

## **ECUADOR FOLLOW-UP REVIEW – JUNE 2007**

### **SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS**

In general, the MSID Ecuador program is well run, in most ways a model for international education and development internships. The program is based on a history of thoughtful revision, a philosophy which has yielded high-quality experiences for the students in nearly every aspect of the program. We offer recommendations in this spirit of incremental improvement.

First, a number of students requested more information on the recent political and economic history of Ecuador, covering approximately the last 20 to 30 years, and on a better description of the current economic, demographic, and environmental characteristics of Ecuador. Basic information on the population, age distribution, ethnicity, economic status, and basic industries would help students better understand Ecuador. In addition, current income inequalities, policies, and attitudes are driven in large part by recent history such as the dollarization of the economy, the source and history of external, border disputes with Peru and Colombia, and inter-Andean migration driven by conditions in neighboring countries. Readings and classroom instruction aimed specifically at these sorts of questions would help students situate Ecuador in both a global and local context. Possible readings on these topics might include reliable Internet web sources, scholarly journals, weekly news periodicals, and recently published books. (Note: Some instructors in the United States ask students to rely primarily on .org or .edu websites because of quality-control issues for commercial sites.)

There are different activities that we have incorporated:

- We provide at the very first week a session called Ecuador Today, which addresses the very current issues in the political and economic situation of Ecuador.
- The new Cimas website refers students to the main academic libraries in the country as well as the websites of the major sectors of development.
- Every single reading assignment students are given is related directly to current problems of development, in some cases these current problems are put in relation to a historical framework, but always these articles reflect a current reality.
- In the planning of both the readings and the conferences, Cimas and our professors, always try to present conceptual and theoretical frameworks that contextualize the development issues that are discussed as well as those that will be seen.
- Most of the academic program addresses the last 40 years of Ecuadorian development. Our data bases, as well as virtual libraries that Cimas is a part of, provide with all kinds of statistical information on Ecuador and Latin America.
- Our whole program is designed to provide a critical overview of development, using Ecuador as a case study. Some of the main concerns are in relation to inequalities, ranging from economic to cultural, health and environmental perspectives.
- Our students have complete access to internet, and are constantly using the cyber resources. We have not included any regulation or control about the websites that the students may use.

Second, there was some unnecessary confusion on the part of students regarding the specific form and formatting required for the major internship report. Conversations revealed that although the current description of expectations was adequate, most students suggested that even clearer instructions detailing the sections (or topic areas) of the essay, and the expected contents for these sections would be helpful. All noted that in the end tutors and instructors were very flexible and that many forms were acceptable; still, they also noted that a requirements sheet and

copies of previous stellar examples would ease some anxiety.

- Each student is assigned an academically trained tutor who is paid to assist them throughout the period of the internship.

- Each tutor is provided with guidelines on the role that he/she should play in the academic advising of the students. Along with these guidelines, tutors are provided with a rubric for grading the final internship reports as well as documentation on precisely what Cimas requires these papers contain.

- The students, in addition to the documents received by tutors, are also given a field manual for research which includes hints for applying field research to the final report. The syllabus also includes a description of each component of the final report, the length requirements etc.

- Students are called to individual meetings with the academic coordinators to define their topics at which time they are given a guide on how to select a topic for research and once this is done, the academic coordinators assist the students to focus their thoughts, which is a process that continues via telephone or email throughout the internship period, depending on students' requests.

- Students have full access to a library within the Cimas office, where we have catalogued all the final term papers. Students are also able to search this library of final term papers digitally, according to topic matter.

- This last semester we offered three hours of workshop time on how to structure the final paper and how to organize field research into a report.

- Students are visited in the sites of their internships at about the half-period mark to ensure that they have focused their topic matters as well as their daily chores. Many times, if students have requested additional readings, this is a time that the coordinators can get the resources to them physically.

Third, perhaps the only problem we observed in the CIMAS internship program was a relative scarcity of internships directed towards environmental projects. Two current year-long students and two semester students with interests in environmental topics indicated that they had expressed interest in environmentally oriented topics, but there was a relatively scarce number available. We are aware of the substantial efforts required to identify, contact, review, and approve new internship opportunities. To their credit, CIMAS sets high standards for projects and ensures these are met through a thorough evaluation. As a result, developing new internship opportunities is a costly and time-consuming endeavor, and we are highly impressed by the diligence, tenacity, ingenuity, and results of those members of CIMAS that are currently involved in these activities. Our observation is in no way a criticism of the current execution of the system in place, but rather a suggestion that more attention should be directed towards developing and evaluating new internship possibilities. This effort would likely require additional personnel resources. However, these additional opportunities would likely be rewarded by an expended pool of students interested in environmental topics, to the benefit of MSID, CIMAS, and the participating students.

- Since very early in the semester, Cimas develops information sessions about internship opportunities, and it is at that time when the majority of the students begin to make the final decisions. There are plenty of opportunities for the students to select internships in environmental projects. It is very seldom when a student may have a very specific request that we are not able to find an internship. Quite often the situation is opposite, some of the students have significant difficulties in making the final decision about their internships until very late in the program, and even though they continue to manifest that they have not received the support

for the internship that they considered.

·We recognize the limitation we have in the area of environmental projects. One of the main causes for this limitation is directly linked to the location of environmentally based projects, many of which are too far away from Quito for Cimas to adequately support and others are in conflict zones. In this way, we feel that this area of internship experience is more challenging to define in safe areas that also provide a minimum standard for housing. Finally, many of the larger projects receive waves of foreigners to do volunteer work, we do consider these locations but do not highly recommend them as they do not provide for a truly Ecuadorian experience, nor are these projects necessarily Ecuadorian run.

Fourth, students would likely benefit from adding an additional semester of Spanish as a requirement to get into the program. Currently four semesters are required but those with only that amount of previous Spanish were the ones struggling the most with understanding the classes and doing the readings. For University of Minnesota students it might be good to recommend adding SPAN 3015 as a requirement since that course is required for any University of Minnesota student who wants to continue in 3000 level Spanish courses on campus. This requirement would be strongly supported by our Spanish Department faculty as there is currently a concern about the fact that study abroad students are slipping through the cracks with regard to this requirement.

We want to stress that these changes would only enhance an already strong program. The review team feels that none are mandatory, although we recommend CIMAS and MSID incorporate each recommendation to the extent possible given the inevitable limitations of resources. MSID and CIMAS should be congratulated on offering such an excellent program, and encouraged to continue their constant improvements.

·Of course it suits our mission of academic rigor quite appropriately that students would have more experience in Spanish language use and literature prior to arriving in Ecuador as this assists them in the process of cultural adaptation and integration, better participation in class, better comprehension of the readings, better communication with the professors (and vice versa), and finally better written assignments. However, we have always been concerned about limiting the access of students to our programs by putting in place such requirements. We understand the challenge of studying academic topics in a foreign language, but this is also a challenge which most students rise to and by the end of the semester always surprise both themselves and Cimas staff with their incredible improvement.