Colombia Support Network Delegation

I received the LACIS grant in order to fund the traveling costs to Colombia this past summer. I went through my internship with the nongovernmental organization of Colombia Support Network. We traveled to Medellín, San José de Apartadó, and Bogotá. Our main purpose was to listen the concerns and desires of Dane County’s sister city, the Peace community of San José de Apartadó, so that we would be able to address the issues and discuss solutions with multiple politicians, social activists, and other international organizations such as the United Nations. Prior to this trip, I traveled to Spain in 2009 and only dreamed of living there, but this delegation opened my eyes. Colombia is not the drug ridden South American nation we are lead to believe it is. It has provided far more such as Gabo, Botero, universities, and a culture that can be said to surpass our own.

I acquired immense amounts of information and knowledge while listening to numerous viewpoints of leaders, experts, and witnesses on the Colombian situation, more than I could have ever learned from a lecture hall. After every meeting, I heard myself asking questions as to why one group contradicted their allies and desiring more knowledge on the proposed solutions such as the Justicia y Paz law and the Peace Talks in Havana, Cuba. I even was forced to wonder why it was so difficult to meet with my own U.S. embassy and discuss the topics at hand. The Director, Cecilia Zárate-Laun, and her husband, Jack Laun, packed every day with meetings from breakfast until dinner; it was exhausting, but completely worth the time spent. I heard the dark sides of capitalism, free trade, mining, and the military. However, there was definitely hope present in the country represented by the government-funded organizations spread throughout the country to assist those who are affected by the fighting.
From Medellín lit up by streetlights, homes, restaurants, and vehicles to Bogotá’s museums and market areas, the entire delegation was a trip I will never forget. However, my most valuable experience was the time spent in the Peace Community of San José de Apartadó. It is a community that has built itself from nothing into a village that resists the war and refuses compensation without an end to the violence and threats. Everyone in the community works to protect each other knowing that every action not only affects one person, but the group as a whole. They function just as normally as we do daily except they have a war surrounding them every moment of the day to the point that they can distinguish a gunshot from whether it came from a paramilitary or military rifle. The community is full of extraordinary people that I will not soon forget and I will value everything I have learned from them.

Steven L. Snyder