



Meet María José Aldana, Fulbright Scholar and MA candidate in International Development

Language Skills: English, Spanish

Undergrad Institution/Major: Universidad del Valle, Guatemala; Anthropology

Tell us about yourself:

I am Guatemalan. I am an anthropologist; I did anthropology for my undergrad. I worked at the same time as I was studying so that gave me the opportunity to get to know the field, and that's how I got interested in the Master's in Development. When you were in second year at my college from second to fifth year you do field work every single year. I was working a lot of places because I am a consultant, so it was a lot of short term projects. The recent ones have been at the [Population Council](#) in Guatemala and the other project I really liked was at the UNDP ([United Nations Development Program](#)). I worked on environmental issues, and also on education. But health, education, I am more passionate about. Most of my fieldwork has been health related, even my thesis dissertation was on cervical cancer though more from the anthropology perspective, not the biomedical perspective.

What brought you to the Josef Korbel School:

The Korbel School visited my college at an informative session, and I got really interested. Basically finding out about the program made it one of my first choices. I was really excited about hearing about the program. The fact that you can choose your classes, that is not something you can do in Guatemala. So picking classes and concentrating on what you want. Having core courses but also choosing what you want to concentrate on was one of the things I really liked. And also having an international experience is better. I am on a Fulbright Scholarship here. A new country, a new language; it gives you a wider perspective.

Career Goals:

I see myself working with women. My concentrations are health, and the other is gender. I have worked on central public health issues in the past, and I really like it. It's really important. I want to go back to Guatemala, but it depends on the political aspect. They are having elections this year and if the president, who is ex-military, gets in the government, I wouldn't see myself working necessarily at the government level, but maybe at a NGO or other civil society role. But it would be great to go back to Guatemala. I am applying to the [Global Health Certificate](#), so I would like my internship to be related to that field. Maybe I would do a month in Guatemala and another in the central offices in New York at Population Council. It would be great to work with gender and public health issues.

Favorite Classes:

I am registered for four classes so it's been a bit crazy. I have never worked in a quarter system before; it has always been semesters. It's been really different, and I can't believe I am on the third week of only ten weeks! There are two classes that really excite me. The first is "Health and Development" with [Professor Sandy Johnson](#). That is one of my concentrations so I am learning a lot, and I like the international perspective she is giving. It is really different from how an anthropologist sees things, even medical and development where you would focus on communities and specific health issues. The other class I'm really liking that I didn't think I was going to like that much is a 3 credit class: "Issues in Policy Making," with Professor David Cherney. It's really, really interesting. I recently worked on public policy analysis back home, looking at what public policy and legal framework girls and women have to work in favor of them [sic]. And I was really frustrated because it doesn't really matter if it is written, if it is not working. But then in this class I am learning about how you analyze public policy, how the whole process comes together. I have learned a lot.