2012 Plastino Scholars

Daniel Reyes: Feeding Communities and Rebuilding Local Food Systems, at Home and Abroad

A global grassroots movement to change the way we produce, consume, and think about food, has defined itself by promoting the development of local food systems that are based upon sustainability, environmentally friendly agriculture, equal access, community cohesion, and improved nutrition. My experience will focus on two countries where food system reform has becoming increasingly relevant: the United States and Guatemala. I will spend ten weeks at the Women’s Environmental Institute (WEI) in North Branch, MN, an organization dedicated to social justice and environmental sustainability. I will be working on their organic farm as well as undertaking a personal research project to develop educational and outreach campaigns to improve community and market connections in low-income areas of nearby Minneapolis/St. Paul. In addition, I will be working with to redevelop the WEI’s North Circle Collaborative, to increase economic stability and cooperation among local organic farmers. My time at the WEI will prepare me for the second half of my project, which will take place in the winter of 2013, where I will spend five weeks based out of the Miguel Angel Asturias Spanish School (MAASS) in Xela, Guatemala. During my time at MAASS, I will live with a Guatemalan family, receive Spanish tutoring, and work with a local farming collaborative both in the field and at farmers’ markets. I will also travel to Lake Atitlán, where I will work with the Instituto Mesoamericano de Permacultura (IMAP), to learn about Guatemalan permaculture and to access the Chichicastenango Market. This experience, in a country known for its chronic under nutrition as well as its agricultural exports, will give me the perspective and opportunities necessary to learn about Xela’s local food system.

Elizabeth Hetterly: Maternal Health in Bangladesh

According to the World Health organization, a woman’s lifetime risk of maternal death in wealthy, industrialized countries is 1 in 7300. In developing countries, the risk is 1 in 75. As a pre-med student at UD determined to change the world, these disparities in maternal health not only concern me but have motivated me to pursue a Plastino Scholar experience in which I will travel to Bangladesh to study the underlying causes of maternal death. I have already demonstrated an interest in this area, as a Dean’s Scholar studying global health and having just completed an independent study course on maternal health in Bangladesh. My studies have been crucial in preparing me for a career in global health and medicine, but they should also be complemented by a first-hand awareness of the issue at hand. By traveling to Bangladesh to study maternal health with the help of the Plastino Award, I will gain a practical understanding and be able to apply my studies to the real world. My experience will involve traveling to Bangladesh to work with an international health research institution called the ICDDR,B, where I will study integrated, community-based postpartum care as a strategy to reduce maternal mortality. I will gain an understanding of the causes and possible solutions of maternal mortality in Bangladesh through my research at the ICDDR,B but also by living with a family for the duration of my stay and experiencing Bangladeshi culture. Through this experience, I
expect to collect data for my Senior Thesis, and, more importantly, follow a passion that is not just a part of my education and career but a part of who I am.

Jill Farquharson and Katie Yoder: **Finding the Voices of America and Giving them Back**

Our experiences as Plastino Scholars will take us down the East Coast, starting in New Jersey and ending in New Orleans, Louisiana, interviewing the Americans we meet on what they feel is wrong with the country today. This time in American history has been characterized by major political, economic, and social issues. Americans have lost trust in the government and the media, and many are downright angry. We want to find out what everyday people have to say about the current state of American politics. In a campaign to give American their voice back, we will travel along the East Coast; starting in our hometowns, then to New York City, and ending in New Orleans many miles later. We will travel through ten major cities, as well as suburbs, small towns, and rural communities, exposing ourselves to different cultural settings and giving us a diverse population of people to meet. Using our different backgrounds, Jill from Political Communication and Katie from Visual Communications, we will use interdisciplinary methods to reach our goal. We will interview the people we meet on camera and document our entire journey through film and photography. We will give our campaign momentum through its own social media (Facebook and Twitter) and write online blogs through the political- and art-perspective to share our journey with the world. With business cards and information brochures, we will have the resources necessary to explain our campaign to the people we meet; this will also give the opportunity for them to continue the journey with us using social media. Finally, we hope to create a documentary of our entire journey from start to finish. We want to find out what the American people really want, and give their voice back with a viewing at the University of Delaware before the 2012 Elections, in the name of our Plastino Scholarships and sponsored by the Center for Political Communication and Department of Visual Communications.

Allison Solowsky: **The Indian Diaspora and Preserving Cultural Identity**

Thus far in my life I have received a fair amount of stares and questions due to my very personal existential paradox. My name is Allison Solowsky and just this fact alone has elicited many questions due to the paradox of my Indian physical features and the European origins of my name. Due to the fact that I am adopted, explaining this paradox has always proven to be quite difficult. I was born and raised in New Jersey by my adoptive parents, who are German and Ukrainian. I was fortunate enough to be adopted into a large family; as my parents already had four biological children before adopting eleven children, including myself. My parents adopted me when I was three months old after my biological mother had to make the difficult decision to give me up for adoption. My birth mother’s family was originally from India but migrated to Guyana sometime during the late 19th to early 20th century during the Indian Diaspora. My birth mother grew up in Guyana and left to attend college in the United States before I was born. My birth mother’s family was extremely traditional and therefore they did not approve of my
birth mother’s pregnancy and with threat of disownment, she had no choice but to give me up for adoption. These stories as well as the middle name of Naisha that my birth mother gave me are the only two links I have to my heritage. Besides these two links, I have never known anything else and have always dreamt of learning more; until I learned about the Plastino Scholars Program, I did not know if I would ever have the chance to travel to India. In my Plastino Experience, I wish to study the key elements the East Indians living in Guyana, following the Indian Diaspora to the Caribbean, use to express their cultural identity as well as to identify which of these cultural elements are most emphasized by East Indians. I plan to study how the East Indians living in Guyana define their relationship with India; especially how they define their relationship to the specific regions of India from which they originated. I wish to identify if there is a regular flow of traffic of Indo-Guyanese (East Indians living in Guyana), back to India, specifically to their areas of origin. In order to connect my research to my own personal story of my adoption and my biological mother’s historical movements through the Indian Diaspora, I wish to see if there is preservation of Hindu culture, traditions, and values amongst the Indo-Guyanese, specifically in correlation to the cultural practices and stigmas regarding pregnancy before marriage and the adoption of these children.

Marcela Omans: **Adoptions in Colombia**

Upon hearing about the Plastino scholarship I immediately realized that it was a scholarship that I couldn’t look past. Not only because I had just recently organized a trip to China last summer and I know how to budget and manage a trip but also because I have a proposal that is very close to my heart. I was adopted from Bogota, Colombia twenty years ago and I would like to use the Plastino scholarship to return to Colombia where I would experience the culture and take an in-depth look at the adoption process. I truly believe that this is a trip that would have a huge impact on my life that I could not otherwise gain in a university environment. The Plastino Scholarship would allow me to have this experience in any way I plan and it would also give me sufficient time to truly appreciate the trip and enjoy the experience. I want to study the adoption process not only because I was adopted but because my brother and my cousin were also adopted from Colombia and South Korea respectively. It is an interesting phenomenon that people from a completely different part of the world travel long distances to adopt children who otherwise would have no one. What are the things that push people in the United States to adopt abroad, what are the forces that push people in other countries to put their kids up for adoption and how does the system work? These are all questions that I am passionate to find the answers to because it is these processes that have profoundly impacted the entire outcome of my life. These questions about adoption are not the only focus of my trip. I would also use the Plastino scholarship to explore the culture and all the diversity that makes up Colombia. I believe that this is also an integral part to my trip because I would like to find out what it means when I say, “I am Colombian.” I am fine with my identity and I am not searching for the “meaning of my life” but rather how I relate to other people within this culture. Then I can truly say that, “I am Colombian” and have a clear understanding as to what this means to myself and what it signifies to other people.
I propose to travel to Bogota, Colombia over the summer for approximately 45 days that would be from the end of May to the end of July. I will be staying for about 4 weeks in total with the Campbells while I work with FANA and tour Bogota. I will go to visit FANA (Fundación para la Asistencia de la Niñez Desamparada) which is an orphanage and organization that helps out children and mothers in Colombia. I would be looking into all the aspects of the adoption process because I was adopted from FANA in Bogota, Colombia when I was a couple months old. I would tour the facilities of FANA. This would include the place where the children stay and el Hogar de Margarita, which is where the birth mothers stay. I have contacts at the Barker Foundation, and doctors and affiliates at FANA. I will also stay at the El Refugio Hotel for a week because this is one of the places where adoptive parents stay while in the different stages of the adoption process.