

Researching Children's Health Disparities in Quito, Ecuador

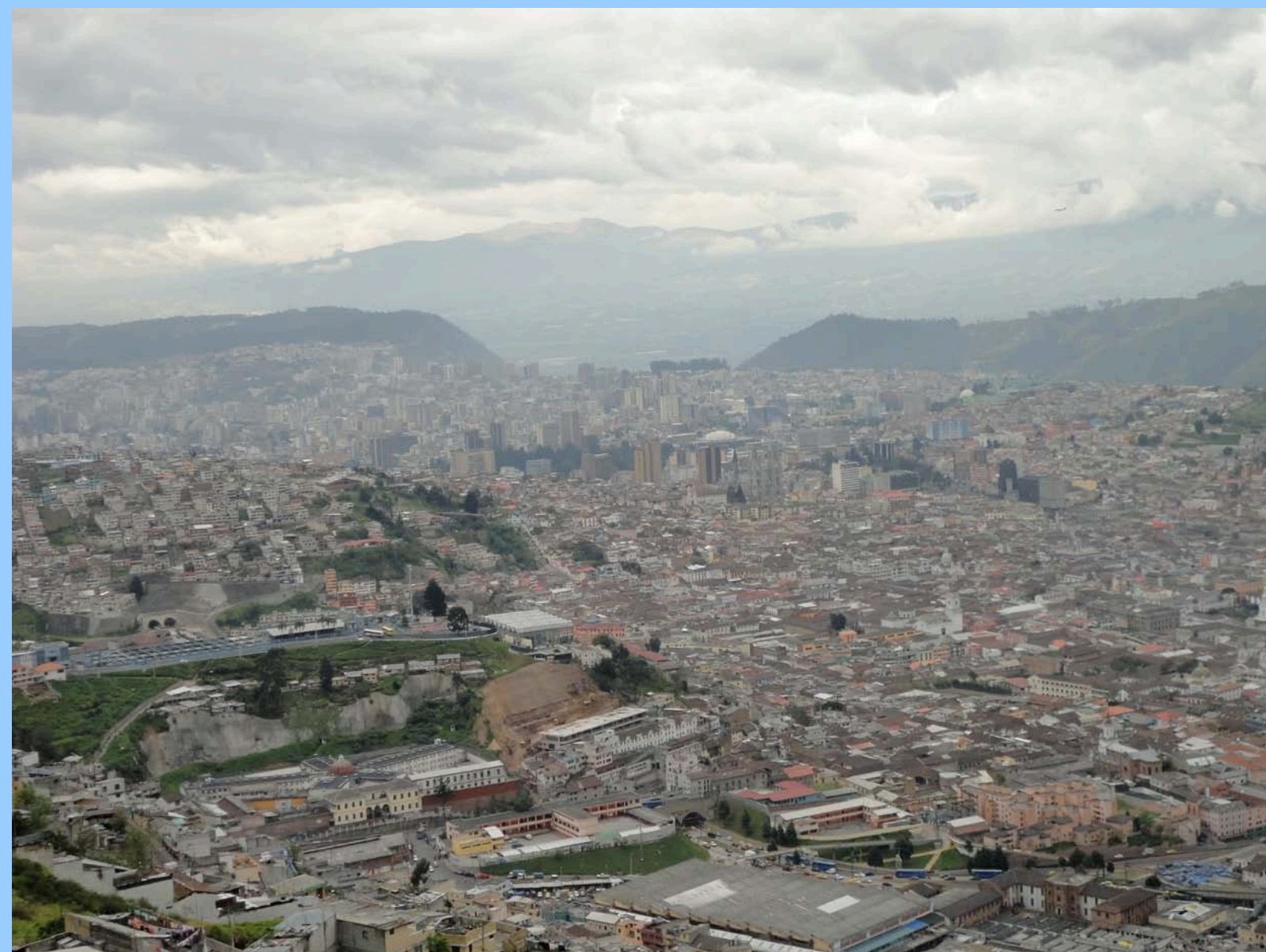
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1 Location: Quito, Ecuador

Ecuador is in the northwest part of South America. It is bordered by Peru, Colombia, and the Pacific Ocean. Ecuador's majority culture is Mestizo, a combination of Spanish and AmerIndian traditions. This relatively small country is environmentally rich, claiming both the Galapagos islands and parts of the Andes Mountains amongst its wealth of biodiversity.

Quito is the capital city and is home to 2.5 million people. Quito sits on the east side of Volcan Pichincha, an active volcano, and is flanked by mountains on its western and eastern sides.



Quito, Ecuador

2 Special Studies Project

For my Special Studies course, I worked with The Quito Project, a nonprofit organization whose mission is to collaborate with local partners in developing evidence-based solutions that support and build capacity in the health, education, and social sectors.

My goal for this project was to gain a practical understanding of social work practices and international collaboration in Ecuador through my work on a health disparities study.

3 Outcomes

During my six weeks in Quito, I served as the in-country Project Coordinator for our research team. This provided me the opportunity to adapt and build leadership, management and collaboration skills suited to an international healthcare setting.

Major accomplishments:

- Coordinated and led meetings with a teams of doctors, hospital administrators, and students from partnering universities.
- Assisted in developing research to evaluate the efficacy of waiting room, educational interventions for improving nutrition knowledge and changing feeding practices.

Skills Developed:

- Engaged in multilingual, multicultural programming.
- Facilitated intergroup dialogue.
- Designed research tools and protocol.
- Implemented and evaluated human subject research.



Teaching a workshop on protein consumption in the waiting room of a public health clinic.

4 Connections

Classroom Connections:

- SW 522: Research Methods in Social Work
This course gave me an excellent foundation for developing and implementing a human subject research project. I was able to draw on the principles I had learned to help design research tools, interventions, and protocols.
- SW 560: Macro Practice in Social Work
This course provided me with skills for evaluating our project and facilitating intergroup dialogue.
- SW 799: international Social Work
This minicourse served to further raise my awareness of cultural competency and help me establish learning goals for my experience.

Career Connections:

This special studies course gave me the opportunity to develop, coordinate, and lead an international collaboration. This experience will serve me well as I continue to work in multicultural settings both domestically and abroad.

5 Lessons Learned

- Our research principles are based on American values. In international research, it is important to consider how these principles may be perceived by the host culture.
- In international partnership, your host country collaborators are your best resources. No matter how much preparation you have done, nothing can come close to their expertise on potential cultural misunderstandings, logistical troubleshooting, etc.

6 Advice

- Be flexible. Sometimes the lessons awaiting you do not match the goals you set out with. Be mindful to take full advantage of every learning opportunity .
- Cultural competency means not only an awareness of your host culture, but also how others perceive your own culture. Reflecting on this and its impacts on your your work can prevent misunderstandings later on.

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