

*Newsletter
Winter 2007*

*Panamá
Global
Connections*



Greetings

Welcome to PGC. This is the first of our quarterly newsletters. Each quarter we will focus on different events and people. We will try to include information that is helpful to educators planning trips with us, as well as short pieces written by participants. The medical focus of parts of this issue came from the physician assistant education conference we attended in October. We welcome your suggestions for future topics.

Meet our Staff in the United States

Donna DeGracia, Education Coordinator

Donna grew up in South Korea. After returning to the United States she earned a degree in International Studies from Ohio State University. The Peace Corps led her to a new calling and she went back to school earning a Physician Assistant Certificate from Wake Forrester University, and later a masters degree from the University of Nebraska. Her careers in medicine and education together have spanned over 30 years. Donna has taught students of all ages from nursery school through the graduate level. She has taught in Korea, Panama, and the United States. She has spent the last ten years in Physician Assistant Education while simultaneously continuing her clinical practice. Donna has developed courses for graduate students in Nicaragua and Guatemala combining her love for teaching with her commitment to global issues.



Sumaya McDonald, Program Coordinator

Sumaya was born and raised in Panamá city. Her hard work in high school paid off with a scholarship to attend college in the United States. She earned a degree in Electronics from Kentucky State University before returning to Panamá where she worked for the Panamá Canal Authority. Back in the United States she has worked in Real Estate, but her real passion is languages. She has ten years experience teaching language courses customized to her students' needs as well as interpreting and translating in both the United States and Panama. Sumaya maintains extensive contacts in Panamá and has an amazing ability to network and identify resources. Sumaya's attention to detail and endless energy makes her the ideal person to coordinate great education experiences.



Christmas in Panamá

By Sumaya McDonald Wilson

Besides the fact that we have no snow, there are other differences between Christmas in Panamá and in the United States. Christmas in Panamá is very family oriented and revolves around a succulent feast that is fun for the whole community. Christmas starts early in Panamá because Mother's Day is on December 8th. It is the start of the holiday season. From then on people start decorating for Christmas, bringing out the lights, tree, decorations, and of course the Nativity. The neighborhood Christian groups walk around singing Christmas Carols and go to those houses that display Nativity scenes.

On the 24th of December, Christmas Eve, basically everybody gets involved in getting everything ready for that night. People start planning, setting up schedules and responsibilities. In my family the day starts at around 5am or even earlier. My mom and aunts get ready to go to the Seafood Market, while my cousins and I go to the grocery store to get the famous Rosca de Huevo - "Egg Wreath", some tamales, grapes, nuts, and much more. Some of the guys are responsible for getting the fireworks ready; making sure everything is in place for midnight.

Once everyone is back, the action starts. One person peels the Jamaica flowers to make the drinks; another peels the potatoes for the salad. Another is rinsing the rice, pigeon peas, seafood, etc. My mother marinates the turkey and ham, while my aunt is mixing the ingredients for her famous cake. My uncle makes sure that the patio is cleaned and my grandmother is making sure all of her grandkids are coming for the night.

Once food is ready, it is placed on the table and everybody starts to get ready for the night. At around 10 pm, some of the neighborhood kids start to play outside; the youth start the fireworks, leaving the best for last, Midnight!!!

When midnight arrives, the show starts; everybody gets to enjoy the magnificent display of lights. The sky lights up, full of colors and sounds. All the neighbors start coming to our house to congratulate us and of course to taste our delicious food. It is our custom to share our food! While the party continues in the neighborhood and all the young guys and gals gather outside on the streets to talk, drink, and dance until the next morning, some people go to other relatives to exchange presents and spend the night with their family.

I hope you would like to spend a Christmas in Panama with us!

PGC at the PAEA

Conference

On October 25, 2007, Panamá Global Connections U.S. staff attended the Physician Assistant Education Association annual conference to spread the word about our educational opportunities. There was quite a bit of interest, particularly in the areas of tropical medicine and medical rotations.

As the population of the United States becomes more and more



diverse, medical providers are finding it necessary to understand both other cultures and diseases not endemic to the United States. Tropical diseases are becoming more common among immigrants as well as among U.S. citizens who travel globally. Panamá has the largest tropical medicine research center in Latin America and is able to provide students with an unequalled learning opportunity.

The value of global experience as it contributes to cultural sensitivity is well recognized. Panamá Global Connections has a very systematic approach to teaching cultural sensitivity. Through careful preparation, exposure to cultural experiences, and structured reflection sessions PGC incorporates cultural training into every course. Nothing is left to chance. Whether the student is part of a course, or taking an elective medical rotation, cultural training is written into the plan.

Clinical Rotations

The international elective requires extensive preparation by the student and a high level of responsibility for self-directed learning in an unfamiliar environment. It provides a profound and life-changing experience that is not easily measured. The effects of this experience will continue for many years to come.

While a clinical elective in another country may be attractive, it requires extensive preparation by both the student and the site. PGC takes selection and preparation of clinical rotations very seriously. Whether students come from medical schools, physician assistant programs, nursing programs, or other health professions, clinical site requirements for international rotations or internships must be the same as for sites in the home country. PGC will work with institutions to ensure the quality of the international experience. However, the home institution and the individual student also need to be involved in the preparation. It is the responsibility of every program to ensure that clinical sites and preceptors are meeting student learning needs and program expectations. PGC is the vehicle for communication and planning.

Eligibility standards for students

- Must be in good academic and professional standing
- Must have endorsement of home institution
- Must have conversational level Spanish proficiency

This table outlines a recommended timetable and the responsibilities of PGC, the home institution, and the student:

<i>Timetable</i>	<i>PGC</i>	<i>Home Institution</i>	<i>Student/s</i>
1 year before	Begin preceptor/site selection process Supply rotation guidelines	Begin communication with PGC to ensure proper preceptor/site selection	Meet with academic and/or clinical advisors to begin planning elective rotation Begin language study
6 months before	Begin preceptor training Begin planning specific trip logistics	Supply PGC with student objectives	Begin study of conditions typical at training site. Begin planning trip logistics with PGC Apply for passport
3 months before	Send out trip packet including specific information on the site and itinerary, orientation materials, etc.	Continue communication with PGC	Visit travel clinic Arrange travel insurance Review orientation materials Continue communication with PGC

1 month before	Finalize living arrangements and site/preceptor specifics	Meet with student/s to finalize trip details and plans for communication and assignments while on site	Meet with advisor Begin packing Continue communication with PGC
1 week before	Confirm travel schedule with student/s Answer last-minute questions from students and sites. On site preceptor and staff training	Meet with student/s to make sure that everything is in order. Continue communication with PGC	Finish packing Continue communication with PGC
Upon arrival	Meet student/s at airport Notify home institution of student/s safe arrival		
Week one	Provide orientation Transport student/s to site and make introductions to preceptor/s and staff	Maintain communication with student/s and with PGC	Communicate with home institution and/or advisor Begin working on rotation objectives
Throughout rotation	Maintain communication with site, student/s, and home institution Trouble-shoot where needed Provide necessary resources for student/s Conduct periodic site visits Insure the availability of cultural experiences	Maintain communication with student/s and with PGC	Fulfill rotation objectives Participate in cultural opportunities Maintain communication with PGC and home institution
After return home	Provide opportunity for reflection	Help students with readjustment Provide a venue for student/s to share their experience with others	Prepare and present a talk on their experience to an appropriate audience. Provide feed-back to home institution and PGC

Rotation Guidelines

These are criteria that you will want to discuss with your PGC representative to make sure the site meets specific program expectations.

1. Location of site
2. Whether or not the site serves underserved populations
3. Preceptor experience with student training and other preceptor qualification
4. Patient demographics
5. Weekly patient volume
6. Typical weekly schedule for the student(s)
7. Additional duties/assignments
8. Housing arrangements
9. Arrangements for meals
10. Personal safety issues
11. Evening and weekend responsibilities
12. Level of supervision
13. Number of preceptors involved in training
14. Level of interaction with other staff
15. Involvement of the site with other health professional training
16. Cultural learning opportunities outside of the clinical setting
17. Level of PGC involvement while student is on site

Participants in Previous Programs Led by Donna DeGracia



Jodi Metz

Spending time abroad during my education is one of the most rewarding experiences I have had in my life. We live in a global economy and the borders between countries and individual cultures are blurring. The knowledge I have acquired and the experiences I have enjoyed while studying abroad have taught me lessons that I have used in my career, in communication with others, and in understanding the role my own culture plays in the world and at home. My experiences have opened many doors for me. Experiencing first hand the variations among people, families, economies and governments in other parts

of the world is, I believe, an essential component to a complete education. It has been the opportunity of a lifetime and an experience I will carry with me forever

Megan Rose

Global education programs are an enlightening experience. In the past seven years I have been to Mexican orphanages, nursing homes in Spain, habit for humanity sites within the United States and a hospital in Nicaragua. With each experience I felt that living in a different culture challenged my perceptions of the world and made me more aware of the similarities and differences between cultures. I would always have expectations of a place prior to traveling and realize that as soon as you get off the plane those expectations would be trumped by reality. For me, the best global experiences occurred when I truly immersed myself in the culture and participated in the new customs, holidays, art, food, music and politics. Often global experiences have the intension of changing other people's lives and but you will come to realize that the person's life that was the changed the most is quite possibly your own.



Heather Bidinger

After experiencing international travel as an educator and course leader, my belief in the importance of providing such opportunities for students changed. I had viewed the chance to study curriculum abroad as an added privilege to a student's education. I now see it as an integral component in one's career path or vocational calling. After having this experience, I understand the term, transformative learning, to be something other than an academic buzzword. I've seen first hand, how international travel through structured curriculum (especially to a third world country), provides the opportunities and framework

for one to reflect on values and challenge pre-conceived perceptions; it also allows for a broader point of reference, which might not otherwise be possible.