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3-6-2007

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University Relations, "UMM prepares Norgren '08 for ELTAP in Ecuador" (2007). *Campus News Archive*. 957.

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UMM prepares Norgren '08 for ELTAP in Ecuador

Summary: In a few short weeks, Ecuador and its people challenged University of Minnesota, Morris ELTAP participant Amanda Norgren's mind and captured her heart.

(March 6, 2007)-Ecuador's impact on Amanda Norgren '08, Rockford, could be described as swift, powerful, and beautiful. She arrived in Quito in mid-January to serve through UMM's English Language Teaching Assistant Program (ELTAP) at Colegio Los Pinos, an all-girls Catholic school. In a few short weeks, Ecuador and its people challenged her mind and captured her heart.

A bilingual school, Norgren assists Los Pinos classroom teachers in the elementary and high schools, and teaches an after-school remedial English class. Norgren credits her UMM English and Spanish classes for preparing her for the ELTAP program and also notes: "The wide range of knowledge gained at a liberal arts college like Morris prepared me to better understand and appreciate a different culture."

"This is my first time abroad," reflects Norgren, "so the biggest challenge for me has been to rid myself of expecting things to be how they are at home. I am learning to live in a new way in this new place. My entire world is bigger and my mind is open to new things. I have learned to be flexible and adaptable. I have a better understanding of what culture means and am learning to see the world in a new way. And my education is incredibly enhanced by this experience."

In addition to opportunities at Los Pinos, Norgren's roommates, also university students, provide exposure to Ecuadorian culture. "The girls in my apartment have taken me to concerts, historical sights, and museums in Quito and other cities, and I will be going on a trip to the jungle," she shares. "The people I've met here in Ecuador treat me like family. Their view of relationships is different than in the United States. They are warm and generous, and consider you a friend right away. I didn't expect to be so loved so soon!"

After Norgren completes her ELTAP assignment in April, she plans to volunteer for a nonprofit organization in Ecuador or Peru before returning to Minnesota.

ELTAP students share knowledge of their own culture and language with teachers and students studying English in 26 different countries. By doing so, they become part of another culture and community—living, serving, learning, and making a difference in the lives of others.

Photo above: Norgren visited the Vivarium in Quito which has 87 live reptiles and amphibians. She says, "I was glad to learn that even though there are many snakes in Quito, most are not poisonous."

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