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Lina Lee, Associate Professor of Spanish, COLA

Lina Lee

University of New Hampshire - Main Campus, lina.lee@unh.edu

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Lina Lee

Associate Professor of Spanish - College of Liberal Arts

Professor Lee traveled to Costa Rica in January to learn about overseas academic programs in San Joaquín de Flores and San José.

Due to the current security situation in Mexico and the travel warning issued by the US State Department, our Puebla summer study abroad program is temporarily inactive. As director of the Puebla program, I was interested in seeking an alternative program for the summer of 2011. After consulting with Claire Malarte-Feldman, the Director of the Center for International Education (CIE) and Beth Kilinc, the Administrative Director for Study Abroad, a summer program in Costa Rica appeared to be a good option. Since many of our students have had a very positive experience with the programs provided by the Academic Program International (API), I then contacted Julie Van Vechten-Smith, the Director of Customized Programs of API to discuss the possibility of establishing a six-week summer program in Costa Rica. With the support of CIE and API, in January, I spent one week in Costa Rica visiting the study abroad programs offered by the Instituto San Joaquín de Flores, the Universidad de Costa Rica and the Universidad Veritas in San José. The primary purpose of my trip was to gain first-hand knowledge of academic programs sponsored by the Instituto San Joaquín de Flores located 10 miles from San José.



Lina Lee (far right) with colleagues from Instituto San Joaquín de Flores and Academic Program International (API)

The Institute is situated in the colorful and quaint town of San Joaquín de Flores, a 15-minute ride by local transportation to the town of Heredia, where the Universidad Nacional is located. It is housed in a colonial style building surrounding by lush gardens with tropical plants, fruit trees and orchids. The two-story house has classrooms, lounges and study areas on each floor. Upon my arrival at the Institute, I met with the Academic Director, Alexánder Sánchez, the Assistant Director, Ana Alvarado and the API Resident Director, Esteban López to discuss course selections and cultural learning opportunities. Alex explained to me that the Institute was built specifically to be an academic and language school. The Institute offers a variety of Spanish language and culture courses taught by a team of faculty from the Universidad de Costa Rica and the Universidad Nacional. Volunteering and community service learning opportunities are also available for students. During the coffee break in a charming patio, I chatted with the professor who teaches the Spanish for nursing careers. He emphasized that the linguistic and topical components of the course enable students to learn vocabulary in the health and medical fields and further develop their ability to communicate effectively with patients and their families in local clinics. In my view, the course is a perfect option for nursing and pre-med students.



Professor Lee at the Instituto San Joaquín de Flores

During my visit, I also had the opportunity to sit in one of the cultural classes. I was impressed by the amount of interaction that the professor and the students had in a small class setting. Obviously, the students felt comfortable speaking Spanish during class activities. Immediately after my class observation, I was accompanied by Esteban and Ana to visit a host family, who showed us the house and shared with us their experiences of hosting international students over the years. We even got a taste of famous Latin dessert "Arroz con leche" (rice pudding). What a treat! What I liked the most was that students are placed individually with local families who live within walking distance of the Institute. Living with 'tico' (Costa Rican) families is the best

way for students to improve their Spanish speaking skills. More importantly, the small setting and slower pace of life of San Joaquín de Flores allow students to have exceptional opportunities for linguistic and cultural integration. In addition, students explore the beauty, culture and history of Costa Rica through day and weekend trips to volcanoes, beaches, coffee plantations, rain forests and more.

With the assistance of API, I visited the Center of International Affairs and made initial contacts with the Head of the Student Mobility Section at the University of Costa Rica. I also met with Alejandra Barahona, the Director of the Center for International Programs at the Universidad Veritas in San José to discuss a possible two-week summer seminar for Spanish and ESL teachers. I am grateful to the CIE for funding my trip and to API for hosting me in San José. It provided me with the wonderful opportunity to interact and collaborate with the host institutes. With great enthusiasm and energy, I continue to work on the six-week customized summer program in San Joaquín de Flores for UNH students.





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Hood House • 89 Main Street • Durham, NH 03824 • Ph 603-862-2398 • Fax 603-862-0169
Thompson Hall • 105 Main Street • Durham, NH 03824 • Ph 603-862-1288 • Fax 603-862-0844

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