

Rapport de stage

On June 6th, 2011, six other Quebecers and I embarked on a 10 week internship with *Mer et Monde* working in partnership with a network of artisans, *la Red de Mujeres*, in a touristic village of 3,000 named Valle de Angeles in Honduras. In fact, the internship started in September 2010 when I was selected to participate in this *Québec Sans Frontières* project and only came to completion in the fall of 2011. This report will provide greater details on the internship and my experience in Honduras.

Since beginning my degree in International Development Studies with a minor in French, I sought a hands-on-experience to complement my education. I first became interested in development and other cultures through my participation with the Social Justice Committee at my high school, Queen of Angels Academy. I pursued Liberal Arts at Dawson College. I was then accepted to the Page Program of the House of Commons with the Parliament of Canada and studied for one year at the University of Ottawa. This allowed me to witness first hand Canadian democracy in action and begin my studies at the same time. Throughout my bachelor's degree, my areas of interest and research have included gender relations and development, microenterprise and alternative methods of commerce as well as sustainable environmental policy. In 2009, I returned to my hometown of Montreal to continue my degree at McGill. That summer, I volunteered in Peru at a community school teaching English. I also continued to volunteer for local organizations including Ten Thousand Villages and *Santropol Roulant*. Thus, when researching possible internships, I sought a community-based project in one of my areas of interest where I could practice working in French as well as in Spanish, my second and third languages respectively.

In early September 2011, I received an email from the McGill Arts Internship Office that advertised *Québec Sans Frontières* internships. I read through the list of projects and was immediately interested in one with *Mer et Monde* in Honduras working with an artisan's cooperative and their boutique. *Mer et Monde* is a non-profit organization based in Montreal that promotes partners in Honduras and Senegal working in the areas of human rights and sustainable development by coordinating internships for Quebec residents. *Mer et Monde* interns are advocates necessary in creating long-term partnerships with organizations in these countries based on mutual understanding and cultural exchange.

During my internship, my fellow interns and I took on various duties. Our primary project was to organize and orchestrate the network's store. Upon our arrival, the *Red* had only recently acquired the store and it was our responsibility to create a mission and vision for this new enterprise. We aimed to present a completed store along with inventory system, marketing plan and trained staff within our timeline. We were in charge of planning our own schedules and setting our own goals that would ensure that all project objectives were met within our fifteen-week deadline. Some of my duties included conducting interviews with artisans in order to assess their involvement in the network and to complete a survey written by my team that would help us create personalized information sheets for each artisan to be displayed in the store. Other duties included the creation and translation (between French, English and Spanish) of our various publicity materials. My group also organized and animated meetings for the artisans of the store in order to make important decisions regarding the store logistics,

vote for a new managerial administration and create and implement an internal statute for the participating artisans.

Prior to my departure, my learning objectives included improving my confidence and mastery of the French and of the Spanish languages. I also aimed to observe the Honduran perspective by creating individual relationships with artisans in order to gain a better understanding of their lifestyles and personal struggles. Likewise, I desired to gain experience leading a team and improve upon my interpersonal skills in a group.

When thinking back on my internship, many highlights come to mind. One is most definitely my host family and my surroundings. *Mer et Monde* arranges for its interns to live with families in order to allow for a genuine cultural exchange and a greater immersion of the intern into the language. Valle de Angeles also proved to be a beautiful and safe home base for my two and half months in Honduras. Another highlight was the completion and opening of our store. After several weeks of hard work and a lot of patience, we opened the doors of *Raíces Hondureñas*. The public gave us very positive feedback but more importantly so did our artisans. I noticed an immediate increase in their confidence and, in most cases, a rise in their cooperation and solidarity. Another final highlight was the opportunity to engage with and relate to the artisans. Each had their own unique story and product and sharing with them and learning from them was a truly enriching experience.

My academic background most certainly prepared me for this internship. My French and Spanish language courses were indispensable to me in my work and my everyday life. My international development courses prepared me to approach new situations as an observer with caution and awareness. Overall, I was able to enjoy my

time in Honduras as informed and aware intern because of the classes I had completed at McGill. When I observed a situation I did not necessarily understand at first, I was able to use my academic background to separate factors and identify connections between this case and larger global and historical trends.

Through the course of this internship, I gained a greater understanding of my desired future profession and further education. I learned that I enjoy leading a team, carrying a project through from beginning to end and seeking creative solutions to problems. I am certain that I will pursue a master's degree after gaining some work experience.

After returning from Honduras, my group and I completed an awareness campaign where we shared our experiences with members of our communities. I would recommend this internship to interns who are interested in learning about another culture and another way of life on a deeper level. I witnessed a great deal, related and unrelated to the study of development, that I will carry with me throughout my future studies and career.