



Fall semester 2008 I studied at 'La Universidad Veritas' in San José, Costa Rica through the International Studies Abroad (ISA) program. I had a wonderful experience living and studying abroad in a Latin American country for three and a half months. I lived with a very friendly and loving family, la familia Tristan Vargas, which included the papá Juan, la mamá Leticia (Lety) and the daughter, along with four great roommates. Two of my roommates, Clair and Mandy, were U.S.

ISA students like me and the other two were architecture students from Guatemala, Pablo and Jacqueline, who were also studying at Veritas. Our new extended family bonded over watching soccer games on T.V. in the living room and eating many meals together in the dining room. My tica family didn't speak English so my roommates and I had to learn how to communicate with them even when we couldn't remember something learned in Spanish classes. Hand gestures, puzzled looks, and laughter ensued during many conversations, but my Spanish has improved immensely from the experience. I became very close with all of them and appreciated the gracious support and help I got from my padres.

When it came to the academic side of my life in Costa Rica, I took four very interesting courses at the private university of Veritas, in the heart of tico (costarricense) life in the city. Two classes were taught in Spanish and two in English: Cultura Costarricense, Cine y Literatura Latinoamericana, Latin American Art and Culture, and Human Rights in Latin America.



Besides classes, I also volunteered for two days per week, four hours each day, for two months of my semester in Costa Rica at the Hospital Nacional de los Niños, in downtown San Jose. I mainly helped out in the kid's burn unit and the game room. In the burn unit I asked mothers if they needed a break or found a child that needed care. In either case, if a child needed some care, I would hold them, and play with them; if they were really young, I would feed them and change their diaper. My volunteer experience was pivotal to my study abroad experience-I will never forget those kids and how much I felt I was making a difference. At first I was scared and nervous of getting lost on my way to the hospital-I had to take a bus downtown and then walked two miles to get to the hospital-but I got into a routine. Working at the hospital was scary too-the

building itself was like a labyrinth and I didn't know any medical terminology (in Spanish or English)-but it was also a rewarding experience where I feel I got more back than I even gave.

All in all, I think I learned more about 'Latin American' culture from living and exploring San José, and studying and volunteering in the city than I could have learned in the classroom here. I met such nice people and some very interesting characters in the oddest places: like a sweet old lady who sat next to me on the bus when I was going to volunteer at the hospital and told me about her daughter who worked in the U.S. After my study abroad experience, I came back to the U.S. feeling like a stronger and more confident person that had a clearer understanding of Latin America and its people.

