

Jessie Burch
International Studies Internship, INTL-4201
Dr. Rob Huesca
December 6th, 2012
Internship Evaluation

1. Organization name and contact:

Esperanza Peace and Justice Center
Supervisors: Director Graciela Sanchez and staff member Amanda Haas

922 San Pedro Ave.
San Antonio, TX 78212
esperanza@esperanzacenter.org

2. Goals and objectives:

The Esperanza Peace and Justice Center is a liberal organization that serves the community as a cultural center, as a defender of social justice, as a promulgator of activist movements, and as a social outlet. The Esperanza was founded nearly 25 years ago by a group of women that felt San Antonio lacked an organization with a local-to-global perspective and the will to grapple with certain politically or socially unpopular social issues.

Since that time, the non-profit has developed a set of broad and noble goals including social and environmental justice, economic and social equality, cultural preservation, fomenting intercultural and cross-cultural communication through artistic creation and expression, and individual empowerment. They work primarily with minority and marginalized groups in San Antonio, particularly with the Chicano/Mexican American population and the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community. There is a particular emphasis on gender equality through their work with women from these minorities.

The Esperanza Center is working to achieve these goals with multi-pronged, multi-faceted programming. When I began working at the main office in August, they had an art exhibit, "Maíz: en el umbral de la agonía," on show in the lower half of the building. The exhibit was one part of the Esperanza's work to promote community awareness about the issues associated with genetically modified corn seed and the North American Fair Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the negative affects they have had on Mexican communities. They also had a film viewing, an evening with Veronica Castillos de Izucar, and several other events to educate the community about the issue.

In the midst of that project, the Esperanza continued with long-established and ongoing programming. En Aquellos Tiempos and la Casa de Cuentos are two ways in which Esperanza supports the living history of the West Side, by documenting and sharing the

photographic and oral stories of people from the West Side. Additionally, the Esperanza creates a forum for discussion and expression through *La Voz*, a monthly publication featuring editorials focusing on a diverse range of important issues at local, regional, national, and international levels. Noche Azul, MujerArtes, and the Peace Market are yet other ways through which the Esperanza brings people together to create intercultural and cross-cultural communication, support artistic creation, and strengthen the community as a whole.

3. Tasks, duties, and responsibilities of interns:

I worked mainly on the Peace Market planning and organization, although also helped with weekly or monthly projects as needed. Tasks pertaining to the Peace Market included:

- Researching, contacting, and maintaining correspondence with international and national artists and cooperatives for the Peace Market. Presentation of findings to committee;
- Contacting local restaurants and business for donations for the Peace Market concessions and raffle. Presentation of results to committee;
- Contacting media outlets regarding publicity for the Peace Market and writing press releases;
- Designing, editing, and distributing promotional material for the Peace Market;
- Organization and storage in preparation for the Peace Market;
- Day-of facilitation of volunteers in concessions as well as serving food, selling raffle tickets and helping with vendor check-out.

Tasks for other events, programming, and general day-to-day functions included:

- Researching foundation in preparation for grant proposal;
- Take-down and storage of art exhibit, “Maíz: en el umbral de la agonía”;
- Set-up and lighting for the Día de los Muertos celebration;
- Answering and/or directing general inquiries from community members;
- Calling volunteers, vendors and community members in regard to different events.

4. Strengths and weaknesses of the internship

One of the main strengths of the Esperanza is that it is a very tight-knit group of people who really care about what they do. Some of the positive aspects of working at such a small organization included a huge flexibility in defining what projects I wanted to work with and an ability to be involved at several levels within the organization, from doing volunteer work to event planning to grant research to presenting at staff meetings.

The casual and egalitarian atmosphere at Esperanza was a really good space in which to learn about the Behind-the-scene running of an NGO. Additionally, the Esperanza provides a hands-on opportunity to learn about and appreciate the Mexican-American

culture, art, and experience. For me, one really positive attribute of working at the Esperanza was the opportunity to practice Spanish in a new setting.

What weaknesses that existed were largely due to my personal situation. While the flexibility of the internship was very beneficial in some ways, at times I also felt that this flexibility/lack of structure didn't utilize my abilities to the utmost. It didn't help that, due to my academic schedule, I was only able to go to the Esperanza twice a week for four-hour blocks; I think that structure hurt my ability to be a real asset to the organization because I was not present with the frequency necessary to take on some of the bigger projects. Because the Esperanza has a limited number of staff, and I wasn't there to follow through with my assignments on a daily basis, much of my work fell through the cracks. At times, I was working on small, unrelated, or "filler" projects that didn't seem to be the most efficient or effective use of my time as an intern. On the other hand, all of the projects and tasks I helped with are important to the Esperanza, either in the short- or long-term.

5. Recommendations

I would recommend to future interns that they have a solid idea of what they want to gain from working at Esperanza, what projects they want to be involved in, and be open in expressing those desires and ideas. Also, I think it is very important to have an interest in Mexican-American culture, comfort with the LGBT community and an enjoyment of art and cultural events. I would stress the importance of consistency in attendance, because it is all too easy to become disconnected if one does not make the effort to present every week. While I didn't feel that speaking Spanish was necessary, it was certainly beneficial to be able to communicate in the language. Especially for students interested in working with an NGO in the future, it could be a great time to learn first-hand about the structure, funding, politics, etc. in the NGO setting.