Program: UW Microenterprise and Health in Ecuador, Winter

Cassie’s Majors: International Studies; Latin American & Caribbean Studies

Academic Life: The course I took was a one credit course titled Nutritional Science 421: Microenterprise and Health in Ecuador. The course was based off of field work and participation in the group projects. There were eight UW-Madison students who collaborated with Ecuadorians to work on Global Artisan projects. There were two professors and one TA which made the class very fluid and function very well together. I learned an immense amount of information in ten days and they were all things that could not be learned sitting in a classroom.

Cassie’s Fieldwork: My fieldwork was all throughout Ecuador and we worked with many different artisan groups. One of the projects that we did was work with women on the coast doing silk screening so they could design their own t-shirts to sell locally. Another project that we did was work on the advertising piece of the handmade, natural soaps that the women on the coast were making. Lastly, we introduced some new designs that the women in the highlands could incorporate into their products to make them more marketable. What I loved the most about all of these projects is that they were all collaborative works in that both groups brought unique information and knowledge that all people were able to benefit from.

Different Work Environments: When we were working with the women groups, one thing that was apparently different was the pace of the work environment. Ecuadorians take their time on their tasks because they are often accompanied by good conversation and genuine relationship building. This was a very different work environment than the fast-paced one that I am used to in the United States.

“I learned that I am more capable than I thought, of doing things that demanded stepping outside of my comfort zone.”