The Thiel College Nicaraguan Experience: Spring Break 2014 Service Trip

by Sean Oros and Dr. David Buck, History Department Chair

During spring break, Dr. David Buck, associate professor of history and department chair, led a group of ten Thiel College students on a service trip to Nicaragua. Amanda Bauer, Elliot Beach, Keesey Criswell, Jenna Ehrlich, Suelen Gutierrez, Dan McFetridge, Sean Oros, Tom Pulice, Keith Stover, and Brittney Sudnick. Working with Compas de Nicaragua, a non-profit organization based in New Hampshire, the Thiel College party learned a great deal about Nicaraguan culture and, by comparison, the affluence that Americans enjoy. The most important lesson, perhaps, lies in the phrase that Dr. Buck used repeatedly; through the comparisons in culture, we learned that, after all, “it’s all relative.”

One service project was shadowing a “Women in Action” family for the day. Women in Action is a cooperative group of about 40 women who are organizing health, education and income generating programs in the La Primavera settlement in Managua. Dietrich Honors Institute student Sean Oros spent the day with Leslie, Marvin, her husband, three daughters and son. Their house was a tin-walled house comprised of a series of protective plastic containers on either end. A 50/50 mixture of water and manure ran through it from one side to the other, releasing methane on the way and collecting it in the central bag. A pipe channels the methane to the house, and the refuse that exists the far end forms a potent fertilizer used for fields and gardens alike. As a result, at each stage the manure is put to use, maximizing efficiency. The students helped construct the casing in New Hampshire, the Thiel College party learned a great deal about Nicaraguan culture and, by comparison, the affluence that Americans enjoy. The most important lesson, perhaps, lies in the phrase that Dr. Buck used repeatedly; through the comparisons in culture, we learned that, after all, “it’s all relative.”

In addition to a variety of service projects, the students took time for tourism adventures taking advantage of a zip lining excursion over a volcanic crater lake in downtown Managua. During a ‘break’ day, swimming and hiking around Laguna de Apoyo, a volcanic crater lake between Managua and Granada, were a treat. Another excursion took the group up the slopes of Volcan Masaya, an active volcano, the crater of which emitted so much smoke and gas that inside was indiscernible. Hiking up the side one of the dormant craters, rising high over the landscape, we could see a number of the local cities and lakes. It was a phenomenal view, especially for those who pushed ahead and climbed up to the highest ridge.

Overall, our group will never regret having taken this adventure or having attempted to experience as much as possible while on it. We made friends and experienced in Nicaragua that we will carry with us for the rest of our lives. Altogether, the spring break trip was a marvelous success. There were many tears from students and host families alike when we parted ways, but the memories created between us will persist, despite the geography that divides Thiel College and Nicaragua.

For more information about Compas de Nicaragua please visit: www.compas1.org/home.html.

If you are interested in joining or supporting a future service trip to Nicaragua, please contact Dr. David Buck: dbuck@thiel.edu.