Dear Class of '55,

I would like to thank you for your financial support with my semester abroad in Costa Rica. I have always considered the opportunity to study in a foreign country an integral component and high priority of my college education. After returning from Costa Rica, however, I realized that the impact of this experience is one much deeper than purely educational.

I studied with the ACM Tropical Field Research Program, which is unique in that it provides the opportunity for students to design their own research projects and then follow through with that research independently for two of the four months in Costa Rica. My project focused on anthropological research in the small village of San Vicente de Nicoya, Guanacaste, where the majority of the community participates in the tradition of making ceramics from all natural materials found in the area. About one year ago the community opened an ecomuseum called the Ecomuseo de la Cerámica Chorotega to preserve the cultural and natural resources of the area and to provide economic support for the artisans by facilitating the direct sale of ceramics. Due to the ecomuseum’s early stage in the community, my research focused on a holistic analysis of the functions of the ecomuseum through interviews and observations of the various groups involved with the museum such as, artisans, members from the National Museum of Costa Rica, and tourists. From this analysis I was then able to reach conclusions on the future needs of the ecomuseum to ensure its success and the satisfaction of all groups supporting the ecomuseum. In addition to anthropology field experience, my time in Costa Rica greatly improved my Spanish speaking abilities—a tool that I will appreciate for the rest of my life.

While my research experience will undoubtedly aid my future educational endeavors, the connections with the people and the opportunity to understand more about another culture is of the most value to me. Thank you for supporting this wonderful opportunity. Your contribution not only supported my four months in a foreign country, but skills that will help me in graduate school, opportunities for future research, the ability to speak a second language, and live-time relationships with Costa Rican friends and host families. I hope that your generosity will continue to provide opportunities like mine to future Cornell students.

Thank you,

Dani Merriman