

Stanford School of Engineering Stanford Summer Service Learning Program (SSLP)



Getting ready to go: “This summer I am participating in the Stanford Summer Service Learning Program (SSLP). Eight of us are going to Argentina for five weeks to work on the water sanitation system in Córdoba. Argentina is considered one of the more developed countries in Latin America, but the population size has outgrown the sewage system. As you can imagine, there are flooding and sanitation issues. Our group is looking at developing solutions in partnership with the local government and universities. To prepare we took a class that immersed us in Argentinean culture and the problem at hand. We don’t want to show up and throw our American ideals on people.”

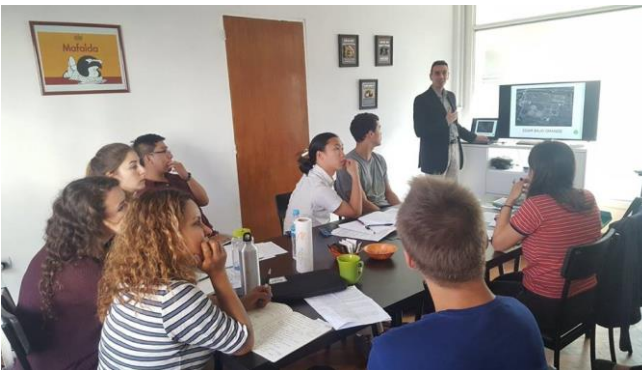


Natalie Homsji, '18
Mechanical Engineering
Stanford University



Excited to make an impact: “As I sit in the airport, waiting to get on a plane to Argentina, it is difficult to articulate my feelings. On one hand, I am incredibly excited about the opportunity to work on the water system and infrastructure development in Córdoba. We will be meeting with many different people and I hope we can make an impact. At the same time, I am nervous about the

language barrier. The Argentinean accent is completely foreign to me. But we took an engineering class last spring that gave us a good understanding of the big picture problems there. This is going to be an interesting transition. I can’t wait.”



First day of work: “These first few days have been jam-packed with meetings and activities.

We’re learning as much as we can about the situation here in Córdoba. We’ve met with municipal engineers, architects, doctors, government officials, lawyers, professors and urban planners. We’ve heard a number of completely different perspectives on

the problem. We are trying very hard to stay objective and understand the problem from all angles. It’s interesting and surprising to see how much everyone cares about our project. It seems like we have the potential to have a really large impact. Soon we’ll begin to narrow down our focus and spend time visiting areas directly affected by the problem we are addressing, including the Bajo Grande treatment plant and the town directly downstream of it, Chacra de la Merced. Next week we will also visit the town Villa Libertador, a community in the south of Córdoba without access to the sewage network.”



Encountering political challenges:

“We decided to focus on the issue of the sewage system within the city and what can be done to fix it. The sewage situation here is very complex. There is a river, called the Suquia, which runs into Córdoba from a lake, called Lago San Roque, north of the city. The river then flows through recently built neighborhoods that don’t have proper

sewage treatment, so many of them dump sewage directly into the river.

“One of the biggest challenges we’ve encountered so far is the political and bureaucratic red tape surrounding this project. It is very difficult to get clear numbers and data from anyone. The process of obtaining data takes a really long time so we’ve spent a lot of time researching the problem while waiting for people to give us the data we need. Because the problem is so politicized and we are working with people from both sides of the issue, it is a little difficult to gain trust and reassure that we are neutral. **This process has been very interesting and is a very big learning experience.**”



A foundation to build on: “It’s hard to believe my time here is coming to a close. I have had such an amazing experience and seen so many different aspects of Argentinean culture, life and work. This project tested us in ways I never could have imagined. We spent the last week writing our final report; it’s over 80 pages. The biggest contribution our group has made is taking all the information and data and ideas that people have about the sewage system problems in Córdoba and organizing them in a coherent and useful way. We have made extrapolations and conclusions based on the data we were given and developed a strong foundation for future groups to build the project more. When we arrived, it was hard to clearly see where the project was going. Now there is a clear direction and tons of research and ideas for future projects.





Dance is a central part of life:

“Argentinean culture is truly amazing. I think the thing I’ll miss the most is public dancing. My first weekend here my host sister took me and my roommate to a plaza in central Córdoba where every weekend people meet and dance bachata and salsa. As an avid lover of bachata,

this was heaven for me. We watched and danced all night, soaking in the beauty of late night dancing. The next weekend our group stumbled upon another group of people dancing in a plaza; this time it was tango. People of all ages were gliding around the park and it was mesmerizing to watch. Dance is a central part of life in Argentina and I love it.”



A deeper understanding of what it means to work in a foreign country:

“I’m not ready for my time in Argentina to be over. I love this country and its culture and people. I’m so grateful to have had this experience. I hope to take the laid-back, tranquilo attitude of Argentines back home with me. I am very curious to see how this project develops in future years

and, who knows, maybe I’ll be back to work on it. **This experience has given me a deeper understanding of what it means to work in a foreign country and has made me even more passionate about pursuing a career involving international engineering. This is exactly the type of work I dream of doing in the future. I don’t have words to describe how much this experience meant to me.**

“I just finished hiking Fitz Roy and climbing on the glacier Perito Moreno in Patagonia with two of my team members. It was an experience unlike anything I’ve ever imagined and a perfect ending to such an amazing and unbelievable adventure. This country has so much diversity and beauty, I am so grateful to have experienced it.”

Natalie Homs

ONIX FOUNDATION – INTERCAMBIO CULTURAL

Deán Funes 826 – # 29 – Centro - Córdoba – Argentina - Zip Code 5.000

Tel: +54-9-3512381781 / +543514232837 – onix@onix.org.ar www.argentineculture.org

Pictures: <https://www.argentineculture.org/onix-in-pictures> - About Us: <https://www.argentineculture.org/about-us>