Working in Ecuador is always both challenging and rewarding, and this summer in the Galapagos Islands has been no different. I first came here two years ago to study and volunteer, and my service work that semester led to a community service internship working with Hacienda Tranquila. Hacienda Tranquila is a nonprofit organization that lets volunteers from all over the world come and live and work on its farm, devoting themselves to service projects centered on tackling social and environmental challenges here on the islands.

Last summer, I worked with the manager of the Hacienda to establish a free English as a Second Language program for the students of El Progreso, a tiny farming community in the highlands of San Cristobal Island. I taught three classes for two months. However, after I left, it was difficult for the classes to continue. I sent lesson plans, but the Hacienda struggled to find native English speaking volunteers who were able to teach, and who would be in the Galapagos for a sufficient time. My primary goal in returning for a second summer was to flesh out the school in El Progreso and ensure that it will continue after I am gone.

Projects in Ecuador move slowly, and I am still here and plan to stay through the end of August or beyond in order to make sure that the classes will continue. Since being here, I have taught the classes myself. I again divided up the classes into age groups of 6-9, 10-12, and 13-16. Upon arriving in July, I was disappointed to discover that the students had forgotten nearly all of what I taught last summer. On the flip side, that confirmed what I already knew—that the classes have to be offered constantly in order to do any good. Learning a language is all about repetition, and any breaks in the offering of classes all but erase what has been taught. This summer, I have
again covered the basics plus a good bit of more advanced material for my older students --basic vocabulary such as colors, numbers, animals, basic verbs, adjectives describing how one feels, how to introduce oneself, talk about one’s' likes and dislikes, how to discuss the weather, and other conversational skills. I have taught how to form sentences in the present and past tense, and we are currently working on question formation. After seeing how easy it is to forget something without constant practice, I always incorporate a review session in the first ten minutes of class. I have also sporadically given private lessons to adults who express interest.

The classes themselves have been a success; I love teaching and I know all the students from last summer, so it has been a pleasure to come back. The more difficult issue has been figuring out how to ensure that the classes continue. I have made detailed lessons plans of everything I have covered so far, and have researched ESL teaching and curriculum development and have so far written lesson plans that should cover up until January at least, depending on the pace of the teacher. I have also made a list of useful ESL internet sites that offer tips for lesson planning and ideas for class activities, and when I return to the United States I am planning to send ESL books over with the rest of my internship money.

To address the problem of a teacher, my boss and I have created an English teaching position that is going to be posted on the Hacienda Tranquila website. The volunteers at the Hacienda have been renovating a small building on the property into a classroom. It is not quite ready--we are waiting for some more seating, but it has a dry erase board and a long table. Moreover, it is clean and isolated from distractions, and I think it will be perfect to offer classes in (currently I am teaching in an all-purpose room above the community library). I have created a
profile for the English position; the person will be a native English speaker, ideally have basic Spanish skills, will be able to stay for a minimum of 8 weeks, and preferably longer. In exchange for their teaching, they will be given free lodging as well as breakfast and lunch at the Hacienda. Though it is unfortunate that we can't offer payment, I think that it is still an opportunity people will leap at; everyone wants to visit the Galapagos, and this would be an more affordable and meaningful experience. I think it will appeal to young people, like recent college grads from the United States and Europe, who want to travel and are passionate about making a difference. We have not yet published this position on the Hacienda Tranquila website because the classroom is not quite ready and my boss is still figuring out the lodging for the volunteer. That is one of the reasons I am still here--I am not leaving until it's done, because if I leave before, it will probably never happen!

I have been involved in several other smaller projects in addition to the English classes. I help to coordinate the weekly horse therapy at the Hacienda of disabled children on the island. I have created a small book with pictures of the projects of the Hacienda to distribute to hotels so that interested tourists might donate to some of the Hacienda's projects. Finally, I am currently helping my boss to apply for funding from a German nonprofit to distribute skateboards and possibly build a skatepark for the children of El Progreso.

My time here has taught me a lot about teaching, about Latin American culture, about how to be a leader, and about how to push for things that are important to you. In September, I plan to begin my year with WorldTeach, a volunteer organization that places volunteers all over the world to teach English. I will be (of course) in Ecuador, teaching English at a university.
Because of my time here, I feel prepared not only to teach, but also to connect with my students and to deal with any cultural problems that may arise. My work in Ecuador has prepared me for any long-term career path I may choose, be it teaching or nonprofit work. Living and working in Ecuador has made me adaptable and flexible, but also able to stand up for myself. In short, it has made me grow up, and I am so thankful for that. But I am even more thankful for what the funding has allowed me to do here; because of Sewanee internship funding, the children of El Progreso will have access to English classes hopefully for years to come.