

# PiLA

PRINCETON IN  
LATIN AMERICA



## Fellows Report from the Field

*A year of growth – a lifetime of change*

# 2014–2015

Newsletter

February 2015

### Endeavor Mexico

Iara Guzman

“Don’t go. It’s too dangerous,” people told me when I accepted the assignment at Endeavor Mexico, to undertake work unlike anything I had ever done before. But despite no experience in business, and knowing only one person in the Distrito Federal, I arrived in Mexico City just a few weeks after graduating in June 2014. Although I was nervous, I was also excited to be in one of the world’s largest cities, and to return to Latin America after six years of living in the U.S. and Europe.

Since then, I have become convinced that applying to PiLA and accepting the fellowship at Endeavor was the best decision I could have taken, both in terms of my career and personal life. Over the past seven months I have found living and working in Mexico to be extremely fulfilling. Both through Endeavor and outside of work I have met and had the pleasure to collaborate with extremely talented and motivated Mexicans and foreigners who are equally as excited for the future of the country.

Perhaps my most unexpected and life-changing experience has been the opportunity to witness first-hand the growth of Mexico’s burgeoning tech startup scene. Working with entrepreneurs in big data and e-commerce I have learned how technology can be applied to solve some of Mexico’s most pressing problems. Although challenging, being a part of Mexico’s new-technology business environment has been a great learning experience, leading me to reassess my career goals. Today I know that I wish to continue working here for a couple more years, helping Mexican entrepreneurs establish and grow their technology-based businesses.

#### Endeavor

a nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting economic growth via mentoring and entrepreneurship



*Background:* Iara graduated from Princeton University (2014) with a B.A. in political science and a certificate in Latin American studies. She was born and raised in Bolivia.

**Donate Now**

Dear Friends of PiLA,

This issue covers the activities of a handful of 50 fellows currently serving across the region. For success in 2015, we ask you to **make a tax-deductible gift to support PiLA’s mission**. A nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization, PiLA depends on the generosity of visionary individuals—like you—who share our commitment to positively impact life throughout the region. With your support, in 2015–2016 PiLA will continue to place fellows in year-long service posts across the region. Please join the many generous individuals and organizations that support PiLA’s critical work to match talented, motivated recent college graduates with NGOs that are grappling with the myriad cultural, social, economic, and political issues that impact the lives of people across the region. Your help is essential to make PiLA’s work possible. Please also share this newsletter with family and friends!

To make your gift today, call us, mail a check payable to Princeton in Latin America, 194 Nassau St, Suite 211, Princeton, NJ 08542–7003, or donate online: [www.princeton.edu/~pila/support/](http://www.princeton.edu/~pila/support/). No gift is too small to sustain PiLA. We thank you for your commitment and generosity of spirit!

## Providencia, Montevideo, Uruguay

Kate Collins & Marianne Richardson

When we first got to Providencia, we were a little overwhelmed. The organization has many different kinds of programs, and for us, each one represented a new possibility (and a new challenge). Because Providencia focuses both on providing youth with opportunities, and on creating a welcoming place for kids to be themselves, it was difficult deciding where and how we wanted to get started. However, one thing we knew (and which our supervisors also emphasized) was that Providencia's students would benefit from getting to know people from another culture. So when one of our supervisors suggested that we join the girls' soccer team to build stronger relationships with the students, we agreed. The team meets every Monday for drills and a game—fun but also tough sometimes, as many of these girls are far better athletes than we are, and one of us (Marianne) had never played on an organized sports team in her life. Through soccer, the girls practice self-control and sportsmanship, learn healthy exercise habits, and blow off steam after a long day in class (8 am–5 pm). It may sound trite, but playing soccer also helped us get grounded in the organization and see another side of what Providencia is trying to do.



**Providencia, Montevideo, Uruguay**  
a nonprofit organization dedicated to education and youth development

Providencia has been working with families in the Cerro for a long time, always pushing to give kids better academic opportunities, places to be creative, and a loving environment for them to grow up in. Dozens of trained staff members (teachers, professionals, social workers), as well as volunteers and parents, contribute to these goals every day. The organization functions in three parts: the Club de Niños, which provides afternoon classes to young children; the Liceo, a full-time middle school where kids practice things like robotics, journalism, and theater; and Desarrollo Institucional, which secures diversified funding and community support to ensure Providencia's sustainability.

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Now that we've better organized our responsibilities within the team, we spend time every week in all of these sections. Our biggest responsibility is teaching and planning English classes—this year, all our students passed their final English exam—so exciting! We also helped children paint masks in art class which they wore to Providencia's birthday party in October, and we're exploring ways to connect Providencia with people and businesses in the U.S. who could support them in their goals. For the upcoming academic year, we want to start an after-school workshop on computer programming.

By far the most rewarding moments we have at Providencia are those when our work responsibilities and original goals converge—cultural exchange and building relationships with young people. We did this in a memorable way at the end of October, with a Halloween celebration in our English class.



**Background:** Kate graduated from Tufts University with a double major in community health and child development.

Marianne graduated from Butler University with majors in international studies and Spanish and a minor in chemistry.

The students dressed up in costumes and decorated their classrooms with jack-o-lanterns and spider webs. We made a slideshow with photos of our families and favorite Halloween traditions, and students designed a haunted house while practicing related English vocabulary. It was a great opportunity to celebrate and learn about one another's traditions. It also helped us prepare for a Thanksgiving dinner we hosted at home for 35 Uruguayan coworkers and friends—we knew it would be worth the work, even though we only have one burner, a microwave, and a tiny oven (we ended up roasting chickens at a friend's apartment and taking them home in a taxi).

A quote on Providencia's walls reads; "Education is the impact one life can have on another." It's a constant reminder that we all, children and adults, are constantly influencing one other, and sensitivity toward our changing community is part of education's legacy. We're thrilled to be a part of it, and await the coming year with excitement.

## World Food Programme, Panama City, Panama

### Lauren Wyman

Overlooking large ships passing slowly through the Panama Canal, the World Food Programme (WFP) offices at the converted army base called La Ciudad del Saber houses some of two dozen UN agencies in the country. Where US soldiers once stood watch, international organizations dedicated to socioeconomic development now populate the palm-lined streets of this tropical neighborhood.

To the north, Central America is the most disaster-prone area in the world, facing a battery of hurricanes, floods, droughts, earthquakes, and volcanoes every year. Yet apart from Haiti, the region has generally been spared the complex large-scale emergencies common elsewhere in the world. In addition to food aid, WFP has increasingly emphasized regional emergency preparedness activities and government response capacity building.



In my time at WFP, we have launched a massive campaign with the governments of El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua to provide relief to smallholder farmers and vulnerable communities affected by a prolonged drought in the so-called Dry Corridor. WFP is shifting from in-kind food assistance to cash-and-vouchers, which gives beneficiaries greater choice in determining what to eat, while also putting money back into the local economy.

I'm on the Disaster Management Team (DMT). I help to write donor reports, concept notes, and project proposals, and manage information that comes in from the country offices. Some highlights for me have been liaising with the country offices about their drought response and engaging in theoretical discussions with my co-workers about gender, resilience, and humanitarian effectiveness. And having the chance to taste all of the chocolates that co-workers bring back from their missions to faraway places. The WFP receptionist has affectionately nicknamed me the diabetic vegetarian, for the quantity of fancy chocolates I consume.

In college I studied ecology and came to WFP with much more understanding of the region's wonderful and unique environments in Latin America than of the humanitarian efforts underway around the southern hemisphere. It has been a daunting learning experience. During my remaining six months at WFP I want to further explore how to bring the environmental perspective to the work I do with the DMT, while learning as much as I can about humanitarian action and socioeconomic development in the region.

**Background:** Lauren graduated from Princeton University with a major in ecology and evolutionary biology, and certificates in Latin American studies and environmental studies.



# Fundación Arias para la Paz y el Progreso Humano, San José, Costa Rica

## Kara Hernandez

I work with development and programming for Fundación Arias in San José, Costa Rica. In fall of 2014, we have worked with the international community on such projects as “What to do about violence and crime in Central America?”; “Supporting Regional Capacity Building: Improving Controls to Reduce Armed Violence in Latin America”; and a “Workshop to promote the ratification of the Covenants on Human Rights in Cuba.” Fundación Arias has also been a major actor in the creation and ratification of the Arms Trade Treaty, which recently entered into force with the United Nations on December 24, 2014.

Before starting at Fundación Arias, I had been working in the non-profit sector on the east coast (D.C. and New York) for the past two years. Walking into a longstanding PiLA partner organization, I knew I had to adapt to a different office culture. But I also needed to utilize my past experiences to define the role and impact I would have as the new fellow. Being familiar with private and corporate grants, social media, and website management has allowed me to tackle several projects at once it also has allowed me to experience these areas through different systems of management.

I have been fortunate as well to participate in local governmental workshops hosted by Fundación Arias and el Centro Regional de las Naciones Unidas para la Paz, el Desarme y el Desarrollo en America Latina y el Caribe; to attend the UN Meeting of State Parties on both cluster munitions and the Arms Trade Treaty; and to create and co-plan new regional initiatives.

Yet the most valuable aspect has been connecting with and learning from the people around me. I have been able to learn more about AIDS; international trade; the causes and effects of violence and crime in Central America; and personal narratives of living, surviving, prospering in the region.

Going forward, Fundación Arias looks to work with the support of private and corporate giving to combat issues of organized crime, forced migration due to climate change, prison alternatives, juvenile pregnancy, resource management, conflict mediation, and social and economic development throughout Central and South America.

My personal goal is to establish a private-public partnership with respect to water and land resource management in Mexico and Central America, as this relates to the quality of life, both physically and economically, specifically in countries with underdeveloped water, sanitation, and health infrastructure.

Living and working in San José (Chepe), a multiethnic, international city offers a rare chance to work and connect with smaller communities throughout Central America, while also being exposed to the metropolitan side of Costa Rica, which has much more to offer than stereotyped images of tree sloths and beautiful tropical beaches.

Previously, San José had been notorious for being a “backpacker’s purgatory” but I’ve been fortunate to meet many activists, immigrants, entrepreneurs, civil servants, artists, and foodies who have reinvented Chepe culture. With time to volunteer, explore and take courses, I have been able to create my own inspiring and productive spaces outside of work. There are endless opportunities here to create art, create change, create businesses, and so forth.

PiLA has given me the opportunity to make the jump from domestic nonprofit work to international relations, and I have enjoyed a surprising degree of exposure and incorporation into Latin American civil society network and the international community. I am extremely grateful to be working with Fundación Arias and PiLA, and cannot wait to see what 2015 will bring.

**Background:** Kara graduated from University of Texas with a dual degree in history and Latin American studies, and completed her certificate of Native American and indigenous studies in Guatemala.

Fundación Arias para la Paz y el Progreso Humano,  
Costa Rica  
a nonprofit organization dedicated to promote fair and  
equal societies

## PiLA in the Dominican Republic

In November 2014 board president David Atkinson visited PiLA's partners in the Dominican Republic: Liceo Científico (Salcedo), DREAM (Cabarete), and Yspaniola (Esperanza), all educational institutions in the north-central zone of the country. Twelve fellowships were allocated among these organization for 2014–2015 to address the critical need for quality education for under-served communities. Fellows have been enthusiastically engaged in their service and deeply committed to the missions of their respective partners.

David also travelled to Santo Domingo to meet with Miguel Barletta '79 and his sister Nelia. The Barlettas have been very generous supporters of PiLA, and are providing a sizable new gift to support PiLA fellows working in the realm of education and youth development in the Dominican Republic.

PiLA also is negotiating a new partnership with Fundación Abriendo Camino that will expand PiLA's engagement in the Dominican Republic.

Abriendo Camino is a nonprofit established over a decade ago to improve the lives of children in the *barrio* of Villas Agrícolas, in northern Santo Domingo.



Calling all PiLANistas: Pay it forward! Join us by making a recurring gift to support the work of current and future PiLA fellows. Your donation will make a difference.

Gifts can be made online at [www.princeton.edu/~pila/support/](http://www.princeton.edu/~pila/support/) or by sending a check or calling [609.258.9200](tel:609.258.9200).



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