

New Faces in PFSS

At the beginning of this year we welcomed back two new Panamanian professors who are now a part of PFSS!



Ariel Espino studied architecture in Panama and also holds a Master's in urban planning from University of Arizona as well as a Ph.D. in social and cultural anthropology from Rice University. Ariel worked with the National Historic Heritage Office in Panama and directed the Office of the Old City which was concerned with the rehabilitation of Casco Antiguo in Panama City. Ariel currently has a private practice in architecture and urban planning, teaches at the Central American Master's program in Management of Cultural Heritage for Development, and conducts research on urban segregation and affordable housing. Ariel joined PFSS in 2012, where he lectured on affordable housing and development in Casco Antiguo. He led students on a site visit to some of the buildings he had helped convert into affordable housing and commercial space. Ariel feels that the interdisciplinary and cultural exchange qualities of PFSS are invaluable because they allow students and professors from different backgrounds to share and develop their knowledge of common challenges we face in the world today. This year, Ariel again taught students about contemporary urban problems in Panama with a focus on social inclusion and sustainability.

Ana Spalding has a background in economics, marine affairs and policy, and environmental studies (B.A. University of Richmond, M.A. University of Miami, Ph.D. University of California, Santa Cruz). She is currently a postdoctoral visiting researcher at the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute investigating the history and evolution of Panamanian land tenure in coastal areas regions with regards to protected areas and beach access. Ana was introduced to PFSS in 2012, when she stepped in to co-teach the Geography course, Humans in Tropical Environments. She brought her expertise to the class, focusing on livelihood and development in the coastal town of Pedasí on the Azuero Peninsula. Ana was impressed and appreciative of the eagerness and dedication of the PFSS students. This year, Ana taught the environmental management course alongside Professor Thomas Meredith. She feels that cross-cultural exchanges like PFSS are important and eye-opening for students, as they offer first-hand experience, and a demanding and engaging style of learning that students are not usually exposed to in the classroom.



"El agua se fue": Internship Highlight

PFSS 2012 students Timothée Pasqualini, Evelyne St-Louis, and Ateeya Vawda were chosen to do their internship at the Punta Galeta, STRI's marine laboratory located on the Caribbean coast near the city of Colón. Since 1964 the research station has been working on environmental impact and education projects. McGill student projects with Galeta have focused on topics such as open sea aquaculture in Panama, environmental education in Colón, impacts of the expansion of the Enrique A. Jimenez International Airport, and the establishment of a coastal marine park surrounding Isla Galeta. However, last year's project took on a unique new focus. Evelyne, Tim, and Ateeya had initially been asked to work on a power plant project, but during their first visit to the research station, they were taken aback by a water shortage that the Galeta staff assured them was normal. Inspired by this experience, and the recent water protests occurring in Panama, they came up with a new idea. Ateeya, Tim, and Evelyne were fortunate to be supervised by Stanley Heckadon, a well-known Smithsonian researcher and Director of Communications and Public Programs at Punta Galeta. They also worked with other welcoming Galeta staff members like Gabriel Thomas, Jorge Morales and Illia Grenald.

With little information available on the water shortages, the interns gathered input from as many perspectives as possible: they visited the headquarters and water treatment plants of Panama's national water and sanitation utility, IDAAN (Instituto



de Acueductos y Alcantarillados Nacionales). They spoke with David Michaud, employee of the Panama World Bank Water Project, Jose Fierro, engineer and former director of IDAAN, and Felipe Cabeza, leader of Frente Amplio de Colón, a civil society organization at the head of the water protests in Colón. They also visited homes in Colón to analyze the effects of inadequate water distribution. Ateeya, Evelyne, and Tim found that there were crucial technical problems with water treatment and distribution. They determined that many infrastructural problems emerge from the social, economic, and political problems of the way that IDAAN is run. They concluded that once actions are taken at the administrative and political levels, positive changes will trickle down to the technical issues of water treatment and distribution. The interns were grateful to be involved with such a relevant community issue and were thankful for the guidance of Stanley Heckadon and the Punta Galeta staff. There is hope that an article on their project will be published in a Panamanian newspaper, as it would broaden local and governmental perspectives on the water shortage issue.