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DUCIGS Summer 2019 Field Report
Camasca, Intibucá, Honduras

The time I spent in Camasca, Honduras was the most influential time of growth in my life. Camasca is a rural town near the Honduras-El Salvador border. I worked in collaboration with a non-governmental organization called Shoulder to Shoulder located in this area to conduct my research project and connect with the town. I lived in a homestay with the first-grade teacher at the public primary school, where I taught English lessons each morning. I started each week day by teaching first, second, and ninth grades. This opportunity provided me with a deeper connection to the community of Camasca when I began my research. The community members who I interviewed for my research project often asked me what all I was doing in Camasca and were always happy to know I was working with the English program at the local school. While the ethics related to the teaching of English in other countries are extremely important to consider and are often controversial when entering a new place as a volunteer, I found that my ability to offer something to the community I was researching in really helped me connect more to those who participated in my survey.

I spent the majority of my working hours on my research project focused on eye health and care in the town of Camasca and its surrounding villages. I conducted almost one hundred interviews during my time there. I interviewed anyone over the age of 18. I worked with the health center located in the town center to interview patients while they were waiting to see the doctors there. I also did home visits in the surrounding villages with employees of Shoulder to Shoulder. Through this process, I reflected on how to conduct these interview surveys in the most neutral way possible, which was proven to be a difficult task, especially in another language. In all of these surveys, I enjoyed getting to know the participants and certainly grew in my confidence as a Spanish-speaker and generally as a communicator and researcher.

Beyond this personal growth associated with my project, I learned more than I could have ever imagined about eye health and the nature of health care both through the questions I asked in my interviews and the stories participants told me about their experiences with providers, and experiences with need for care without means to receive it. I also witnessed the effects of health care professionals and students coming from the United States in brigade settings to provide care to this community. Although this service often helps the individual community member in that moment, it seems to disrupt the overall progress towards sustainable access and trust in Honduran health care.

Shoulder to Shoulder was beginning a project focused on improving eye care accessibility for the population of the Honduran Frontier (which is the area of Honduras that borders El Salvador). Shoulder to Shoulder began a partnership with the Lion's Club eye clinic in the closest city of La Esperanza while I was there. I had the opportunity to travel to La Esperanza on multiple occasions to meet with the president of the Lion's Club chapter there, as well as the doctor in the clinic to discuss my research as a way to better inform their decision making as they formed the partnership to provide the people of the frontier with eye care. I am still working with Shoulder to Shoulder on this project to create informative materials for health promoters of the frontier so they can share the information of the Lion's Club.

Outside of my work conducting surveys, I spent most of my time talking with my host mom and sisters, playing with other kids in the plaza, hiking, and talking with other community members around the town. I ate the best food ever and even learned how to cook some of it myself! The other Duke students and I regularly attended a church in Camasca where their host parents were members. The connections we made with the members there helped us tremendously while we were working on our projects, and really made the experience even more meaningful. From this

experience, I grew not only in my professional and Spanish-speaking abilities, but also spiritually and personally. I am forever thankful for the short time I spent in Camasca. Although this experience has finished, I will carry the people I met and the lessons they taught me through every moment of my journey.