



## 2008 Wesleyan University Summer Experience Grant Application

*When completed, save this application as a Word document and submit through MyCRC by Tuesday, March 25, 2008, at 11:59 p.m. See the Quick Start Sheet for submittal instructions. Please be aware that this is a firm deadline: you will not be able to apply after this date and time. Hard-copy applications will not be accepted.*

Your Name:	Lorena Estrella		
Campus Box:		Campus Phone:	
E-mail Address:		Are you a U.S. Citizen?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> / No <input type="checkbox"/>
Major(s):	Studio Art (concentration in Printmaking), Latin American Studies		
Home Address:			
Home Phone:			
Organization Name:	Norwalk-Nagarote Sister City Project (N/NSCP)		
Sponsor Name & Title:	Tish Gibbs, Co-President		
Address:			
Sponsor Phone:		Sponsor Fax:	
Sponsor E-mail:			
Dates of Employment:	June 9, 2008-August 4, 2008		

1. Provide a brief overview of the organization for which you will intern or program/project you are developing.

The Norwalk/Nagarote Sister City Project (N/NSCP) is a non-profit organization that over the last 22 years has brought the Greater Norwalk Area of Connecticut and Nagarote, Nicaragua together in partnership for sustainable community development in Nagarote, Nicaragua. In its two decades, the Sister City Project has built a strong relationship with the people of Nagarote and supported many community projects including the creation a public library and school, access to clean water, and construction of housing for victims of Hurricane Mitch in 1998.

The N/NSCP was founded in 1986 in solidarity with the Nicaraguan community as counterforce to the U.S.-backed Contra War of the 1980s that was destroying the Nicaragua's economic and social fabric. The Sister City's goal is to actively "support peace and democracy through friendship and understanding" between the two communities. The project works towards its goals of peace, mutual relationship, cultural and educational exchange through various ongoing projects for sustainable community development. In the last five years the N/NSCP has focused on four areas for community development including: a reforestation project, a youth project in the Jeronimo-Lopez barrio, a preschool project, and a scholarship program for students in grades one through college.

In 2002, following a community needs assessment and census in Nagarote, N/NSCP chose to focus on the youth of Nagarote's poorest area, the Jeronimo-Lopez barrio, and began the Jeronimo-Lopez Youth Project. The Youth Project, which has grown to 150 teens, provides year-round, after-school activities designed to offer youngsters

ages 11-17 an alternative to the gangs, drugs and crime prevalent in their neighborhood. Community service, leadership training and developing marketable job skills are key components of the program. In 2006 and 2007, with a grant from the New England Biolabs Foundation, 60 teens created a tree nursery and planted more than 5,000 trees throughout poor, treeless areas of Nagarote as part of their community service work.

2. Briefly provide details of the internship or experience, including responsibilities and tasks.

The internship will be an overall learning experience that will allow me to engage in the both the administrative as well as the one-on-one, personal work involved in non-for-profit and community development. Over the 8 weeks, I will be living in Nagarote, Nicaragua working alongside Field Director, Sarah Proescher, and Project staff members assisting in day to day activities in the office and in the project's activities. The Jeronimo-Lopez Youth Project provides a wide range of classes for teens which include English, photography, painting, tailoring, baking, computers, and sports. I will be able to assist in whatever way possible in any of the classes offering my skills and experiences in drawing, English, and sports activities. I will also be able to assist in the tree reforestation project serving as a leader (alongside Peace Corps volunteers and an employed Arborist) to students during community canvassing, data collection, and tree distribution. This work will occur periodically throughout the eight weeks and I will work at least one day a week on updating the progress of the tree project in electronic form.

More specifically, I will be working closely with the current English teacher who is fluent in English, having lived in the states for some time, but has never received any formal educational training. Together we will form and execute lesson plans and in-class exercises and activities to better prepare students in practical English skills for future job related areas. I will need to work on creating lessons and curriculum throughout the weeks and help teach the English class twice a week. The preschool project is also in need of some assistance as the current teacher and staff transition into applying Montessori methods and materials. Having visited the preschool just two weeks ago, I have seen the positive direction the implementation of Montessori practices in the preschool students. I will be able to work one-on-one with the preschool teacher and two assistants to create materials that can be used in class to promote Montessori goals of fostering individuals. Employing such learning materials in classes twice a week will be a fascinating experience, seeing young students develop motor skills and self-esteem.

Lastly, with the support of Sister City staff I have proposed to host a series of creative writing workshops entitled, "Encontrando Mi Voz: Belleza, Fuerza, Conciencia" (Finding My Voice: Beauty, Strength, Consciousness"). Something I have noticed in my last three visits to Nagarote is the hesitance and fear of writing. Most of the education in poor countries like Nicaragua is formal and demands memorization and regurgitation of information. Therefore, the fostering of "voice" and personal perspective become lost in the educational system which translates into young people not feeling comfortable expressing their opinions openly, especially in writing. My initiative proposes a series of workshops offered once a week (or twice depending on current class schedules) that will encourage various creative writing exercises and group exercises to build self-esteem and confidence in expressing one's thoughts both on paper and in a group atmosphere. The goal will be to look at the works of contemporary poets and artists to see how they have gone about expressing their artistic voice in various mediums. We will collectively explore and learn from each others writings drawing inspiration from writing prompts, photographs, discussions, and found objects. The workshop will bridge many of the goals of the Youth Project and help students develop a sense of self through writing and artistic terms to better express their stories and dreams. This being my personal initiative will require a lot of planning and work before and throughout my stay in Nagarote. I will collect and organize materials (readings, videos, visuals, books, etc.) prior to my trip and establish a workable packet for the workshops. At the end of the workshops, I hope that students will have developed a mini-focused project to present to their peers in the Youth Project.

Overall, my involvement in the Youth Project, whether it be my time in the tree project, preschool or creative writing workshops, will give me a wide range of opportunities to serve as a mentor, leader, and role model for teens in the Project.

3. How have you communicated with the employer and determined mutual interest?

I have been in communication with Co-President, Tish Gibbs, and current field director, Sarah Proescher, to establish a mutual interest for the proposed internship via email and phone. We have thoroughly discussed my previous work and service experiences both domestically and internationally and have determined that this opportunity will be a great learning and focused experience for my future goals of work in community development. We have recognized my fluency in Spanish and three previous service trips to Nagarote as a good basis to continue to build ties with the Nagarote community and a lasting partnership. My relationship with Tish Gibbs and Sarah Proescher stems from working together to organize a week long service trip that seven Wesleyan students and I recently completed March 9-17, 2008 in Nagarote, Nicaragua.

4. How will this experience enhance or broaden your career goals?

Coming to Wesleyan, taking a variety of courses, and meeting people from all different backgrounds have been monumental steps in opening my mind to the world I thought I knew. Theories of social constructs, notions of power and hierarchy, agency, race, and gender suddenly erupted in my consciousness as areas necessitating challenge and change and there was no turning back. Awareness of racial and gendered inequalities have changed the way I live, think, read, write, interact, and function! I am no longer the person I thought I knew. Nothing was safe in my mind and who I was needed to change. I needed to change how I saw myself and take control of the person I was becoming. Action was the only solution. Fueled with the vocabulary and knowledge, I can begin to reflect and challenge my personal identity and that of my family and the culture I grew up in. My upbringing and experiences in an immigrant Latino household have definitely shaped the social and political positions I now stand by. My interests in Latin America grow out of a search for my own family's history and realities and in a greater sense a call for recognition of their stories and similar stories of marginalized communities. Ultimately, my career choices will involve working with people on a grassroots, community level to develop programs that will help the community and its members grow strong and positive amidst difficult realities.

One of my biggest moves here at Wesleyan has been my involvement in the Nagarote-Wesleyan Partnership (NWP), which is a student run group that seeks to rethink international service in non-paternalistic ways and build a lasting partnership with the Nagarote community. I was attracted to the group's approach to international service that focused on building a lasting relationship with the community of Nagarote that was meaningful and more than just a week long experience. It was more about the relationships and strengthening of community ties than the place that attracted me to the group. Nonetheless, Nicaragua is a country with a complex, fascinating history that is exemplary of how various colonial experiments manifested differently over time and region. My experiences in Nicaragua have allowed me to learn, observe and connect various histories and social hierarchies at play in Latin America to what I've read about in my classes.

My involvement in NWP has allowed me to visit and work in Nagarote three times over the last year. Every visit has been a new learning experience and one that has made me more passionate about community work. One thing that I have learned is that *community work is a process* just like everything in life and it is not easy; change does not happen overnight. Every visit has been a step towards creating a mutual relationship and one that continues to grow over time. Traveling last summer with the help of 100 Projects for Peace has also made me aware that peace is an important goal to keep in mind and that peace is also a process involving building personal and community relationships.

Many times I have asked myself, like many of my family members and close friends, what exactly am I doing in Nicaragua. It is a question that I struggle with because so much has happened so quickly in the last year and before I know it I somehow find myself back in Nicaragua. My commitment has been to the people and projects I have participated in and truly believe in. I have had various conversations in Nagarote that affirm that a young college group helping in the activities serves as a reminder and role model to students in the Project that they do matter. I hope that students and community leaders in Nagarote can see me as a friend and as someone who can relate to their stories because of my Latino identity and shared common experiences. I cannot divorce my brown skin from my white privilege in my ability to travel to Nicaragua so often and return to my American comforts. No matter my socioeconomic background, I am privileged to be a student at Wesleyan and can only hope to overcome the "-isms" that characterize Americans which form a part of my identity for a greater cause.



This internship with N/NSCP in Nagarote, Nicaragua will offer insight and clarification towards my potential future career paths. It will allow me to combine my passions of art, people, and social activism into a focused experience in which I will be able to work on developing community, youth and art initiatives. My recent experiences tutoring at Traverse Square here in Middletown has allowed me to work closely with bilingual students and their families. Teaching has blossomed in my mind as another possible career choice I had never fully considered. In both my experiences abroad and domestically, I have learned that learning and education can come in many different forms, colors, and languages. I want young people to feel proud and empowered about themselves and where they come from so that they can be comfortable in their own skin in a world that is closing in on free thought and expression. In being given the opportunity to teach the English class and creative writing workshops, I will gain invaluable experience and leadership skills that will help me decide if teaching is right for me. My involvement with the Jeronimo-Lopez Youth Project and the Sister City Project will offer me the experience to continue to build confidence, motivation, and community in myself and with those I will be working with.

*In this internship, I hope to do to something that is human and real and can guide me along a future in community activism at home or aboard.*