Scholarship Exchange in Ecuador
FINAL REPORT 2011-2012

Final Reports are written by each Scholarship Exchange Program student at the completion of their time abroad. Final reports are meant to serve as an overview of the program and to orient the future exchange student. The information in this report is subject to change and is the experience of one person.

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1. **Obtaining a visa/residence permit:** The process to obtain the 12-VIII visa was relatively painless. There is no need to travel to Chicago; there is an Ecuador consulate right in Northeast Minneapolis (conveniently close to campus). The address is 333 East Hennepin Avenue, and the consulate is located inside the U.S. Bank. The phone number is 612-721-6468. **There is no longer a location off of East Lake Street, no matter what Google might tell you!**

I suggest calling ahead and getting an appointment set up as soon as possible in case the ambassador happens to be in Ecuador for a large part of the summer (this created a few difficulties for me during the process). Follow the directions given to you by USFQ, and $80 later you will have your 12-VIII visa!

Once in Ecuador, USFQ will tell you all about how to register your visa and obtain your residency card. This process has changed since August 2011, when I went through it, so I do not know specifics, but it should not be that complicated. When going to the Migration office in Ecuador, get there very early (before it opens) to avoid having to wait around all day.

2. **Materials:** You will receive emails from Veronica Castelo, the international student contact at USFQ. Her email is vcastelo@usfq.edu.ec. She is an absolutely invaluable resource for each and every issue you may have while attending USFQ – her door is always open! You will receive information regarding obtaining your visa; there are some key documents that the consulate will need (such as a letter of admission and a letter of request to obtain a visa). Lastly, the student will receive information about his/her host family.

3. **Arrival:** Once I received the contact information for my host family, I emailed back-and-forth with them until my arrival. They offered to pick me up at the airport, so I was met there by them in August. In the case that the host family cannot be there, it is possible to arrange for someone in the international office at
USFQ to pick you up. Otherwise, taxis will cost anywhere from $5-10 (depending on the address of your host family). Make sure to have this address written down (it might be easier to simply show the taxi driver the address rather than attempt to explain it before you are familiar with the city).

4. **Health issues:** The only clinic I ever used was the one attached to USFQ. Many of my international student friends went there when they had problems with the food and/or parasites. You can walk right into the clinic as appointments are not required. I only went there for several vaccines; I never had any other issues (luckily!). The yellow fever vaccine there is less than $15 and is the same exact one you receive here in the U.S., so I highly recommend waiting until you get to Ecuador to get that done if your insurance does not cover it here. I did not ever use the CISI insurance policy. You are not required to purchase any additional insurance. I also cannot speak to dental care as I did not ever utilize dental services while in Ecuador. Keep in mind that most (if not all) of the medical professionals will not speak English, so bring a dictionary or ask an Ecuadorian friend to come with you if you have specific things you do not know how to discuss in Spanish.

5. **Money Matters:** Before leaving, I opened up a checking account with Charles Schwab bank because they do not charge ATM fees abroad. They also reimburse you ATM owners’ fees up to $15/month. I highly recommend using them as the ATM fees REALLY add up. With my TCF checking account, for example, I would have gotten a TCF charge of about $3 for every withdrawal and have to pay ATM owners fees (another $.50-3 each time).

I usually used Banco Pichincha ATMs because they have a bank right across from USFQ (and it’s safe). Only carry around your debit/credit card if you know you are going to use the ATM. Avoid taking out large sums of money (another reason why having a checking account that does not charge many fees is a great idea). Put your money away before exiting the bank.

You can use your credit or check card at many places, like the supermarket or the pharmacy, but keep in mind your bank back at home might charge a 5% international fee on all charges.

**Bring lots of small bills. Ecuador has a change shortage.** You will not be able to get change for a $100 or $50 bill anywhere. In terms of budgeting, it really depends on personal preference. I traveled a lot. There were many people who didn’t travel much or who set extreme limits for themselves (only $1.50 per meal,
for example – my caution is that these are also the people who often ended up with food poisoning). My point is that whatever you are comfortable with is doable! I spent about $8,000, but that included 10 days in the Galapagos and a month-long trek around Peru (with a visit to Machu Picchu). If you are in a bind and need to get money wired to you from home (if you are the victim of a robbery, etc.), there are Western Union locations (including one across the street from the school).

6. Scholarship:

**Average Monthly Budget: Ecuador**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Amount</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>rent</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>covered by scholarship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>utilities</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>covered by scholarship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>food</td>
<td>$200</td>
<td>Lunch is not included in any of the host family stays, and in my case I had to buy most of my own food.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>transportation</td>
<td>$200</td>
<td>Figure based on bus rates, occasional taxi, and traveling almost every weekend around the country.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>entertainment</td>
<td>$150</td>
<td>Going out to dinners/bars, movies, eating out, taxis home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>books (per term)</td>
<td>$90</td>
<td>Books are usually photocopied, bound, and sold only in the bookstore (not many copyright laws here). You will have to pay to print homework on campus or off campus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>photocopies/school supplies</td>
<td>$20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>$660 + (more during the months in which I traveled a lot)</td>
<td>It’s a once in a lifetime opportunity! Live every moment of the experience to the fullest.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7. University/Campus: The campus is extremely small in comparison to the University of Minnesota! There are only 5 minutes scheduled between classes. The campus is beautiful. Because there are only a few main buildings, everything is easy to find. I used the computer labs almost daily, but I also often brought my laptop to school. The IT office can help you set up wireless on your laptop. The library seemed very small compared to the University of Minnesota libraries we are used to! It is always packed with students who are studying or meeting for group projects. The International office is in Casa Tomate, next to Casa Blanca. This is where Veronica Castelo’s office is (as well as Daniel Cordova, the director), so this is the place to visit if you are ever having any issues. There is a gym on campus; even though it is quite small, I used the weights quite often.
8. University Calendar: We received the University calendar as part of the materials given out at Orientation (the second or third week of August). Classes begin in August. There are two major breaks: one in the fall, and one in the spring. They are countrywide vacations, so at these times the beaches are extremely crowded! You will get about 3 weeks off for Christmas; I came home to visit my family during this time. Final exams are the last week of the semester. The academic calendar is very similar to that of the U of M!

9. Academic Issues: For me, school was much more difficult here, simply because of the fact that all my classes were taught in Spanish. Classes are smaller than those taught at the University of Minnesota; usually there are never more than 25-30 students. In some of my classes, I had a midterm and a final, but in the majority, I had about 4 exams and a final. There is more work here than at the U of M; nightly homework is common in many classes. Grading of international students varies greatly. In my psychology classes, even though I was the only international student, there was no leniency on my grades. I appreciated this toughness, but be aware that many professors will not cut you slack for not being a native speaker of Spanish.

Fall schedule:
1. Conversación Intermedia with Claudia Gutierrez (highly recommended) – 4 credits
2. Cerámica with Emma Kohn (more difficult than expected) – 4 credits
3. Principles of Marketing with Thomas Gura (taught in English) – 4 credits
4. Introducción a la Nutrición Humana with Lucia Ramirez (very difficult but I learned a lot) – 4 credits plus 1 cred lab
5. Español Avanzado with Lidice Alonso – 4 credits
21 credits total

**To be honest, even though the credit system is a bit different, this course load felt exactly as it would have if I was taking 21 credits at the U of M. The classes are just as long, there was just as much work, etc.

Spring schedule:
1. Lengua y Literatura with Enrique Wong (all international students; fun and challenging) – 4 credits
2. Estudios Críticos de Comunicación y Arte with Santiago Castellanos (incredibly difficult – nightly 50 page readings on academic theories, all in Spanish – but Santiago is the coolest person ever) – 4 credits
3. Psicología de Motivación with Ana Trujillo – 4 credits (tough grader but interesting class)
4. Conversación Avanzada with Claudia Guiterrez (highly recommended) – 3 credits
5. Psicología Organizacional with Lorena Pastor (not too difficult of a grader; interesting class) – 4 credits
6. Andinismo with Diego Nuñez – 3 credits

22 credits total
However, it felt like 19 credits; the sports class only required 3 weekend trips for the whole semester, so it was not a weekly engagement.

I am still in the processing of seeing how much I will/will not get credit for at the U of M. It is a bit difficult to obtain transfer credit; talk extensively with your advisers before leaving.

10. Language Courses: I took Conversación Intermedia and Avanzada and Español Avanzado. I would recommend all of these classes; my confidence and knowledge levels both improved because of these experiences. Claudia is such an amazing person; she is a great teacher and friend.

11. Volunteer/Internships: I did not volunteer or participate in an internship while abroad because of my hefty class schedule. However, there are many classes you can take that require a volunteer placement if this is something you are interested in! Talk to the international office for more information.

12. Housing: You will live with the family of the student who comes to Minnesota to study abroad. In the case of the 2012-2013 year, this will be the Roma family. You will have your own room. Many families have a maid; mine did not. Keep communication lines very open with your family in order to prevent issues. Know that you will need to adjust and adapt to your host family’s schedule and rules. Host family situations have their challenges, but you will learn a lot about yourself throughout the process. Host families are a great way to practice your language skills and learn about the country from people who have lived there all their lives.

13. Eating & Entertainment: Breakfast and dinner are eaten with the host family. Breakfast and dinner were prepared for me by my host mother. Be aware that you will need to adjust your eating schedule so as to follow that of your host family. Bigote, a restaurant across the street from USFQ, is where many of the
international students eat lunch. Bigote means mustache in Spanish. This place offers yummy, healthy sandwiches and other popular items.

Every international student loves La Zona (also referred to as La Mariscal, the Foch, Gringolandia, New Town, etc.). I was no exception! 😊 There are a ton of restaurants and bars within a small area, so it’s very convenient when you don’t have a car! However, I also hung out with a lot of Ecuadorians who didn’t really like the Foch, so we explored other nightlife options around Cumbayá and Quito as well. If you go out in Old Town, don’t stray too far from La Ronda. It can be dangerous outside this heavily-guarded area. The nightlife is much more relaxed in Old Town than in New Town.

14. **Transportation:** I lived in Cumbaya, so I walked to school or took a $1 taxi. Taxis are $1 pretty much everywhere in Cumbaya. To go to Quito in a taxi from Cumbaya, it costs $8-10 depending on the time of day. The bus is $.25 one-way (takes about 30 minutes). Within Quito, tell the taxi drivers to use the “taximetro” to avoid being overcharged. You will definitely get the “Taxi 101” at Orientation!

15. **Communication:** I bought a Skype subscription for 100 landline minutes ($4 for three months – great deal) so I could contact people when they weren’t on Skype. It’s not necessary to use your Ecuador cell phone to contact the United States because of Skype, but if you do need to, it’s about $.25/minute for calls and around $.12 per text. Your family will likely have wifi. Getting a cell phone within Ecuador will not be difficult. If you have an old phone, it’s worth bringing there to try out, but keep in mind it might not work with the SIM cards provided by Ecuadorian companies. Do not get Claro! You will be much better off with Movistar.

16. **Background information on country/city:** There have been a lot of issues with the current president, Rafael Correa. The majority of people at USFQ highly dislike the president (it has to do with their economic class). It is definitely a good idea to understand the situation (read some articles about his political and economic views and how they have been affecting the country); you will definitely be asked for your opinion.

Ecuador is awesome in terms of geography. It’s only about the size of Colorado, but it has three distinct regions: the sierra, the jungle, and the coast. There are not really seasons in Quito because of the position on the equator. There is a rainy season (officially October/November through April/May), but it rains a lot during the non-rainy season, too! It’s a spring-like climate all year round. It usually gets
up to about 80 during the day (especially in Cumbaya, which is a bit warmer because it is in the valley), and in the 50s at night.

17. **Safety:** Safety in Ecuador is an issue. The majority of the international students faced issues throughout the year, although they were generally not victims of violence. I was lucky enough to not have any problems. However, I was hyper-aware to the point that many people called me paranoid. I’m a city girl (from Philadelphia), so I tend to conduct myself in that way in all of my surroundings. It paid off. Use only reputable taxis, and take as many precautions as possible to feel safe. If I felt a bit sketchy about a cab I was in, I would make a call and make sure the driver heard me giving his license plate number over the phone. I would never sit by the window on a bus, and I would never walk alone at night (or in small groups, for that matter).

18. **Packing:** I over-packed, but that is because I have a slight clothes obsession. Do NOT plan on buying any clothing at the malls there because it is all imported and ridiculously overpriced. I bought a few items at markets, like alpaca sweaters and scarves. The students at USFQ dress quite nicely, so follow suit if you wish. Shorts are not really worn at all in Ecuador, and certainly not in Quito. You might see them at the beach, where it is much hotter. Bring a warm jacket – the nights get colder than expected (I had to have my winter coat mailed to me). Definitely plan to dress in layers. The fact that Cumbaya is always several degrees warmer than Quito means you should be prepared to modify your outfit depending on where you are! The sun gets really intense. **WEAR SUNSCREEN.** You can buy sunscreen in Ecuador, but it is slightly more expensive, so I brought my year’s supply from home. Always bring an umbrella when you leave the house for more than a few hours. It seems like pretty much every day starts out beautiful and sunny and by afternoon, it’s downpouring. You can buy every toiletry in Ecuador (at the grocery store or the pharmacy). I do suggest bringing over-the-counter medicines (Tylenol, Pepto-Bismol, etc.) because these things can be difficult or confusing to find.

19. **Resources:** I always used the Lonely Planet guide book when I traveled and I was constantly asking my Ecuadorian friends for suggestions/advice. You can also talk to your host family to see what they might have for you to use and what you might need to bring from home.

20. **Overall Assessment:** Hands down the best experience of my life. Take precautions so that nothing happens to ruin your experience! Keep an open mind and spirit, and don’t be afraid to ask for help. Take every opportunity to practice
your language skills, and don’t be afraid to try new things. CHULLA VIDA – Only one life. Learn that phrase and live by it. 😊