The program outlined in this document is subject to change according to practical realities within Bolivia as well as the particular interests of participants. This flexibility allows the Bridge Year cohort to move at its own pace, to be responsive to personal and group interests, and to take advantage of the learning opportunities that result from unexpected events.
Novogratz Bridge Year Program in Bolivia

in partnership with Where There Be Dragons

Students in Bolivia engage in service assignments throughout Cochabamba, a city located in an agriculturally rich and politically vibrant region in the central valleys of the country. Known as being a land of extremes, with soaring snow-capped peaks descending at astonishing angles into lush tropical forests, Bolivia is an intriguing and dramatic place to explore. Cochabamba is situated in both the heart of Bolivia and the South American continent, perched between the eastern flank of the Andes and the tropical lowlands. It is a center of Quechua culture, one of Bolivia’s 36 ethnic groups. Cochabamba boasts a year-round temperate climate despite an altitude of 8,400 feet. The Novogratz Bridge Year Program is based in Tiquipaya, a semi-rural community tucked up against the mountains outside of Cochabamba. This backdrop provides program participants with an ideal venue from which to explore Bolivia’s rich cultural and ecological diversity, while engaging with important issues in development, Andean history, indigenous representation, and the nation’s unique political reality.

Arrival and Orientation

Upon arrival at El Alto Airport, the highest international airport in the world, students descend by private transport to the Yungas, a lush cloud-forest region north of La Paz. Here the group settles into an eco-lodge for a week of orientation, planning, getting to know each other as a group, and learning about safety and cultural norms in Bolivia. Inhabited predominately by Aymara and Afro-Bolivian coca-producing communities, the Yungas region offers a striking first glimpse of Bolivian geography and culture. In between orientation activities and workshops, students have the opportunity to explore local markets, hike to nearby waterfalls, and take in the stunning panoramic views.

Cultural and Service Learning

After completing orientation, Bridge Year participants engage in a two-week service learning and cultural immersion experience in the ethnically Aymara city of El Alto. El Alto, one of the fastest growing cities in South America, is a fascinating place to begin exploring the rich cultural, social, religious, and political complexities of Bolivia. Based in the Ciudad Satélite neighborhood, overlooking La Paz, students settle into homestays with families associated
with Teatro Trono, an arts-based organization and community center working with low-income youth and their families. One of the most socially organized cities in the Americas, El Alto provides an ideal vantage point for learning about indigenous representation and community activism in Bolivia. The Bridge Year partnership with Teatro Trono includes workshops with young artists and activists at the center, immersion into the local community, and exposure to the history and vibrant political mobilization of El Alto. Program participants also have the opportunity to explore the dramatic city of La Paz, meeting with local intellectuals and organizations while learning to navigate this fascinating urban landscape. Putting into practice the skills gained during orientation, this time is meant to integrate students into the local environment while exposing them to important themes in Bolivia’s socio-political panorama.

While in El Alto, participants also begin intensive Spanish-language classes with local teachers. This time concludes with a multi-day project in collaboration with El Centro Para el Desarrollo de la Mujer Campesina (CADEMCA), an organization that promotes livelihood and income-earning opportunities for Aymara in El Alto and surrounding rural communities. In the past, project areas have included the distribution of solar ovens, construction of greenhouses, access to clean drinking water, recycling programs, and artisan project development. Working with CADEMCA exposes volunteers to the unique challenges that women and their families face in rural Bolivia and introduces the ethics of service learning in a cross-cultural context. In conjunction, this period exposes students to the challenges and triumphs of life in the city with the largest indigenous population in the Americas, while immersing them in the Spanish language and Aymara culture.

**Arrival in Cochabamba**

Bridge Year students arrive in Cochabamba at the end of September and settle into Tiquipaya, the semi-rural community where the program is based. The group participates in a five-day orientation that aids participants in navigating a new landscape, learning about relevant socio-political issues in Cochabamba, and preparing for service placements. Site of the famous 2001 Water Revolt, in which civilian protests reversed the privatization of the city’s public water system, Cochabamba is Bolivia’s third-largest city and has a long history of social mobilization. Orientation provides students with a thorough introduction to both Cochabamba and Tiquipaya, including practical skills to help participants find their way around, integrate into the local culture, and succeed in service placements.
Homestay

Program participants live with families in and around Tiquipaya, a semi-rural community 30 minutes west of Cochabamba. The extended homestay provides a unique opportunity to deepen language skills, establish a relationship with a local family, and integrate more fully into the community. While most families are of Quechua descent, Spanish is the primary language spoken at home. Participants can expect modest but comfortable accommodations within easy access to public transportation. Most meals are prepared and eaten with the homestay family. The bonds developed between students and families often prove to be among the most memorable and meaningful aspects of the Bridge Year experience.

Language Instruction

From October to December, Bridge Year participants receive two to three hours of intensive Spanish language, five days a week, from our group of trusted and respected teachers. From December through March, language classes continue, but with less intensity and depending upon interest. Additionally, Quechua classes are offered for those interested, as it is the most common language of the majority indigenous population in Cochabamba. Classes and language mentoring are available to students for the full duration of the time in Cochabamba.

Language instruction is an important component of the program and begins with an intensity designed to assist participants in their service work and cultural immersion. It is also one of the most tangible and transferable skills developed on the program and they can expect to gain a very high level of proficiency during the program.
Community Service Placements

Participants spend three to five hours per day, five days per week, at their service placement. Travel to and from the service site depends on the assignment but can range from a 15-minute walk to an hour-long ride on public transport. Staff orient students to their respective assignments and provide continuous support throughout the program. Below is a list of host organizations in and around Cochabamba and potential participant service assignments. This list is not comprehensive but provides examples of the types of service assignments in which volunteers might be placed.

**Kusi Kuna Escuela Ecoactiva** is a small alternative school and learning community that has a holistic approach that aims to teach to the whole student. Kusikuna strives to nurture the growth of young people in ways that prepare them to face the challenges of our modern world, grounded in respect for themselves, others, and the natural world. The learning approach seeks to cultivate critical and creative thinking, active participation in the learning process, and respect for diversity. Kusikuna works with children and families from a diversity of backgrounds, and the school is situated on a small farm with sustainable, ecological structures in a rural area. Students are placed in age groups and the school promotes creative learning styles and freedom of expression. Volunteer opportunities depend on the volunteer’s interest and skill set but could include developing an arts or music program, leading after-school and athletic activities, supporting the agro-ecology program, a teaching assistantship in the natural sciences, curriculum development, community and family outreach, and programs in environmental awareness.

**Fundación EnseñArte/Performing Life** ([http://performinglifebolivia.org/](http://performinglifebolivia.org/)) is an arts-based NGO that works with children and adolescents who are working and/or living on the streets of Cochabamba. The organization provides skills training in the circus arts and other creative activities that boost income-earning opportunities for children and their families while ensuring school retention and safer livelihoods. In addition to arts workshops, EnseñArte provides after-school support with homework, a music program, meals for the kids, and a micro-credit program that supports integration into society, and other community development initiatives. Volunteer opportunities include support with arts and music workshops, facilitating tutoring and after-school programs, sound engineering and editing, computer literacy, English language training, outreach, micro-finance development, and documentation of the organization’s programs and activities.
Mano a Mano ([www.manoamano.org](http://www.manoamano.org)) works for the social development of some of Bolivia’s poorest communities through comprehensive projects in health, education, and infrastructure. Mano a Mano’s primary work is to build clinics, schools, and roads in rural areas and provide training for local professionals in health and education. The organization also provides medical supplies to clinics around the country, enhances access to clean water, and facilitates training in agro-ecology and environmental education. Volunteer opportunities include support with an agro-ecology project, environmental education, assistance with construction projects, support in mechanics and furniture workshops, and documentation and other administrative tasks.

Infante ([www.infante.com.bo](http://www.infante.com.bo)) is a social development institution working in the defense of the rights of women and children who are victims of violence. Using a multi-disciplinary approach, Infante provides psychological support and safe living spaces for women and children that have suffered domestic abuse or other forms of violence, income-generating skill development, alternative education, public policy initiatives, research, and awareness campaigns promoting principles of respect, dignity and equality. Infante recently opened a Montessori-inspired school at the day-care, pre-school and primary school levels promoting values of human rights, inclusion and mutual respect. Infante is seeking volunteers to develop an English-language program at the Montessori school.

mARTadero ([http://www.martadero.org/](http://www.martadero.org/)) is a multidisciplinary and alternative arts center whose principal focus is to promote social development through art and culture. mARTadero strives to foster growth and creativity by introducing concepts and activities that promote greater social consciousness. They work to cultivate critical and creative thinking and to assist young emerging artists by offering financial and institutional support. The project works with children, youth and families from a variety of backgrounds, neighborhoods and different social conditions and their activities include workshops, urban revitalization events, environmental awareness trainings, and advocacy of the local arts movement. Workshops include activities such as parkour, contemporary dance, theater, writing and graphic design and film for students. Volunteer opportunities depend upon volunteer skills and interests, but may include facilitating arts workshops, developing new training curriculum, assisting with community outreach efforts as well as event management and publicity and marketing.

La Fundación Abril ([www.fundacionabril.org](http://www.fundacionabril.org)) founded in 2002 in the wake of the Cochabamba water war, is a grassroots organization that strives to raise awareness of water rights in the city of Cochabamba. The Cochabamba water war is an historic milestone in Bolivia and globally, as it was the first time people were able to challenge a multinational water
corporation, and take back control of their water systems. The organization’s mission is to work collectively with communities to develop democratic, and alternative political processes in water management. They work from the foundation that water is a human right and a common good, not a commodity. Currently they are working closely with schools in impoverished areas of the city to build water catchment systems and school gardens. This project provides water and food to school children and the community of parents and teachers in general.

The Bolivian Institute for Human Development (IDH) ([www.idhbolivia.org](http://www.idhbolivia.org)) works to improve the quality of life of people, especially in rural areas, through research, education, and activism in the fields of public health, environment, and human rights. IDH is one of Bolivia’s leading organizations in research, prevention, and treatment of HIV/AIDS. The organization focuses on prevention of sexually transmitted infections, sex education, and diversity and human rights education especially supporting the LGBTQIA+ community. Volunteer opportunities include prevention education in local schools, workshops with teachers, organizing and participating in local public health festivals, advocacy work within the local healthcare system, designing educational and promotional materials, grant-writing, web design, and general administrative support.

**Program House**

Program participants have access to the Novogratz Bridge Year Program House, a centrally located building in Tiquipaya that serves as a meeting place and “home” to the Bridge Year group. Here, volunteers can find a place to relax, meet with on-site staff, cook or share meals, and host guest speakers and performances. The program house has a classroom, kitchen, library, lounge area, and an office with a laptop and internet access for volunteer use. This is where participants will take more of their language classes as well.

**Cultural Enrichment Activities**

The following activities are available to Bridge Year participants to add context to both their service work and their overall cultural experience in Bolivia.

**Guest Speakers:** Over the course of the program, guest lecturers and local experts are invited to discuss and present on diverse topics including Bolivia’s history, Andean spirituality,
agricultural ecology and food systems, land relationships, gender issues, the arts, environmental issues, and the nation’s current social and political transformation.

**Independent Enrichment Activities:** Bridge Year participants have the opportunity to engage in one-on-one mentorships in music, art, pottery, weaving, filmmaking, medicinal plants, carpentry, dance and many other subjects of interest. The activity may correspond to or directly enrich the service assignment or may simply serve to enhance understanding and appreciation of the Andes and Bolivian culture.

Examples of enrichment topics include: folkloric music and dance, traditional Andean wind instruments, Andean weaving, Bolivian cooking, film and photography, traditional medicine and healing plants, silver-working, Andean ritual and cosmo-vision, salsa lessons, theater and puppetry, agroecology and organic farming, graffiti and street art, and many more.

**Excursions:** Bridge Year participants also partake in at least two program-sponsored excursions outside of Cochabamba. Excursion destinations depend on many factors including weather, time constraints, student interest, and relevance to the overall program, but a number of different options are available. These include a trek in the Andes or lowlands, visits to Incan ruins, a rural village stay, a visit to the coca-producing Chapare region, a trip to the mines in Potosí and the colonial capital city of Sucre, a hike to Tunari National Park, and a trip to the Salar de Uyuni. To the greatest extent possible, ownership of the volunteer experience is given to the participant, empowering Bridge Year participants to work with on-site staff to research, plan, and manage the logistics for these group expeditions.

**Student-led Spring Excursion**

In early May program participants leave Cochabamba, traveling overland back to La Paz. Here, Bridge Year participants work as a group to plan, organize, and facilitate the excursion itinerary, with opportunities for rural homestays, service learning, meetings with local organizations, and a multi-day trek in the surrounding mountain ranges. The excursion introduces students to a unique culture and environment, altogether different from the months spent in Cochabamba. This experience invites students to broaden their perspectives on service learning, development topics, and environmental issues, as well as further explore Bolivia’s cultural, spiritual, and linguistic dynamism. With the support of on-site staff, students work together to plan and manage the excursion, further developing group communication skills and honing leadership abilities.
Program Wrap-up

During the final week of the program, participants travel to Lake Titicaca for a Transference workshop. Along the sparkling shores of the most sacred lake in the Andes, students will begin to close out their journey through Bolivia. Individually and as a group, participants identify, examine, and assimilate the lessons learned from their experience. They also have an opportunity to reflect on their return home, their goals for the future, and the ways in which they can best integrate their experience into daily life at Princeton and beyond.