President’s Column

The culmination of my upbringing, experience, and personality has resulted in my belief that open discourse and open minds is the path to forging solutions for long-standing and emerging problems faced both on an individual and a societal level. This belief has been shaken of late, not that the principle is faulty, but that the world is capable of either respectful open discourse or that people will retain an open mind when it is most critically needed. I am concerned that organizations such as Friends of the International Center is at a crossroads of sorts in the world of public opinion about the purpose it serves, and how it goes about doing so (excluding financial scholarships).

In the ever-changing American landscape, thoughts about inclusivity and cultural respect have taken on shifting shapes making me think twice (not a bad thing) about how Friends should or should not continue fulfilling its missions. Controversy and polarization seem to be erupting over ways of conducting ourselves that, at least in my lifetime, have been considered the open, inclusive, and respectful way.

A recent article from the Los Angeles Times brought to my attention: “we stopped the practice of italicizing non-English words ... words we choose to italicize—and thereby highlight as ‘foreign’—can have an ‘othering’ effect ... Our work ought to reflect the diversity of the communities we serve. The decision to drop italics may seem like a small one, but language has the subtle power to both empower and disenfranchise.”

A book tour for a praised work of fiction entitled American Dirt was canceled by the publisher, because of threats made stemming from anger that the author was not herself a representative of the fictional characters she wrote about. And, the very concept of showcasing a culture by those who are not from that culture is all-too-often denounced as cultural appropriation.

Each of these examples causes me to question Friends practices. Perhaps we too should stop italicizing non-English words? Perhaps we should not host cultural events if we do not have representatives from that culture leading the event? Perhaps we are misguided in even thinking it is admirable to showcase a culture that is not our own? And on my questions go.

When we host events, especially ones that showcase cultures of specific countries and/or ethnicities we now face the danger of being seen as guilty of cultural appropriation, especially by those younger than most of our current membership, which means that Friends has an even harder time attracting younger members. A couple of our members have recently shared that our culturally themed events are offensive to their younger friends and relatives who revealed that they would never attend such an event. In my opinion, it is wrong to dismiss these unfamiliar views as isolated opinions.

It saddens me that our well-intentioned educational exposure to other cultures is not necessarily received as such; it saddens me that simple things like wearing ethnic clothing purchased during travel sits in the closet for fear of causing unintended offense; and, it saddens me that our attempts to remove walls might be perceived
President’s Column, continued from p.1

as building them.

However, as President it falls on me to help us navigate the new seas and I am counting on you to help me do so in the way that makes the most sense. Thankfully, I know that Friends is comprised of open-minded people likely to share my belief that through open discourse we will find solutions. And, so I ask that you please take some time to reflect on this column’s topic, speak with others in your circle of friends/family (including young generations), and that you then share your thoughts about how you think Friends can best fulfill its missions while being cognizant and sensitive to all. Please be open minded and consider all the alternatives, including questioning whether it is time to determine that Friends has served its purpose for an admirable fifty-nine years, and it is now time to either dissolve or transform into a different type of entity.

And, please feel free to attend a board meeting, or send me an e-mail so that YOU have a voice in the discourse!

Katya Newmark
PresFIC@ucsd.edu

Family Orientation
—by Eileen Tozer

Family Orientation is usually held on the first and third Wednesday of each month, but because the first Wednesday in January was a holiday (January 1), we held consecutive sessions on January 8 and 15, but are back on schedule again. We have a team of local and international volunteers who help inform our new international spouses and dependents about the activities of the Friends organization and about life in San Diego.

Presently, there are four local volunteers from the community and eight international volunteers from all over the world. We generally work in teams of 1 local and 2 international volunteers each orientation.

Because one of the key components of Family Orientation (and the Friends organization as a whole) is to help the newcomers adjust to their new life here, our diverse group of international volunteers is great: having someone who might speak their language or understand them is very comforting. As well, the volunteers can share their personal experiences with the new arrivals and this can be an impactful testimony to the benefits of getting involved with the Friends of the International Center.

The current Family Orientation volunteers are: Tuktuki Bhattacharya (India), Anne de Pastors (France), Barbara Fitzsimmons (U.S.), Nancy Homeyer (U.S.), Yeji Kim (South Korea), Laura Libotte (Belgium), Sunil Prasad (India), Maki Sakai (Japan), Eileen Tozer (U.S., program chair), Fernanda Vio (Chile), Loreen Wilhelmy (U.S.), and Jane Zhang (China).

Because our international volunteers are often here only for a relatively short time, we always welcome any new volunteers who would like to participate in this program.

March 2: Winter Quarter ends
March 25: Spring Quarter begins

March 2, 9, 16, 23, 30: Tai Chi, 2:00-3:00
March 3, 10, 17, 24, 31: Gus’ Table, 10:00-Noon
March 3, 10, 17, 24, 31: FIC Craft Circle, 1:00-3:00
March 4, 18: Family Orientation, 9:15
March 4, 11, 18, 25: Wednesday Coffee, 10:00-Noon
March 4, 11, 18, 25: Mommy/Daddy & Me, 1:45-2:45
March 5, 12, 19, 26: Everyday English, 10:00-11:30
March 6, 13, 20, 27: Friday Chat, 10:00-Noon
March 7, 14, 21, 28: Yoga, 10:00-11:00. Please confirm.
March 10: Friends Board Meeting, 10:00
March 12: Cooking Class, 9:00-Noon
March 21: Winter Quarter ends
March 25: Spring Quarter begins

Lunch at Anne de Pastors’ home: Yeji Kim, Fernanda Vio, Barbara Fitzsimmons, and Maki Sakai
Visiting an American Home

Judith and her husband, Donald Wesling, have hosted several UC San Diego international scholars. Most recently they and their neighbor, Susan Minnicks, hosted a Japanese family that included, by Judith’s account, a “lively and charming daughter, a brave kindergartner in a public school, by now quite fluent in English.” The get-together was such a success that the Weslings and Susan Minnicks decided to invite the Japanese family for another lunch in the future.

For the guests’ part, Yuri Uchinami wrote Elisabeth Marti, Visit an American Home Coordinator (hostFIC@ucsd.edu): “Thank you for arranging the wonderful host Judith for us! We enjoyed the first lunch. I’ll send you pictures.”

In February, Linda Ferri and husband Norbert Kubilus had a Brazilian couple with children and a mother-in-law for brunch. This visit, too, proved a success. Wrote Josiane Dantas, here from the Instituto de Tecnologias da Saúde, who holds a Ph. D. in Engineering: “Thanks again, Linda and Norbert, to invite us for lunch at your house. We lovely this get together. I hope see you soon!” To which the host responded: “It was our pleasure, Josiane. We thoroughly enjoyed meeting you and your beautiful family, and hope to see you again.”

Membership

We are pleased to welcome as a new member, Karen Reid. Please say hello to Karen, who may be found in the Friends Resale Shop on Fridays.

It is with sadness that we report the death, at the age of 88, of Ernest Mort. Ernie, as we called him, was a Paulist priest, who served in San Diego from 1966 until his retirement in 1993, first as Director of UCSD’s Newman Center and later as Dean of Revelle College. He took a great interest in students, an interest that led him to fund the Ernest Mort International Scholarship for Revelle, which he set up to enable Revelle undergraduates to study and travel while continuing their education abroad. It has been the Friends Scholarship Committee’s privilege to select the recipients. Ernie enjoyed meeting the recipients, carried on a correspondence with many, and until a year ago loyally attended the Friends Annual Membership and Scholarship Awards Dinner. As his friend and colleague Quelda Wilson said: “We will all miss his gentle presence.”

Mommy/Daddy & Me

Not just Friends, but the entire campus, not to mention the entire world, is grappling with how to handle the coronavirus outbreak in China that is spreading to other areas. Understandably, parents of young children are particularly concerned for their children’s welfare, compounded by the fact that numerous cases of influenza are being reported.

Responding to parents’ concerns for various diseases going around, Yukina Nakazawa thought it wise to cancel the first two Mommy/Daddy & Me sessions in February. There being fewer worries about infections being spread at outdoor activities, the Thursday Play Dates were held as usual, from 4:00 to 5:30 p.m.

As of this writing, the campus is busily discussing the general impact of the coronavirus. Please check on current information.

Friends Volunteer Hours for January 2020
706 = 4.01 FTEs
How A Friends Fellowship Can Rekindle Memory
—by Ruth Newmark

March tends to be the time that the Friends Scholarship Committee reads applications for spring scholarships, which means that considerable work goes on earlier in the year.

By late January, a Call for Nominations for Friends graduate fellowships goes out to the different campus departments. This notice is sent out by the Graduate Division, on behalf of its Dean, James Antony, who left Harvard University Graduate School of Education to join UC San Diego as Dean of the Graduate Division and Professor of Education Studies.

Continuing the support of his predecessors, Dean Antony has given his enthusiastic endorsement of Friends of the International Center’s mission of furthering global education, not to speak of giving his strong backing of our scholarship program by approving the long-standing financial collaboration between his Division and Friends.

Although not unique, Friends fellowships differ from most other grants available to UC San Diego graduate students in that students may not apply for our fellowship directly but must be nominated by their department, with each department allowed to nominate three candidates.

Also characteristic of Friends fellowships is that they come without restrictions, so that our awards of $2,000 take on a distinct meaning. Recipients tell us that they use the money to buy special equipment, to pay for travel expenses, to hire assistants essential to their fieldwork, to cover fees to conferences they might not otherwise attend. Occasionally, we hear that a student will use the money to pay rent while conducting short-term research projects abroad, or, most often in the case of an international student, to pay rent for the summer months when the student has no income from teaching.

Since Friends scholarship recipients are required to write a report, many of which appear in our monthly Newsletter, readers may well be familiar with how a Friends fellowship impacts the recipient. But each case differs from the other, and I can’t resist sharing the touching story told by a Turkish student, Neşe Demir, working towards her Ph.D. in Linguistics.

Describing her first fieldwork experience, Neşe wrote:

“In the summer of 2019, I went to the North East of Turkey to collect data for my dissertation. My fieldwork focused on the Laz community, a minority group living in the Rize area. I was in the field to investigate the Laz language, the non-standard Turkish spoken by the Laz community, and to investigate the contact between these two languages. It is unfortunate that most younger members of the Laz community no longer learn Laz as their native language, if they learn Laz at all. So, Laz is endangered; furthermore, the variety of Turkish spoken by the Laz community is gradually changing and becoming more like standard Turkish. Therefore, it is important to record these people’s language.

“As students of linguistics at UCSD, we are very well trained to conduct fieldwork with the use of language consultants. We practice linguistic fieldwork by hosting speakers of understudied languages in a classroom environment in order to collect data. We do such data collection, along with its analysis, in collaboration with other linguists, which is a fulfilling experience for all.

“After being ‘well-trained’ and ready to fly on my own, I went to the field, but little did I know it would...
be a very different taste of fieldwork. Working with consultants in a classroom environment was one thing; visiting the Laz community and meeting the locals in the field was a completely different experience. Whatever I had read in textbooks and articles about the challenges of doing fieldwork became real, and suddenly I was the only one to make decisions and find solutions to the challenges. However, this made me become a more resilient and better fieldworker.

“The most rewarding thing about undergoing those challenges was that I was embraced by the Laz community. Everyone I met was extremely happy that I was there trying to understand their language along with their culture and history. Most of my consultants encouraged me to do even more fieldwork, wanting to make sure that I had sufficient data for my studies. I was able to conduct many interviews and record stories about Laz history, and I am now using the recorded data to analyze aspects of the Laz language.

“For my research, I had no funds other than the fellowship I received from Friends of the International Center. I used this money for accommodation in the field and for compensating my language consultants for their time. Many of them chose to donate what they received to a local charity or a child in need, so in this sense the whole community benefitted.

“Friends of the International Center provided me with the opportunity to conduct fieldwork in Turkey. In doing that, they also touched the heart of a beautiful lady and helped her remember her past.”

Donations: Thank You!

The impact of a Friends scholarship is keenly felt by our recipients. Undergraduates speak of how their study abroad was life changing and how without our financial support they might not have been able to participate in this long-dreamt-of journey. And while the Friends scholarship might not have been the deciding factor, it certainly made the time spent abroad more rewarding. Said Sebastian Clark: “Over the past summer I had the great opportunity to travel to Greece to take two upper division courses in one of my majors, Theatre. It was the experience of a lifetime, and FIC made it possible.”

Isaac Chang, majoring in Molecular and Cell Biology, provided a quite different reason for being appreciative of his Friends scholarship: “My time studying abroad at Yonsei University was not only a truly breathtaking episode, but also greatly productive in ensuring a 4 year graduation. Studying abroad this summer was crucial to graduating on time, and so I want to thank you for helping to make this trip a reality.”

Graduate student often use the Friends award to cover travel costs related to their research. Revealed Ahanjit Bhattachharya, the recipient of a 2019 Luna Fung Scholarship, working towards a Ph.D. in Chemistry/Biochemistry: “The fellowship helped me immensely to meet the expenses for attending some of the leading conferences in my research areas, such as the Biophysical Society Annual Meeting and the American Chemical Society National Meeting. The fellowship also helped me to meet my expenses during a recent visit to India, where I visited several academic institutions for collaborative research work.”

Friends thank all those who contribute to our scholarship fund. We acknowledge the check from Lily and Shao Chi Lin destined for the Diane Lin Scholarship, named in memory of their niece, a former President of our organization; as well as the contribution to the Ruth Newmark Scholarship made by Ruth and Leonard Newmark in celebration of their grandchildren, Danya and Justin Costello. We are most grateful to Joan and Lou Adamo for their thoughtful scholarship donation, and to Gail Fliesbach for her renewed contribution to the Tcele Kidane-Mariam Scholarship.

Equally welcome were donations made to the Friends UC San Diego Foundation account. We thank David K. Jordan, the Jewish Community Foundation (recommended by Irwin M. and Joan Jacobs), and Josephine and Fred Randel for their support of study abroad for undergraduates.

No one knows the value of a Friends scholarship better than the recipient. To cite Rosalind Chaplin, pursuing research in Germany on the philosopher Kant: “the Friends scholarship has proved absolutely indispensable in allowing me to attend academic conferences outside of my ‘home base’ in Berlin,” while Juliana Gaona-Villamizar, D.M.A. candidate in the Department of Music and 2019 recipient of the Friends Fitzsimmons Scholarship wrote: “I applaud the Friends of International Center for their support to the UCSD international students’ community.”
Friends Dinner Social: Tempting Thailand
—by Katya Newmark

Our Thai-themed Friends Dinner Social was another quick sell-out, as well as being another delightful evening.

The room was thematically decorated with red and white lotus flower-shaped napkins at each place setting, with orchid stems in bud vases placed on a round placemat in the colors of the Thai flag. Some tables also had wood carved Thai dolls.

Guests began the evening with a glass of Thai basil lemonade or Chardonnay, while playing a game providing opportunities to learn about cities, national sites, cultural customs, foods, and miscellaneous fun facts: e.g., the orchid is Thailand’s national flower, the country boasts over 1,500 orchid species, and Thailand is the second largest exporter of orchids in the world (#1 the Netherlands).

One of my friends, Jitra Jootar, read out the menu in Thai and English, and provided a living example of Thai basil and a map of the country for our guests’ reference. Dinner began with an appetizer of Mee Krob (Thai Fried Noodles in Sweet-Sour Sauce with Tofu) that was followed by Thom Kha Gai (Chicken Coconut Soup). The buffet allowed guests to sample Gai Yang (Grilled Chicken Skewers), Pad See Eiw (Rice Noodles with Beef), Pad Krapow Moo (Stir Fried Basil and Pork); Gang Garee Tau Hoo (Yellow Vegetable Curry with Tofu), Khao Neow (Sticky Rice), Pad Phak (Stir-Fried Vegetables with Cashews), and Som Tum (Thai Green Papaya Salad). The meal concluded with a delicious modern interpretation of Sang Kha Ya Gak Thong (Pumpkin Custard) served with Itim Gati (Coconut Ice Cream).

Thanks to Nikki Bhupa, President of the San Diego American Thai Chamber of Commerce, what was to be a simple dance performance by children turned into a performance by professional danc-
er, Niramon Siriwong Zucker, brought in from New York for the occasion. Khun (Ms.) Zucker brought with her an entourage that provided a colorful and authentic background for her performance.

Following the dance, Abel Jimenez, owner of local King Tiger Gym, led two of his boxers, John Castañeda and Marcus Morishige, in a demonstration of Muay Thai (aka Thai boxing). Muay Thai is the national sport and cultural martial art of Thailand with a history that dates back several hundred years and arguably back to the 14th century. It is sometimes referred to as the art of eight limbs referring to the eight points of contact used. Guests were awed by the beauty and grace of the traditional dance and awed by the power, strength, and agility of the boxers.

Guests often opine that they cannot believe the many people who do not attend our events since they feel they are really missing out and while I agree, it is also true that the Friends Dinner Social has a limited capacity, so please keep this in mind.

COLOMBIAN DINNER
Saturday, April 18
6:00 p.m.
Village 15

Our next Friends Dinner Social will be on April 18, 2020 and is entitled Captivating Colombia. In addition to dining on a menu featuring many regional favorite dishes, guests will be treated to a post-dinner concert of traditional Colombian music performed by Alex Arango, a pianist and accordionist from Medellín, Colombia. Alex is also a recent graduate from UC San Diego, where he studied jazz piano and music technology.

Should you want to get a jump on signing up for the dinner, please go to: https://fdscolombia2020.eventbrite.com

Cooking Class

Photos and testimonials proved that the January cooking class, featuring pasta, was another successful and fun class for our 14 international participants.

In the spirit of Valentine’s Day, the theme of the February 13 class is chocolate. Under chef Vaughn Vargus, the class will prepare and enjoy eating an array of dishes, beginning with Chocolate Hummus with pretzels, green apples, and strawberries; a Spinach Pear Salad with a chocolate balsamic dressing; followed by Chocolate BBQ Chicken; and ending for dessert with a Chocolate Tart, as well as Chocolate Pot de Crème topped off with chocolate whipped cream.

The March class is titled Celebrating Spring.
Medical Spanish in Ecuador
Thanks to a Friends scholarship, I had the opportunity to spend part of the summer in Ecuador learning medical Spanish and gaining a better sense of different health care systems. For one month, I lived in a community called Cacha just outside of Riobamba, Ecuador at the Pucara Tambo Cultural Center with several other students participating in a language immersion program.

On weekdays we attended clinic in the mornings. These rotations ranged from rural health centers to the outpatient urban clinics, and included a week in the hospital. During the afternoons, we had Spanish class where we learned how to best communicate with our patients and learned basic Spanish medical vocabulary. As we were working on improving our grammar and verb tenses in class, we got the real world experience of speaking with our patients directly, and taking histories in Spanish.

It was incredible to learn more about health care provision in different healthcare systems from amazing doctors and nurses and to be able to connect with our patients in their own culture and language.

During the weekends, we had a chance to explore more of Ecuador. Thanks to their well-developed public bus system, we were able to visit all over the country, from hiking up waterfalls in the Amazon to wandering through museums in local towns. At the end of our trip, we had the chance to visit the Galapagos Islands as well!

Since returning to San Diego, it has been so rewarding to be able to continue improving on my Spanish and to know that I am doing my best to provide high quality care to all of my patients, regardless of what language they speak.

Thank you so much for this opportunity and support!

Mihiri Karunaratne
M.D. Candidate, SOM, Program in Medical Education, Health Equity (PRIME-HEq)

My Summer in England
My study abroad experience was a six-week international summer program with Pembroke-King’s College at the University of Cambridge. The start of the program was a bit rough because of the long travel day. There was a welcome reception where I felt awkward since people had already formed groups to talk with. Things got a lot better the next day. It was at the program’s orientation where I got to meet other UCEAP and some international students.

Honestly, on arrival day, I was worried about not being able to socialize well. Everything eventually worked out; better yet, I ended up making friends that I will stay in touch with, something I really thought would not happen.

In regard to the classes I took, the highlights definitely were Cyber-Security and Materials Science. The latter is the route I’m leaning towards as my career path. In just six weeks, the course was able to introduce all the relevant areas of materials science, so that I can confidently come back to UCSD and take other classes in the field. Having a quick, yet strong, foundation will make these future courses much easier to take on.

That’s pretty much my summer in a nutshell: one of the best in my life, even if it was stressful.

A thankful scholarship recipient,

Jefferson Lei
Chemical Engineering major

Hello,
I am writing to provide a brief summary of my experience abroad in the Netherlands. I’m currently near the end of my program and have had a tremendous time overseas. During my time, I tried to balance my time between exploring the Netherlands and studying for my courses. As I come back next week, I want thank the Friends of the International Center for providing me a scholarship to aid my travels abroad. It provided me with extra income to finance trips across the country and across Europe that I would not have been able to take otherwise.

Thank you,

Wells Huang
Mechanical Engineering major
To the Friends of the International Center:

My name is Emily Griesenbeck and I am a fourth year student at UC San Diego, majoring in Political Science. I am currently abroad in Mexico City on the UCEAP UNAM Fall Program and have been abroad for almost 6 months now. As my time abroad in Mexico City is coming to a close, I have had ample time to reflect on the truly incredible and unique experience I have had here. Having studied abroad once before in a UCEAP Program, I had certain assumptions and expectations about what this study abroad experience would be like, and what I've discovered is that I was completely wrong.

This experience has been incredibly challenging, perhaps the most challenging experience I have voluntarily endured. My classes at UCSD are challenging, but taking classes at one of the best universities in Latin America alongside Mexican and other international students of the same caliber, having to think, speak, write, express, discuss, and argue in Spanish was a completely other type of challenge.

In my semester at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), I was confronted with a completely new and different academic reality. Having to navigate academia completely in Spanish was incredibly challenging and, as a consequence, incredibly rewarding when I finally made my first comments in class, got homework assignments back, and seeing I had received a 10 (out of 10). I began to feel comfortable contributing to class discussions and presenting my own, unique perspectives.

In my time at UNAM I learned how to approach global issues from a completely different perspective. I came to understand much better the way that Mexican students and academicians think about world and American issues and this was an experience I could not have gained any other way.

Life in Mexico City was also completely different from what I had expected. Every day, 22 million people come and go through Mexico City. The city is absolutely gigantic, in a way that even after six months of living there, I can barely wrap my head around.

Taking the metro or the metro-bus to get around the city was an experience I was only peripherally familiar with, having spent time in other large Latin American cities like Buenos Aires and Santiago de Chile. But being on the metro in Mexico City at rush hour was an experience that no amount of forewarning could have prepared me for. The public transit systems were almost always packed, and pushing someone onto a train so that you could fit yourself in the car was seen as commonplace. People are always rushing through the stations, carrying huge objects on their shoulders, or pushing carts, or actually running to try and get on the nearest train. It is a sight to behold and always a hub of activity, motion, and commerce.

Outside the subway stations, without fail, there are about 15 different taco stands, each cooking up various meats, serving tortas (sandwiches), or stands with elote and esquites, and these quickly became my favorite places to eat. Cheap, delicious, and incredibly fast, these stands were also always crowded by employees on lunch breaks, students getting out of class, or people just in between things trying to get from one chore to the next, needing something quick to eat. Regardless of where you are in the city, there always is a street cart full of steaming hot food within walking distance, and it is one of the things that makes the city so vivid.

Mexico City also has tons of parks and green space littered throughout the huge cityscape. They offer a refreshing break from the huge avenues and bustling streets filled with honking cars and rickety buses. There always are crowds of people strolling through the park, old friends meeting up to chat and catch up, young kids roller skating or skateboarding, dogs running with their owners, and families enjoying the fresh air. I found the parks to be one of Mexico City’s many secret charms, and parks quickly became my favorite spots to sit in and read a book while taking in the activity of the city.

I had never lived in or even been to a city as large as Mexico City, and so living here definitely took some time to get used to. Navigating the endless hustle and bustle was tiring at first, but I soon learned my own short cuts and insider tips to make the hustle and bustle more fun and less frightening.

Exploring the city and getting to share new discoveries and funky spots with friends from other UC campuses, having their own unique experiences here as well, was such an eye-opening experience for me. Being alongside other UC students and growing, struggling, improving, and connecting was an experience that is hard to put adequately into words, but that has become an integral part of who I am now, and I hope that I can carry what I have gained, learned and experienced here in Mexico City to my life back in San Diego.

Truthfully, without the help from the Friends of the International Center, this experience would have had at the least been very different for me, with much more stress and much less freedom to explore and take advantage of being here, and might not have happened. I will forever be grateful for the generosity of the Friends and their investment in students and helping students learn and grow in such a unique way. I would really enjoy keeping up correspondence with the Friends in any way possible and would love to share more of my experience if possible. Thank you!

Emily Griesenbeck
Political Science major
Research Report

As a Ph.D. student in Political Science, I am dedicated to understanding how organized crime corrupts politics and undermines the quality of democratic institutions in Latin America. Despite the centrality of the issue and its detrimental consequences, studying the topic presents serious challenges. Criminal groups operate in secrecy, meaning that researchers cannot obtain organizational documents or data, survey their members, or walk into their offices and ask for an interview. Nevertheless, studying the topic is of central importance, and it is what I am dedicated to.

The fellowship provided by the Friends of the International Center allowed me to travel to Mexico for a month, where I was able to meet with and interview senators, local politicians, policy analysts, activists, and public servants. Being able to speak with these experts provided me with invaluable knowledge about the challenges that politicians, government agencies, and civil society face when confronting organized crime. Getting first-hand accounts into the problems posed by the money and violence that criminal organizations invest into influencing politics has proven instrumental in advancing my knowledge and research.

I hope that with this new knowledge I can one day understand the topic sufficiently to provide policy proposals that help ameliorate the consequences that criminal organizations have on societies. I am therefore truly grateful and appreciative of the opportunities that the Friends of the International Center fellowship provided me.

Marco Alcocer

Turks and Caicos Islands on OAP

When I stepped off the plane in South Caicos, the first thing I noticed was the heat. At an average temperature of 90 to 94 degrees Fahrenheit and a daily UV index of 12, things heat up quickly in the Turks and Caicos. The next thing I noticed was the incredible nature of my surroundings. The Center for Marine Resource Studies, where I spent my month abroad, is converted from an old hotel called the Admiral’s Inn. Sitting on the very South East corner of the island, it commands an amazing view of the ocean and the nearby Long Cay. The rest of South Caicos, though less scenic, is just as interesting. In what spare time we had, I got a decent chance to explore the island. Ten minutes from the center gate, past the Salinas [remnants of the old salt industry] and churches and the school, is town. There you can find a couple of shops, restaurants, a liquor store, and even a Laundromat, if you want to spend 15 dollars for a wash. With a population of less than 1200, South is a really unique little community that I came to love during my time there.

During the week, most of our time was spent either in lecture or working on our assignments, but the most memorable experiences from my time abroad came from the field exercises we participated in. Our very first field day was spent on Long Cay, finding and recording data on the critically endangered Turks and Caicos Rock Iguanas that can be found there. Getting to work so closely with such a unique animal was a rare opportunity, and the perfect way to start off our fieldwork.

The rest of our fieldwork brought the focus back to the topic of the class: Marine Megafauna. Our primary goal was to photograph Eagle Rays and Green Sea Turtles. Once we got the photos back on dry land, we could input each one into a program that would analyze their markings and designate each one as an individual. Each could then be compared with a database from previous years, in order to tell which ones had been seen before, and in which area. While it might seem like trivial data, this sort of long term record keeping is vital to understanding how different ecosystems are being affected by the changes our world is undergoing.

Studying abroad with the School for Field Studies was unlike anything I’ve ever done. Not only did I get the chance to take an engaging class in one of the most beautiful places I could imagine, but I was also afforded the opportunity to get hands-on experience in the field, as well as contribute to meaningful research. I’ve only touched on a few aspects of my trip, but the rest of the memories I have are no less extraordinary, and I will not be forgetting them anytime soon.

Joshua Allen
Division of Biological Sciences
Ecology, Behavior, and Evolution major

From the Faculty

Co-Director, Study Abroad:

I recently met with Joshua Beal, one of the students who received one of your awards last year. He just came back from his quarter in Bologna, Italy. He was so enthusiastic about the whole experience.

Those are the moments that make me really happy and justify why I’m doing all this.

Thanks for helping to make it possible!

Ivano Caponigro
Associate Professor, Department of Linguistics
Intersection Between Fiction and Philosophy

With the money I received from the Friends of the International Center scholarship, I gained the time and resources to continue developing my MFA thesis in the Literature Department, finishing 150 pages as I had planned. I was able to finish my readings in phenomenology, communication, and Confucianism. These readings were integral to this process, with Kwong-loi Shun’s *Confucian Ethics* being one of the most important in developing a meaningful practice of writing about ego and a lack thereof.

The time I had to work on my thesis resulted in it diverging in some ways; I’m now thinking about how to write about humans in cities, how to position subjectivity in a space which is “made” for individualism and consumerism. Being able to finish these pages, I now have a clearer understanding of the limitations of the piece in terms of genre and form.

My preliminary readings that the scholarship gave me time to indulge in led me to more fiction. Zadie Smith’s *NW*, Elena Ferrante’s *Neapolitan Series*, and Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* were all texts that I added to my research in terms of thinking about the narrative form, and this idea of “being human”—particularly in urban space.

The mixture of non-fiction, theoretical texts with the “embodied” approach of applying these theories to creative texts were illuminating in my own writing; upon finishing the 150 pages over the summer, I saw how the space and time dedicated to my research really shaped the project, taming it into something more specifically city-focused.

Completing these chapters has allowed me to focus on finalising and finishing the project. I feel the project’s scope has narrowed but its length has expanded, and this knowledge has allowed me to reshuffle my timeline in terms of the future of my writing and researching.

The Friends of the International Center scholarship was integral to all these developments and I am truly grateful for the time and resources I was given access to as a result of the award.

**Klara Feenstra**  
Writing student from the UK
March 2020

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