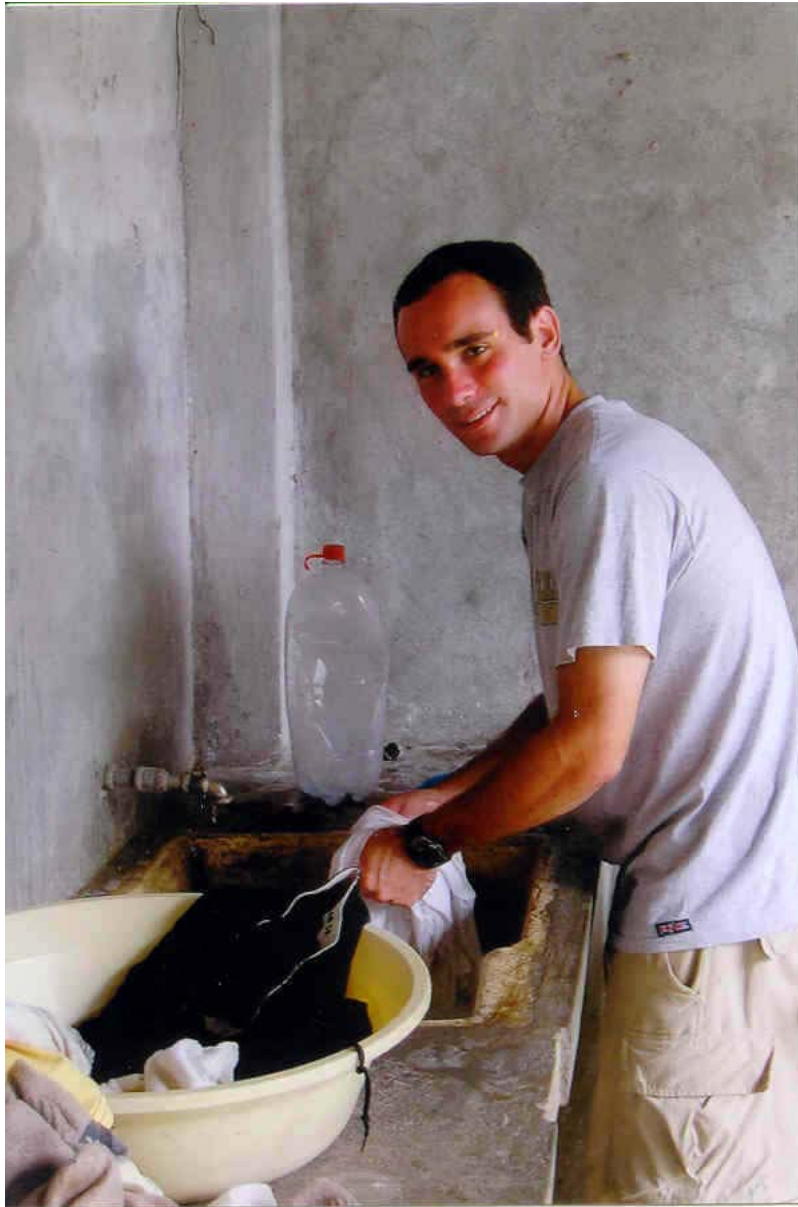


Rob Hirten, '05

Colimes, Ecuador

Overall my trip to Ecuador was an amazing experience that enabled John and me to see how people outside of the United States live. The poverty levels are absolutely astonishing. What was even more amazing was how incredibly happy these people were despite their financial situation. They were happy with life and made the best of what they were given. Although I had been to poor areas in the United States, nothing compared to what I saw in Ecuador. This was the first time that I had been to an area like this outside the United States. The average salary was only 4 or 5 dollars a day.



Washing my clothes by hand, which John & I did every day or so. It took us about one and a half hours each to wash our clothes.

As soon as we arrived at the village that we were staying in, the differences between our two countries became apparent. Some people didn't have any shoes and their homes were nothing more than four walls with a thatched roof. Like I said before, the people were still happy. Everyone said hello, kissed hello and goodbye, and always offered a smile. We stayed in places where we didn't even have water for the shower. We used a large bucket full of water. We visited people who drank and washed in the river water. Yet, everyone invited us in and offered us food and drink.



A house in the village of Colimes.

Perhaps the biggest realization I experienced when we came back to the United States was how much the people here have and take for granted. The next day when I went into my closet to take out a shirt, it took me by surprise how I had a closet full of clothes to choose from. It bothered me how I had always taken my clothes, sneakers, and a refrigerator full of food for granted every morning. People forget how lucky they are. Here, I could open my refrigerator and pick from a number of things. In Ecuador our refrigerator had only bread, a bottle of soda, some water and old jelly. Occasionally we had some fruit to eat.

Although we learned a great deal about Ecuador and people in general, the main volunteer activity we performed was teaching English. Each morning we would teach elementary school children from approximately 8:00-10:30. Generally, we were able to make up our own lessons for them which usually consisted of basic English vocabulary. For the last week and a half we also taught high school children in the afternoons from 12:00 to 2:00 and every night from 5:30-10:00. In the High Schools we taught from a textbook that was mandated by the government.



John teaching English to some of the elementary school kids. He is teaching the children the days of the week and the months of the year.

We met so many people through teaching. Most days we would play basketball or hang out with many of our students outside of school. We were often invited to different places by them and were given the opportunity to really get to know some of the people there. In fact, I became such good friends with some of the people that I hope to visit them again in a few years. I have actually talked to some of the people on the phone since I have been home. Out of everything I took from this trip I will never forget the people I met there.



John & I



John & I with a family in the fields around Colimes. They have no running water and use the river water in front of their house to drink and bathe in.

I would consider this trip to be one of the most enlightening experiences of my life. Every future physician should go on a similar trip. It made me see how much people truly need to be helped. As a doctor, I hope that I will be able to help improve the lives of some people. There are so many people who need help in this world. I also now want to travel when I am a physician to other countries and volunteer my time helping people like those I met in Ecuador.



John & I in the banana fields. Those are all the banana trees in the background



Riding a horse around town.



The Church in Colimes, the town we stayed in.