

Objective: To assess the structure and services existing in the community of Santa Cruz in order to generate sustainable models for future collaboration with the University of Virginia.

The University of Virginia, through an interdisciplinary effort led by Dr. David Burt, has participated in past efforts to collaborate with communities in Guatemala. Through these past experiences, it was discovered that prior to engaging foreign communities in long-term partnerships, it is necessary to understand the infrastructure of these towns. With students from the Engineering School already undergoing a water filter installation in the community of Tzununa and looking to expand their project to Santa Cruz La Laguna, we found it imperative to first assess Santa Cruz, its needs, and its assets.

Research Experience:

We worked with two nursing students (forming the Evaluation team) to complete assessment over the course of five weeks. Interviews were conducted with residents from all levels of the community: housewives, *trabajadores*, entrepreneurs, educators, government officials, healthcare providers, and NGO workers. We took notes during the interviews and transcribed our notes at the end of the day while discussing the newly collected data and comparing our interpretations. Because the majority of residents in Santa Cruz speak Kaqchikel, when necessary we would utilize the services of a translator. She also served as our community liaison, introducing us to community leaders and explaining details of residents' daily lives.

Outcome:

From our interviews, the Evaluation team was able to compile a list of recommendations for further collaborations with Santa Cruz, as well as a list of organizations and individuals who are already working in Santa Cruz through which we believe partnerships will be more successful. Most of our recommendations can be divided into the fields of health, education, and economy. While we feel that our proposal reflects the interests of Santa Cruz's residents, we were not able to follow the traditional model of a community-based assessment. We attribute this to the social structure in Santa Cruz, which appeared to center around the individual and his or her family, rather than around the community as a whole. However, the pertinent needs of Santa Cruz presented to us by community leaders, government officials, and foreign aid providers corroborated with the information we received from the residents themselves.

Personal Reflection:

We are extremely grateful for the opportunity afforded us by the Center for Global Health. We've returned to the US with a much more comprehensive understanding of Guatemalan culture, in particular that of Santa Cruz, which has enabled us to communicate more comfortably with people from all different backgrounds in a clinical setting. Being able to collaborate with students from other schools taught us how to effectively integrate multiple, interdisciplinary points of view for the benefit of a community. Not to mention that our Spanish has improved immensely, which should prove to be an asset for our future patients.