

THE BUCKNELL BRIGADE

Fall 2017 Newsletter

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MAHA KOURIKCHI, STUDENT CO-LEADER, CLASS OF 2018, SHARES HER BRIGADE EXPERIENCE

Looking back on my experience in Nicaragua that I had roughly two years ago, I can say with confidence that it was the best experience that I have ever had in my entire life. Never had I been so vulnerable, uncomfortable, and open-minded than when I was there. Being in Nicaragua granted me a multitude of opportunities to learn from others, to meet amazing people, and to experience the world in a completely different light. Not only did I learn about the world and about Nicaragua, but also, I learned so much about myself and what I want to do with the rest of my life; this is something that I have been struggling with for years, but being a part of the Brigade made everything a bit clearer for me.

First, I want to start off by emphasizing just how thankful and grateful I am to have been a part of this incredible service trip. Not many people get the chance to do something like this, so my heart is filled with so much gratitude. To have the privilege to travel with such ease when others have such a difficult time getting access to a visa or a passport certainly opened my eyes to the overwhelming amount of privilege that I have compared to others. Since I am now more aware of my position in this world, all I want to do is use it in order to give back and help others. I truly believe that everyone deserves the right to travel and experience the various cultures, languages, music, art, and food that the world has to offer. When it comes to helping others, this trip taught me that it is crucial to ask what people need rather than deciding what is best for them; no one knows what is best for someone other than that specific person. Also, this trip taught me to take a step back from the hustle and bustle going on in order to appreciate what I do have and where I am in life. It is so easy to get caught up and not be satisfied. Constantly wanting more and more is an easy mindset to fall into, but greed does not lead to happiness. Appreciating what one has and truly



Maha Kourikchi, center, blue shirt, takes a break from digging post holes for the third clinic building in Nueva Vida, Nicaragua.

feeling content helps lead to happiness, but constantly searching for what one does not have just creates a lot of unnecessary negativity. Therefore, this trip allowed me to take a look at my own life and figure out what I need to work on and also just feel thankful for being alive and well.

Moreover, I cannot help but feel like a changed person. During one of our reflections, Julianne (one of the co-leaders) said that we should allow this trip to change us and not be afraid of that change. I have found that I have completely embraced that change, and it has made me hungry for more and more change. By this, I mean that I want to continue to have these experiences that challenge the way I view the world and in turn reflect on my life and experiences in order to grow and mature as an individual. In a way, this trip seemed to help me more than the people at the clinic because I feel like I gained so much more than they did. Indeed, we helped with the construction of the new addition to the clinic, but the amount of knowledge and reflection that I gained through being there surpasses any type of service that I was a part of.



Furthermore, when I say that I felt uncomfortable when I was there, I am referring to the fact that everything was so foreign to me. There was a bit of a language barrier, the culture was different, and the communities we encountered also felt different from what I was used to. Some might expect me to put up a barrier and feel turned off, but rather this made me more open to learning and more willing to be a part of the community. My discomfort motivated me to integrate myself into the community to the point at which I actually began to feel comfortable. That is why Nicaragua felt like home by the time we left, because I

had been exposed to so much and truly did not want to leave. People say that all great things must come to an end; I refused to believe that and now am co-leading a trip this January.

Another reason I want to return is because I was able to learn about the history of Nicaragua and how the economy was affected throughout the constant ups and downs they faced on their political front. Also, I learned about the various social justice issues prevalent in the country. For example, there is an overwhelming amount of poverty in the country, and according to Cirilo Antonio Otero, a Nicaraguan sociologist, there is also a dilemma regarding health and obesity in the country. A connection that I made was that Nicaragua and the United States have gone through similar struggles and are facing many of the same social issues, but of course to varying extremes. For example, both countries experience poverty, but poverty can look very different in each country. In addition, this trip has enhanced to my education because it has improved my comprehension and speaking skills when it comes to the Spanish language. Being surrounded by Spanish every day of the trip allowed me to learn more about the language and the variations that exist in different countries; for example,

people in Nicaragua tend to drop the “s” when it comes to saying certain words, which is something that I was not really taught in my formal Spanish classes. Additionally, I learned a lot about political systems and what a revolution truly consists of, with the Sandinista revolution being a great example. Another way the Brigade contributed to my education is that it has encouraged me to take chances when it comes to my education. Going to Nicaragua pushed me to study abroad in Spain and even take part in the BACES service trip to the Dominican Republic.

This demonstrates that the Brigade not only affected my education, but has also altered certain mindsets that I have and has allowed me to grow more than ever before. It is safe to say that the Brigade has made me more fearless about traveling than I was before. Also, the fact that I was uncomfortable at times pushed me to grow, because I believe that the most effective way to reach growth is to step out of one’s comfort zone. There is this one quote that my mentor said to me that has stuck with me for quite some time, and it applies perfectly to this trip: “Be comfortable with being uncomfortable.” At times, this can be very tiring and draining, but it is effective in promoting growth, reflection, and exposure to new perspectives.



Dr. Emily Parent, who first traveled to Nicaragua as a Bucknell student, returned in March to provide health care to individuals at the health clinic.

It seems as though cooperative societies are very common in Nicaragua, unlike in the United States of America, where there seems to be much more of an individualistic mindset. This leads to the busy nature of people in the States, and the attitude some people have about working for their own personal gain instead of trying to help others. Of course, this is a generalization, because not every community in the United States of America is individualistic, but for some reason, it just felt as though people we met in Nicaragua had a personal connection to each other and truly supported one another in their endeavors.

This makes me reflect on what a community consists of, and the different qualities a community needs to have in order to function well. For example, the community we interacted with at El Porvenir did not discuss certain topics, such as politics, that would cause some sort of divide. I thought this was questionable because I thought that it would be better to discuss topics such as politics in a respectful manner than to just avoid the topic completely. In my opinion, I think that a very successful community needs to consist of people who respect one

another, who are working towards the common goal of maintaining and bettering the community, and who are capable of communicating effectively. Of course, there are many more facets to take into consideration when creating the “perfect” community, and it is interesting to delve into the pros and cons of including certain characteristics of communal life. Overall, each group of people works differently, and their environments definitely play a big role, because people tend to be a product of their environments, which could ultimately dictate or influence the way that they behave.



Instead of signing the bus, current Brigadistas sign a wall at the JHC compound.

Nicaragua ignited a spark in me, and fostered a desire to truly help others in any way that I can, as well as foster meaningful connections with other individuals. I believe that everyone has a story to share, and I want to be able to listen to as many stories as possible and meet as many incredible individuals as I am capable of meeting. On the last day of the trip, I wrote this quote on the wall: “Everyone has their own story to share. Listen to others, feel for others, learn from others, and LOVE others.” This quote summed up this whole trip for me and highlighted the importance of love, relationships, and truly listening to people because at the end of the day, everyone just wants their voice to be heard.



This quote sums up the feeling I had upon returning to campus: “You will never be completely at home again because a part of your heart will always be elsewhere. That is the price you pay for the richness of knowing and loving people in more than one place.” I cannot help but agree, because Nicaragua has definitely become a home to me, although I do not think that knowing and loving people in more than one place is a price to be paid. In fact, I believe that it is a privilege and honor to know people in more than one place, as it expands your horizons and gives you more perspective. As I said before, traveling to Nicaragua has been life changing, and this country will always hold a special place in my heart. Until we meet again, Nicaragua.

NICARAGUA IN THE NEWS

In this edition of the newsletter, we look at the recent 2017 elections, give an update on the aftermath of Hurricane Mitch, review the ranking of Nicaraguan rum, and discuss how renewable energy is being implemented in some of the poorest regions of the world.

2017 ELECTIONS

In November, Nicaragua held municipal elections where, in a throwback to the '80s, the Sandinistas (FSLN) won the majority of the seats - 134 out of 153 mayoral races. In particular, the cities of Managua, Matagalpa, Granada, Chinandega, Jinotepe, Boaco, Juigalpa, Esteli, Jinotega, Leon, Masay and Somoto will all be headed by FSLN-ers. The result, although tipped largely in favor of FSLN, has been approved by an impartial organization, the Organization of American States electoral observation group, as having taken place “peacefully” and “normally”. The participation rate for these elections was between 52 and 53 percent.



Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega and Vice President Rosario Murillo show they voted by displaying the ink on their thumbs.

HURICANE MITCH UPDATE

Almost 20 years after Hurricane Mitch, the US will terminate its protected immigrant status for qualifying Nicaraguans (announced November 7). Although the program will not end until January 2019, many Nicaraguans in the US find this move by the Department of Homeland Security troubling. At the heart of the termination lies the idea that Nicaraguans no longer need the temporary relief which allowed them to stay and work in the United States following Hurricane Mitch. Interestingly, Nicaragua did not request the program be extended. Nicaragua is the first country whose citizens have lost protected status under the Trump administration, and the decision will impact about 2,200 people, a small fraction of the 200,000 Central Americans and Haitians currently granted TPS.

FLOR DE CAÑA DECLARED BEST RUM

Written By Sarah Junkin Woodard

Putting to rest for all time the passionate debate about which is the best rum in the world, 400 experts in London for the International Wine and Spirit Competition declared Nicaragua's Flor de Caña the best rum among the 90 countries competing.

Flor de Caña (Spanish for "sugarcane flower") is a brand of premium rum manufactured and distributed by Compañía Licorera de Nicaragua, which is headquartered in Managua, Nicaragua and dates back as far as 1890. Some solidarity activists boycotted Flor de Caña for a period, demanding resolution for cane workers suffering from kidney disease, but the company has improved practices. Flor de Caña employs about 2,000 people in Nicaragua, and has been steadily increasing its share of the world rum market. Sales in the first nine months of 2017 exceeded the same period in 2016 by 13.4% (El Nuevo Diario, Nov. 29).



RENEWABLE ENERGY IMPLEMENTATION

Despite being one of the world's most impoverished countries, Nicaragua has been making strides with regards to renewable energy. Strong winds (flowing from the country's geographic location) propel 30 turbines, generating 20 percent of the country's electricity. Additionally, Nicaragua is showing interest in leveraging its position in the Ring of Fire to harness geothermal power drawn around volcanoes (steam power) to generate electricity. Although renewable sources of energy are attractive for environmental purposes, Nicaragua intends to pursue these for economic reasons, highlighting the fact that renewable energy need not be expensive.

NICARAGUAN CANAL DELAYED

In September, Nicaragua announced that it had renewed an environmental permit for a Chinese company to proceed with construction of a cross-country shipping canal intended to rival the Panama Canal. Forecast to be completed by 2020, work on the project has been postponed indefinitely amid reports that controversial business magnate Wang Jing has suspended operations and his projects are facing setbacks worldwide. Bloomberg Businessweek indicated Jing was linked to a business scandal in the Ukraine. In August, Amnesty International published an article suggesting that the deal made with President Ortega in 2013 "violates a catalogue of national and international standards on human rights and might lead to the forced eviction of hundreds of families." Between 30,000 and 120,000 people would be impacted, and 90 protests have been staged.

JUBILEE HOUSE COMMUNITY UPDATE



Delegations from Massachusetts General Hospital, East Tennessee State, Ohio State University, East Chapel Hill Rotary Club, and Bucknell University have all been to Nicaragua to work in the Nueva Vida Clinic over the past few months. Students from each institution played an essential role in assisting nurses, promoting health in the community, and constructing the clinic's third building. The new facility is expected to contain an X-ray room and a small surgical room. Students and mentors on each trip have since gone on to spread their experiences in the US and generate a base of support for humanitarian work in Nicaragua.

Information taken from the September 2017 JHC Newsletter

TALKING TO MIMI BATEMAN

We sat down with Mimi Bateman, Class of 1984, to determine how the Bucknell experience helped shape her worldview and lead her to pursue future philanthropic success.

Mimi Bateman, a medical outreach associate, came into Bucknell with a very different dream than the one that she currently lives. Eventually graduating from Bucknell in 1984 with a management and accounting degree, a far cry from her original biology major on the pre-med track, she went to work on Wall Street. During her time there, she began to feel disillusioned by the lack of good being accomplished, and more importantly, she felt she personally could contribute to the public good.

This frustration inspired a 20-year work hiatus. She reentered employment refreshed and ready to do the good that she felt was missing during her initial stint on Wall Street. When re-entering the formal work force, she remembered her father, a man who donated free medical services and supplies to their neighbors in dire need of such services. She remembered her father being such a giver that he had to open up a second medical practice to offset the costs of all the free work and supplies that he was giving. Inspired by his legacy and impact, she aimed to do just as much good in the world, joining an organization that donates free medical supplies and does free medical outreach in 164 countries, including the U.S. Involved with this Connecticut-based operation, Mimi's current aim is to reach out to as many universities with global Brigades as possible, hoping that through this expanded network, she can maximize the amount of medical outreach, and ultimately, the good that she and her organization do.



When asked about her Bucknell experience, Mimi, with a wide smile on her face, recalls some of her greatest and most fulfilling moments happening at this institution. Bucknell did so many amazing things for her, going beyond her undergraduate career as she relied on the Career Development Center (CDC) to help re-integrate her into the workforce after her 20-year work hiatus. Imbued with a deep love and gratitude for the institution, Mimi only hopes to reach back to and repay the university that shaped her so much; helping Bucknell help others through donating medical supplies, and helping them offer medical services is one of the chief ways she aims to show her love for the school. Ultimately, not only does donating medical supplies to the Bucknell Brigade help her repay the university for all the good it has done for her, it also helps her honor and further her father's legacy, while doing the good that she has always sought to do in the world.

Q&A WITH FORMER BRIGADISTAS

Name: Brianna Rutty

Class Year: 2020

Major: Biology & Spanish



Q: How did going to Nicaragua with the Brigade differ from a regular family vacation?

A: Usually we take vacation trips over the summer, but I work in the Office of Civic Engagement and I have been hearing about this trip since the beginning of my first year. I felt as though going on a vacation wouldn't be as important to my future life. Chilling and having a good time is cool, but I had a good time on the Brigade and was learning about a different culture and what it means to struggle for a couple of days. It wasn't like school where you are sitting and learning about it in a classroom, but you are actually experiencing and participating in service-learning and helping people in the community while also learning things for myself.

Q: What were you most proud of during your trip on the brigade?

A: I think I was most proud of the amount of Spanish I was able to use while I was on the trip. I had learned a little bit of Spanish in my early years of elementary school and high school, but my speaking skills were very rusty. I was really surprised about how I was able to interact with the people. You could obviously tell that I wasn't fluent, but being able to ask questions and help people translate, was really enjoyable for me. I was proud of being able to use skills in another country that I learned previously in school.

Q: Prior to your departure, what was your expectation for the Brigade?

A: I thought it was going to be more science and medical-based before going and it really wasn't. There were days where I had the opportunity to work in the pharmacy and help bag medication and shadow the doctor for a day. I did more medical-based stuff than other people that were on my Brigade, but a lot of other people on my trip were doing more labor-intensive things such as making concrete. Apart from all the work we did, we took tours and learned about the city and the everyday living of the people in the community.

Q: What advice would you give to people that are about to go on the Brigade?

A: Keep an open mind; the people you are working with have different experiences from you. I have experienced more of the poverty side so it was difficult to see so many people on the trip so shocked by it and

not knowing how to handle it. Try to understand that everyone on the trip comes from a different background, and try your best to support the members of your Brigade. Even if it means having an hour and a half conversation about what poverty is, even if you might know what it is. Try to be open to new things as well - for example, I never really was into labor-intensive tasks and, one day, I made cement. It doesn't sound like a lot, but it was actually really fun and I was able to see what goes into making a building.

Name: Ariel Antoine

Class Year: 2020

Major: Cell Biology/Biochemistry



Q: Why did you choose to go on the Bucknell Brigade?

A: I chose to go on the Bucknell Brigade because, coming into Bucknell as a first-year student, I was looking at the IN Network before coming to Bucknell and figuring out ways to get involved, and the Brigade was one of the first things that came up. From there, I continued to learn about it and went onto the Jubilee House website to learn more about the community they are serving. I talked to other students that went on the Brigade and just hearing about their experiences in Nicaragua really made me want to participate. I knew going on this trip would make it a memorable school year.

Q: What were you most proud of?

A: There are two things. I was most proud overall of how well our Brigade worked together and knew that we were going for a cause and a mission. Of course, we all had our own personal goals, but there was an understanding of what our role and purpose is for the trip. Even though it was hot, we hadn't showered, and we were smelling so bad, we had a mission and we knew that we had a job and needed to get the work done. No one had a bad attitude, and it was a nice experience to have people who had similar goals as you and were prepared to get things done. I think, for myself, I was the most proud of accomplishing one of my own personal goals. I am a very shy and reserved person, and so I made the goal of branching out and trying to get to know people and have conversations with not only the people in the Brigade, but the people in the community. This is a goal that I feel like I fulfilled and really pushed myself to be outside of my comfort zone.



Q: What was most memorable for you on the trip?

A: The most memorable experience was when I was shadowing a doctor on the trip. Her name was Emily Parent, and she was a gynecologist. We were in the clinic, and the women were getting physicals done. I remember sitting there and seeing how different the doctor's office was compared to a doctor's office in the U.S. In that moment, I realized the health care disparity, which was very apparent. For example, when you go to the doctor's office in the U.S., you have a nice space and it's expected to have new clean sheets in the area you are being examined each time a person comes in, but here in Nicaragua, they would use the same sheet for each person and remembering "wow, this is not sanitary ... like this is crazy." But that's what they had to do and what they could afford, so they had to work with it. Again, I realized the health care disparity and how we really have to work on it.

**Q: How did your experience during the Brigade help you when coming back to Bucknell's campus? Did it help you form any goals or consider what you would like to do differently for your Bucknell experience?**

A: When I came back from the trip, I knew as a person that I changed a lot in such a short amount of time. I feel as though if you do any type of volunteer work abroad, you go through some type of transformative inner experience. After coming back, I knew I wanted to do more, and I really looked up to

Emily Parent who was the gynecologist on the trip and a former Brigadista herself. To see that she came back to assist with the trip was really amazing to me. I know I want to be a doctor one day and be able to go help different communities abroad. In order to do that, while I'm on campus, I have to open myself up and be open to all the opportunities and resources that Bucknell is able to provide.

NICARAGUAN COFFEE SALES

The Brigade offers freshly-roasted, fair-trade, organic shade-grown Nicaraguan coffee throughout the year. The coffee is purchased directly from the worker-owned Manuel Jose Lopez Cooperative in El Porvenir, Nicaragua. The raw beans are imported to Fresh Roasted Coffee LLC, a local company based in Selinsgrove, PA, that roasts the beans on demand, guaranteeing the freshest coffee possible. This coffee is purchased by Dining Services and used at a number of Bucknell venues, and we are grateful to Parkhurst for partnering with us to support efforts in Nicaragua.

Coffee can be purchased for \$12 per pound (\$9.50 for orders exceeding 25 pounds) using our online form, by contacting Kyle Bray via email or phone at kwb004@bucknell.edu / 570.577.3928, or at the front desk of the Office of Civic Engagement (119 Bertrand Library). Cash and check payments only - credit/debit cards cannot be accepted.



DONATIONS

In addition to raising funds to cover the operating costs of the clinic, Brigadistas collect donations of medical supplies, including prescription and over-the-counter medicines, vitamins, bandages, condoms, and many other items needed in Nueva Vida. Please consider contributing, or asking your civic club, school, or house of worship to collect supplies. We cannot accept expired medicines. A full list of requested items, along with information about other ways to assist the Brigade, is available at <https://www.bucknell.edu/about-bucknell/civic-engagement/alternative-breaks/bucknell-trips/bucknell-brigade/opportunities-for-involvement>

All financial donations or health supplies may be sent to:

Bucknell Brigade
Bucknell University Office of Civic Engagement
119 Bertrand Library
Lewisburg, PA 17837

Financial donations can be in the form of a check made payable to Bucknell Brigade, or online using credit/debit cards at <http://www.bucknell.edu/script/gifts/?f=Other&d=Bucknell+Brigade>.

Financial donations may also be given directly to the Jubilee House Community. Visit their website <http://jhc-cdca.org/life-giving/> for more information.

Special thanks to the following students for contributing to this newsletter:

Ryan Bailis, '21; Cali Wilson, '18; Shirah Moffatt-Darko, '18; Leo Orozco, '18; Effiem Obasi, '20; and Maha Kourikchi, '18.

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