

October 2010 Newsletter

Spotlight on Kim Beers, IMIFAP, Mexico City, Mexico

Although I've only been in the Princeton in Latin America position with *the Instituto Mexicano de Investigación de Familia y Población* (IMIFAP) in Mexico City since August, the past two months have been full of experiences that have given me a glimpse of what this year's fellowship will bring; professional and personal experiences that can only be gained by working abroad in a different culture and challenging yourself. Thanks to PiLA, I have the chance to do just that.

One of the richest aspects of the PiLA experience comes out of throwing yourself into life in a new country with a culture that differs from your own. To me, a key component to professional or any type of success is personal stability and living a balanced life. As such, a large part of my initial time here has been devoted to finding this balance and adapting to a new rhythm of life. My method? Headfirst immersion. This has meant eating a lot of pozole, wandering the streets of this colossal city, getting lost, being called *güera* 50 times in ten minutes while strolling through street markets, going to art galleries, museums, plays and concerts, battling crowds in the metro and buses, and getting lost again. Through it all, I've not only begun to get to know a city, but also feel at home: food is now practically inedible to me unless it's doused in chile and lime; tacos can be eaten at any time of the day or night; I'm slightly offended if I'm not greeted with a kiss on the cheek; and I know and am resigned to the fact that at any time plans may change due to a street protest, technical difficulties on the metro, flooded streets from rain, or other transit-related small catastrophes. This city of over 20 million

people is a metropolis with a heartbeat, *un ritmo*, that with more time and more tacos is slowly converging with my own.

At the office, I've gained new insight on NGO work in Latin America. In my previous job in Washington D.C., I had the opportunity to interact with many non-profit organizations in Latin America. Now, working at IMIFAP, I'm experiencing first-hand the NGO world on this side of the border. The language, work environment, and manufacture's date of the computers at the office have changed, but the mission is the same: to affect positive social change.



Kim & D.F. friends at the Pyramids

IMIFAP has a unique method to achieve this change. While the organization focuses on a

range of health and development issues, each program it implements has a base in social psychology that aims to foster personal agency and the acquisition and improvement of psychosocial skills in program participants so they will be empowered to take control of their lives. My work at IMIFAP office is divided mainly between grant writing and communications. However, in a couple weeks, I will have the opportunity to go to the field to accompany the implementation of a new project on infant health and development in San Luis Potosi. I'm excited to travel to another part of Mexico and to see IMIFAP's methodology be put into practice.

September was a busy and exciting time both for IMIFAP and for Mexico. We launched IMIFAP's "I want to, I can" movement that has grown out of our programs and encourages people to make small, positive changes in their daily lives, and have been busy promoting the publication of IMIFAP's President, Susan Pick's new book, "Breaking the Poverty Cycle: The Human Basis for Sustainable Development". My arrival in August also coincided with the weeks of anticipation leading up to the celebration of the bicentennial of Mexican Independence in mid-September. These weeks were a time of both celebration and self-reflection for the people of Mexico. In a way, this also mirrors my fellowship experience: rather than 200 years of independence to reflect upon, criticize, or celebrate, I have the chance to embark on an exciting fellowship year but also stop to ponder, like Mexico, where I've been, where I am, where I'm going, and how?

With everything I've already experienced and learned in the first two months here, I'm excited to see what the next months bring as I continue to answer these questions, explore Mexico City, and seek new opportunities and challenges at work.



Kim with IMIFAP coworkers at an awards ceremony that recognized IMIFAP for its leadership and innovation in the field of social entrepreneurship.

Gabriela Jara's Summer Service in North Carolina—Gabriela is the Arias Fellow

This summer, I was fortunate enough to have stumbled upon one of the most formative experiences of my life. I emailed USCRI- the United States Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, inquiring about their volunteer program, knowing I wanted to work with them after graduation. The volunteer coordinator in North Carolina suggested I run a summer program for the young children from refugee families.

I led the children, aged 4 to 14, in different activities, ranging from sports to arts and crafts and field trips to a nearby museum. Most of the children had just arrived to Raleigh with their families-- they came from different countries: Somalia, Burma, and Cuba. I was overwhelmed at the thought of being unable to communicate with them. Over time however, they started to pick up some phrases, and from the start they were very eager to take part in whatever activity I had planned.

I worked with them from June till August, helping to make the transition to the US easier and preparing them to enter the public schools system in the fall. It was really quite rewarding to get to know the children, witness their resilience, and share in their enthusiasm as they discovered new things-- like brownies, water colors, kickball, baseball, dreamcatchers, etc.

Besides picking up a few English phrases (ie: "Be careful," something I seem to have repeated often), the children also began to make friends among themselves and started to forge a sense of community among the other refugee children. The summer program in general, was intended to introduce the kids to their new lives; in the long run, I believe the friendships and ties the children made will continue to help them settle into their new schools.



Enjoying new art supplies



Trying pizza for the first time!



The Group with their newly made fans

Photos from Caitlin Schoenfelder at Convivencia Educativa, Mexico



Letter from the Director

Dear Friends of PiLA,

The 2010-11 Fellows are successfully launched and, hard as it is for me to believe, it is already time for fall recruiting! Peter Johnson and I had a terrific time meeting students at the recent campus Career Fair and I look forward to meeting them again this week at the Information Session. Then, before we know it, December 1st will arrive and applications will pour in. It is indeed a whirlwind season.

As you can see in this newsletter, our fellows are off to a great start and are not wasting any time in learning from their placements. In the months to come, we will offer you glimpses into the work of fellows in human rights, public health, entrepreneurship, and education. We also hope to have a link to a video filmed in Puerta Varas, Chile, by three PiLAs: Jessica, at Mujeres Empresarias, and Janine and Mai Ann, both at Endeavor-Chile.

You will soon receive our yearly appeal and I hope that you will consider making a donation this year. We would like to offer fellowships opportunities to as many of the qualified candidates that we can and thank you, in advance, for whatever you do to help us achieve this goal. Our fellows bring a lot to the organizations with which they work and enable them to accomplish more with their resources than they would otherwise be able. To remind you of one of our favorite partner quotations: Alan Farcas, director of Endeavor Chile, told our Allen Taylor: "PiLA is the best program that Endeavor has!" We want to make sure that all of our partners can continue to host fellows.

Thank you for your support and your interest in PiLA.

Best wishes,



Claire Brown '94
Executive Director

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In Kind

Susan Fou, Webmaster