

The United Nations: a life-changing experience



(R to L): Isak Larsen, Dr. Eddy Cadet, Carol Bejar Orellana and Christopher Cardenas at the United Nations

I had the great opportunity to go to the United Nations (UN) to report on my student-engaged visit to Senegal, Africa. In Africa, I participated in a research group where we tested the local water sources to find contaminants. We also interviewed local families and women to gather social information about water usage and water exposure. We found a number of contaminants in the water, so we informed the local government organizations about it. It was such a great experience to do such a noble service.

I was very excited to have the opportunity to present on this research trip at the UN's 62nd session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW62) during March 19-21, 2018. I was always nervous about this because I knew that the UN is such a great and respected global institution. However, what helped me feel more prepared was reviewing the presentation with my research partner, Isak, and also practicing the presentation with my husband, Christopher Cardenas. When we reached the UN, I was fascinated by the amazing goals and determined purpose that the UN has. The sustainable development goals (SDG) are very ambitious. As we toured the UN, meeting with important officials and experts, and learning more about what the UN is about, my mind was opened to the possibilities to make an impact on this world. I may be one person, but I can join others in the cause for an improved world.

My presentation during a parallel event on March 20, 2018 went well, even though I was nervous. It was an exhilarating experience to participate in something so grand. I felt more motivated to do water treatment research in other parts of the world, especially mountain women communities. I am originally from Arequipa, Peru, and my dream would be to do water treatment research in the Peruvian communities high up in the Andes Mountains. They have access to lots of water, but it is not a drinkable water. The UN has motivated me to be more ambitious, take initiative, and put my foot forward. Since I have gone to Africa to participate in the water treatment research, I feel like I already have international, hands-on experience, and that I have value and experience to help benefit others. I have already contacted the department for the Environmental Minister of Peru to see if we can do research there with them, and they responded joyfully to my email. I was so excited. If it had not been for the student-engaged learning trip to Africa, and for the inspiring experience at the UN, I would not be as engaged in the world as I am now.

This whole experience has also served my marriage a great deal. My husband, Chris, supported me in going to Africa by making sure I had everything I needed and by calling me constantly to make sure I was alright. He also ended up going with me to the UN headquarters this year to support me at my presentation. He came along to all of the events, and he too was inspired. His passion is in educational innovation, and he ended up contacting one of the NGO's, representing Native American tribes in North America whether he could intern with them and provide quality education to the Native Americans on the reservations. He was also inspired to look for opportunities to work for the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). My husband loved going on the trip with me, and we both feel more united because of this whole experience.

Ever since I started my student-engaged learning experience at Utah Valley University, my life has changed. I feel more engaged in the world, and I feel more of a responsibility to be engaged. The UN was an inspiring experience, and I am motivated to continue this research in the mountains of Peru. My husband and I feel more emotionally bonded because of this entire experience, and we want to be more engaged in

implementing SDGs across the world. The student-engaged learning trip, together with the UN trip was a life-changing experience.

Carol M. Bejar Orellana, Utah Valley University student