

## BC Alum Reflects on His Experience as an English Teacher in Paraguay



The thing I remember most about my freshman orientation in 2007 was a certain Jesuit passionately enlightening me about the importance of “setting the world aflame.” At the time I can’t say that I knew a great deal about the Jesuit order, or the history of St. Ignatius for that matter. His words to me seemed a bit cliché, something meant to inspire incoming Boston College students to be all they could be while impacting those around them with grace. It was not until I came to Paraguay to teach English at a school for severely underprivileged kids that I truly came to grasp the necessity of “setting the world aflame.”

I was pretty involved in the BC community during my time at the Heights. I majored in History with a minor in Philosophy, played rugby for a couple of years, and even obtained my Massachusetts Real Estate license and leased off-campus houses to BC students. As Commencement neared though, I, like most of my fellow classmates, was unsure of what the future had in store for me.

As my senior year was winding down, I couldn’t bring myself to seriously consider jumping right into permanent employment after my graduation. I was tired from being a student for the past 15 years of my life, and I wanted to take my

education and put it to use in *the real world*, somewhere outside the confines of a classroom. I had this yearning in my heart to do something different, something unconventional. I just didn't know what.

Then one day my roommate, Eric Carroll '11, approached me with the idea of moving to Paraguay to teach English. His brother, Jared Carroll '06, was currently the director at the school there, and Eric would be taking over his directorial duties once he finished. I would be the school's English teacher. Without thinking twice I replied, "Are you crazy? I don't even speak Spanish! Thanks, but no thanks."

In retrospect, I see my initial dismissal of Eric's offer as the voice inside all of us that tries to limit us from doing something great or outside of our comfort zone—the one that whispers to you that you aren't strong enough to take on the obvious challenges that would come with accepting such an imposing opportunity.

In the ensuing days after my brief conversation with Eric, the thought of moving to Paraguay kept eating at me. The more I considered the offer, the more I realized just how invaluable of an opportunity this was. I had lived a life full of comfort and privilege, and this seemed like the best chance to throw myself into a completely foreign environment, away from my family and friends, and to find out if I had the strength to persevere and thrive on my own.

I arrived in Tobati, Paraguay in September 2011, and immediately began teaching English at El Instituto Cultural Reinaldo Macchi (ICRM), a high school funded by "Team Tobati," a 501(c)3 non-profit organization. The school's mission is to educate the smartest and most economically disadvantaged children in the area. Each student receives a full academic scholarship to study, three meals a day, and

full health care. The ICRM is funded completely by private donations and by an annual community service trip run through Kingswood Oxford, a college prep-school in Hartford, CT.

Adjusting to life in Tobati was very difficult at first. I was unable to communicate with anyone given my nonexistent background in Spanish (I had studied eight years of Latin between high school and BC). The bucolic setting of Tobati was a stark contrast from the fast-paced, comfortable university life I was used to in Boston. I was 6,000 miles away from everything that had been familiar to me, and I didn't have many friends or family to help me through this transition—but that's what I had signed up for.

I soon became inspired by my work with the students at school. Their determination had a profound impact on me. Whereas my biggest concern was not understanding Spanish, the students didn't even know if they would have food on the table at dinner time. The kids' ability to persevere in the academically rigorous atmosphere at the ICRM, while living in dire poverty, inspired me to improve in every facet of my life. I began studying Spanish for hours on end, refusing to be embarrassed if I made a mistake.

A few months in, a student of mine by the name of Joel Unzain approached me and expressed his dream of one day studying at a university in the United States. I began working with Joel two hours every day after school for about eight months in order to help him prepare for the application process. We covered TOEFL/SAT I & II prep, and I assisted him with the completion of his college applications. Joel's drive and passion humbled me. Here was a kid who came from a modest home, with

a family income north of just \$500/month, yet his perseverance exceeded that of anyone whom I had ever met in my life. This past year, Joel received a full financial aid grant to study at six universities in the U.S., including Trinity College (CT), Amherst College, and the University of Pennsylvania. Joel chose to study at Penn, and is currently in the midst of his first semester there.

Joel's admission to these schools represented one of the happiest times of my life. He'd been rewarded tremendous fruits for his labor, and I had finally felt a sense of belonging. I obtained a profound sense of purpose in Tobati, and I realized that everyone in this world has the capability to do something great in life as long as they have the proper resources. The slogan for Team Tobati adequately embodies this sentiment—"Todo es Posible," which translates to "Everything is possible."

As my time in Tobati comes to an end this December, I am looking ahead to what my next step will be. I have been humbled to the core by the experiences of these past two years of my life in South America, and I'm trying to figure out a way to continue supporting the cause while residing in California.

I'm currently planning a cross-country bicycle trip, with the current Director of the ICRM, which will help raise money for various projects, including replacing old chairs and desks, upgrading the computer lab, and starting a post-graduation fund for our students who need financial assistance to attend university. In January, we will embark along the Southern Tier from St. Augustine, Florida to San Diego, California. Our goal is to complete the trip in less than 50 days, and to raise at least \$20,000.

Only God knows what the next step after the bike trip will be. I have an interest in applying to the U.S. Department of State, working in Real Estate, or pursuing any work where I can utilize my passion for Spanish or writing. I have learned to adapt to whatever life throws at me, and to make sure that I am ready to pounce on an opportunity when it presents itself. All I can do is to make sure that I live life passionately, the way my students in Tobati taught me to do.



Taylor and Eric at Machu Picchu



Taylor and students on a field trip



Taylor and Joel



Taylor with a group his students



Taylor and his co-workers with the U.S. Ambassador of Paraguay, James H. Thessin



Taylor with a group of U.S. students who came to Tobati on a service learning trip