

Project Description

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I am excited to serve as a Program Coordinator for The Arajuno Road Project in Puyo, Ecuador, beginning in February 2014. The Arajuno Road Project works to provide educational opportunities to ten small schools between the town of Puyo and the rural community of Arajuno, just outside of the Yasuní National Park in the Amazon Rainforest. I will be serving in the English Teaching arm of this organization to provide language instruction to children in these schools. While English language education is a given in Ecuador's cities like Quito, Guayaquil, and Cuenca, it is far more expensive and rare in rural schools with few resources, such as those in Arajuno. Learning English gives students in rural Ecuador a better chance at joining the workforce and competing in the global economy as it prepares them in the language most commonly spoken in business, technology, tourism, and other fields. Aside from the economic benefits of learning English, learning a second language opens students up to new perspectives and cultures. This understanding leads to a greater ability to empathize with others and see the world as another might. In recent semesters, the Arajuno Road Project has incorporated skype conversations and letter writing exchanges between the students in the Arajuno Road schools and English-speaking classrooms in other countries to practice language skills and encourage relationship-building among cultures. In some of the schools that the Project works with, there is just one teacher for all seven grades in the primary school. While these teachers are creative and committed, the schools do not have the resources to effectively teach English without the help of an outside organization like the Arajuno Road Project.

One of the things that drew me to this position is that my work will not only include teaching English to Ecuadorian children, but also supporting other young adults from the United States, Europe, and elsewhere adjust to life in Puyo as they volunteer through the Project. This program is a learning experience for the English teacher volunteers as much as the students. I am excited to learn how volunteering as an English teacher in a small community engages them differently than the typical semester abroad.

In addition, this position will require lesson planning on a weekly basis, liaising with local school directors, and monitoring and recording class progress. In the classroom, I will be responsible for assisting English teacher volunteers in executing the lesson plans and translating between them and the Spanish-speaking students. Towards the end of my time in Puyo, I will be responsible for updating the Coordinator manual for those who take the position in later semesters. The Arajuno Road Project language program is unique in that it involves the local school directors to ensure that the English instruction complements the standard curriculum, but also incorporates principles of interactive learning, which inspires creativity and practices problem solving skills. Outside of English classes, the Project becomes involved in the community through conservation projects like school gardens and summer camps for children.