

Learning Clusters Students Study Around the World

By: Learning Cluster Participants, Academic Affairs

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Thanks to the generous support from the Luis and Linda Nieves Foundation, four Learning Clusters traveled internationally to Japan, South Korea, Singapore, Indonesia, Peru and Brazil.

Contesting Memories and Peace in East Asia | Japan and South Korea *Dongyoun Hwang, Professor of Asian Studies*

This Learning Cluster (LC) required students to explore, among others, questions as to how and why the same past has been remembered (or forgotten) and represented differently in East Asian countries and has been the source of various disputes among them; how memories of the past have been represented by the state?; are the state-defined memories (and state-certified history) corresponding to individual memories?; what has been the function and role of memory in the above-mentioned disputes?; and, finally, is it possible to construct memories of the past (or write a history) that could be shared and thus can enhance mutual understanding and achieve harmony and peace among the East Asian countries? The field trip to Japan and South Korea allowed students to consider the meanings of our memories of the past, both as precarious memories that could continue to generate new conflicts/disputes and as memories that could serve as a guide for a peaceful and harmonious future.



House of Sharing where the former Korean “comfort women” are living together

From Field to Cup: The Politics, Economies, and Ecologies of Sumatran Coffee | Singapore and Indonesia

Shane Barter, Associate Director of Pacific Basin Research Center and Assistant Professor of Comparative Politics

Our Learning Cluster sought to better understand where the goods we consume come from, following the commodity chain of coffee from the moment it is planted to the moment it is tasted. We wanted to understand the ethics of this commodity chain in terms of the returns enjoyed by farmers and the ecological conditions of local farms.



Dr. Barter and LC Students at farmer's union, Takengon, Aceh, Indonesia

These concerns took us to Aceh in Sumatra, Indonesia. After convening in Singapore, we took the long trip into the province's isolated interior by way of Bireuen. In Central Aceh, we visited several coffee farms, processing facilities, cooperatives, and cafes. Our long, informative days in the field were then followed up with intense classes back on campus. The course was capped off with a visit to Hidden House Coffee in San Juan Capistrano, where we were able to roast coffee that we had brought back from Aceh.



Dr. Barter and LC Students at the Government Rice Institute, Bener Meriah, Aceh, Indonesia

One of the most important learning moments for the class was when we visited a village in Takengon, where village chief Asnaini, the head of a woman's microcredit cooperative, explained her group's activities. We wanted to know about coffee, but she insisted that coffee is only one small part of her village economy, and demanded we see the rice fields. This was a valuable lesson, as coffee cultivation may be best when it is one of several local crops and economic activities, something missed in efforts to increase production and the returns for local farmers.



Dr. Barter and LC Students at coffee fields in Bener Meriah, Aceh, Indonesia

At Crossroads: Human Development in São Paulo | São Paulo, Brazil *Ian Read, Associate Professor of Latin American Studies*

More than a year ago, twelve students gathered for an on-campus learning cluster to study Brazilian history, politics and society, and to begin planning for a potential trip to this continental nation.



The poor and rich, side-by-side in São Paulo

For the big, guiding idea, students chose *human development*, or a mode of envisioning and shaping collective goals in ways that respect local ambitions and puts people before money. For the case study, students chose São Paulo as a destination because of its unjust contrasts. Its political capital is one of the most unequal cities in the world, with luxury apartments and private helipads looming over vast

squatter communities and shantytowns. While wealth is evident in the glass-encased headquarters of multinational corporations, designer retail stores, and penthouse apartments, the severe restriction in human capacity is obvious in its hundreds of shantytowns and its countless indigent. This January we had the fortune of realizing our goals through the support of the university and generosity of the Nieves family. Students transformed a study within a classroom into a study within a foreign culture, six thousand miles away.



Jordan Lindsey (2017) and a classroom for the arts at the Brazilian Landless Movement School in São Paulo

In São Paulo, students explored the capabilities approach to development within the diverse ways that *Paulista* (São Paulo) residents express their hopes, celebrations and frustrations about their lives and future. Over a ten-day trip, students talked with small-land farmers who had survived through occupation, human rights defenders, low-income housing builders, a city councilman of Brazil's most powerful political party, a trash-recycling (more derogatively, trash-picker) cooperative, a radical young protestor, and others. Unsurprisingly, students came to different conclusions, but the capabilities approach provided a way to have a shared conversation and better grasp Amartya Sen's argument that in order to understand the capabilities and obstacles for the development of others, we need to understand the capabilities and obstacles within ourselves.

Biosecurity in Aqua-structure: Parasites in Food | Iquitos, Peru *Anthony Mazeroll, Professor of Biology*



Learning Cluster students and Mr. Carlos Chuquipiondo, an expert in fish parasites

Students investigated the incidence of parasitic infections in the live foods that are being used in aquaculture facilities in Iquitos, Peru. Most of the aquaculture that takes place in the developing world is not on big factory farms, as it is in the USA, but takes place on subsistence farms. These farmers use anything they can to feed their fish. Often times the food they feed their "crops" are organisms that are found in not ideal environments. These "non-ideal" environments allows the local farmers to catch these live fish easily. In so doing, they are exposing their "crop" and themselves to potentially pathogenic organisms.



Student examines the small intestine of a fish

My students and I travelled to Peru to investigate if these fish are indeed infested with parasites, which may, in turn, infect humans. By studying this subject on site in Peru, students were exposed to the different methods of inquiry on a local scale. They utilized freshly caught fish that are more likely to be infected than fish they would have encountered back at SUA; dead fish tend to lose parasites so they may not have been detectable if we did this study at SUA.



In addition, the fish that are used as food in the aquaculture industry are illegal to transport out of Peru. During the LC Fair, the students demonstrated the techniques they undertook to determine parasitic infections of the fish.

Photos contributed by Learning Cluster Participants