

## Early Spring 2011 Newsletter

### Spotlight on Veronica Bustabad at Alternativas y Capacidades, Mexico D.F.

I can hardly believe time has gone by so fast! I arrived in Mexico about six months ago (August 2010) and have since been working in my PiLA position with Alternativas y Capacidades, A.C., a non-profit capacity-building organization based in Mexico City. My experiences in Mexico City have been perplexing and interesting in some ways, yet certainly challenging and exciting thus far.

Our mission at Alternativas y Capacidades, A.C. is to contribute to social development in Mexico by strengthening civil society organizations and donor institutions, fostering their ability to influence public policy and promoting collaboration between sectors. More information on the organization and their publications and reports can be found at [www.alternativasociales.org](http://www.alternativasociales.org).

My responsibilities at the organization are two-fold: (1) to develop the internal monitoring and evaluation system for the organization and (2) to assist with a campaign, called *Muévete por la educación*, to advocate for better education policies in Mexico.

I have no prior experience with monitoring and evaluation of social projects, nor do I have significant experience in advocacy and lobbying work, so I have had to learn on the job. Since working at Alternativas y Capacidades, however, I have had to read about monitoring and evaluation indicators, learn about different strategies for effective advocacy and networking and work in a context in which funding and deadlines fluctuate very irregularly, all of which has been rewarding and interesting, yet challenging as well.

Similarly, I have been learning to be more flexible and adaptable in my work style, and to take more initiative in developing my own work plan, seeking guidance when necessary. As a PiLA fellow, I have had to design evaluation instruments and analyze data sets, work on different projects and multi task within the organization when needed, adapt to changing

circumstances as well as improvise on writing reports and systematizing information.



Since working at Alternativas y Capacidades, I have also been learning about the many struggles in strengthening democracy, accountability and transparency in Mexico, in a context in which poverty and social inequality are high and educational standards and quality are very low. Similarly, civil society organizations (CSOs) operate in adverse circumstances

in Mexico due to stringent legal and fiscal requirements.

Most CSOs address immediate needs of underserved communities, rather than pursuing advocacy work, or a combination of both, to address the root causes of Mexico's educational, economic, and environmental barriers to development. Yet another challenge to strengthening the non-profit sector in Mexico is due to the lack of trust that permeates all sectors of Mexican society, because of high levels of corruption, which have permeated the social sector as well.

As a PiLA fellow, I have also had the chance to participate in some really unique opportunities, including a workshop on digital activism by Obama's chief campaign blogger, the People's Global Action Conference on Migration, Development and Human Rights, a seminar on philanthropy at the Instituto Tecnológico Autónomo de México (ITAM), advocacy and lobbying workshops to CSOs in Mexico, and professional development training sessions on poverty, social development, public policy and digital activism, for example.

Thus, my PiLA fellowship has been an intellectually, personally and civically stimulating and enriching experience. As a result of my fellowship, I have become a lot more interested in opportunities in non-profit consulting, philanthropy, public policy and social entrepreneurship. As a result of my fellowship, I have also deepened my connections with the region and, therefore, my interest and commitment to working with Latin America in the future. Overall, I am continually grateful for the opportunity to gain valuable personal and professional experience living and working in Mexico City.

## Spotlight on: Mario Moreno, Human Rights Watch/CELE, Buenos Aires, Argentina

I don't own an alarm clock. While some of you may consider this a symptom of chronic tardiness, the reality is that I don't actually need one in Buenos Aires. Every morning, instead of being woken up by a jolting alarm clock, I rely on the sounds of the noisy Buenos Aires morning to rouse me from my slumber. As I awaken, the noise outside is a constant reminder of the bustling and frenetic pace of the mornings. Cars honk at each other as overflowing buses rumble by; all the while the characteristically loud *porteños* talk to each other in their aggressive, but somehow lyrical, accent. Yet, when I step into this veritable cacophony of sound, I remove myself from Buenos Aires, and am transported back to my native Mexico; you see, the sounds aren't exclusively emblematic of Argentina, rather, they conjure up images of the daily effort and struggle of an entire continent willing itself to progress. They are emblematic of my region's constant struggle for a greater quality of life, and a greater democracy.

My placement is exciting in that it allows me to live and work in Buenos Aires, all the while working on issues that encompass the American Continent's fight for progress. At the Center for Studies on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information (CELE), I am working with world-renowned scholars on freedom of expression and access to information issues across the continent. Previously, my work mainly focused on a collaborative project between the UN and CELE on the state of these rights in the region. Currently, my work is focused on helping develop a comparative project on impunity in violations of freedom of expression.

My concurrent placement with the Americas team of Human Rights Watch has allowed me to explore the complexities of democratic issues throughout the Americas. Outside of monitoring the human rights situation in Bolivia, my work has also involved extensive research on the state of human rights in countries like Ecuador, Venezuela, Honduras, Argentina, and Bolivia. Additionally, working with HRW has introduced me to the efforts of international organizations in monitoring the effective implementation of democratic norms worldwide.

Outside of work, my life is divided along a series of different endeavors. In order to alleviate some of the financial burden, as well as fund some future trips, I work on translations and college essay editing. Both are time consuming and hard, although the college essay editing is a worthwhile endeavor. For that, I am affiliated with a great Chicago based organization that provides college counseling for first generation Hispanic college applicants. Some weekends, I partake in pickup games of soccer along Puerto Madero, a beautiful recreational area along the coast of the River Plate. The Argentines' love for soccer is remarkable, and their skill is usually on par with their passion. The games are always exciting and lengthy affairs, which usually end up with



Mario (far right) with friends in Buenos Aires

the players sitting on the ground, exhausted, joking around, and sharing refreshments. My weekends are also filled with cultural outings. Most of my weekend

nights are spent with friends at places like Matienzo, which is a cultural organization that hosts an "Old Movies on the Terrace Night" (not an accurate translation).

(Mario, continued)

While I have yet to travel around Argentina, I have some plans for excursions in the very near future. Primarily, I am excited for the upcoming summer, when the Copa America, South America's foremost soccer tourney, comes to Argentina. Games are going to be held throughout the country, and the trash talking between my Argentinean friends at work and me (a Mexican) has already started!

Amongst all of these activities, three months of time has slipped by. It has been a hectic, sometimes frustrating, but always exciting experience thus far. My work, and all of my other activities, has introduced me to a culture and people that are extraordinarily unique, but somehow similar. And, as the sun sets on another beautiful day in Buenos Aires, I go to bed fully trusting that the sounds of the next bustling Argentinean day will greet me tomorrow.



**Mario at his office—hard at work!**

## Letter from the Director

Dear Friends of PiLA,

We are still deep in the placement process, working with a group of 40 Finalists, to secure about 24 Fellowships. We have recently acquired a new partner in Brazil, Saude Crianc, based in Rio and several new partners in Chile, including Fundacion Chile, El Consejo Ase-sor Empresarial de Puerto Montt, Fundacion Mineras Escondidas, and El Centro para el De-sarrollo Productivo, based in Patagonia (the first two) and Atacama (the latter two).

This month's newsletter offers the chance to read about two such fellows, Mario Moreno Zepeda and Veronica Bustabad, fellows at Human Rights Watch and Alternativas y Cap-cidades, respectively. The work at Convivencia Educativa and Libras de Amor is demand-ing and very hands-on and, as you will read, richly rewarding, as our fellows have the chance to give so much and to learn so much.

If you have not already donated, and you can see by our list of donors (p.6) that we are off to a solid start, I hope you will take this opportunity to do so: <http://www.princeton.edu/~pila/support/index.htm> We need your support now, more than ever. We would like to offer fellowships opportunities to as many of the qualified candidates that we can and thank you, in advance, for whatever you do to help us achieve this goal. Our fellows bring a lot to the organizations with which they work and enable them to accomplish more with their resources than they would otherwise be able.

Thank you for your support and your interest in PiLA.

Best regards,



Claire Brown '94  
Executive Director

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