

My father and his forefathers once walked freely through the thick tropical forests of Puerto Rico on quests for precious fruits, vegetables, and roots. On visits to my Grandfather's mostly unfarmed land in Cabo Rojo, Puerto Rico, I would follow behind my aging father, machete in hand, as he tore through vines and scared off an occasional predator through our humble "nature reserve" of vast tropical plants and rolling hills. I imagined him as a young boy and all the adventures he could have gotten into—sure of himself as guest of Mother Nature and as a child of his Taino ancestors that once ate from the same *canepa* tree. Back in the *pueblo* or at the local food market, it is clear that the tropical diversity of this un-touched town is fully capable of serving its inhabitants throughout generations from the Tainos to the *mezcla* (mixed races) of Puerto Ricans nowadays.

Be it my ancestry of tropical explorers or the gifts of heart touching experiences that I have had in my life, I am prepared to appreciate living and studying amongst the natural inhabitants (be it the people or the brightly colored insects) of the Costa Rican land. I was fortunate enough to visit my own family in Puerto Rico and other Caribbean islands many times while growing up. Traveling extensively in areas where humankind and Mother Nature are still so connected has opened my eyes to the widely forgotten wisdom of our Western ancestors: "When a **man** moves away from **nature** his heart becomes hard,"- Lakota Proverb. His body also becomes weak and his life unbalanced.

It is because of this reason that I have dedicated my life to fighting for global health in a manner that fully acknowledges natural medicine and reveres Planet Earth. I recognize how important human environmental interaction is in understanding the causes and prevention of environmentally induced health risks. I have been struck in awe from

meeting people who have controlled and fought off serious health problems through natural remedies that grew in their own back yard. Inspired by personal accounts of such human environmental interaction, I seek to conduct an independent research project that will allow me to investigate an ecosystem of critical importance to the people of Costa Rica. I am searching for a broadened perspective on the natural nourishment that Costa Ricans depend on for a viable life.

Spending a semester at the biological field school in Monteverde, Costa Rica will boost my present academic and future career goals to become a medical scientist with a focus on global health concerns. Even more, I am considering focusing my global health efforts on Latin America, yet I recognize my lack of cultural connection to Central America. I would take pleasure in getting to know the local people on a personal basis. Through these relationships, I can further my understanding of their tropical environment and its importance to them.

Unfortunately, financial need is a limitation that may prohibit me from studying abroad in Costa Rica and understanding its natural world of knowledge. I am an underrepresented Hispanic-American and independent student who attends college solely on financial need and merit based scholarships, grants, and loans. I am also responsible for my ill older sister and her son, whom I support while attending school. I am not capable of taking out large amounts of loans as my family is already in medical debt and my educational goals of attending graduate school will be financially constraining.

I am applying to John E. Bowman Travel Grants, Robert B. Bailey Scholarship, CIEE-International Study Program Scholarships, and Jennifer Ritzmann Scholarship for Studies in Tropical Biology. I am excited about studying abroad with CIEE in Costa Rica

next semester and I hope to be able to overcome any possible obstacles with your generous help. Thank you for your consideration.