

PiLA
PRINCETON IN
LATIN AMERICA



November 2008 Newsletter

Spotlight on Mike Solis, Human Rights Watch/FLACSO Fellow

I awaken most mornings to a view of snow-capped mountain peaks glowing orange underneath a purple sunrise. My favorite part of Santiago is the geography, with the commanding Andes Mountains in the distance and expansive, green hills dotting the cityscape. Just a fifteen minute walk from my apartment one can take a gondola ride up St. Cristobal hill to relax before the vast, urban expanse or to get lost amidst a maze of flora-filled trails. On the summit, a majestic statue of the Virgin Mary looks upon, perhaps somewhat ashamedly, a city with a pitch-black past but a bright future as a hub of one of Latin America's most stable democracies.

My placement is unique in that it allows me to reconcile, through two organizations, the remnants of Chile's past with the prospects for its present and future. At the Latin-American Faculty of Social Sciences (FLACSO), I am working with scholars dedicated to improving the internal security of Chile and other developing nations. We are currently constructing a network called the Global Consortium on Security Transformation (GCST), which will promote change and heightened understanding of south-south security development by encouraging scholars from developing countries to contribute dialogue to the matter through generous scholarship opportunities and specialized working groups. GCST's budget has been passed and we are now compiling essays for our first book on global security, preparing to launch our new website and the first round of \$5000 research grants, and coordinating the work of two international teams on regional security and the securitization of governance.

My concurrent placement with the Americas team of Human Rights Watch has provided me with firsthand experience in advocacy and in understanding the role of a prominent international organization in affecting change within the human rights field. HRW recently published two reports on political threats to human rights in Venezuela and Colombia, and my job has been to monitor the human rights situation of both countries so HRW is constantly aware of those issues or decisions that compromise the fundamental rights of Latin-American citizens.

Because of the heavily research-based nature of my positions, I quickly became eager to seek more active involvement with Chilean reformers outside of the workplace. In September I joined the Unified Movement for Sexual Minorities (MUMS), where I have been working with an energetic and beautifully diverse team of LGBT activists. Aside from translating their webpage and documents into English, I helped paint banners and build the floats for the annual gay pride parade. The event was widely attended and met positively with crowds of interested and mostly supportive onlookers. As a member MUMS's human rights team, we pressure the government to commit to anti-discriminatory legislation concerning issues such as school expulsion and conflicting, heteronormative laws on age restrictions for sexual consent. Recently, we have also been campaigning to support the candidacy of MUMS activist Gonzalo Cid, one of the few openly gay political candidates in Chilean history, who is running in the municipal elections.

Mike Solis, cont....

On Saturdays I practice Capoeira, which is something I have wanted to do since observing the martial art/dance performed on the streets of Rio in 2006. Our group practices in the outskirts of Santiago in a very poor area where residents welcome us into their single-room shacks, offering their hearts, hospitality and soda in thanks for our volunteer demonstrations. Mario, the instructor, has asked me to assist with a project to develop a Capoeira youth criminality prevention program, which I plan to grow throughout the year in conjunction with my research on crime prevention at FLACSO.

I do intend to get to know the rest of Chile better when provided more time to travel during the holidays and summer months. Thus far, I have taken weekend trips to the waterfall at Cajón del Maipo, the beach down of Valparaíso, and the Teniente mine, "the largest functioning underground copper mine in the world" (not to get too specific).



Mike and friends campaigning with Gonzala Cid in Santiago

My living situation is always apt to keep things spicy, to say the least. Thrust into the plotline of a real-life telenovela, I am forced to play strategic liaison in a relationship between my apartment-mate, a man who has had three wives, children numbering in the double digits, and a workplace love affair that cost him his job, and a warm-hearted woman with a proclivity for snooping through her partner's personal belongings and emails. Inevitably disaster does strike and liaison I do, but the thought of moving has crossed my mind.

Although two months have passed, the time has flown with the imagined rush of an exhilarating dream. Through work, MUMS, Capoeira, and ran-

dom encounters during bus rides, holiday barbecues, and weekend trips, I have come to befriend a good number of Chileans. In the process, I am building an increased understanding of a vibrant people and culture.

My days in Santiago end with the familiar display of orange, yellow, pink, and purple hues that magnifies the evening sky when the sun sets behind the Andes Mountains. Taking in the scene, I am inclined to think about the possibilities, opportunities, and relationships that lie ahead. I am also increasingly inspired to contemplate how my work Chile will influence a future career in human rights and public interest law that I hope to pursue after my year as a PiLA Fellow.



Mike's Capoeira Class

Notes From The Field

Lily Lyman, Endeavor Patagonia Fellow

Lily writes: "Life down here in Puerto Varas, Chile is going very well. I have spent the last three months as part of a small team opening up the newest Endeavor office, Endeavor Patagonia, and it has been a great adventure--searching for new entrepreneurs, building a network base, and working with other organizations in activities to educate and support entrepreneurial initiatives in Chile's Southern regions. The region is currently facing challenging times with the global financial crisis combined with the local salmon industry crisis, making Endeavor's work supporting entrepreneurship all that more important. Endeavor Chile has recently experienced great success with four new entrepreneurs (three from Santiago, one from Patagonia) passing the international panel in Buenos Aires and joining the Endeavor network. Ana and I have been working very closely with these entrepreneurs over the last few months and it is very exciting to see the successful result of these efforts.



Now that the weather is improving, I've been able to take advantage of some of the great activities the region has to offer, including climbing and skiing some of the local volcanoes, crossing over the Andes into Bariloche, biking, and visiting the national parks. Ana and I spent a great weekend in Valparaiso, enjoying the ocean, seafood, and mystique of the Chilean beach-town. We also met up with Michael for a nice lunch in Santiago. I'm looking forward to December when Ana will come down to visit and work for a few weeks down here in Puerto Varas. I welcome any and all PILA fellows who want to visit Patagonia!"



Lily with Endeavor Entrepreneurs in Patagonia

Saludos from PiLA Alumni

Melissa del Aguila checked into tell us: I'm studying Arabic here at the Institute for Non-Arabic Speakers in Damascus:. I plan to study Arabic here for 9 months.

Michelle Parris out at Stanford Law says: "I am in my second year at Stanford Law School. This past summer, I worked at the Bronx Defenders, doing indigent defense and some housing work with the large immigrant population in the Bronx. It was a wonderful experience because the organization is innovative in practicing community-based, holistic advocacy. In addition to public defenders, the organization houses attorneys that address the myriad issues clients may have -- including immigration, housing, and family court cases -- as a strategy for lowering recidivism rates. I also got to use my Spanish a lot, which is always a bonus!

This year, I have continued my commitment to doing public interest work by enrolling in the Immigrants' Rights Clinic at Stanford. In the Clinic, we get hands-on experience, handling both individual clients and advocacy work. I plan to pursue my interests in immigration and criminal justice issues this summer and after I graduate."



Ana Cordovil, Endeavor Chile
Fellow in Valparaiso

In Other News, PiLA alumni **Danielle Rowland '05** and **Adam Abelson '05** were in attendance on October 20th at a PiLA event in New York City, organized by Claire and Princeton alumna **Mary Connell Grubb '97**, who is helping spearhead a movement to raise awareness about our program in NYC and throughout the Princeton alumni body in the U.S. and Latin America. A group of about 8 Princeton alumni met at Rayuela, a Latin-American restaurant in NYC, to discuss initiatives for increasing PiLA presence in PU alumni minds: this included creative ways to win foundation grants, begin to build an endowment, planning for a large benefit event in Fall 2009, and helping Claire in her search for high-quality new partner organizations. There was a lot of energy at this meeting and plans were laid for an event after the New Year, to which we hope to invite about 50-60 people and get them informed and excited about helping PiLA to grow!

As some of you know well, **Clare Riley '86** has been very active on PiLA's behalf in Mexico City—helping Claire to find new partner organizations, welcoming D.F. fellows, and aiding them in settling in to life in Mexico City.

If you would like to be part of this initiative, either in NYC or your hometown or country, please contact Claire and let her know what you'd like to do to be involved!

Message from the Executive Director

Dear Friends of PiLA,

This month is the real beginning of the heart of our placement season. Throughout November and into early January, when we conduct interviews, I will meet a host of applicants for the 2009-10 fellowships. Although I'd be hard-pressed to say exactly what I love most about running PiLA, I'd certainly rank applications and placements very high on my list. This is the time when I get acquainted with so many impressive and wonderful young people, all of whom have a deep passion for public service and Latin America. You can only imagine the difficulty which I and my Fellowship committee face when trying to make decisions about which applicants we will offer positions to for the coming year!

We are hopeful that this year, despite the economic turmoil which roils both our country and those in Latin America, we will be able to offer about 20 positions for 2009-10. I anticipate many more applicants to PiLA and other public service programs this year, as opportunities in more traditional fields become much tighter. This will make PiLA more competitive than ever and I expect to receive, even more than in past years, a great number of applications. Of course, I will keep all of you up-to-date on these developments as they occur, as this is an exciting time for all of us at PiLA.

PiLA relies on the support of our friends to enable us to continue to offer high-quality fellowships. On behalf of our fellows and the board of directors, I would like to thank all of you who have helped us in past years. Again, we at PiLA realize all too well the economic constraints in which many find themselves these days, but we hope that you will still consider supporting PiLA this year, in any way which is comfortable for you. This year, we are aiming for 100% participation from PiLA Alumni. While we understand that many of you are in graduate or professional school, we still hope that you will remember PiLA and make a modest donation to the program that you enjoyed. After all, as you know personally, PiLA opens many doors for its fellows and provides opportunities to work and live in Latin America that would be otherwise difficult to pursue.

If you have any questions about PiLA or would like to discuss finding new partner organizations, or supporting PiLA in other ways, please contact me at pila@princeton.edu or (609) 258-9200. I look forward to hearing from you! Many thanks for your interest in and support of Princeton in Latin America.

Sincerely,

Claire Brown
Executive Director

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