

Erin Hennessy

Major: Sociology

Minor: Hispanic Studies and International Studies

Through the Eyes of Service: Social Justice in Chile (Summer 2016)

Why did you choose this program?

The class focused on the political economy and theories behind it in the specific setting of Chile following the Pinochet regime. I didn't know anything about the Pinochet regime, so that was an academic interest of mine, but I also love traveling, and I'm a double minor in Hispanic Studies and International Studies. This course was a good unification of all of my academic interests, with the focus on social justice and how Chile dealt with human rights atrocities and the rebuilding process. Another thing that drew me to the course was the homestay. I think it gives you a whole new perspective on the culture from the inside, from people who know and live it in their daily lives. The volunteering at the local homeless shelter also really grounded my experience in the people of Chile and provided that insider perspective.

Tell me more about your experience with the homestay.

The couple I lived with could not have been nicer. They host students fairly often, so they were used to being a guide and helping students with their language skills. It was great for my Spanish. They spoke slowly, repeated things, explained things in different ways, and as time went on I felt myself getting more and more comfortable, which I loved. All of the other students in the class also had great experiences, but it was cool to see how different they were. Some students had a bunch of siblings, some were in houses or apartments, and it was interesting to learn about varied experiences.

What was the most memorable part of the program?

The field trips in general were amazing. They all coincided with different lessons from the course and gave you the real world perspective. The most impactful one was a private tour of a housing compound that during the regime was turned into a torture camp, and the man giving the tour was someone who had been imprisoned at the camp, so it was very emotional. All of the outings we went on had that ability to show the personal, lived experience of the dictatorial regime.

What advice do you have for students who are considering the program but have some hesitations? What kinds of students would you recommend go on this program?

Santiago is a very manageable city: the metro is very easy to navigate, you can find people who speak English, and you have the support of the other BC students in the group. It is also great to have the opportunity to explore the surrounding area. I went skiing in the Andes and spent the weekend in San Pedro de Atacama. There are two students from the host university that serve as guides to the city, and they really ended up becoming our friends throughout the trip.

But I would also say that one of the good things about this trip is going out of your comfort zone. It definitely made me a more well-rounded person that has a greater awareness of the world and people around me, and this wouldn't have been possible without being in the city and talking to the people.

How did your participation in this program influence the remainder of your time at BC or your post-graduation plans?

The program definitely reinforced my interest in social justice and international studies. It also inspired me to take a course back on campus called "Restoration and Resistance," which is all about rebuilding after atrocities. Since participating in the program in Chile and taking that course back on campus, I've been thinking about pursuing a career in social justice. This summer I'll be working with immigrants and refugees, and my time in Chile enabled me to feel much more comfortable interacting and speaking with people in those difficult situations, even if we don't share a common language. I know that I will be working with vulnerable, underserved populations in the future, which was heavily influenced by my time in Chile.