I was granted the opportunity to work with the Instituto de Formación Permanente (INSFOP) in Esteli, Nicaragua. This organization defends the rights of vulnerable sectors of the population and searches for solutions to two issues in particular that plague Central America: gangs and drugs. This is an international phenomenon that affects the United States as well as Latin America. This organization works to form policies that will help this problem on the local and state level. However, with a focus more on specific neighborhoods within Esteli itself, the type of work was more social related than strictly policy oriented.

My duties for this internship at INSFOP were to work with and support the project “Reinserción Social de Grupos Juveniles del distrito III,” which works exclusively with six gangs (Los Frijoles, Los Salvatruchas, Los Alminios, Los Vengaboyes, Los Ángeles del Infierno, and Los Poison) in District 3 of Esteli. The main goals of this project are to recreate and restore the reputation and image of these young men in the community, help them find jobs, write letters of recommendation based on their participation in events put on by the office of Reinserción, clear their police record, give them scholarships to finish primary, secondary, or technical school, and help them reflect on their life choices by hosting several series of weekend spiritual retreats. Another component of this internship was related to my previous research done at Sewanee. I was given the chance to give presentations in a workshop setting on my thesis as well as other papers I had written at Sewanee during my senior year over topics such as drug and border violence, gang violence, narcotrafficking, and the prison system in Central America. We also created a sports league for the juvenile groups, as a way to compete against each other and “defend” their neighborhoods in a healthy, non-violent manner.

This experience was one of the highlights of my life. It is one of the most valuable things I have ever done, and it taught me a lot about my own strengths and what I am passionate about. My Spanish also improved tremendously, and I finally changed my ability to “fluent” on my resume. So, although this internship was less policy oriented than originally thought, we still aided in the mobilization of ideas of these “chavalos,” and worked with the National Police in order to accomplish our goals. I will definitely work to stay in contact with INSFOP as well as with the “chavalos” so that should I have the opportunity to help them in the future, I will be able to do so.