

Jenny G's Final Report CFHI Bolivia

Question Set #1

1. First Impressions:

What have been your initial impressions of your host organization/work site?

Gonzalo, the CFHI program director is very gracious and wants to help in any way he can. He knows tons about La Paz and he has also been our Spanish instructor. However, sometimes he talks so much that we don't get much done in class. This week I have been at Centro de Salud Puerto Mejillones. It is a primary care clinic that serves pregnant women, kids under five, and the elderly. Alison and I are learning from Dra. Gutierrez in her office. I was surprised by how small the clinic was, although I don't think I had been to a clinic before. I was also shocked by the number of young mothers we saw at the clinic and malnourished children. And of course there was a lack of resources at the clinic. They had one stethoscope and sphygmomanometer (for taking blood pressure) that were sort of falling apart, and one fetal Doppler monitor.

Provide a brief overview and thoughts about the kind of work you've started doing.

Alison and I wake up around 6:15 so that we can make it to the Teleferico around 7:15. The commute is an hour and 15 minutes so we arrive around 8:30. We leave around 12. So far we have been observing Dra. Gutierrez talking to and examining patients. She sees lots of patients in a day and so we don't have a ton of time to ask questions. When she has some time in between patients she explains general trends, reasons for what we saw in the last patients, etc. However, since Alison is finishing med school she can usually answer our questions. We have been able to help by listening with the stethoscope, distracting children or using the ultrasound to find a baby's heartbeat. Today, we also went with a nurse to a local school and gave out vitamins, while the nurse explained the importance of them for their health. Overall, I am learning so much about the main health problems in women and children in Bolivia and what is done to treat these problems. Malnutrition and lack of family planning are the biggest themes that I have observed. I do sense that the doctor usually addresses or ask for help with something from Alison. Which is totally fine since she is much more qualified than me but because of that I am having a harder time connecting with the Dra. Gutierrez.

How does the work match your expectations, how does it match your goals?

I was originally planning on starting my rotations at El Hospital del Niño but we shifted my schedule so Alison and I could be together. Therefore, I expected to be moving around more but being in a clinic the patients come to you, of course. Since it is very busy at the clinic, we see many patients and it is very interesting to start to observe the themes of issues that patients have. I expected to mostly just observe, which is mostly what I have been doing. I sometimes feel a bit like a burden, or like I am invading the privacy of the patients. It was cool to be involved in a more public health intervention when we went to the school today and gave out vitamins. Some of my goals were to learn about the strength and weaknesses of the Bolivian healthcare system, learn about different diseases and treatments, interact with patients, and to ask questions/have discussions about the social determinants of health. Those are pretty lofty but I do feel like I am already starting to scratch

the surface on each. It really helps to have a roommate that is a med student who can answer certain questions I have but I know that once I am alone I can also just research. One thing I would like to do more but I still feel like I am not capable enough is interact with patients.

2. What stood out to you the most regarding your arrival?

The vastness of the city of La Paz stood out to me the most. It is also an incredibly beautiful city. The first day I thought I had seen most of the city by walking to a bridge and having a view of the south of the city and the mountains. Once I took the 4 Telefericos in order to get to the Centro de Salud clinic in Mejillones in El Alto I realized the city was much bigger. The buildings are mostly brick but they definitely vary by quality depending on what part of the city you are in. Where I am staying in Sopocachi, the buildings are a little more modern and the people dress more western. In El Alto there is more poverty and many more indigenous people. Hand in hand with how huge the city is, it is very difficult to get to certain places unless they are in the line of the Teleferico, which still is continuing to expand. This is because of the communities built on cliffs, lack of roads in some places, and traffic.

3. What was your greatest anxiety prior to departing and how do you feel about that now that you have arrived?

My greatest anxiety was definitely having to speak Spanish. Since I had a day in Miami I challenged myself by speaking some Spanish to a couple of my Lyft drivers. It was a good way to make the transition a little less abrupt. I am happy to be in Bolivia because compared to many other Latin American countries, people here speak very slowly and clearly, they don't drop off certain letters like other Spanish speakers do. My roommate Alison and I are at about the same Spanish speaking and comprehension level, I might know more grammar since I have taken Spanish classes more recently. But for the most part, it is really nice to have each other to bounce off of when we are speaking or listening to our house mom, Olga, Gonzalo, or the Doctor at the clinic. I definitely feel much better about Spanish now. Much of my nervousness of speaking is gone and I understand almost everything when I am listening to the three people above. My speaking abilities have improved but I still have a way to go.

Question Set #2

1. How are things going at work now that you have settled in for a bit? How does this work align with your professional goals that you set for yourself? Knowing the site as you do now, what would you like to be sure you achieve by the end of your internship?

I have been at a different site each week thus far so I haven't really had a chance to settle into one place. My first week I was at a primary care clinic in El Alto. Last week I was at Virgen Niña, an incredible center for kids with disabilities. I started on Tuesday at Hospital Del Niño, in the infectious disease unit. So far this week I have been pretty confused since there has been discussion about diseases and tests that, being an undergrad, I have not learned about. Each location has been very unique and has open my eyes to different aspects of the strengths and weaknesses of Bolivian health care.

I felt that my work at Virgen Niña aligned the most with my professional goals so I requested to return there for my last two weeks in La Paz. There I spent time in physical therapy as well as a classroom for kids with disabilities. Since my interests lie both in public health and education, and I

am able to interact more directly with both kids and health care workers at Virgen Niña, I am excited to go back and learn more about the different therapies they provide and create stronger relationships. One of my professional goals is to gain more clarity into the kind of career I want to pursue. I have recently been torn between going into medicine as a pediatric physician's assistant or being a teacher. I have loved my time at Virgen Niña and I am now interested in working with kids with disabilities. I am still fascinated by medicine but I am realizing that I value creating longer lasting relationships with kids rather than working with them in short periods of time like doctors.

2. How are things going relative to your personal goals? In which areas have you made progress and where do you still have some room to expand? What will you do to ensure you are successful personally before you leave?

My personal goals have centered around trying new things, doing activities/trips independently, journaling every day and making friends with local people and listening to their stories. I have gotten very close with my roommate Alison and filled out last two weekends with hikes and a trip to Salar de Uyuni. Therefore, I don't think I have done anything independently, besides when we are separated at clinic. I love her company but I am also looking into doing a day or weekend trip on my own after she leaves this Saturday. I want to take steps toward being more independent here in a new environment. I have been journaling every day as well as updating my blog once or twice a week for friends and family. Sometimes it feels like a burden to find time to do all this writing but I know I will be grateful in the long run. I started to make friends with some of the PT students at Virgen Niña but I only spent 4 days there so I hope to talk to them more when I return.

3. How are things going relative to your cross-cultural goals? What cultural experiences have stood out to you so far? What do you want to ensure to experience before you leave?

I would include language as a cross-cultural goal. Embarking on this journey, I wanted to be more comfortable speaking Spanish, be able to think on my feet more when speaking and get to a point where I could be myself when speaking Spanish. I have definitely made a lot of progress in my Spanish speaking and understanding. I still have a way to go but I am able to communicate so much better, my grammar is improving and am learning new words all of the time, even words/phrases that are specific to Bolivia. Unfortunately, the Spanish classes haven't helped much with this. Most of my practice comes from talking to my house mom, other interns, or doctors. I have mixed feelings about Gonzalo, our program director and Spanish teacher. He has been super supportive and always means well but he is not the best teacher. We don't use class time very wisely. Gonzalo often goes off on tangents or Alison and I get frustrated because he didn't understand our questions or was teaching something incorrectly. He had to look up some verb forms because he would get confused. I think it is because he is a native speaker that he isn't the best at teaching in a way that Alison and I respond to. Some days have been helpful or fun, today we listen to a song in Spanish, but for the most part the classes have lacked organization and are usually dominated by Gonzalo talking.

Going to El Alto was a cultural experience in itself, seeing many Cholitas and learning about how the way they wrap their babies often causes hip dysplasia. Each Thursday we have a cultural excursion instead of class and a couple of weeks ago we went to an art museum. It was also like a history lesson and cool to see some parallels from the book I am reading on the history of Latin America. I have eaten some delicious salteñas, basically a Bolivian empanada, and tried a cherimoya, one of Bolivia's native fruits. Alison and I went to Mercado de Las Brujas which is a very touristy thing but also cultural immersion because I talked to a woman about the llama fetuses and what they do with them. They burn them and bury them as an offering to Pachamama. This past weekend Alison and I did a three-day tour of Salar de Uyuni which was incredible. The tour guides

were great about throwing in some history lessons and talking about some cultural customs along the way. Tomorrow Alison and I are going to be zebras! “Cebritas”, people dressed as zebras that help direct traffic here, began as a public health program to reduce car accidents. They are now beloved by the people here and part of the culture of the city. Alison and I get to be cebritas for the day after completing a training. I still want to go see Cholita wrestling, go to a soccer game and possibly take a day trip to Tiwanaku ruins.

Question Set #3

1. Describe a day in your life:

What is your work schedule like?

The past couple weeks I have been spending time at Virgen Niña, the center kids with disabilities. I either take the Teleferico or a minibus to El Alto, usually an hour commute. I leave the house around 8am. I stay at the center until about 12:30, learning in physical therapy or helping in a classroom.

What activities and tasks are you doing day-to-day?

In physical therapy, I usually watch the PT residents work with patients, ask questions, and help out when I can. In the breaks between patients, I talk to the PT residents who are now my friends. I have also spent time in a classroom with kids with autism, helping keep the kids on task or talking with the teacher about different teaching strategies.

What do you do after work?

After work I come straight home for lunch with my host mom and the other students, there are currently 5 of us. Lunch lasts a while, usually an hour or an hour and a half. After lunch I rest and catch up on emails or work on my blog. I am supposed to have Spanish class at 4:30 Monday through Thursday but recently they have been canceled because Gonzalo, who doubles as the program director and Spanish teacher, has had to do orientations with all of the new students arriving. Honestly, Spanish class hasn't been all that helpful. Gonzalo is a wonderful program director but is not a great Spanish teacher. At night I like to get api (hot drink made from corn) and a huminta (a warm corn and cheese cake like food cooked in a corn husk). I have also done things in the afternoons and evenings like gone to Cholita wrestling, been a zebra, shopped at the market, seen a movie, etc.

How do you balance your time between work and exploring life outside of work?

It is pretty easy to balance work and exploring because I only spend 3 or 4 hours at the center or clinic. However, I have had a little bit of difficulty balancing working, exploring, writing my blog, and journaling every day. I also need to be working on my assignment for public health credits but haven't been able to make much progress on it. I think in Tarija, a smaller town where there is less to do, I will be able to dedicate more time to my public health paper.

2. Housing:

What is your living situation like?

I live in an apartment in Sopacachi with a nice older woman names Olga. I think she is in her late 60s but she seems much younger. My first 3 weeks I had a roommate named Alison and we got along great and did everything together. A week and a half ago my new roommate Elisa, a med student, arrived and this weekend 3 undergrads arrived. It is a bit crowded with 5 of us girls

staying here but it is only for my last week so I don't mind.

Knowing what you know now, are there other options you would have chosen instead?

Originally, I was upset to be living with just one woman instead of a family with kids. However, I have grown to love Olga. She is like a second mom and I might not have had as much time to explore or time to work if there were kids in the house. Therefore, looking back I wouldn't change anything. If there weren't other students, I would have been forced to practice my Spanish more but it has been nice having people to explore and go on weekend trips with.

If you can provide some resources for future interns, that would be most helpful.

Even if you are living with other students, really try to get to know your host family (or host mom in my case). Most of my Spanish improvement has been from long conversations at lunch with my family. Be flexible! The housing situation might be different than you expect.

3. Finances:

How is your budget working out for you?

I came with lots of US dollars to exchange and am just running out at this point. I paid for my 3 day Salar de Uyuni trip in US dollars, which was 210, the bulk of the cash I brought. But I am able to take out money with my debit card. I didn't have an exact budget coming in but I was willing to spend money on food, gifts and weekend trips.

Are you spending more or less than what you expected?

Most of my expenditures have been on weekend trips.

Things are pretty cheap here so when I add up all that I spent on everything besides weekend trips it is really not much. I am also spending less than I expected because I don't eat a big, or sometimes any dinner here since lunch is so hearty.

How much do you typically spend on food, recreation, travel, etc?

I would estimate that I spend roughly 100 bolivianos (only about \$15) on food in a week. It varies based on if I travel on the weekend or go to a nicer restaurant. My 3 day Uyuni tour was about \$300 including the bus to get there. This weekend I went to Corioco and biked death road and the whole trip was about 1000 bolivianos (about \$140), this included transportation, food, the hostel, and the bike tour. Pretty cheap!

What would you do differently knowing what you know now?

I don't think I would do anything differently. Living here is much cheaper than living at home in the US. I might have kept track a little better of how much I was spending on gifts and food. However, keeping track of every little expenditure is stressful. I think I prefer keeping track of how much money I brought, how much I switch into bolivianos, how much I take out of the bank and big purchases like tours.

4. Travel and Transportation:

How do you typically get around town and to work? Are you satisfied with that choice?

To get round town I either walk or take a minibus, which usually costs only 30 cents per ride. If I am working in El Alto I prefer to take the Teleferico because of the comfort and the gorgeous views. It is a bit more expensive. I have to take 4 lines which is 18Bs round trip. But this is only about \$2.50 for the day which is totally reasonable.

Would you recommend other options?

I would recommend trying both and seeing what you prefer. The minibus system can be hard to learn but after a while it is easy. It can be pretty bumpy if you are sitting in the back though. Walking is a great option if you aren't going too far because there is often traffic so the minibuses can take a while. The teleferico goes right over the traffic but is a less direct path to El Alto. So it depends on your preference and destination.

Do you have time to explore the surrounding area on your time off? How do you manage that?
Definitely! I have explored La Paz a lot. We don't have Spanish class on Fridays, and Thursday is usually a cultural excursion outside of the classroom. Therefore, I have used that time, the gap between lunch Spanish class and time after class to walk around La Paz. I have been to the witches market countless times, Mirador Killi Killi, Valle de la Luna, my favorite salteña place called Paceaña la Salteña, Bits and Cream for ice cream, a local movie theater, to Zona Sur for a rock climbing lesson... lots of places J.

Where do you recommend exploring?

All of the places above I would recommend. There are probably tons of cafes and restaurants that are great that I didn't make it to. El Prado is the main road that leads to Plaza San Francisco and Mercado de Las Brujas. It is worth exploring. I would recommend the hike to Muela del Diablo, seeing Valle de la Luna, checking out the market in El Alto Thursdays and Sundays, and eating lots of salteñas I didn't get to explore Zona Sur very much but there is probably lots to see there too. I would highly recommend a 3 day tour of Salar de Uyuni. Corioco was really beautiful and different from the city because of its tropical climate but if you go bring bug spray!

Question Set #4

1. Professional Learning:

Describe the workplace culture at your host organization. How does your personal cultural lens work within the culture of your host organization?

I will focus on the clinic I was in last week, Centro de Salud Villa Avaroa. The building was recently built and in terms of resources the clinic was much more closely related to places in the US compared to the centro de salud in El Alto that I was in. In El Alto, there was one doctor, in a tiny room and made patients were malnourished children or pregnant teens. At Villa Avaroa, the patient population was seemingly more well off and had more education about their health. I found it odd that the pediatrician and gynecologist only saw patients until around noon. There is only the one pediatrician at the center so I imagine many kids can't be seen or have to come back another day if they don't get to the center early enough. In the US, doctors work long hours and there are usually multiple doctors in the same specialty so they can collaborate. What happens if the one pediatrician gets sick? The gynecologist is pregnant and going on maternity leave and I was pretty sure I heard her say there wasn't anyone to replace her during the months she would be gone. During the quarterly staff conference, I sat in on, it was clear that the doctors were frustrated that there was a lack of doctors to attend to the huge population of patients. I imagine that the decisions about how many doctors work at each clinic are made higher up, based on how many people the government wants to pay. The system these doctors work in limits them to meet their yearly goals.

What parts of your work have you enjoyed the most? Is there any part of your work that you find particularly challenging?

Here in Tarija, I believe I will be changing where I will be rotating every week. Last week I was at the

primary care clinic, this week I am at a Chagas clinic. I continue to learn new things each day, and about a variety of health topics. I am learned about how to track kids height and weight, the Tarija health insurance program, who comes in to get tested for Chagas, the treatment for congenital Chagas, all sorts of things. Although most of my day is just listening and helping with small things when I can, I love the challenge of understanding what both the doctors and patients say. What is a little challenging is knowing when it is appropriate to ask questions because sometimes the doctor is busy filling out forms or examining a patient and I am unsure if I would be interrupting if I say something. Also, dictating my questions in Spanish can sometimes be a bit of a challenge.

Describe a professional accomplishment that you are proud of - be specific.

What I am most proud of is being able to better understand the doctors, ask them my questions and develop a much stronger awareness of the major health issues in various communities in Bolivia. However, to get specific I would say I am proud that I was able to find fetal heart beats with the fetal monitor in my first week in El Alto. Although it's not all that hard to do, it was my first time interacting directly with a patient. Before that I had listened and observed. Doing something this simple, but independently, was exciting and gave me more confidence to work directly with patients, within my skill set and qualifications of course. Part of the reason why I loved my time at Virgen Niña was because there was so much of that direct patient contact in physical therapy that I could participate in.

2. Cross Cultural Learning:

Describe an event where you misunderstood something due to cultural differences. What did you do? What would you do next time?

When I was in a clinic in El Alto, the doctor would always have pregnant women sign a paper to get tested for HIV. She would do so without explaining what HIV is, asking if they wanted to take the test, etc. I was slightly upset and confused that she was having them sign the paper without explaining what the test was for. In the US, it is important that the patient is informed and is empowered to make decisions for themselves. A doctor in the US would have explained what HIV is, the transmission, diagnostics and treatment. However, I learned that it is routine in Bolivia for all pregnant women to get tested for HIV. I also understand that even if the doctor attempted to explain, the patients might not comprehend because of their low level of education. I think the doctor prioritized getting through her long line of patients, and making sure these pregnant women got tested. In the moment I did not say anything because it was not my place. In hindsight I might have asked why she doesn't at least explain on a basic level what the test was for and its importance.

3. Personal Growth:

What are the most important things you have learned about yourself thus far through this experience?

Through rotations at different types of health facilities, I have learned that I value longer term relationships with kids rather than short appointments. For that reason, I do not want to pursue PA school anymore. I might work in physical therapy or in education. I have learned that I am a lot more independent than I thought I was. I have enjoyed trying new things independently like rock climbing, Zumba classes, and biking the death road. I was able to organize trips and navigate new cities on my own. I realized that I struggle a little with self-discipline when I lack a structured

schedule. I have had trouble sitting down and working on my paper for my school credits.

What has been the greatest personal challenge? What has been the greatest reward?

I would say that Spanish initially was a big challenge. When I arrived I lacked a lot of confidence when it came to speaking to my house mom or the doctors. Also, the medical Spanish I heard at the clinics and hospital was initially confusing and hard for me to understand. My roommate Alison often understood more since she had been to medical school. However, by continuing to listen, using my medical dictionary, and asking Alison medical questions I started to understand more and more. The greatest reward is the progress I have made in my Spanish comprehension and speaking. Now alone in Tarija, I have been able to understand everything at the clinics and am not afraid to ask questions. This weekend, I had a meeting with my program director and conversed and listened very easily in Spanish for an hour and a half. We had a great conversation and got along well. I would not have had the confidence or ability to do this when I first arrived. I am very proud of the progress I made and continue to make with the wonderful Spanish teacher here in Tarija. Being here in Bolivia I enjoy Spanish much more than I did and school. I am much more passionate about continuing to practice and improve.

Question Set #5

1. Professional:

Have you learned about any new possibilities for career paths?

Yes! At the start of the program I was pretty sure that I wanted to go to Physician's Assistant school and work in pediatrics. I discovered through observing in various clinics and hospitals that in my career I want to have more time to get to know the kids I work with. I loved working with the same group of people and a lot of the same kids at Virgen Niña in physical therapy. I want to work with kids directly, encourage and support them, rather than prescribe medicine. Since this discovery about myself, I have researched different physical therapy programs, and centers in my home town at which I hope to observe this summer.

Have you done any informational interviews (formal or informal) to learn about the field?

Some of my conversations with the physical therapy interns at Virgen Niña could be considered informal interviews. From them I learned the different populations they can help, different settings they work in—both of which have a large variation. I could work with kids, adults, the elderly. There are physical therapists in schools, hospitals, private practices. I also asked them why they chose the career. One responded that he liked to work with his hands and has a passion for health, so PT was a perfect combination.

Recently, at Hospital San Juan de Dios I had the privilege of working with their adult physical therapist. It was refreshing to have that kind of experience in the hospital because my experience in the hospitals had been frustrating. Doctors speak fast and use medical terms that I would not even understand in English. Much of the time spent there I was following 10 or 15 doctors and students to different patient rooms. With Erika the physical therapist, I noticed that she had much more compassion and patients with the patients, probably partly because she was less busy than the doctors. She explained to me how she helped patients with respiratory infections once again start to use their lungs fully. We worked with some paralyzed patients to stimulate their muscles and

brain. I saw a totally different type of physical therapy from the therapy in Virgen Niña. Erika explained to me other types of patients she works with and what her general schedule looks like day to day.

2. Cross Cultural:

Looking back at your pre-departure journal or notes, how have your impressions of the host culture changed?

I did not expect to feel so comfortable and welcomed by local people. Before coming I was a little worried about safety and communicating with people in Spanish. I was pleased that people I worked with as well as strangers I met in the cities were helpful, patient and welcoming.

I read about the indigenous people of Bolivia, of the Cholita women in La Paz for example, but I did not realize the strength of their presence until I arrived. Many of these people used to live in the country and have since moved to the city. The contrast between young professionals walking in the streets and Cholita women selling things like fruit or tissues to support their children was very interesting. These women seemed incredibly strong to me, usually caring for many children as well as participating in informal economy. I don't remember ever seeing them with a man. Always alone or with their babies. The Cholita wrestling, a tourist attraction, was started to resist machismo and violence, to show that Cholita women could also support themselves financially.

From what I read before coming to Bolivia, it seemed like most people supported their president Evo Morales and that he was doing great things for the country, like constructing the Teleferico system. After speaking with many Bolivians, I learned that at this point many people are not supportive of Evo. I learned of the governments corruption and lack of support for health care facilities. There are huge disparities in spending. Many in La Paz pointed out that the government is building a huge tall new government office. It looks like a building you would find in New York City. Spending time in the main children's hospital, it was clear that more resources and money were needed to improve the quality of care.

What is the most frustrating aspect of your host culture? What is the most rewarding aspect?

The most frustrating aspect of Bolivian culture is the predominant machismo in society. Although I was not affected significantly by machismo, it was difficult to see so many pregnant young women come into clinics. Some of them were as young as 14 while the father was in his mid 20s. One of the doctors explained to me that many of the young women are not on birth control because their husband forbids it. It is frustrating that the burden should be completely on the woman to prevent an unplanned pregnancy. I don't imagine the majority of Bolivian men are insisting on using a condom. Related to machismo, I noticed that many of the doctors in hospitals were men while almost all of the students and the nurses were women. I imagine a machismo attitude also permeates the professional world in Bolivia.

The most rewarding aspect is just the custom of greeting and acknowledging one another. I will miss people saying "buenas dias" as they enter the minibus. I will miss the warm smiles from vendors in the markets. I know I can always ask a stranger for directions or have a chat in the Teleferico or with my cab driver. Here in Bolivia I have it true what I read before coming, that people value quality time with others over getting work done efficiently. They don't usually follow strict, packed schedules like many people in the US. Bolivians treat each other with kindness and take time out of the day to talk with each other. I will miss this aspect of Bolivian culture the most.

3. Your Culture Curve:

The period of cultural adjustment is often represented by a “W” curve with various peaks and valleys: Honeymoon (peak); Initial Culture Shock (valley); Cultural Adjustment (peak); Further Culture Shock (valley); Further Adjustment (peak); Re-entry Shock (valley).

Outline your personal W Curve or cultural adjustments starting from when you arrived in your host country to the present-marking the highs and lows with approximate dates and descriptions of events that represent some of these phases (recognizing of course, that you are still in process of adapting to life back home).

Honeymoon (peak)
April 8th- April 30th

I think my honeymoon phase lasted a really long time. My first three weeks in La Paz were wonderful. Everything was new. I was really interested in what I was learning in the clinics. I was exploring new areas of the city with my roommate Alison. We did some hikes and went to the salt flats one weekend. Even though my Spanish was a challenge, I found it much easier to understand people than I expected and I slowly got better at speaking too. It was all so fun, interesting, and exciting that I did not miss home.

Initial Culture Shock (valley)
May 1st- May 3rd

May 1st was my 21st birthday. It was also a holiday in Bolivia so I did not have to go to the clinic or Spanish class. Receiving messages and calls from friends and family made me feel a little homesick. A few days earlier Alison left and recently a new student had arrived. Her Spanish level was much better than mine which I think made me feel that all my progress in Spanish was minimal. We had a little celebration for my birthday which was very nice. Olga, my host mom, even pushed my face into the cake! Nevertheless, I found myself feeling down that day and the days following. I think it was in part transitioning to a new roommate. Everything was new for her but I had already seen a lot of the city.

Cultural Adjustment (peak)
May 4th-May 24th

I soon adjusted and became more independent. Previously I was going to rotations with Alison and she would be in charge of directions. My last week in La Paz I was taking the Teleferico by myself to Virgen Niña (a center for kids with disabilities) and spending more time in the classrooms and physical therapy there. I had made friends with the PT students and they even made me a card when I left. My peak continued into the beginning of my time in Tarija because I was getting another chance to explore a new place. I also met a Canadian girl through my Spanish teacher that I hang out with a little. It was nice to have her since I was the only student in my program.

Further Culture Shock (valley)
May 25th-June 6th

My second valley has been longer lasting and I honestly think I am still working to come out of it. I think it has had a variety of causes. Being the only student in the program my first 3 weeks, I got lonely. What made it worse was that I could not seem to connect with my host dad, a middle aged divorced man. I still am a little confused why they placed me with him rather than a male student with him. We don't have much to talk about, we eat all of our lunches out at the same 3 places. At the beginning I didn't mind but at this point the routine is getting old and I miss the home cooked

lunches that I was so fortunate to have in La Paz. In general, my schedule is busier here as well and I do most everything independently. I usually don't get enough sleep even if I do I still find myself pretty sleepy during the day. Maybe having to focus on speaking and understanding makes me more tired. There has also been a lot of change, as I have rotated at a different health facility each week and switched up my schedule in terms of classes and volunteering in the afternoon. I probably miss the consistency of my last couple weeks in La Paz.

Further Adjustment (peak)

June 7th to the end of the program?

I think I am slowly starting to adjust, but I only have one more week left. I will hopefully finish out my program on a positive note, spending some time with the new students in my program and meeting their host families and enjoying the peacefulness of Tarija before I head back up to La Paz to meet me mom. I have also planned a trip to Potosi and Sucre for next weekend which I am looking forward to.

4. Articulating your Experience:

Please write one paragraph to sum up your experience, touching on the professional, the cross-cultural and the personal. Discuss your learning, the rewards and maybe challenges of the program. You may think of this as a summary you might give in an interview, or to a fellow student who was asking you about your internship.

Coming to Bolivia independently adapting to a new language and culture and learning about the health care system has been incredibly rewarding. I was surprised that I did not feel very homesick and was constantly finding new ways to experience more of the culture. I did things I never imagined like taking a rock climbing class on my own in Spanish and being dressed as a zebra on the streets of La Paz. I found that I was comfortable going places on my own and having conversations with locals. The style of living differs in many ways from what I am used to and I enjoyed talking to Bolivian students and doctors about these differences. I have much more confidence in my Spanish speaking and ability to connect with people from different backgrounds. This experience has inspired me to return to South America in the future. Professionally, spending time in various clinics and hospitals I realized that medicine is not for me. I crave a longer term and closer relationship with the kids I work with. I found this in physical therapy at the center for kids with disabilities where I chose to spend 3 weeks. I have begun to research physical therapy programs and hope to shadow a PT in my home town to confirm if it is the career for me. Overall, my experience in Bolivia has allowed me to gain confidence, interact with a variety of people, and gain insight into what I am passionate about.