

Studying abroad at the Universidad San Francisco de Quito (USFQ) through the Boston College in Ecuador program was an incredibly formative opportunity. This experience served as the starting point for my passion for public and global health medicine. I had the opportunity to work with Dr. Iván Palacios of the Facultad de Ciencias de Salud and Department of Global Health at USFQ to research adolescents' knowledge of sexual health and practices. We investigated potentially useful interventions for sexual health education. Working with two schools and over 200 youths, we partnered with USFQ medical students who helped with data collection and obtaining consents of potential subjects. Through our research, I learned the importance of community partnerships in healthcare delivery, listening to the needs of populations from their perspectives, and actualizing interventions based on research findings so that participants and their communities can have access to better health care. With the help of Dr. Melissa Sutherland of the BC William F. Connell School of Nursing, we published our findings in the journal *Annals of Global Health*, formalizing the research report in an International, inter-institutional research publication.

This partnership has benefited both the Ecuadorean youth from the communities we worked with and other BC students who wish to conduct health research in Ecuador. Most importantly, Dr. Palacios used our findings to implement sexual health presentations by USFQ medical students at local schools. The goal of this program is to increase access to accurate health information for these youths. This is especially important as sexual health has been subject to cultural taboos and often ignored in the curriculum. Through his Community Engagement Program, Programa de Salud Integral, Dr. Palacios continues to mentor students doing important work with Ecuadorean youth, the elderly, and persons with disabilities in these vulnerable communities.

The mentors I was able to work with, Drs. Palacios and Sutherland, alongside Dr. Rocío Bastidas, the Resident Director for BC in Ecuador Program, helped to make this research project possible and my study abroad experience in Ecuador some of the most exciting and formative months of my life. I am so grateful for their guidance and friendship over the years. It is my hope that this partnership between BC and USFQ can continue to expand and become available to even more students at USFQ and BC and that the health care needs of these populations continue to receive the attention they deserve.