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Dear GESI Student,

Welcome to the ninth annual Global Engagement Studies Institute (GESI)! GESI began with the idea and perseverance of an undergraduate like you. It has since grown from a small experiential-learning program in Uganda exclusively for Northwestern students, into a nationally recognized model that has trained and sent over 400 students, from almost 100 colleges and universities, to seven countries for community development work.

GESI offers students the unique opportunity to apply their classroom learning toward addressing global challenges. Students will spend their summer working with, and learning from, our community partners across the world. Northwestern University provides students with comprehensive preparatory coursework and training, ensures a structured and supported in-country field experience, and facilitates critical post-program reflection.

This program will challenge you to think and act differently. To create change you will need to listen, ask questions, and build relationships, not merely provide solutions. We trust you'll approach GESI with the respect, curiosity, and humility requisite to understanding people, their talents and challenges, and the role you can play to support positive social change.

GESI is one step on a path toward your personal, professional, and leadership development as well as your understanding of complex issues of consequence to the planet and its people. Throughout the summer, our professors and student instructors will be in contact with feedback and encouragement; in August they will help debrief what you've learned. Even after GESI, our staff will be a strong support system as you use your own unique skills and passions to live lives of global social change.

We have seen this program make a tremendous impact on students’ academic pursuits, career paths, and worldview, as well as their skills in cross-cultural communication, project management, and collaboration. We are excited to join you on this journey and to see where it leads. Get excited!

Best of luck,

Patrick Eccles
Assistant Director, Global Engagement at the Buffett Institute
Northwestern University
601 University Place
Evanston, IL 60208
Phone: 847.467.0844
E-mail: patrick.eccles@northwestern.edu
http://www.gesi.northwestern.edu
Program History

Global Engagement at the Buffett Institute:

The Buffett Institute for Global Studies mission is to prepare undergraduates with the knowledge, skills, and experiences to address shared global challenges and to lead lives of responsible global engagement. Global Engagement at the Buffett Institute is a comprehensive student support center dedicated entirely to improving undergraduates’ abilities to address global poverty and inequality. We help students attain tangible skills and critique academic theory through experiential learning. Through a unique set of multidisciplinary opportunities, ranging from study abroad programs to fellowships, the Institute builds the capacity of young global leaders to cross borders and partner with communities to produce responsible, sustainable solutions to global challenges. We connect students to a network of individuals and organizations at Northwestern and around the world and are actively shaping a new generation of experienced, effective, and compassionate global leaders in a variety of fields. The Buffett Institute runs the Global Engagement Studies Institute (GESI) program. To learn about other programs and activities, visit: www.buffett.northwestern.edu

GESI History:

GESI was first conceived in 2005 by a group of undergraduate students led by Nathaniel Whittemore, then a Northwestern University junior who had recently returned from volunteering at refugee camps outside Cairo. Talking with dozens of other students volunteering and researching abroad, Whittemore realized that he was not alone in feeling a gap between the desire and ability to make a difference in the world: “The story among my peers was pretty common... tons and tons of passion and energy, a deep belief and desire to connect across cultural, religious, and national borders to make a better world, and frustration at the lack of support, infrastructure, resources, and education necessary to really move beyond our good intentions. Young people knew they didn’t have the skills or resources needed to impact the problems they were trying to solve; they didn’t even know where to get those things.”

Whittemore and a fellow Northwestern student, Jon Marino, went in search of academic training that could be combined with off-campus experiential learning to help students gain the tools they needed to be agents of change. Rather than founding another program to raise awareness of global issues, they sought to create a new type of study abroad experience that would provide the educational tools and experiences that could help students in the field, and then help students reflect on what they had learned by working at the grassroots. The program, they hoped, would provide the training and capacity-building young people would need to run, start, or participate in international development, service, and social entrepreneurship.

From these student-initiated roots, and together with support from across campus--including the Northwestern Office of the Provost, Buffett Institute for Global Studies, School of Education and Social Policy, and School of Communications--the Global Engagement Studies Institute, developed.
Who does what in GESI?

The Global Engagement Studies Institute (GESI) is a program, not a physical institute (despite what the name might suggest!). Whether or not you are a Northwestern student, the “acronym soup” that surrounds GESI is often confusing. It is important for you to understand the difference between each organization that helps make GESI happen so that you can communicate it effectively to your friends and family and so you know where to turn for support (now and in the future). There are numerous partners who make important contributions to your academic, cultural, and personal experience in the GESI program.

Global Engagement at the Buffett Institute: The Buffett Institute is the Northwestern University office that runs GESI. We include people you’ve met or spoken with (Patrick Eccles, Meghan Ozaroski, Emory Erker-Lynch, and Corey Portell) when applying to the GESI program. GESI is part of the Buffett Institute for Global Studies, which is run by Bruce Caruthers. Brian Hanson and Paul Arntson will be your main professors during the GESI coursework. The GESI team supports you before, during, and after your trip, in the following ways:

- **Program Arrangement and Logistics:** GESI works with the on-site teams to make arrangements for your trip. We also provide you with lots of information and supports you during the program application phase.

- **Pre-Departure Orientation and Materials:** GESI provides you with important information about your program to help you prepare for your experience. This includes resources, such as this packet, and in-person meetings related to health, safety, budgeting, travel, and academics.

- **Academic Coursework and Credit:** GESI is responsible for organizing all Northwestern coursework.

- **In-Country Support:** Your on-site team will provide support for you while abroad and should be your primary resource, but if you need additional assistant or would feel more comfortable approaching GESI staff with any matters experienced in-country, please do not hesitate to contact Meghan Ozaroski, Program Manager or Patrick Eccles, Assistant Director (contact information on page 6).

- **Reintegration Support:** Upon your return, we will provide you with resources to help you transition back into campus life, as well as connect you with other returnees and opportunities.
Program Staff

Patrick Eccles | Assistant Director
patrick.eccles@northwestern.edu
Office: +1 847-467-0844, Cell: +1 312-282-4508
Patrick Eccles joined the Buffett Institute staff as Assistant Director during the fall quarter of 2012. Prior to joining the Institute, Patrick spent seven years working to expand and deepen experiential learning opportunities for undergraduate students while coordinating local, domestic and international immersion experiences at Loyola University Chicago. Patrick earned his bachelor's degree from Northwestern, majoring in political science with minors in international and environmental studies. During his college years, Patrick spent a year volunteering on a reforestation project and assisting with various community development efforts in the western highlands of Guatemala. He earned his Master's degree in Latin American and Caribbean Studies from the University of Chicago. In his Master's thesis and fieldwork, Patrick pursued research interests in trade, human rights and the environment through a critique and comparison of fair trade arrangements in coffee production as a sustainable development approach in Guatemala and Mexico. He speaks fluent Spanish and limited Portuguese.

Meghan Ozaroski | Program Manager
m-ozaroski@northwestern.edu
Office: +1 847-491-5932
Meghan is program manager of Global Engagement at the Buffett Institute where she works with the GESI program and the Institute's co-curricular student groups. She created the Northwestern University Global Opportunities (NUGO) website, global.northwestern.edu. She also founded AHEAD@NU: the Association for Higher Education Administrators' Development, a professional development group for employees of the University which has grown to over 700 members. Before coming to Northwestern, Meghan worked at the Associated Colleges of the Midwest (ACM), coordinating study abroad programs in Tanzania, Botswana, India, Japan, and Chicago. Meghan has a master's degree in Higher Education Administration and Policy from Northwestern. As an undergraduate at Coe College in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, she majored in Psychology and Music.

Corey Portell | Program Coordinator
corey.portell@northwestern.edu
Office: +1 847-467-2689
Corey joined the Buffett Institute in October 2013 as Program Coordinator. She came to the Institute from Stephens College, a women’s college in Missouri, where she worked in admissions with domestic and international recruitment. She received a BA in international studies, political science, and religious studies from Loyola University Chicago, where she focused much of her co-curricular efforts on harm prevention, women’s rights, and social justice issues both in the United States and during her time studying abroad at the University of Ghana.

Emory Erker-Lynch | Graduate Intern
emory.lynch@northwestern.edu
Office: +1 847-467-5728
Emory joined the Buffett Institute in 2014 as an intern while working towards her master's degree in Higher Education Administration and Policy from Northwestern. Before coming to Northwestern, she worked in Boston as a housing resource manager and advocate for persons experiencing homelessness. Emory has a master's degree in Theological Ethics from Boston College, where she also worked as a graduate assistant with the Arrupe international immersion education program. She received a BA in Religious Studies and History from Santa Clara University before living and working in El Salvador for two years with the Casa de la Solidaridad study abroad program. When not working, you will often find her with her nose stuck in a novel, her hands covered with dirt in the garden, or out exploring new parks.
Emergency Contacts

Students will receive detailed in-country emergency contact information at the pre-departure summit in Chicago. In case of emergency, parents should call (in this order):


Parents should not call the site teams.

Patrick Eccles  
Assistant Director, Global Engagement  
Office: +1 847-467-0844  
Cell: +1 312-282-4508  
patrick.eccles@northwestern.edu

Meghan Ozaroski  
Program Manager  
Office: +1 847-491-5932  
Cell: +1 319-389-0380  
m-ozaroski@northwestern.edu

HTH Health Insurance:  
001- 610 254-8771

University Police:  
001-847-491-3456
Program Partners

The Foundation for Sustainable Development (FSD):
FSD is GESI’s on-the-ground partner for sites in Bolivia, India, Nicaragua, and Uganda. FSD is a non-profit, non-governmental organization created in 1995 to offer capacity building and funding to grassroots community based organizations throughout Africa, Latin American, and Asia. A professional field staff and trained volunteers provide on-site technical training and project support, while enabling information sharing to more than 300 partner organizations around the world. FSD is GESI’s oldest partner. FSD has a played a key role in supporting the development of the GESI model over the past seven years.

Social Entrepreneur Corps (SEC):
SEC is GESI’s on-the-ground partner at the Dominican Republic site. SEC is a social enterprise that leads innovative and dynamic international internship programs. GESI students will work with SEC’s sister organization, Community Enterprise Solutions, to support the creation, development, growth and impact of social innovations focused on intelligently and sustainably alleviating poverty. Participants create sustainable impact in the field while gaining the perspectives, skills, and knowledge to become the social entrepreneurs of the future.

ThinkImpact:
Our on-the-ground partner in South Africa is ThinkImpact. Headquartered in Denver, Colorado, ThinkImpact is a global social enterprise that trains the next generation of social entrepreneurs to think differently about poverty alleviation. ThinkImpact sites are located in rural Africa. GESI students will learn about new cultures while exploring market based solutions to poverty. ThinkImpact’s approach utilizes an asset-based community development philosophy to fuel social innovation in developing economies. Students work with local community members promoting a mindset of innovation and self-sufficiency rather than dependency and aid.

Each GESI partner has unique offerings based on their networks and development model. All partners have a commitment to asset-based community development, provide exemplary health, safety and logistical support to our students, and are well respected locally and internationally, including by our peer universities. It is important for you to understand that each year we adapt our programming to fit the feedback of our alumni and in-country partners and to align with the learning goals of our program. Given the different cultural contexts and models employed by our in-country partners, your experience will differ from what you’ve heard from alumni. To succeed in this program (and in any international engagement), you must be flexible and open-minded. You must also listen to be surprised—something you’ll hear us say a lot during your courses. It is important that you take time to get to know students who are traveling to other GESI country sites. The experiences of your peers in different cultural contexts, working with different types of organizations, can enrich your own learning and reflections on community development, cultural exchange, and global issues.
What is experiential-learning?

The following are definitions of various types of experiential-learning. GESI fits most closely into the “service-learning” category, though the program incorporates elements of all of the below:

• **Volunteerism** – Students engage in activities where the emphasis is on service for the sake of the beneficiary or recipient (client, partner)

• **Internship** – Students engage in activities to enhance their own vocational or career development

• **Practicum** – Students work in a discipline-based venue in place of an in-class course experience

• **Community Service** – Students engage in activities addressing mutually defined community needs (as a collaboration between community partners, faculty and students) as a vehicle for achieving academic goals and course objectives

• **Service-Learning** – Students engage in community service activities with intentional academic and learning goals and opportunities for reflection that connect to their academic disciplines


What to expect at GESI Pre-Departure Coursework (June 15 - 21):

The GESI pre-departure coursework at Northwestern University is an intense seven days of class. You are expected to arrive by 11 am on June 16th; we will spend the rest of that day getting to know each other, getting to know representatives from FSD, SEC and ThinkImpact, and establishing expectations for the week ahead. From June 15 through June 21, you will be in class from 9 am to 9 pm, with breaks for meals. GESI alumni will serve as student instructors, facilitating class activities and discussions. We will have many guest speakers supplementing class lectures as well; it is important that you complete all course readings before arrival. Some nights, we will assign additional (short) readings. You will need to discipline yourself so that you are able to complete these assignments and be alert and engaged for long days of class. If your group flight departs on June 22nd, you will have free time that day until your flight departs for your host country. We will provide CTA cards for you to get to the airport.

Below is a sample day of class. A detailed schedule will be provided upon arrival in Chicago.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9:00 - 10:55 am</td>
<td>Lecture by Brian Hanson on International Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:00 - 11:55 am</td>
<td>Language lesson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:00 - 12:55 pm</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:00 - 4:45 pm</td>
<td>Lecture and group activities with Paul Arntson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:00 - 5:55 pm</td>
<td>Guest speaker on your host country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:00 - 7:30 pm</td>
<td>Dinner with group or on your own</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:30 pm</td>
<td>Back to hostel for evening reading and sleep</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Academic Information

In-Country Assignments:
We feel strongly that in a foreign context you should look to your local hosts for “expert” advice. Your interaction with GESI staff and faculty while abroad will be limited. Occasionally, GESI staff, faculty or student instructors will reply to your weekly updates (and/or other deliverables, as outlined below) with comments, questions, cautions or feedback. However, given that they are not in-country with you, their written feedback will be limited. Only you, your site team, and community colleagues can truly understand your situation and challenges in country. Please note that GESI staff are always available to discuss any program, health, safety or other concerns you have.

You will be evaluated based on satisfactory submission of the following (through Canvas):

1. **Project Proposal.** This should be a maximum of 2 pages; initial proposals are due within the first few weeks abroad.

2. **External work plan.** These are due at the same time you submit your project proposal. These should be a maximum of two pages and conform to the template provided. FSD students will also be required to submit a budget along with their proposal and work plan.

3. **Weekly group reports.** These are due on each of the seven Fridays while in the field. Submit these online on your group’s Blackboard blog. Entries should be a maximum of 1 page, and should answer the following questions:
   - What you accomplished the previous week
   - What you plan to accomplish in the week ahead and who is responsible for these goals
   - What are the barriers/challenges that you are dealing with in terms of accomplishing the work plan, and interacting with your organization, community and your group

4. **Reflection Journal.** You will be given a spiral-bound reflection journal upon arrival in Chicago. It is your responsibility to complete at least two of the reflection activities outlined in the journal each week. You will choose from a variety of reflection topics outlined in the journal. While we will collect these journals from you at the Final Summit, you can choose to fold any page you do not want us to read and we will honor your request. We will mail the journals back to you after we are done reviewing them.

5. **Final Reflection Summit Summary.** In order to share your work with your fellow GESI colleagues, you will complete a summary of your work, including your rationale, process, and assessment. This will be shared with all students at the Final Summit to guide discussions.

6. **Evaluations.** Before you return to the US, the country site teams will complete a 2 to 3 page evaluation with you. You will also be required to submit a comprehensive GESI program evaluation electronically by August 25th. Failure to complete the electronic evaluation will result in an “incomplete” grade appearing on your transcript until we receive your completed evaluation.

**Note:** There may be times when you do not have access to internet or communications for some time. If you are unable to submit any of the aforementioned assignments due to communications issue, do not worry. GESI staff and faculty are accustomed to technological delays and this will not be held against you as long as you submit any missing deliverables once your internet access allows for it.
Academic Information

What to expect at the Final Reflection Summit (August 17 - 19):

Upon returning from their host-countries, students meet back in Chicago for a three-day Final Reflection Summit where we will reflect on some of the program's learning outcomes, including but not limited to the following:

• Understanding ethical, historical, political, economic, and/or social issues in relation to community development
• Analyzing multiple perspectives of the social issue at hand
• Taking responsibility for your own actions as they have an effect on society
• Contributing to the society through the application of new field knowledge
• Appreciating ends as well as means
• Appreciating cultural pluralism and global connectedness – as well as the challenges and opportunities of each

In addition, GESI participants from all six sites share and compare geographical experiences while processing their immersion and what it has taught them about global development challenges, culture, and themselves. Students will also consider how to respond to the GESI experience by networking with professionals who are creating social change in a range of fields.

What Happens After GESI?

As the program closes, GESI transitions into the role of alumni support. GESI aspires to help students lead lives committed to international social justice. For us, this means helping our alumni find internships, jobs, or project support opportunities that allow them to continue engaging with the issues they care about most. You may always contact the GESI team for guidance and support.

Changing our worldview is an implicit goal of most service-learning programs. Unless we understand how political, economic, and judicial systems tend to favor one group over another, we will be unable to truly assist those in need.

Safety

Crisis and Emergency Procedures & Contacts:

In the event of any unanticipated crisis or emergency, it is important that you understand the action plans that your on-site staff will follow to ensure your health and safety, as well as your roles, responsibilities, and appropriate prevention and response steps.

General Policies and Preventive Measures:

• Site teams will arrange to ensure students have cell phones. You must provide your cell phone number to your on-site staff, so that you can be contacted in case of emergency. You should also program your cell phone with your country Program Director’s, GESI’s, other students’ and local emergency contact numbers.
• All students must carry the list of emergency contacts and the Emergency Card—both provided in Chicago during the pre-departure coursework—with them at all times. If an emergency arises and you cannot access the contact numbers in your cell phone, you should have a backup, so that you can call the emergency phone numbers.
• Contact your country Program Director first if an incident arises. They will lead you through next steps and make any necessary arrangements. If your Program Director is not available, contact another on-site contact to help you. If the incident involves your on-site administrators or if, for some reason, you cannot reach anyone on-site, contact GESI staff.
• Do not participate in any kind of rally, protest, or political manifestation.
• Report any independent travel, including a written itinerary and contact information, to your on-site administrators. Also enter your travel information into the Personal Travel Locator in International SOS.

Scenario I: Physical or Mental Health Emergency
If you are not feeling well or are experiencing emotional distress, contact your country Program Director or other on-site administrator, and they will help you get the care that you need. You will be given more specific information at your in-country orientation.

Scenario II: Crime Committed Against a Student
If you are the victim of a crime (e.g., a robbery or assault), contact your country Program Director or on-site administrator, and they will notify you of the proper procedure for reporting the crime and if applicable, the steps for replacing stolen items. If your passport is lost or stolen, you will need to contact local police and the US Embassy.

Scenario III: Hostility Toward United States Citizens & Terrorist Acts
We monitor International SOS and the State Department for announcements regarding the safety of our students abroad. In case of emergency, we will work with the US Embassy, the State Department, and International SOS to analyze the severity of the situation. We will keep you informed of any situations that have occurred and any relevant warnings and update you about any potential risks or areas to avoid. If necessary, we will make arrangements to evacuate students to a secure and calm location far from Anti-American or terrorist activity to prevent attack.

Note: You will be provided with comprehensive safety sheets and emergency contact information prior to your departure!
Cultural Adjustment

Cultural Norms & Adjustment:

Students will experience cultural differences and react to these differences (commonly referred to as "culture shock") in a variety of ways. There is a lot of helpful literature related to the cultural adjustment process, including common themes and experiences, representing phases of highs (comfort and excitement) and lows (discomfort and anxiety).

Your on-site teams will be the most important resources for helping you to navigate cultural differences and adjustment, but just keep in mind a few things:

• Culture shock is normal and however you experience it is normal.
• Intercultural adjustment not only varies by individual, but also by program. You may find that some of the traditional “low” phases may correspond with program excursions and produce a “high.”
• Culture shock can exacerbate other mental health challenges or conditions. If you have seen a therapist or psychiatrist for any mental health conditions within the past three years, be sure to indicate this on the required NU Health Assessment Form and meet with your doctor to discuss your condition in light of study abroad. If you require any special accommodations, be sure to discuss your situation with GESI prior to departure, so that we can work with on-site staff to determine what—if any—provisions can be made.
• Be aware of what you are experiencing. If you encounter any difficulties or discomfort, which prevent you from being successful, discuss this with your on-site administrators or GESI staff ASAP.

Encountering Culture:

For many GESI students, witnessing extreme poverty first-hand causes a great deal of culture shock. Encounters with beggars, for example, can be a deeply unsettling experience. Richard Slimbach offers the following advice,

“Begging may be a deeply flawed method of redistributing wealth, but letting ourselves lapse into callous indifference only injures our moral sensibilities. Whether to give or not to give ultimately must be decided case by case, because much depends on our knowledge of the particular beggar and the larger social context. We simply cannot give to all beggars but neither must we refuse all. Over time, our giving probably will be selective, biased in favor of those who provide some service. Instead of our “gift” reinforcing the notion that poor folk are simply welfare wards of wealthy westerners, it can become a legitimate and dignifying form of payment for services rendered” (Slimbach, p. 188).

Bargaining is another cultural experience that can sometimes overwhelm students. Yet bargaining can be the most enjoyable of experiences abroad and we hope you’ll learn to have fun with it! Remember that if you really want something, you should plan to pay fair price, not the lowest possible price. Bargaining can be a fun way to form relationships with locals. Just be careful not to pay high prices for basic goods because it may harm locals. If local merchants can get premium prices for their goods and services from foreigners, they may be less likely to sell to their neighbors at lower, fairer rates.
By doing some research before you go abroad, you will begin to grasp important historical events, as well as social, economic and political systems that shape the cultural realities in your host country. Knowledge will make you better equipped to interact with residents in a substantive way, throwing aside stereotypes of the “Ugly American”. Without doing research and grappling with multiple perspectives about your host country, you are likely to have many misconceptions about the place and people, carrying counterproductive stereotypes with you that taint your ability to fully comprehend what you experience on the ground. “Carrying knowledge conveys a curious and concerned self, one who cares enough about the peoples and places in one’s destination country to invest the time learning about them. This, in itself, may not be enough to distinguish us from the camera-toting and culturally clueless tourists piling in and out of tour buses, but it’s a good start” (Slimbach, p. 128).

Therefore, don’t leave home without “packing” place-specific knowledge into your head. You should develop at least a basic understanding of the cultural, social, political, historical, and environmental dynamics of the place where you will be living. Knowledge of the local language spoken is also critical. GESI predeparture coursework will provide you with some of this information, but you will take more out of the classroom and field experience if you discover new knowledge about your host country on your own as well.

Please complete the following activity before coming to Chicago on June 15th:

This activity is taken and amended from Richard Slimbach’s Becoming World Wise. Divide up the following sections among your teammates. See what you can learn about your assigned topics, make sure you read from multiple sources with conflicting viewpoints, and be prepared to informally present your findings with your teammates, faculty, and GESI staff. Once abroad, you will have the opportunity to reflect as a team on what you read versus what you encountered. The following are examples of questions you can consider for each category—but you are encouraged to dig deeper!

a. Geography: In what region of the world does your host country lie? What are the neighboring countries? What is the climate in each of the host country’s main regions? What are its major natural resources (e.g., forestry, fishing, mineral)? What are the names and locations of the country’s major states/provinces? What are the names of the major urban centers in each? What is the national capital?

b. Political History: What are the major periods and watershed events in your country’s history? Was there a classical era or “golden age”? Describe the experience of colonialism or foreign domination: How was the colonial rule imposed? How was independence won? What historical events are annually commemorated? Who are the nation’s heroes and heroines? For what are they best known?

c. Economy: What percentage of the labor force is involved, respectively, in agriculture, industry, services, and the military? What is the country’s annual per-capita income and gross national product? What are its primary agricultural and industrial products? Where are they produced? What are the leading exports and imports?
d. Groups/Ethnicities: What are the various groups in the country called, and where are they concentrated? What groups occupy the service sector and which make up the elite? Is there an indigenous population? Are there any intergroup tensions based on race, religion, territory or language? Among what group(s) will you be living and serving?

e. Current politics: What is the form of the national government? What are the majority and minority parties, and what issues and perspectives do they represent? Who are their leaders? Does any one group or family dominate local politics? What is the political relationship between your host country and your homeland? What countries are important to them and why?

f. Religion: What religions are practiced? What proportion of the people are followers of each faith tradition? Is there one national religion? What are the most important religious ceremonies? Have you read any of their sacred writings?

g. Arts and sports: What are some of the most popular music and dance styles? What traditional or popular sports are regularly played? What cultural festivals will be held during the time of your residence in country?

h. Environment: What factors affect the productivity of the land and the quality of life of those who farm it? (Consider climate, overpopulation, pests, land ownership, farming methods, indebtedness, seed varieties, deforestation, and desertification.) What environmental factors—like climate, rainfall, calamity, and land productively—negatively affect the country?

i. Education: What indigenous, pre-modern institutions and practices have historically served educational functions? Currently, what are the major divisions in the public and private education system? How many grades are there in each division? Is the school system modeled after that of another country? What are the most pressing issues facing modern education?

j. Current events: Judging from current newspaper articles, what are some of the most important issues and problems engaging the minds of the people?

k. Languages: What languages are spoken in your host country? Are these official or unofficial? Do these languages represent any ethnic, geographically, or socioeconomic divisions? List and learn five essential phrases in the local language.
Food for Thought

You are passionate about making a positive impact this summer, yet short-term study abroad can have long-term negative impacts if the traveler and program provider are not thoughtful and reflective about their engagements abroad. The following are a list of questions taken from First, Do No Harm: Ideas for Mitigating Negative Community Impacts of Short-term Study Abroad (Schroeder, Wood, Galiardi, and Koen, 2009). These questions are meant to help you think about the unintended consequences of study abroad and foreign travel. Many GESI sites are located in areas frequented by general tourists throughout the year. We encourage you to reflect on these types of questions with your GESI groups, in your personal writing reflections, and whenever you travel abroad again. These questions can help us continue to develop programming that does not harm local communities.

- Upon arrival, figure out where your food/water/housing comes from. Do foreigners/tourists impose any hardship on local people, such as water shortages? What about garbage disposal and pollution? Is land being used for visitors rather than local needs?
- Does the economic impact of study abroad or tourism create economic inequality in the community? Do foreigners or local elites own or manage the hotels that students/tourists frequent? Are guides and drivers outsiders or wealthier members of the community? Do local prices go up as a result of the student visit? The giving of gifts can contribute to similar questions, however well intentioned—can nonmaterial gifts be given instead, or gifts to the community as a whole?
- Do student/tourist visits contribute to economies of dependency on outsiders, orienting those economies to pleasing or providing pleasure for wealthy foreigners rather than to local needs?
- Is there a season for foreign visitors to come to the area, such that student visits contribute to a boom and bust cycle in the local economy? Is there any way to mitigate this effect?
- Do outsiders' patterns of consumption contribute to problems in the community? The “demonstration effect” of students bringing high-end travel gear, lots of clothes, spending money easily on restaurants, giving gifts, etc. may create resentment, the perception of American students as wealthy consumers with no responsibilities at home (McLaren 2006), or the desire in local people (especially youth) to leave the community so they can make money to buy similar goods and services. Even traveling on an airplane or traveling away from home can create these problems among people who do not have that option.
- Are local people excluded from any of the areas where foreigners are encouraged or allowed to go?
- Are foreign visitors well-behaved and respectful in terms of the local culture? Do they dress appropriately, or otherwise commit cultural offenses that will anger, distress, or shock people in the local community? Do outsiders see culture and the “authenticity” of local people as commodities to be consumed? What other cultural impacts results from outsiders’ visits? Cultural differences in themselves are likely sources of confusion and conflict in unanticipated ways.
- Do foreigners smoke, drink, or do drugs during their visit? The effect of these behaviors can range from being poor role models for local youth to bringing new addictions to the community.
- Do students/tourists demonstrate other expressions of privilege during their visit, such as doing things “our” way, eating “our” food, playing “our” music, requiring things to be done on “our” schedule?
- How well are students prepared to understand the community they are visiting? Do they bring damaging stereotypes that can be countered throughout the program? These might be as narrow as “Bolivians” but for most students are more likely to be broader such as “poor people”, “indigenous people”, or “people in developing countries”, as well as racist an exoticizing images of people in out-of-the-way places.
- Are there human rights issues already present that are exacerbated by the presence of foreigners?
- Does anything about the students’ presence or activities reinforce a negative self-image for local people, for example that Americans are smarter, more competent, more attractive? Is there any way their presence could promote a positive self-image instead?
To mitigate potentially negative impacts, we encourage you to honor the host community's independence and encourage self-reliance; to never impose your personal agenda when working with the community; to respect local people's visions and opinions above your own; and to be vigilant of any cultural impacts you might be having and adjust your behaviors and actions as necessary. Here are some additional tips to make the most of your time abroad and to leave a positive impact:

- Take advantage of opportunities to interact with people who are different from you.
- Engage in every activity fully, remaining mentally and emotionally present. Consider going unplugged, leaving technology like laptops and iPods aside or even at home. While technology can be helpful to keep us connected to our world and people at home, many times it ends up restricting our ability to immerse ourselves in the local community or interferes with our ability to make ourselves available to the people right in front of us. Think about ways you will travel abroad with technology and still remember to look up.
- Do not try to replicate the U.S. in your host community; avoid demanding the services you would expect at home. Observe the way things are done locally, refrain from judgment, and when you feel yourself getting irritated or judgmental, take a step back and try to understand why the locals do things differently from the way you are accustomed to. Speak with locals to understand their viewpoints, listen to be surprised so that your own assumptions are challenged.
- Question your and your peers' use of words like “authentic”, “real”, “rural”, “indigenous”, and “traditional”. (“To suggest the life of a rural citizen is any more or less “real” than that of an urban citizen of the same culture is condescending and can indicate a disturbingly colonial nostalgia for a cultural experience laden with pre-development realities”) (Johnson, 184).
- Avoid the “theme park” experience, the places that were clearly designed for foreigners' amusement.
- As you meet people and form strong relationships with your hosts, remain curious about the larger global, national and local structures that exist, that recreate the poverty and inequality you are trying to grasp. Global learning must reach in both directions—toward persons and structures.
- Recognize the value of play and lightheartedness in cultivating friendships.
- Practice culturally sensitive photography: Always ask first. Be especially mindful of children, who are often readily photogenic. Photos of children are sometimes easily taken as we seek to document memorable experiences in the community, but be careful and considerate when taking kids' photos.
- Keep an open mind and heart but avoid romanticizing your experiences in host communities. Remember that below the surface of a seemingly homogenous social structure are power hierarchies, conflicting interests, and patterns of discrimination and exclusion.
- Be a listener, more than talker; a learner more than teacher; a facilitator more than leader.
- Observe, listen, and inquire rather than criticize, rationalize, or withdraw.
- When confronted with a language barrier, speak English as little as possible. Expand your vocabulary, if necessary, actively engaging community members with nonverbal communication.
- Risk making mistakes.
- “Go slow. Respect People. Practice humility, and don’t condescend with your good intentions. Make friends. Ask questions. Know that you are visitor. Keep promises even if that means mailing a photograph a few weeks later. Be a personal ambassador of your home culture, and take your new perspectives home so that you can share them with your neighbor” (Potts, 2008).
Stop complaining and start reflecting!

When you catch yourself complaining, ask yourself: Can we—both hosts and guests—learn to adapt to each other? Can our differences be a source of mutual enrichment rather than separation? When we discover that things abroad are profoundly different from things at home, our natural tendency is to flee away from them. Instead of seeking to understand why certain practices irritate us, our immediate impulse is to simply spurn them as primitive and uncivilized, even immoral… “Doing so justifies our escape from the culturally disagreeable environment into behaviors where we can feel protected and affirmed: calling home frequently, sleeping either too much or too little, reading romance novels, blogging or listening to music for hours, movies… We may not “return home” in a physical sense, but psychologically we’re a world away” (Slimbach, 158-160).

Get out your journal.

Writing in an analytic mode helps us to calm down, gain some objectivity, and ask the critical questions: What provoked this reaction from me? How do locals interpret this act or event? And what does my reaction tell me about myself? Especially as we learn to put personal experiences and reactions into a larger social and theoretical context, our writing takes on a distinctive character—one that joins personal expression with cultural analysis—and encourages a more rigorous cognitive process than is common in conversation.

Think About the Six Skills of Intercultural Communication:

1. Cultivating curiosity about another culture and empathy towards its members;
2. Realizing that effective communication requires discovering the culturally conditioned images that are evoked in the minds of the people when they think, act and react to the world around them;
3. Recognizing that role expectations and other social variables such as age, sex, social and economic class, religion, ethnicity and place of residence affect the way a people act and behave;
4. Recognizing that situational variables and convention shape behavior in important ways;
5. Understanding that people generally act the way they do because they are using options that their society allows for satisfying basic physical and psychological needs; and
6. Developing the ability to evaluate the strength of a generalization about the target culture (from the evidence substantiating the statements) and to locate and organize information about the target culture from the library, internet, mass media, people, and personal observation and reflection.
Works Cited


International Program Development Study Abroad Handbook, Northwestern University, 2011.

PART II

CIUDAD SANDINO, NICARAGUA
Letter from FSD

Congratulations again on your choice to work abroad on sustainable development projects in conjunction with Foundation for Sustainable Development (FSD) and Northwestern University!

For many of you this experience will be an event that sparks a lifelong interest in development. For others, it will be a chance to gain insight to other cultures that can only be obtained through direct experience. For all of you it will be a chance to make a lasting impact on people and communities in your host country and an opportunity that will make a lasting impression in your life.

There are many challenges that await you. It is likely that the most difficult obstacles you face will not be the ones that put your technical skills or knowledge to the test. More often it will be the difficulty of gaining the cultural competencies necessary to do successful work in a community. It will be learning to see the problems facing a region from the eyes of a community member rather than through the eyes of an outsider. Try and remember throughout your experience that the information about culture, community and language you learn should guide your work as much as your other knowledge.

It is important to remember that during your program you will represent Americans (even if you do not identify as American), Northwestern, FSD, and yourself in your community. Many people in the region that you will work in have had very little experience with people from outside their country. As such they will develop opinions of you and the work of FSD through their interactions with you or what they hear about you. We ask that you take your visibility into consideration when you make decisions about your actions in your host country.

It is the intention of FSD to provide you with a broad support network to best position you for success, but at the end of the day, it is your effort that will most influence the success of your experience with FSD. You will need to take initiative and put yourself in situations that stretch your comfort levels. You will have to work within cultural contexts that can cause extreme frustration. Many other challenges await. At the same time you face these challenges you also have an incredible set of opportunities. Go into the experience with the willingness to listen and learn. You will find that through this willingness you will increase your ability to give to your community.

This guide has been developed to help make clear what FSD expects of GESI students and what you can expect of us. It is our hope and belief that clear expectations are the foundation for a solid working relationship. Please read this guide thoroughly as it contains information that is crucial to the success of your experience and our partnership with you.

Above all, be aware that you should feel comfortable contacting the FSD site team and/or your Northwestern support staff if you need any additional support or have any questions.

Good luck!
About FSD

Values, Vision, and Mission:
At the center of the student experience are the core values, vision, and mission that make FSD the organization that it is. We ask that you understand and remember these tenets throughout your time abroad, in order to make your program a meaningful experience for both you and the communities in which you serve.

Vision: FSD envisions a world where all people have the opportunity and capacity to direct economic, social, and environmental resources toward sustainable outcomes that improve their lives and communities.

FSD's mission: FSD achieves community-driven goals through asset-based development and international exchange in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

Core Values:
- **Start with Assets, Not Problems:** We take an asset-based approach to development work. We begin by listening to the priorities set by our community-based partners at our international program sites. We then identify and utilize existing assets and capacity to address those priorities.

- **Motivate Community Ownership:** We partner with leaders, organizations, and stakeholders committed to change, action, and social justice. We stress community ownership and participation before launching initiatives, especially in our volunteer and student programs.

- **Generate Enduring Results and Impact:** We ensure the outcomes of our support have long-lasting benefits for our partners. We think hard about how to participate appropriately and effectively in development, and on how to become redundant so that our initiatives outlast our involvement.

- **Focus On The Site Teams:** We are headquartered in San Francisco, but our 10 Site Teams direct our programs across Africa, Asia, and Latin America on the ground, 365 days a year. These teams build partnerships based on trust, respect, efficacy, and alignment with an asset-based approach.

- **Build Capacity:** We strengthen the skills, competencies, and abilities of the leaders of our community-based partners and of our students and professional volunteers. We educate and train, facilitating the sharing of best practices across all of our stakeholders to support our partners’ priorities.

- **Be A Bridge:** We relentlessly build a network of students, professionals, and passionate advocates for our community-based partners to access. We connect this network of assets and volunteers with the work of our partners through our international exchange and grantmaking programs.

- **Change Perspectives:** We share our experiences and learning about the complexities of development with friends, family, and colleagues. We promote cultural exchange and sensitivity, encouraging a reflective approach to navigating cross-cultural issues, confusions, and tensions.

- **Promote Reciprocity:** We operate on our founding principle that producing strong community outcomes must be the priority. We base all partnerships, strategies, and decisions on the Fair Trade Learning concept that we must be ethical and reciprocal in our planning, implementation, and outcomes.
About FSD

Web of support:
FSD is a key partner in your experience. Below are the two main players on FSD's team, with a description of exactly how they will support you.

Site Team Roles:
• Program Director: Program Directors are local experts in the field of community development. Their experience and strong community ties make them a great resource to support you during your in-country project work. The Program Director develops and maintains FSD's relationships with our Host Organizations and is heavily involved in the process from the time you apply to GESI, through your NGO placement, and through the duration of your program.
• Program Coordinators: Your Program Coordinator(s) provide ongoing support to you, FSD's host families and our partner organizations. They also fulfill the following roles:
  • Culture and language bridge
  • Placement advisor
  • Culture shock lifeline
  • Project development advisor

San Francisco Office (SFO) Roles:
SFO works closely with the Northwestern staff to ensure safety and productivity of your in-country experience. Northwestern is in direct contact with the SFO office.
• Emergency Contact: SFO is available at all times in the case of an emergency.
• Additional Support: If the support offered in your host country is not satisfactory.
• Re-Integration Support: Upon your return, SFO will connect you with other veteran and offer opportunities for you to share your experience.

International Programs Team (San Francisco Office):

Mireille Cronin Mather
Executive Director
mireille@fsdinternational.org

Keiko Pinces
International Programs Officer Asia and Africa
老爷子@fsdinternational.org

Julia Mergendoller
Senior International Programs Officer Latin America
julia@fsdinternational.org

San Francisco Office Hours:
9 am – 6 pm PST
Office Phone: 415-283-4873
About FSD

Ciudad Sandino Site Team:

Maria de Jesus Zepeda | fsdmaria@gmail.com
Program Director

Maria is a licensed social worker and psychologist. She has been the country director in Nicaragua since 1998. She maintains contact with the Department of Social Work in the Hospital Ciudad Sandino, where she worked for many years as the staff psychologist. One of her focus areas is to raise awareness and prevent domestic violence. She also develops projects in the area of public health and community health, holding workshops in the community of Ciudad Sandino for people such as health educators, midwives, and volunteers that work with projects to prevent diarrhea and malaria. With FSD she is developing projects involving the training in the prevention and attention to domestic violence to health workers in Ciudad Sandino. With the help of FSD volunteers, she is working to help organizations improve the quality of life in Nicaragua.

Karen Lopez
Local Program Coordinator

After graduating from high school in Managua, Karen become a technician in social development. Over the years she has taken several computer and english courses, and she is currently majoring to get a law degree at the UdeM (University of Managua). Karen has experience working with Nueva Ola which is a program to train teachers and students in the prevention of pregnancy in teenagers. Karen helps getting things on time for our workshops and she also keeps the communication with our host families.
Safety & Security

In addition to the support provided by GESI and Northwestern University, FSD will do its utmost to provide a safe environment and support system to you throughout your experience. To ensure a safe and successful experience for everyone involved we depend upon the following:

• Our team: to assess our ability to ensure that your environment is safe and secure, and serve as barometer of the local political, social, and economic climate
• You: to adhere to instructions and tips regarding your safety and security, and to act prudently

**FSD’s responsibilities:**
• Ensure a safe and secure host community – Our host organizations and programs are run by FSD staff and trusted colleagues who live locally and often have years of experience with FSD. While the political climate varies by location and timing, we feel that our extensive local networks of host families and partner organizations provide us with a good barometer of the climate in relation to the safety of foreign volunteers.
• Support you logistically and emotionally through any medical or emergency situation.
• Direct you to a preferred medical facility in case of an emergency.
• Contact Northwestern in the case of major emergency; Northwestern will contact your loved ones.
• Inform you about safety and security in your host community – through materials like this pre-departure guide, we equip you with information and tools to be aware of the realities of your host community, to avoid situations that would put you at risk, and to manage these situations should they arise.

**Your responsibilities:**
• Inform yourself about the history and current events of your host country and community.
• Talk to your Site Team and host family about safety in your host community and follow their tips.
• Minimize risk:
  • Secure all recommended vaccinations and take precautions to remain safe and healthy.
  • Avoid volatile or risky events, locations and situations. Be aware of your surroundings.
  • Carry as little money and valuables as possible.
  • Hold your bag close to you or in front of you and never leave it unattended.
  • Travel with someone you know at all times and avoid being out alone after dark.
  • Know where you are going or at least look like you know. If you are unsure, ask someone for directions. If you need to pull out a map, do so somewhere sheltered and discreet.
  • Avoid dressing in a manner that gives an appearance of wealth.
  • Pay attention to your environment and adapt your behavior accordingly.
• Carry with you:
  1) A copy of your Proof of Insurance card, in case of an emergency
  2) Any pertinent prescriptions
  3) A card that lists all of your local and emergency contact numbers and addresses - we suggest that you keep this card apart from your wallet
• Keep apart:
  1) Keep emergency contact information and any other important documents in your email account
  2) Keep a copy of your passport and credit cards apart from your wallet and passport
• Notify FSD: In the unlikely, but always possible, event that you are mugged, are involved in an accident, fall seriously ill, or run into any other type of “incident” please notify your Site Team immediately. The Site Team will help you to resolve the situation to the best of their ability.
• Pay all up-front medical and emergency-related costs, in the event HTH insurance cannot work directly with the hospital or clinic to arrange direct payment. Hospitals and clinics may require payment up-front for services, rather than filing an insurance claim. Please bring a credit card (VISA or MasterCard) and extra cash for emergency medical expenses. FSD is not responsible for up-front costs or cash-related medical fees.
• Pursue reimbursement for eligible expenses directly from the insurer: Carefully review all notification and claims procedures prior to your departure for your host country. Claims forms may be obtained from the insurer.
Health Preparations

As a GESI student, it is your full responsibility to identify and take all necessary health precautions prior to, during, and following the Program. Please start your health preparations early, as some vaccinations must be taken as far as eight weeks or more before departure. Providing detailed medical advice is beyond the expertise of FSD so it is very important to consult the resources below as well as medical professionals such as your doctor or local travel health clinic.

Resources:
- Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): Recorded information about health risks and precautions for international travelers: 1-877-FYI-TRIP (1-877-394-8747)
- Traveler’s Health for Bolivia: wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/
- Malaria Hotline: 404-332-4555

Topics to talk to your doctor or local health clinic about:
- Any pre-existing conditions. Please note that pre-existing conditions—even those that don’t impact you on a regular basis in the United States—can flare up while in a new environment due to altitude, allergens, new food, etc.
- Symptoms of the most common illnesses contracted by travelers and appropriate treatment
- Medicines and supplies for preventing and treating common illnesses and maladies (diarrhea, dehydration, sunburn, food poisoning)
- Yellow fever and typhoid fever
- Malaria (if participants plan to travel to at-risk areas)
- Rabies
- Food and water-borne diseases

What happens if I get sick?
For serious illness that may occur during your program, there are public and private clinics and hospitals available in most areas. If you should become sick, please alert the FSD Site and your host family immediately and they will ensure that you receive appropriate medical care. Cochabamba is home to several very good hospital facilities and well-trained, sensitive doctors are easily found.
Visa Information

The recommendations provided here are subject to change at any time. As a GESI student, it is your full responsibility to secure the appropriate visa and ensure the full legality of your stay in the host country during the program. To do so requires consultation of the following resources beyond the information provided by FSD and GESI.

U.S. State Department: Information for U.S. travelers to Nicaragua:

Embassy of Nicaragua
Kilometer 5.5 Carretera Sur
Managua, Nicaragua
ConsularManagua@state.gov
Telephone: +(505) 2252-7100
Fax: 202-726-1727
http://nicaragua.usembassy.gov

Guidance (subject to change at any time):
• Visit the State Department and Nicaraguan Embassy websites (listed above) to review the information you will be required to provide upon arrival as well as any new information regarding travel in Nicaragua.
• U.S. citizens traveling to Nicaragua can get a tourist visa upon arrival at the airport for $10.00 USD.
• Compile all the requirements and have them readily available in your carry-on baggage.
• If you are not a U.S. citizen, you will need to contact the embassy or consulate of your GESI host country to obtain the visa requirements for entry. It is very important that non-U.S. citizens notify us immediately if they require any documentation from us to obtain a visa.
Packing List

Clothes:
- Several pairs cotton underwear and socks
- Light waterproof jacket & umbrella (the rainy season is May-Nov)
- Long-sleeved top(s) (to fend off mosquitoes, protect from sun or use in a cooler evening)
- 1-3 pairs of pants/capris
- 1-2 pairs of shorts
- 1-3 skirts, knee-length or longer for women
- Light sports attire if you are interested in sports, running, hiking, etc.
- Multiple shirts to wear; appropriate for work, leisure, travel
- At least one nice outfit for special occasions (e.g. church, going dancing, festivals, special functions at the host organization)
- 1 pair each of sneakers, sandals; optional to bring “nice” footwear, but often a nice pair of flip-flops/sandals is sufficient
- Bathing suit; sarong; other beach gear
- Modest sleepwear
- Hat for sun protection (baseball caps for guys are the norm)

Health and hygiene:
- A supply of hand wipes/Wet Wipes and/or antibacterial hand lotion such as Purel (some places won’t have restrooms with running water)
- Any medications you use in their original containers and a copy of your prescriptions
- Strong insect repellent and Calamine lotion or other itch-relief cream (you will get bitten by insects at some point during your stay)
- Eye-drops
- Vitamins (especially for those with special health or dietary needs)
- Personal hygiene products – soap, shampoo, toothpaste, tampons, floss, etc (these can be purchased locally to save room in your luggage, but you should pack travel size to use until you can go to the store the first week)
- Antibiotics for travelers’ diarrhea
- Sunglasses

Practical supplies:
- Steel or plastic water bottle
- Travel alarm clock
- Towel (families may not have them, and they are useful for beach days. Hostels in Nicaragua almost always offer towels.)
- Medium-sized pack for day and weekend trips
- Flashlight/headlight (remember that power outages are relatively common)
- Earplugs (if you have trouble sleeping with noise)
- Lock for luggage (can also be used at lockers in hostels if traveling)
- Money belt (around the waist is more secure than around the neck)

Documents and money:
- Airline ticket
- Passport
- Vaccination booklet
- Insurance card
- Visa or MasterCard
- Photocopies of all documents
- Cash (around $100-200 initially)
- Be sure to bring any documents needed for your entry/visa in your carry-on luggage!

Other:
- Spanish-English dictionary
- Reading materials
- Photos of your family, friends, etc. to show your host family
- Small gifts for your host family (optional)

“What I wish I brought to Nicaragua”
Packing tip from 2012 students:

Bring ankle-length pants to prevent mosquito bites!
Packing FAQs

• What kind of luggage should I bring?
Don't overdo it—pack lightly so you can travel more easily and store your bag in small places. Think in terms of a backpack, duffel bag, or moderate-sized suitcase and a daypack.

• What should I bring in my carry-on luggage?
We recommend that you carry all valuables (money, credit card, passport, identification, immunization booklet, insurance card, etc.) and a complete set of clothes (change of shirt, pants/skirt, underwear) in your carry-on luggage in case your checked bag is temporarily lost or delayed.

• What documents should I bring?
You should bring your passport, a vaccination booklet (does not need to be official, but at least write out a list of your shots and dates that you had them), your insurance card, and a list of FSD contacts in Nicaragua (phone numbers for your Program Director, Program Coordinator, host family and trip leaders). Please bring 2 photocopies of each. During the program, store the originals and one copy in your suitcase and keep the other copy on your person at all times.

• What are some items especially difficult to get?
Some American brand medicines, granola bars, razor refills (for women), refillable water bottles, insect repellent, and tampons are all particularly difficult to get in Nicaragua.

• Should I bring donations?
Please do not bring donations from the US. However, you may bring small gifts for your host-family. If you would like to donate to your host organization, you should discuss it with the FSD Site Team and host organization supervisor, and make purchases in-country.

• How are clothes washed?
Families will wash all of your clothes except your underwear. Washing machines will not be available. Your clothes will be hand-washed and line-dried. Please note that because clothes are washed and dried outside they will probably endure some wear and tear. The climate is humid so it can often take days to get clothes fully dry, keep this in mind while packing and opt for lighter weight clothes that will dry quickly. You will wash your personal items by first soaking them in powdered detergent and then washing them by hand, using detergent soap.

• What type of clothes should I pack?
Keep in mind that darker colors are easier to keep clean, and consider what kind of work you will be doing: for example, if you'll be working in a rural area, it is likely you'll need to wear sneakers for going out to the campo, whereas an urban school or microfinance organization will require dress shoes or nice sandals. Lightweight clothes that will breathe in the heat are highly recommended. In general, you can wear clothes you usually wear at home. In Nicaragua, despite consistently high temperatures, the most common article of clothing for both men and women are jeans. Although jeans can be a bit uncomfortable in such warm temperatures, they are considered appropriate for just about every occasion, including church. However, women might find skirts, capris or lighter pants to be a bit more comfortable, which are all also fine for the workplace, as long as skirts are long enough (to the knee). For men pants of any kind are fine for work, but for both men and women shorts should not be worn to work. Shorts and flip-flops are fine for wearing to the beach and around the house but they are not very common for “every day wear.” Comfortable walking shoes are a must, however nice shoes for guys, or nice sandals/flats for girls are good for dressy occasions (church, birthday parties). Also, it is important to bring one or two nice outfits to wear to these occasions as well.
Packing FAQs

• What should I wear?
To avoid uncomfortable stereotypes and feel safe (this is especially important for women), dress somewhat conservative-ly; politically-oriented T-shirts, skimpy tank-tops and and mini-skirts are not appropriate for work.

At work: Bring neat, presentable clothes for your work at the host organization. Jeans are appropriate, but you may find them hot at some sites, especially Ciudad Sandino. Nice outfits may also double for night-time occasions, since Nicaraguans dress up for dancing and the numerous festivals that occur throughout the year. For women, light cotton pants or skirts (knee-length or longer) and tops appropriate for an office-setting. For men, light cotton dress pants and dress shirts (short sleeves) are appropriate. For both genders, comfortable, sturdy, closed-toe shoes or nice sandals are appropriate for work.
At home: Shorts and rubber flip-flops, for both genders, are inappropriate for work – they're usually worn at home or for informal activities such as sports or going to the corner store. Please bring a pair of modest pajamas to sleep in.

Electronics FAQs:
The following are recommendations only; all electronics are brought at your own personal risk. As with your belongings in general, FSD staff takes precautions to ensure that they are transported safely to and from host family homes and families are required to provide a space where your valuables can be locked. Nonetheless, electronics that you will be carrying on your per-son for work or personal use are at risk of wear and tear (hot/humid/dusty conditions, etc) and potentially theft, although this has thus far not been an issue on any level for our site.

Adapters
Voltage in Nicaragua is 110-120 Volts (same as U.S./Canada). Although US students will not require a converter, an adapter may be useful depending on the items you are bringing, since many electric outlets cannot accommodate 3-pin plugs or those with one pin being taller (grounded plugs), thus allowing insertion in only one direction.

Laptops
Many students have found it extremely useful to bring a laptop with them. An alternative to a laptop that you may find useful is a netbook because of its low cost and long battery life. If you have any uncertainties in this respect, please do not hesitate to contact the Ciudad Sandino Program Coordinator via email and they will be able to give you a recommendation based on your particular internship and the experiences of past students there, where possible.

Laptops generally have AC adapter boxes connected to the power source, and this should be sufficient to protect your computer in the event of power outages and surges. For additional protection you can purchase and bring a surge protector. Please understand that taking a laptop entails the risk that it could be lost, stolen or damaged - FSD and GESI are not responsible in these scenarios.

Smart phones
Some locals own smart phones, although they are still a luxury item that is out of reach to most. Be discreet when utilizing electronics in general, and we recommend not using them publicly when visiting cities or otherwise traveling. If students decide to bring a smart phone, they can use wifi to make international calls (via skype or facetime) and do not need to purchase an international plan.

Other electronics
• Bring re-chargeable batteries plus charger if you require them; we do NOT recommend purchasing batteries in Nicara-gua because they are expensive and extremely short-lived.
• Finding brand-name batteries can be difficult. Re-chargeables are much more environmentally/ sustainability friendly in any case!
• If you bring your camera, remember to bring memory cards and a cord for uploading photos.
Food & Water

• Can I drink the tap/well water?
NO. Do not drink tap or well water. For your ensured safety, please only drink bottled water or water that has been boiled. Your host family will always have purified water available for you. When visiting other families or communities bring your own bottled water with you at all times, and when in doubt, drink a bottled beverage. Bottled water is widely available in any “pulperia” or “venta” (small family stores). All ice served in homes or restaurants is more likely than not tap water. Be careful with this, as many places serve ice in all of their beverages without asking.

• What is typical food?
The main staples of the Nicaraguan diet are beans and rice, commonly fried together and known as “gallo pinto.” Both crops are harvested in country, and serve as the daily meal for all Nicaraguans. It is likely you will eat gallo pinto as least once a day, possibly with eggs and/or salty cheese. Gallo pinto is typically a breakfast and/or dinner food, while beans and rice served separately and accompanied by meat, eggs, and/or vegetables is served in a larger portion at lunch. Also, Nicaraguans generally expect a meal to be “accompanied” by boiled guineo (a starchy, non-sweet banana), a thick corn tortilla or fried plantain “tostones.” Other principal foods include plantains, yucca, and tamales. The food tends to be greasy and salty; salads are a rarity, but fresh fruit is everywhere.

• What do most people drink?
Refrescos are fresh juices made from fruit that are both made at home and served in restaurants, and they tend to be very sugary. Have caution when drinking these outside of your host family's home as they can be made with unpurified water. Heavier, grain-based refrescos are traditional, sweet beverages that may be made from cacao, corn, oatmeal and other grains or seeds. Coffee is nearly always of the instant variety (unlike exported brands), and locals nearly always drink their coffee black and extremely sweet. Soda, or “gaseosa,” is considered a treat and not standard in most Nicaraguan homes. If milk is in the home, it is usually in powdered form, or is fresh and un-pasteurized. Beer and rum are the alcoholic drinks of choice.

• How vegetarian-friendly is the local cuisine?
Meat is a big part of Nicaraguan culture and celebrations. However, families can always accommodate a vegetarian diet and many, due to low incomes in general, consume little meat in any case. Please be specific as to your preferences (i.e. whether you eat chicken but no red meat, or no animals, no dairy, etc.) and let the FSD staff know beforehand so they can alert the family. Fresh fruit, such as papaya, mango, pineapple, oranges, mandarins, and bananas – as well as “exotic” items such as jocote, momones, pitahaya and melocoton – are delicious and readily available, depending on the season.

• What food should I avoid?
• Avoid uncooked food and street vendors that have not been recommended by the FSD site team.
• Do not eat fruits or vegetables that have been washed with water unless peeled or with treated water.
• Do not eat pork to avoid the risk of acquiring schistosomiasis.
• Eat lightly upon arrival and stay away from milk and cheese that has not been pasteurized.

• Can I eat fresh fruit from street stands, and trees?
In Nicaragua you are likely to encounter an abundance of fresh fruit. As a rule, if you can peel it, you can eat it! Avoid peeled fruit served on the street unless you watch the vendor peel it.

• How should I express my preferences, or turn down unsafe food that is offered to me?
In many places food is an important form of hospitality and it is cultural practice to offer food and drink as a welcoming, friendly gesture. Never put yourself at risk, but be polite in expressing your needs. Take care not to offend your hosts with negative comments or facial expressions. Your host family will be notified of what you can and cannot eat or drink, but you should also be sure to tell your family what your preferences are. Politely ask your family for food to be less greasy or salty, to put salt on the side, to mention that you like fruits and vegetables, or to be given more or less food.

• Are there any US-style restaurants?
Major U.S. fast food restaurants (TGIF, Subway, McDonald's) are in Managua. The bigger towns offer hamburger, hot dog and pizza places.
Communication

• What is the best way for friends and family at home to reach me?
Email is probably the most reliable way to be in touch with your friends and family at home. You can also call your friends and family easily from internet cafés, or try using free computer-to-computer chatting programs like Skype.

• Are cell phones available?
You will be provided with a cell phone upon arrival by your Site Team. Calls to and from cell phones can be expensive (6-10 córdobas/minute, US$0.30-$0.75). Note that phone communication is often interrupted by bad weather, local technicalities or electricity outages, and sometimes lines are cut in the middle of a call. Let your friends and families know about this with the understanding that it is best not to schedule international calls at exact times. In case of an emergency, your family can call the FSD Site Team and leave a message for you. Please note that the Program Director and host families generally do not speak English. You may call the Program Coordinator any time or the US Emergency Cell Phone.

• Can friends and family call me at my homestay?
The majority of host families do not have house phones and instead rely on cell phones. Never make any long distance calls from your host family or organization's phone without permission (if you use a calling card and ask permission from your family this could be OK). Please be conscious not to use the phone too much as local calls are even more expensive than international ones.

• Is there access to internet and email?
You will have occasional access to internet cafes (called cibers). Many are open late, and most all have the capacity to call home to the US for cheap. Cost is between $1-2 / hour.

• How do I call the US?
To call the U.S., dial 001, the area code, then the 7-digit number. Internet cafés are the cheapest option for calling the US: it's about 1.5 córdoba/minute to call the US, even though it costs 5 córdobas/minute to call anywhere in Nicaragua.

• How do I make a call within Nicaragua?
You can call anywhere in Nicaragua simply by dialing the 8 digit number. Landlines start with the number 2 and cell phone lines with the number 8. There are no area codes in the country. You can make local or national calls for 5 córdobas (US$0.25) from any internet café and, if in Rivas, from call centers.
Money

Nicaraguan Monetary Unit: Cordobas

Exchange rates fluctuate. Be sure to check them online before you leave, at websites like: www.x-rate.com or www.xe.com

- **How much cash should I bring with me?**
  You should plan on bringing about US$100-$200 in cash when you arrive, an ATM card, and a credit card for emergencies. You can exchange money at the airport or upon arrival in Managua. Smaller bills that are in good condition are more convenient.

- **How much money should I plan on spending in country?**
  GESI covers all of your necessary expenses, including room and board, in-country transportation, orientation and debriefing sessions, etc. You may want additional money, however, for entertainment, snacks, books, gifts, newspapers, weekend excursions, additional transportation and health emergencies. As an estimate, you should budget for about US$3/ day and about $50 for a weekend trip. Bring more if you plan to go out often or buy gifts.

Never carry a large sum of cash on public transportation; if you must, please do so with caution. Bring a copy of your passport instead of the real thing when possible. Bring only what you need for the day and use a nondescript bag to carry books or papers. To get cash, ATM machines are recommended because they are accessible, secure and get a good rate of exchange. The nearest ATM to Tola, Las Salinas and Limón is in Rivas, inside the banks BanPro, ProCredit and Banco de America Central (BAC). They are all nearby each other downtown and anyone in Rivas can direct you. The site team will point these out during orientation week, as well as places where money can be exchanged. Outside of Rivas, the nearest ATMs are in San Juan del Sur (30-40 minutes by taxi) and Granada (1.5 hours by bus). Traveler’s checks are not recommended: they do not get a good exchange rate (cash is much better) and are not widely accepted. Do not exchange money with street dealers; banks are much more secure.

- **Are credit cards accepted?**
  Credit cards are only accepted in expensive shops and restaurants – usually only in Managua or in gas stations. Bring Visa or MasterCard since they are the most widely accepted. You may want to notify your bank or credit card company of the dates you will be in Nicaragua so that your ATM or credit cards are not blocked.

- **What is the local attitude towards bargaining?**
  Bargaining is part of the culture and expected at local markets.
Arrival & Transportation

• Your Arrival in Nicaragua:
Participants should look for someone with a sign saying FSD after exiting the baggage claim area. The group will be transported by taxi to a hostel in Managua for the night, and early the next morning the group will start the program orientation then head to their site by bus. The average travel time from the airport to the orientation site in Managua is approximately 45 minutes by bus or taxi. Please make sure to keep your site team's phone numbers on you at all times so if you are delayed or have any questions you can easily contact them.

• What are the most common modes of transportation?
You should be able to walk to most areas in your host community. For trips or to get to other communities you can take the bus; host families and many community members know the times that the buses pass. Except for city routes within Managua, money is not collected until the bus has been on the road for about 20 minutes. Only take your passport with you when traveling the Atlantic Coast as the military may have checkpoints to control drug smuggling. Another option is to take a taxi. Taxis come in many different forms like horse carriages, motorcycle taxis, and cars. Most taxi rides are under a dollar unless you are going long distances. You should ask how much the fare will be before getting in a taxi.

• Can I travel after dark?
You should plan ahead, be cautious, and try not to travel after dark. The FSD Site Team will talk to you more about safety and travel during your orientation.

• Is it safe to go out at night?
Consult with your host family about safety information specific to your community. Plan ahead and be cautious. It is safer not to walk around at night after about 8 p.m. If you must go somewhere, do not go alone. There are long stretches of uninhabited road between rural communities and in the outskirts of Ciudad Sandino, and although one may not think twice about traversing them in the daytime, this could be more dangerous at night mainly due to the potential of running into the occasional drunken individual or group. Also, for whatever reason dogs become more aggressive at night, meaning that if you walk late at night you should be prepared to be barked at by packs of dogs (and throw rocks in their direction if they get too near). Nicaragua is one of the safest Central American countries and, if you exercise caution, it is unlikely you will run into any trouble.
Family Homestay

• A typical FSD host family in Ciudad Sandino, Nicaragua:
Communities in the Cuidad Sandino area are small and virtually everyone knows each other. Nicaraguan families are typically large; until the last couple of generations it was common for women to bear 8-15 children (and in several cases more). Cousins, brothers, and sisters live in the same house or close by and interact on a daily basis, and a family member will typically only leave the area if they marry someone from outside or if they are forced to seek work elsewhere. Family allegiances by far transcend other relationships and independent considerations. Parents generally cannot stand to be far away from their children and grandchildren, and consider cultures where parents and children live relatively independent lives to be very curious. It is very common for family members to sleep in the same bed, no matter what their ages. Essentially, physical closeness is built into the culture, regardless of whether or not it is by necessity. People show their love and support for each other by simply being with each other… words are not as important as presence. The families are very excited to meet you! We know from feedback evaluations that the host family experience is always one of the highlights of living in Nicaragua. You will learn a great deal about Nicaragua through the people who live there, so cultivate a habit of listening and observing, rather than merely hearing and seeing.

• What are Nicaraguan homes like?
The vast majority of Nicaraguan homes are square brick and concrete structures, although the poorest families have homes made of wooden planks and branches. Houses are constructed such that there is a space between the roof (generally comprising sheets of zinc metal) and the walls, which helps with ventilation and for the heat/humidity to escape, but the temperature will generally still be high enough that most opt not to be indoors during the hottest hours of the day. A downside of this type of construction is that dust and insects make their way indoors much more easily, thus requiring a constant cleaning effort. Homes have no air conditioning and the heat of the tropics can at times be frustrating. There will probably be days when you spend most of your hours in front of a fan. Host family homes will have electricity and running water, although these services are interrupted frequently. Consequently, it is common to shower with buckets of water that are drawn up from a well. Some homes also have chickens, dogs, cats, etc. that may or may not be allowed to venture indoors. Dogs are the most frequent “pet,” although treatment of pets would be considered quite harsh by US standards.

• What will my host family provide?
Your family is required to provide you with a private room, access to a bathroom and shower, three meals a day, purified water, a fan, and weekly hand-washing of your clothes. Toiletries and a towel are not provided; you must bring your own.

• Will I receive my own set of keys?
You should receive your own keys to the house so that you are free to come and go as needed.

• What are the living accommodations like?
Living accommodations are basic by U.S. standards. Water and electricity often aren’t available for short periods of time. If the water goes out, bucket showers are the norm, if the lights go out, you can use candles or a flashlight. Ants, mosquitoes, geckos, spiders, praying mantises, scorpions, and small rodents can creep into the house. Please don’t be alarmed! Your family can help prevent these unfortunate visitors, so let them know if you see something! Keeping your room clean and storing food in its place will make a big difference. In the rainy season, rainstorms can be alarmingly low to the ground and deafening, due to rain pounding against the zinc roofs and thunder booming in close proximity. You will become accustomed to a fair amount of night sound, including traffic, animals, rattling of zinc roofs in the wind and rain, and loud music. Earplugs can help.

How are the families structured in Nicaragua?
Many Nicaraguan families consist of parents, grown children, and grandchildren in the same home. Children in Nicaragua, like children anywhere, can be both adorable and annoying, but try to maintain your patience with them in order to integrate smoothly into the household. Sometimes young children will be afraid of you for the first few weeks because you are a stranger and you look and act differently than the people they’re used to. Please don’t take this personally and be patient – they’ll warm up to you with time.
Family Homestay

• Do I need to help out with chores?
We ask families to treat you as another member of the family, which means you will pick up after yourself, keep your area neat, and help out with the cooking and cleaning as appropriate. On the other hand, most families will probably be uncomfortable with you doing any substantial amount of housework, so don’t insist if a family seems unwilling to let you do certain chores.

• Is it safe to bring/store valuables at my family’s house?
There is no need to bring many valuables. We require that you keep items of value locked in your luggage at all times. This is extremely important because friends and relatives are often in and out of the house. However, there have been incidents when a student thought something was stolen only to find that s/he had misplaced it. This kind of “scandal” is hard on the host family who take great care to protect you and your things. If something unusual of this nature does happen, please speak with your host family and/or the FSD Site Team immediately.

• What are standard meal times?
Lunch is at midday, but breakfast and dinner are served a bit earlier than you may be used to, generally because people both arise and go to bed earlier. Family members often eat at different times. Many families watch the news or “tele-novelas” (soap operas) during lunch/dinner. Don’t be surprised if the family serves you before or after their own meal.

• How should I tell my family that I’d like less food, or different kinds of food?
Don’t be shy about asking your family for particular foods or the amount of food you want to eat. Vegetarian food is always available. You should tell your family what you do and do not like to eat. Politely ask your family for food to be less greasy or salty, to put salt on the side, mention that you like fruits and vegetables, or ask to be given more or less food.
A GESI 2011 student's reflections on her experience in Nicaragua:

Andrea Morgan

I have always had an interest in international development and that interest has grown during my time at Northwestern partially due to the opportunities I have had to globalize my education through an international development themed section of Engineering Design and Communication, a two-quarter sequence all freshmen McCormick students must take, and my work on international projects with the student group Engineers for a Sustainable World.

I decided to do GESI because I have come to realize that in order to do successful work in an international setting, even highly technical work, it is essential to have a deep understanding of the community and the culture. With GESI, I spent two months living in Ciudad Sandino, Nicaragua and interning with a NGO named Fundación Fénix, which focused on drug and gang prevention amongst Nicaraguan youth. I worked with a team of four other University students to develop a program to provide a safe venue for youth to discuss sensitive topics that affect Nicaraguan youth as well as expand the existing agriculture program.

Additionally we worked with the mayor’s office and youth to build a new soccer field to increase the allure of the organization to youth in the area. In choosing our project our team followed the design process as well as the principles of asset-based community development; we conducted user interviews and observations, held a formal brainstorming session, and tested our program with the students before developing our final program. The process was one that was riddled with challenges from language barriers to cultural differences but ending up being one of the most rewarding and enriching parts of my Northwestern experience.

As an engineering student, GESI provided me with an opportunity to work with an interdisciplinary team and apply my problem solving skills to deal with pressing social issues. I found this to truly complement my technical knowledge as so much of my experience was focused on building strong relationships and developing a deep understanding of the community I was working in as well as its strengths and needs. This ability to relate to people with different life experiences, or an entirely different culture, is something that can truly set an engineer apart giving us a more user-centered design approach.

As I came back to campus this fall I aimed to continue my experience by bringing my new knowledge to my work in ESW and continuing to develop my Spanish language skills. My experiences with GESI cemented my knowledge that I want to find a future in community development work. My summer in Nicaragua with GESI was one of the most rewarding of my life and an experience I would recommend to any student interested in international development and social justice.
Cultural Practices & Beliefs

You will gain insight into Nicaraguan culture through your own experiences, but here are a few common questions:

Time and Punctuality
The concept of “being on time” is definitely different. You will find that people consistently arrive late to meetings; when someone wishes to specify punctuality, they may note that the get-together is “hora inglesa” (British time). Thus, when someone shows up an hour later than planned for a workshop or your bus never comes, which will happen, you can choose to get frustrated and infuriated with the bus, the person, or the culture OR you can accept the situation as an opportunity to learn about how things work in your host community. In spite of local concepts about punctuality, GESI students will be expected to be on time to work, group meetings and any other host organization-related appointments. This will reflect well on the student’s reputation. The pace of life is slower than what you are probably used to in the U.S., particularly in small towns. People do not react with urgency to issues unrelated to family or work routines. Friends and neighbors are used to dropping by each other’s houses simply to chat, with no set plan or activities.

Privacy: “alone time” vs. “abuelitas”
Your room can always serve as your home base for getting some time to yourself, but in general Nicaraguans are used to being around others all day: in the evening, family and friends hang out in rocking chairs (“abuelitas”) on the front porch or in front of the television. Feel free to tell your family that you need some space and they will respect that wish.

Greetings and goodbyes
When walking down the street, strangers or friends commonly say “adios” (goodbye) to each other instead of “hola” when in passing. It is appropriate to say this to everyone, but women should note that saying it to male stranger is seen as flirting; it is not rude not to greet men under these circumstances. Similarly, young men often draw out the word “adios” as a form of catcalling women. Other than this, all of the usual greetings and farewells are utilized.

Non-verbal gestures and body language
- Nicaraguans kiss once on the cheek when being introduced and upon seeing family and friends. For formal introductions, grasp the person’s right hand while also kissing their cheek. To get one another’s attention, people make a “tst-tst” sound.
- To refer to someone or something in conversation, tilt your chin toward the indicated person or thing.
- Somewhat humorously, Nicaraguans use their lips to point at objects.
- For emphasis in conversation (very good or very bad), people shake their fingers in a snapping sound
- Women often walk together hand-in-hand or arm-in-arm; if men do this they are assumed to be gay.
- Babies are communally loved and cared for, feel free to make faces at them and compliment their parents.

Romantic Relationships
Nicaragua’s population is very young - one third are under 15 years old, with a median age of 22 - and romantic relationships begin early. A third of young women have had their first baby before they turn twenty, but don’t necessarily stay with the father. An unfortunate consequence is a high prevalence of single mothers or “broken” families. Especially in cases where couples have children young, it is common for them to be considered a pair by families/communities and live together with their children but never get married. There is definitely a prevalence of “machismo” among men, however both men and women are aware of it and joke (or complain) about its emotional consequences in relationships.

Animals and pets
Many Nicaraguans have at least one dog, cat or bird, however the concept of pets (“mascotas”) is very different: they are usually not seen as life companions, rather as utilitarian animals. For example, cats can get rid of pests such as cockroaches and rats, whereas dogs are almost always kept chained up in order to guard the house and ward off potential intruders. Skeletal street dogs are everywhere - don’t touch them.

Religion
While the majority of Nicaragua is Catholic, a growing percentage of the population is converting to a variety of Christian denominations (commonly referred to as “evangelismo”). The population and culture on the whole is founded upon a belief in Jesus and God, regardless of the particular branch of religion and the degree of adherence by any one individual to church practices (essentially no one is atheist). Phrases like “gracias a Dios” and “si Dios quiere” are added to almost every statement.
Race, Sexuality & Gender

How you interact with others will initially have a lot to do with preconceptions. You’ll feel more comfortable once the inevitable “getting to know you” period is over, but keep some of these cultural norms in mind.

Race and Ethnicity

In Nicaragua, you may not encounter the same level and/or kind of awareness and sensitivity surrounding race relations and conceptualizations of heritage as you may be accustomed to. If you have features associated with an Asian heritage, kids and adults will shout out, call or greet you as “Chino/a” or “Japones/a.” If you have dark skin or features associated with an African heritage, people may refer to you as “Negro/a,” or “Moreno/a.” If you have fair skin, people may refer to you as “Gringo/a” or “Chele/a.” If you have features associated with a Middle Eastern heritage, you may be referred to as “Arabe”. If you have features associated with an Indian or South Asian heritage, you may be referred to as “Hindu.” In most cases, these names are not derogatory terms; many people use them simply because your skin color or features are unusual or intriguing within that context. In some cases, it may be valuable to engage the people you meet in a conversation about the specificity of your heritage.

Sexuality

Same-gender relations are illegal in Nicaragua, and sexual orientation or preference are not topics that can be openly discussed. In Masaya it is not unusual to see two men holding hands or dressed up as drag queens, however it is less “tranquilo” in other areas and discrimination here is inevitable. Please realize that any affiliation or experiences you have at home (especially in the LGBT community) may not be regarded with the same understanding or sensitivity. Please do your best to take this into consideration when discussing such issues with your host family or other members of the community. For more information and resources you can contact the GESI office, visit Northwestern’s Study Abroad website, LGBTQ Students and Study Abroad: http://www.northwestern.edu/studyabroad/resources/online-guide/identity-and-diversity/lgbtq-students-study-abroad.html, Gender Abroad: http://www.northwestern.edu/studyabroad/resources/online-guide/identity-and-diversity/gender-abroad.html, or get in touch with NU’s LGBT Resource Center.

Gender

Expect to get a lot of unwanted attention. If you are a woman, men will whistle and talk to you in the street. Do not be surprised if men often try to start conversations with you on the street, on the bus, waiting in line, or shopping. Use your common sense. The best thing to do is to ignore them, although this will feel unusual at first. Do not give out your phone number to people you don’t know. You can explain that you are living in someone else’s house and are not allowed to receive calls or visitors. If you are a man, you may find that you get a lot of female attention as well, given that it is generally considered advantageous to date or marry a “gringo.” Please note that such relationships are not simple or frivolous affairs in the local context, for either men or women, and can seriously affect your work, how you are viewed in the community and ultimately the reputation of FSD and GESI as well. This topic will be further discussed during orientation.
Language Guide

Practice
Speaking a language is the best way to learn, so don’t be afraid to practice your Spanish with as many people as possible. Your best resource in learning the local language will be your host family and co-workers at your host organization. Depending on your language ability, this may be extremely frustrating at times. Relax and remember that the key to learning (or improving your skills in) a language is the ability to laugh at yourself.

Dictionaries and Phrase Books
These can be expensive and difficult to find once you are in country, so we recommend getting one before you leave. Oxford and Collins produce good pocket ones, and you can often get older copies free from a school or public library.

Online
• http://www.studyspanish.com
• Rosetta Stone: http://www.rosettastone.com/learn-spanish
• Languages in Nicaragua: http://www.ethnologue.com/show_country.asp?name=NI

Tutoring
If you are interested in tutoring upon arrival, let your Site Team know. They will help you to set you up with a tutor, at your own expense. Sessions usually cost $5 US/ hour.

Language Schools
Please note that FSD is not affiliated with any language schools in Nicaragua; the schools listed below are for reference only.
• Hijos del Maiz: http://www.hijosdelmaiz.net/ - Located in rural Largartillo in north-east Nicaragua, this is a Spanish school with a focus on small farming communities. Students can live with host families and participate as volunteers in projects with campesinos.
• Proyecto Ecologico: http://www.gaianicaragua.org/school.html - Set on the banks of a volcanic crater lake near Masaya called Laguna de Apoyo, the school’s teachers are local residents who incorporate ecotourism activities and active conversation into their classes.

Forms of Address
• Vos: Nicaraguans use “vos” instead of “tu” when speaking directly to a friend, a child, or within other casual relationships. The conjugation of verbs changes with this form.
• In general, verbs maintain the structure of the infinitive but have an added accented “és” or “ás” at the end. For example: “Y vos, que pensés de Presidente Obama?” – “And you, what do you think about President Obama?” By listening to the way your family and co-workers speak, you will pick up this different verb form fairly quickly and easily.
• Usted: always use “usted” with adults -- including co-workers and host-parents -- unless they tell you otherwise. To address adults in general, use the prefix Don or Doña (Sr. and Sra. are not used here).
• Other titles: Most supervisors are addressed as “Licenciado/a (last name)”, meaning they have a university degree. Health professionals are addressed as “Doctor/a” or “Enfermera” and teachers are addressed as “profesor/a”.

Vocabulary at Work
Before arriving in Nicaragua, familiarize yourself with the vocabulary you will need at work. Bringing a dictionary with you is vital, but a list that addresses terms specific to your organization (health, microfinance, education, etc) can help a lot.
**Film Guide**

**La Yuma (2009)** – This is the story of Yuma, a strong-willed and rebellious girl from the poor neighborhoods of Managua. Yuma wants to be a boxer. In her poor neighborhood, gangs fight for control of the street. In her home, lovelessness is the name of the game. She dreams of the ring, energy and agile feet and hands. They are also her only options.

**De Niña a Madre (From Girls to Mothers) (2005)** – At the beginning of the story, Kenia, Blanca and Vivi-ana were between 14 and 16 years old. They were pregnant and gave birth. After the camera followed them through that stage, their lives went on. Now, we pick their stories back up from the beginning and continue accompanying to learn how they are. How are they raising their children? Did their dreams come true? Did they get pregnant again? Do they have support from their partners, their families, society? These aren’t love stories with a happy ending. They are stories to make you think.

**Hot for Profit (2005)** – Hot For Profit is a documentary about poverty in the so-called Third and First Worlds. It analyses both societies from the perspectives of the NGOs, the media, the education, the politicians and the religion, and it challenges the UN eight objectives for the new millennium. Hot For Profit will make you think about your attitude and the potential for change that a single individual may have. The documentary was filmed in Nicaragua and Barcelona.

**Pictures from a Revolution (1991)** – No one captured more powerfully the suffering, sacrifice and finally celebration that accompanied the Sandinista victory than Susan Meiselas, the award-winning photojournalist who covered the Revolution for The New York Times and London Times. In Pictures From a Revolution, Meiselas returns to Nicaragua a decade later with co-directors Richard P. Rogers and Alfred Guzzetti to track down the people -- guerrillas, Socistas and bystanders -- pictured in her original photographs. The people share their feelings about how their lives have changed, for the better and for worse, in the years since the conflict; and recall the circumstances surrounding those moments of their lives captured by Meiselas’ camera.

**Alsino y el condor (Alsino and the Condor) (1983)** – Alsino, a boy of 10 or 12, lives with his grandmother in a remote area of Nicaragua. He's engulfed in the war between rebels and government troops when a US advisor orders the army to open a staging area by the boy's hamlet. Alsino tries to be a child, climbing trees with a girl, looking through his grandfather's trunk of mementos and trying to fly; he goes to town to sell a saddle, has his first drink and is taken to a brothel. But the war surrounds him. The US advisor takes Alsino on a chopper flight, but he's unimpressed. The soldiers' cruelties awake rebel sympathies in Alsino, and after an army assault backfires, the lad is fully baptized into the conflict.

**El Inmortal (2005)** – A formidable documentary about the disastrous Nicaraguan civil war in the 1980s between the US sponsored Contras and the socialist Sandinistas portrayed as die-hard communists by the Reagan administration. The movie confronts two brothers who fought against one another in this civil war. One was recruited as an adolescent by the Contras, the other fought with the Sandinistas. The main reason for the fighting is the deep chasm between a small group of haves and the mass of have-nots. The movie shows also clearly how the US tries to influence national politics (here Nicaragua) via religion. Apparently, even catholicism is too progressive. A must see for all those wanting to understand the world we live in.
El Güegüense by Anonymous
In the seventeenth century, somewhere in the streets of a small colonial Nicaraguan city governed by the Spanish authorities and inhabited by indigenous and mestizo people, a comedy play of high cultural value was born. Expressed in the play was a rejection of the Spanish domination in a mocking, ingenious, and creative way. Over time this theatrical piece transformed into a national symbol for its protesting character that identified the Nicaraguan people. Three centuries later the UNESCO declared this work “Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity.” This historical play, by a unanimous author, is “El Güegüense o Macho Ratón”, the first literary Nicaraguan work, pertaining to the Nahuatl culture. Learn more about the history and contents of this comic masterpiece.

Margarita, How Beautiful the Sea by Sergio Ramírez
In 1956 in a cafe in León, a group of literati gather, dedicated, among other things, to the rigorous reconstruction of the legend surrounding Darío—but also to conspire. There will be an attempt against dictator Somoza’s life, and that little girl with the fan a half-century before will not be a disinterested party. In Margarita, How Beautiful the Sea, Sergio Ramírez encompasses, in a complete metaphor of reality and legend, the entire history of his country. The narrative moves along paths fifty years apart, which inevitably converge. The story becomes a fascinating exercise on the power of memory, on the influence of the past, fictitious or not, in the finality of reality.

The Jaguar Smile: A Nicaraguan Journey by Salman Rushdie
In this brilliantly focused and haunting portrait of the people, the politics, the land, and the poetry of Nicaragua, Salman Rushdie brings to the forefront the palpable human facts of a country in the midst of a revolution. Rushdie went to Nicaragua in 1986, harboring no preconceptions of what he might find. What he discovered was overwhelming: a culture of heroes who had turned into inanimate objects and of politicians and warriors who were poets; a land of difficult, often beautiful contradictions. His perceptions always heightened by his special sensitivity to “the views from underneath,” Rushdie reveals a land resounding with the clashes between history and morality, government and individuals. With a new preface by the author.

The Country Under My Skin: A Memoir of Love and War by Giaconda Belli
Until her early twenties, Gioconda Belli inhabited an upper-class cocoon: sheltered from the poverty in Managua in a world of country clubs and debutante balls; educated abroad; early marriage and motherhood. But in 1970, everything changed. Her growing dissatisfaction with domestic life, and a blossoming awareness of the social inequities in Nicaragua, led her to join the Sandinistas, then a burgeoning but still hidden organization. She would be involved with them over the next twenty years at the highest, and often most dangerous, levels. Her memoir is both a revelatory insider’s account of the Revolution and a vivid, intensely felt story about coming of age under extraordinary circumstances.
Website Guide

History
• General overview, from ESPANICA: http://www.nodo50.org/espanica/historica.html
• NOW with Bill Moyers - Echoes of War: http://www.pbs.org/now/politics/nicaragua.html

Health
• Ministerio de Salud de Nicaragua: http://www.minsa.gob.ni/
• World Health Organization (in Nicaragua): http://www.who.int/countries/nic/en/
• Centro de Servicios Educativos en Salud y Medio Ambiente: http://www.cesesma.org/

Race, Ethnicity, Gender & Sexuality
• Movimiento de Mujeres Marian Elena Cuadra (MEC): http://www.mec.org.ni/
• Puntos de Encuentro: http://www.puntos.org.ni/default.php
• Wisconsin Coordinating Council on Nicaragua (WCCN): http://www.wccnica.org/women.html

Environment
• Ministerio del Ambiente/Recursos Naturales de Nicaragua (MARENA): http://www.marena.gob.ni/
• El Porvenir: http://www.elporvenir.org/
• Grupo Fénix: http://www.grupofenix.org/

Youth and Education
• Federación Coordinadora Nicaraiguense de ONG’s que trabajan con la Niñez y la Adolescencia (CODENI): http://www.codeni.org.ni/
• RevistaEnvio article about youth groups, 2002: http://www.envio.org.ni/articulo/1600

Human Rights
• Centro Nicaraiguense de Derechos Humanos (CENIDH) - http://www.cenidh.org/
• NicaNet: http://www.nicaraguanet.org/
• Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign: http://www.nicaraguasc.org.uk/
• Quixote Center – Quest for Peace: http://quest.quixote.org/
• Coordinadora Civil: www.ccer.org.ni

Micro-Finance and Micro-Enterprise
• Asociación Nicaragüense de Instituciones de Micrafinanzas (ASOMIF): www.asomif.org
• Cooperativa Maquiladora Mujeres de Nueva Vida: http://www.fairtradezone.jhc-cdca.org/
• Planet Finance: http://www.planetfinance.org/EN/index.php
• CGAP: http://www.cgap.org/portal/site/cgap/