



2008 EPS FELLOW

Sam Wurzelmann

HOMETOWN: Chapel Hill, NC

MAJOR/DEGREE:
International Studies
Minors in Public Policy and Sustainability
Class of 2010

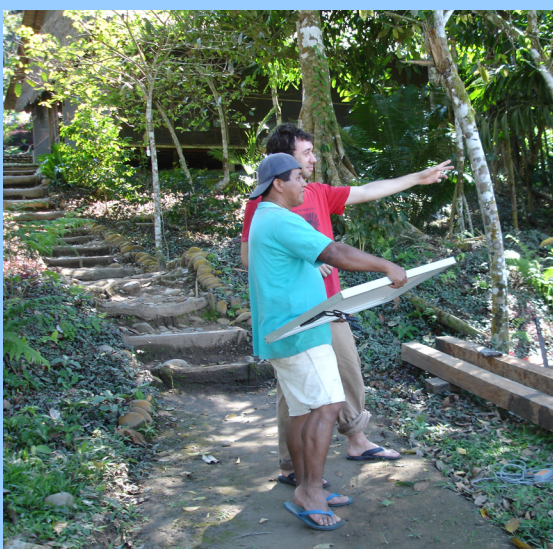
PROJECT TITLE:
Alternative Power to the People

FACULTY MENTOR:
Michael "Raúl" Brown
Department of Romance Languages
and Literatures

COMMUNITY PARTNER:
San Miguel del Bala Eco-lodge

PROJECT LOCATION:
San Miguel, Bolivia

" 'Todo es posible. Nada es seguro' or 'Anything is possible. Nothing is for sure' served as the lyrical background to my Bolivian ballad."



UNC ENTREPRENEURIAL PUBLIC SERVICE FELLOWSHIP (EPS)

Alternative Power to the People

I worked with the community of San Miguel, in the region of the indigenous Tacana Indians living along the Beni River in Bolivia.

More specifically, I helped address the needs of making their community-owned and operated eco-lodge 'San Miguel del Bala' more environmentally sustainable and marketable. This included installing solar panels so that the lodge could eliminate their gas-powered generator; translating for guides on tours; organizing the volunteer program by developing a volunteer guidebook; and installing a bio-sand filter in the lodge.

Project Goals

1. Install a bio-sand filter so that the lodge would not have to rely on bottled water.
2. Create an English-Spanish guidebook for guides to improve their English.
3. Complete the installation of solar power systems.

San Miguel, Bolivia, is unique because it is one of just a few impoverished communities that owns a legitimate business endeavor. The residents repeatedly told me how special and unusual this opportunity is. Few community members are involved with the lodge, but all appreciate what it has done for their community. Some residents recognize the plight of their standard of living in comparison to richer parts of Bolivia and the world, but this was almost always attributed to politics and never to the lodge.

One major roadblock I faced in Bolivia was finding people I could depend on. This limited the speed of my projects to a modest pace. 'Todo es posible. Nada es seguro' or 'Anything is possible. Nothing is for sure' served as the lyrical background to my Bolivian ballad. Anyone could say this, and when it was said, much hope was lost that anything would get done. In retrospect, it is hard to believe I was able to overcome this perception, but eventually I learned who was dependable. Essentially, I had to choose carefully with whom I would work, without hurting feelings.

What most impressed me about San Miguel are the three brothers Alfredo, Constantino and Fernando Nay. Alfredo is the mayor of San Miguel, Constantino is the general manager of the San Miguel del Bala Eco-lodge, and Fernando is site administrator, or the manager always on site at the lodge. As stated to me by a San Migueño, "San Miguel would be just a herd of cattle if it were not for the Nay brothers." The brothers had come up with the idea of an eco-lodge and had spearheaded writing the project proposals to Conservation Inter-



national, CARE, and the United Nations Development Program. As I would learn, they were also the most accountable and trustworthy people within the San Miguel community. I spent the majority of my time with Constantino, and I can say with confidence that he is one of those special people who simply inspires by living his daily life.

My experience working in Bolivia was one of the most empowering and beautifully chaotic struggles that I have ever undertaken. Those helping me along the way, from Chapel Hill to La Paz to the San Migueños themselves, served as the inspiration that allowed me to maintain good spirits and complete what I set out to do.



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