innumerable ways she has shown me this love and hospitality and it is difficult to imagine a living with another family. My Nica family has made me feel right at home; I would definitely say it's a perfect match. And so, as I looked around our Bienvenida (our Welcome Party for our US families who were visiting) I couldn't help but wonder how Dr. O'Hara and Dr. Hodgson had done it. How had they managed to place each one of us with a family perfectly suited to our personalities? As the last month and a half have progressed, and we all have become situated in our families, we have noticed how 'perfect' all of our

placements are. Amy, who is living with Doña Elba, has three sisters and a brother who echo the close relationships that Amy has with her siblings at home. After having a dead mouse thrown at her in jest by Doña Nieves, Jackie commented that she was glad her family has the same humor that she does. So we don't know how they did it, but here in Managua, we are all enjoying the fabulous love and care of each of our respective 'perfect' families!

—Kaitlyn Kramer

*These experiences have enabled us to give a real context to the social justice questions we have been asking in our academic work this semester.*

## Service and Friendship

As the semester passes the midway point, all of us are getting settled into our worksites. At my site, Olla de la Soya: Georgino Andrade (a child nutrition project), my work has taken on new responsibilities lately such as preparing craft activities for the kids and occasionally helping out in the kitchen. The day begins when Amy, Kaitlyn, and I arrive at 8 o'clock in the morning and the kids run out to meet us screaming and laughing. We then fix up the room that the kids spend the day in and clean the dust off the patio. The time before lunch is divided into sections for singing, homework for school after lunch, drawing or painting exercises, and recess. Lunch is the final activity, and because Olla de la Soya means "pot of soy", the meal normally consists of a soy-based food with vegetables, and a fresco, a fresh fruit drink of *piña* or *naranja*.

The kids at service have been great, they never fail to make us laugh. This past month the three of us Xavier students at the Olla have been bonding with the staff; some of our new friends include Doña Christina (the director of the program), Jessica, and Leo (one of the teachers). It has been great to have the experience to get to know such great people and to become a part of their lives. Through these new relationships we have learned much about healthcare and education issues that are affecting the kids at Olla, which in turn has helped us tie in everything else we have been learning in our classes, especially Culture and Service Learning. These unique experiences have enabled us to give a real context to the questions of social justice we have been asking in our academic work this semester.

—Matthew Mellon

## Where Have Our Travels Taken Us So Far?

**Masaya  
La Catarina  
Granada & Las Isletas  
Ometepe  
Ocotal  
León  
Pearl Lagoon  
Bluefields**



### Bringing Course Work to Life

It has become clear amidst any downtime we may have why this is an *Academic Service Learning Semester*. The first half of the semester has proven that amidst daily service, culture trips, and speakers the course load of this semester is every bit as intense as normal. The greatest difference between this semester and one back at Xavier is both the blessing and curse that all of our excursions and work has been intertwined with our class work. In a sense it has allowed for a professor's dream, class seven days a week. At the same time it has been a great privilege to have the opportunity to see our lectures and experiences brought to life in our daily experiences. In our History, Culture, and Service Learning classes we read about how the Atlantic Coast of the country has been struggling not to break from the rest of Nicaragua but to gain autonomy. After these readings we had the opportunity to journey to that part of the country, converse with the community

leaders, and learn their interpretation of autonomy. In a similar way in our Theology course we read about the concept of Liberation Theology as theology from below, and on a regular basis are allowed to visit Christian Base Communities who manifest this theological outlook. Our Spanish courses, which are more like personal tutors with all the personal attention, are probably our most applicable courses with constant opportunities to continue refining our language skills. There are many more examples which I could list but I think what becomes most evident in this semester is that the academic concepts that sometimes seem abstract are really brought to life on a daily basis in Nicaragua.

—Jeff Dorr

*It has been a great privilege to have the opportunity to see our lectures brought to life in our daily experiences.*

**Academic Service Learning Semester in Nicaragua**

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## La Costa Atlántica, or The Atlantic Coast

The Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua is such a different place from the Pacific side that when we visited for five days people asked us when we were going “back to Nicaragua.” The reality is that the whole Atlantic Coast is part of an autonomous region located within Nicaragua. We visited the Pearl Lagoon and Bluefields, both located in RAAS, the southern half of the autonomous region. The region gained the title of “autonomous” in 1987 during Daniel Ortega’s first presidency. Since then, autonomy has been defined largely as, “the recognition and effective exercise of the historical rights of the indigenous people and ethnic community in the context of national unity under constitutional principles.” The ongoing struggle of the coast is to be integrated into the rest of Nicaragua without losing its rich indigenous and creole cultures. Since Ortega was reelected, the *costeños* have high hopes that more of their constitutional rights will be granted within the next few years.

Our activities included speaking with Wesly Williams about the history of Pearl Lagoon. He emphasized the current need for the government to reallocate the communal lands to indigenous and Creole communities, in accordance with the national constitution. Then, Johnny Hodgson spoke about the history of the Atlantic Coast and he mentioned the acquisition of the Atlantic Coast by the Nicaraguan army in 1894. This event was termed the “Reincorporation” by Nicaraguans and the “Overthrow” by the then sovereign nation of Mosquitia. In another talk, a representative from MARINA (the Ministry of the Environment and Natural Resources) mentioned some of the environmental projects that are in effect to protect the rainforests in the autonomous region. And a department director at the URACCAN (the University of the Atlantic Coast of the Autonomous Region) gave us the history of her institution and education in the area. We also spoke with the leader of a small coastal community, and with our guide, Rosa Woods, who is a native of the coast. We learned that the ethnicity of the people there is vastly different from the rest of Nicaragua. Indigenous populations include Miskito, Sumu, Rama,

Garifuna, and Creole. In addition, many people have Afro-Caribbean heritage. The majority of Atlantic Coast inhabitants speak either indigenous languages or Creole (which Rosa termed “bad English!”). The cuisine on the coast consists of a lot of seafood and a traditional dish called “rundown,” which contains coconut milk, potatoes, plantains, and meat or fish.

Luckily for Dr. O’Hara, her birthday fell during the trip. In true Nicaraguan style we “serenaded” her at 4:00 in the morning with the song “Feliz Cumpleaños.” It was a good start to the day for everyone. We celebrated that night with birthday cake, and also had the unique opportunity to watch traditional coastal dances as well. The dancers invited us up to try to dance with them at the end, and we saw just how much harder the dances were than they looked. We struggled to move our hips even half as fast as the trained dancers.

To complete our experience on the coast, we finished the trip with a visit to the Cays. We took an hour-long *panga* ride out to a deserted island in the Caribbean where we relaxed on the beach, swam, and snorkeled. Some people saw starfish and others saw sea urchins, lobsters, tropical fish, king crabs, and coral reefs. The boys collected coconuts to eat and shared them with the group. On the way back, we saw dolphins swimming in the distance. We spent the evening riding 9 hours back to Managua, which more and more feels like home.

—Jaclyn Stenger

*The Atlantic Coast’s rich cultural heritage includes the Miskitu, Sumu, Rama, Garifuna, and other indigenous groups. It also includes a creole population of African and Afro-Caribbean descent, and a sizable mestizo population as well.*



## Adventures in Ocotal

In February we traveled north to Ocotal, a small city located near the Rio Coco, the natural border between Nicaragua and Honduras. After meeting our host families and settling in, we went on a tour of the city with our guides, Francisco and Gerardo, and with three students from the University of Ocotal. As our group walked through the cobblestone streets, we spent much of the time learning about Ocotal's rich history and culture. Included in our tour was the old regional headquarters of the National Guard, Ocotal Market, a colonial church over 400 years old, and a beautiful statue from 1945 dedicated to peace. On Thursday we left Ocotal for the mountains and La Finca Monte Libano, a coffee plantation 2000 meters up in the mountains. There we learned how coffee is grown, harvested, and transported to storage and roasting factories. The process involves intense manual labor, and workers are lucky to earn ten dollars a day. Although the increase in fair-trade coffee has helped the small farmers, it provides very little benefit to the laborers. Leaving the mountains, we had lunch by the Rio Coco then went to a coffee testing lab cooperative where we learned about the extensive testing, roasting, and taste testing that is involved in the production of quality coffee. After buying some fair-trade locally produced coffee we visited the Virgen de las Piedras, where the Virgin Mary is said to have once appeared. People from all over Nicaragua make pilgrimages here in hopes that her presence will heal sick friends and family members. Friday we visited an organic co-operative farm, where one of the owners explained how the cooperative formed, the process of growing organic vegetables, and the difficulties that arise from lack of water. From the farm we headed to a nearby organic fertilizer (*abono*) producer, whose product is used by organic farmers throughout Nicaragua. *Abono* is created by composting a precise mixture of various materials. From carbon ash to coffee shells each of the 18 ingredients plays an important part in the overall makeup of the fertilizer.

Saturday many of our family members accompanied us to Somoto, a 15 kilometer long canyon that was discovered just a few years ago. We spent the whole day swimming, tubing, and exploring the massive canyon. Friday evening Dr. Hodgson arrived with Martín, and we had a gathering with all the families where we shared a Nica meal of fried rice mixed with chicken and vegetables and discussed our trip, what we had learned, and some of our favorite moments. Sunday we said our goodbyes to our wonderful families, guides, and new friends, and headed back to Managua. On the way we made a stop in the city of Esteli to view some of the amazing revolutionary murals there.

—Dan Goodstein

*As we walked through the cobblestone streets, we spent much of the time learning about Ocotal's rich history and culture [including] the old regional headquarters of the National Guard, Ocotal Market, a colonial church over 400 years old, and a*



(left) Krista Kutz with new friends in Ocotal: Francisco (l) & Gerardo

(right) Dr. John Fairfield, chair of Xavier's History Department, visits the city of León with daughter Fran and trip leader Dr. Julia O'Hara.

