

Developed by the UVA Department of Emergency Medicine

SLC-Guatemala

“Service/Language/Culture”

An unique learning opportunity in the highlands of Guatemala that combines medical service, Spanish language acquisition and cultural education in the context of building sustainable relationships with the people and communities of Guatemala



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A Program of the UVA-Guatemala Initiative

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“Service/Language/Culture”

The University of Virginia’s Medical Service
Elective in the Highlands of Guatemala

Introduction: The SLC-Guatemala (Service/Language/Culture) elective is a unique program developed to offer UVA participants the opportunity to combine medically-related service, Spanish language immersion and an introduction to Guatemalan culture. It has been developed in close partnership with several Guatemalan communities with the goal of developing sustained, beneficial long-term relationships between all participants.

Length: 4-8 weeks: Spanish language skills preferred but not mandatory. Note: A 6- week minimum is strongly encouraged for medical students

4 Phases:

- I) Pre-departure orientation and instruction (UVA)
- II) Spanish language immersion training and cultural orientation (Quetzaltenango)
- III) Supervised medical service and learning (selected sites within Guatemala)
- IV) Post-elective debriefing, discussion and final evaluations (UVA)

Phase I (Charlottesville)

Interested participants apply for the elective. Once accepted they are required to meet with the elective supervisor and also talk (via phone) with the UVA in-country coordinator in Guatemala. Prior to departure participants will be expected to read select information and articles on Guatemala and complete UVA requirements for international travel. They will also choose a Spanish immersion school, a Phase III service site and receive a copy of the SLC-Guatemala orientation handbook. An emphasis is also placed on the pre-departure refinement and development of Spanish language skills.

Phase II (Quetzaltenango, Guatemala)

After leaving Charlottesville, participants arrive in Guatemala City and will utilize prearranged transport to the city of Quetzaltenango (Xela) which is several hours from Guatemala City. Once in Xela, participants begin an intensive introduction to Guatemala and the Spanish language. Participants will have the option to attend one of several immersion schools, depending on their individual preferences.

For approximately two weeks (depending on their initial fluency) participants will attend immersion Spanish school and focus on acquisition of basic Spanish language skills. Schools provide 5 hours of immersion Spanish instruction daily as well as cultural activities. During this time SLC participants will also continue to learn about the people, culture and medical system of Guatemala via lecture, visits and activities. These activities are coordinated by the SLC in-country coordinator and full participation is expected.

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Phase III (various sites within the highlands of Guatemala)

After they complete the Phase II in-country orientation process, SLC participants will travel to various sites within the Guatemalan highlands to participate in health-related medical service, patient care and teaching. Participants will be matched to sites on a case-by-case basis. Sites vary in exact setup and structure, but all have in common the following characteristics:

- A well-developed model of partnership and culturally beneficial exchange with the communities they are serving.
- A dedication to delivering long-term quality health care to the Mayan people.
- A pronounced interest in collaborative relationships with UVA.
- A willingness to teach and mentor visiting US volunteers.
- Proven successful past experiences working with US medical personnel.
- Guatemalan and/or American health care providers dedicated to teaching.
- A concern for the safety of visiting volunteers.

During this latter period, SLC participants will work under the supervision of Guatemalan and US physicians and/or health care workers delivering hospital and clinic-based medical care to rural Mayan populations. Other students will be working on community health-related projects. Regardless of exact placement, an emphasis on intercultural interaction and long-term partnership is apparent and SLC participants are encouraged to continue their active learning and participate fully within the communities where they are working. During Phase III they are expected to remain in contact with the UVA in-country coordinator.

Phase IV (Charlottesville)

SLC participants return to Charlottesville upon completion of their elective, where they will have collective and individual debriefing to discuss their experiences. They will also have the opportunity to review their final evaluations, offer input on their experiences and provide suggestions for improvement. The comments of each participant are carefully integrated into continual improvement of the elective. SLC participants are also encouraged to continue their cultural and language studies in the future.

Costs per participant (approximate) are 1500-1900 dollars:

Flights (\$300 to \$500), Spanish school: 2 weeks (\$380), In-country transport (\$100),

Phase III room/board/site fees (\$500-\$600), Books & supplies, etc. (\$100)

Elective contact person:

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