Program:  UW Water for Life: Sustainability and Community Health in Ecuador, Summer

Ashley’s Major: Biology, Global Health Certificate

Academic Life: My program was not a traditional classroom experience, we looked at the different ways human health and water quality interacted first hand. We did a lot of field work, such as field trips to local water treatment plants in Quito where we were able to talk to the people who worked there. Our class was taught by Professor Catherine Woodward, and the class was composed of other students from UW-Madison that were all completing the Certificate in Global Health. Professor Woodward was an amazing resource and was extremely knowledgeable during her lectures and in the field. During the program, we completed small group projects about what we were studying. My group did a project on infiltration rates in different land uses. At the end of the course there was also a final exam.

Ashley’s Advice For Someone Considering This Program: I would definitely recommend this program for anyone who loves the outdoors. We stayed on the coast of Ecuador for just over a week in a tropical dry forest. The forest and the wildlife was amazing, but might not be for everyone. There was no wifi, electricity, or warm water. The bugs might bother some people as well, but they were not nearly as bad as I would have thought. The weather was extremely warm and humid on the coast, and warm during the day but cool at night in Quito. Spanish was not required but it definitely came in handy! Be very open to new experiences, you never know what you might miss out on!

Ashley’s Fieldwork: Our fieldwork consisted mostly of working in the rural Ecuadorian province of Manabi. We tested various water sources for E. coli, macro invertebrates, oxygen levels, turbidity, temperature, and other indicators. We also worked with members of the community to teach them how to test for these indicators in hopes that they will utilize the knowledge to attain better quality water to use. We also did infiltration testing on different land uses, like pasture, reforested area, and forested area. This information gave us an idea of soil quality and in turn we could then predict local water quality. Finally, we took many field trips to look at different areas of the country in order to get a better idea of the water quality of Ecuador as a whole. As a pre-med student, this short fieldwork experience was one of my only opportunities to go abroad. Many of my friends have studied abroad for significant periods of time, but I was not able to do so without significantly setting myself back. I would highly recommend going abroad to do fieldwork because otherwise many people will not get the opportunity to study abroad.

“I believe that I am much more culturally aware after being immersed in another culture for over two weeks.”