

March 2012 Newsletter

Spotlight on Alejandro Alfaro Aco, Metis Gaia, Peru

Even after six months of living in Peru, I still feel very fortunate every time I rise up in the morning, look at the spectacular sight of Lima's Green Coast, and realize that there is an exciting day of work ahead of me. Working at Metis Gaia as a PiLA fellow has been a wonderful experience, challenging and exhausting in some ways, but always interesting and with many lessons to learn from. I am very grateful for belonging to such a great organization, for being surrounded by a smart and hard-working group of people, and for having the opportunity to explore some of the social and economic issues that have interested me for some time.

Metis Gaia works primarily on creating socioeconomic impact-assessment reports on a variety of mining projects, as well as developing long-term mitigation plans for them. Additionally, Metis and its sister organization Red MG have a broader mission of creating large-scale corporate social responsibility through the promotion of educational and leadership initiatives.

The most distinguishing feature of Metis Gaia is its group-work methodology, where there is not necessarily one boss, but different team leaders who supervise a small group of consultants. This structure means that each person usually works in more than one project at a time and performs duties at a higher degree of responsibility. Consequently, effective horizontal communication between peers is essential in order to solve problems, perform job duties, prepare for meetings, and cooperate on important projects. In addition, there is a very strong sense of community at Metis Gaia, which makes for a great working environment. Most people here are under thirty years old, dress casual, and have lunch together. We also hang out together outside the office and try to play soccer at least once a week. The work itself is very dynamic too. Constant meetings, deadlines, new projects, and presentations with clients, among others, make working at Metis Gaia very interesting.



During my first months at Metis Gaia, I worked on mining-related projects, determining vulnerable groups and calculating income figures from data collected on the field. Now, I tend to focus more on government and trade-related projects. In this field, I have been involved in the development of a new management model for a government-run wholesales market, and a baseline study for a program that supports trade-promoting institutions in the north region of Peru. Each of these projects has helped me to understand the complexity of public institutions in the country.

Working on consulting projects for the public and private sectors in Peru has been a very rewarding experience for me, and although I haven't had the chance to do field-work in the countryside, I have been very busy here in Lima. I have gone to several work- 1

shops and conferences, conducted interviews and surveys, met with experts and government officials, and made presentations to clients. I'm not going to lie; working in consulting services can be very exhausting. I have had to spend nights and weekends working, but it has been very rewarding. I really enjoy working so closely with the Peruvian government, because I hope one day to work on public policy issues with the goal of improving the living conditions of people in Latin America. I am looking forward being part of more government-related projects over the next five months.

I am deeply thankful to my Metis Gaia family and to all the wonderful people in Peru who have helped me to grow both personally and professionally and encouraged me to strive for higher goals. This fellowship has been a major turning point in my life and although I am not exactly sure where my next professional endeavor will be, I know that one day I will look back and refer to my PiLA fellowship in Peru as one of the most incredible and life-changing experiences of my life.



Alejandro (second from left) with colleagues.



Letter from the Director

Dear Friends of PiLA,

This latest newsletter, hard on the heels of the January-February posting, brings you a report from Alejandro Alfaro Aco, the first fellow at Metis Gaia, in Lima, Peru. While he is modest, I will happily brag that his outstanding work this year has encouraged this new partner to take a total of three fellows for 2012-13. Thank you, Alejandro, for making it possible to open up such an amazing experience to even more PiLAs!

To bring you all up to date on the placement process thus far: our first World Food Programme fellows have been selected, as well as Saude Crianca, Valle de los Pinos, Azuero Earth Project, and Convivencia Educativa. I look forward eagerly to seeing where the rest will go and that should be revealed in the next two weeks or so! When next you hear from PiLA, we will have the complete roster for 2012-13.

If you have not already donated, I hope you will take this opportunity to do so: <http://www.princeton.edu/~pila/support/index.htm> Our fellows bring a lot to the organizations with which they work and enable our partners to accomplish more with their resources than they would otherwise be able. I hope you will agree, after reading this newsletter and our past ones, too, that our fellows are certainly making the most of the opportunities that they have won as PiLAs.

Thank you for your support and your interest in PiLA.

Best regards,



Claire Brown '94
Executive Director

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