

My Service Immersion Trip to Carmen Pampa, Bolivia was an amazing experience and the perfect way to finish my freshman year at Neumann! Our long trip began with an overnight flight from Washington D.C. to El Alto, Bolivia. Arriving very early in the morning, we drove through Bolivia's capital, La Paz, to a small, beautiful hostel named Sol y Luna, in the town of Coroico. There, we were able to get some rest and recuperation to prepare for our week of immersion in Carmen Pampa. After some rest and our first group reflection at the hostel, we left that afternoon to head to the Unidad Académica Campesina (UAC), which is a Catholic college located in Carmen Pampa, Bolivia. We stayed on campus for about seven days, and visited other neighboring communities while there. Our group gained first-hand knowledge of the Bolivian culture and we completely immersed ourselves in a different way of life. We spent most of our time learning about Quechua, one of the largest cultures in Bolivia, and we even had an opportunity to learn some of the Quechuan language. At the end of the trip, we went back to La Paz for a full day before we departed to come home. The trip was enlightening, inspiring, and spiritually refreshing.

When we arrived on campus, we learned that a tradition at the UAC is to celebrate the anniversary of each of the majors. On each anniversary, the students in the major plan several days of celebrations and activities. While we were there, they were celebrating the anniversary of the education major and we were very lucky to be a part of it. Our first morning at the college started at 4:00 AM, when we were woken up with fireworks and a local school's band to begin the Education major celebration. We were still very tired from all our traveling, but we were so excited to get started! We quickly got dressed and joined the celebration. The morning was filled with dancing, hot chocolate, and snacks. We were so thankful we got out of bed and participated in the early morning activities! It was a very unique experience, and the celebrations continued

throughout the day. We played soccer and volleyball with the students in the Education program. Although we were not as athletic as them, we all enjoyed playing with each other!

That evening, the campus held a cultural night where we witnessed the Saya, which is a native Bolivian dance that originated in the Yungas region, as well as many other native dances. Natalie, a five-year old whose parents work for the college, participated in the dance. Before the cultural night began, she came up and taught us the Saya. Then she asked us to play tag with her and her younger cousin. A couple of other kids joined and played with us as well. The kids had so much fun playing with us and we enjoyed it a lot too! Though there was a language barrier, we were able to communicate with each other in different ways, and still able to enjoy each other's company. The language barrier encouraged me to want to learn Spanish more and it motivated me to work harder in my class this upcoming fall semester. Along with learning different cultures, I learned about different ways of living. Everyday life in Bolivia is notably different than everyday life in America. My trip made me step back and rethink how I spend my time. It also helped me appreciate the people in my life and helped me realize how people affect my everyday life.

There were two long-term Franciscan volunteers who were stationed at the school for two years whom we met with throughout the trip. We enjoyed spending time with them and learning about their experiences in Bolivia. They are able to take away so much from their time there and we were so thankful that they opened up and talked to us about what they learned and how their time there has impacted their lives. The volunteers led us in a beautiful prayer service on one of our last evenings. Seeing their commitment to the Bolivian people at Carmen Pampa made us want to strengthen our commitment to service as well.

This trip inspired me to reach out to people more; people in Bolivia really care about each other. They were so friendly and they never failed to stop and talk to everyone they passed. The way the people cared not only for each other, but the land, also inspired me to see nature in a different way. I was able to appreciate God's gift of the environment. The views were breathtaking and it helped me realize how much natural beauty there is that often goes unnoticed. About halfway through our trip, we went zip-lining in the town of Yolosa. Being so high up gave us the opportunity to appreciate things from a new perspective. This was one of my favorite memories from the trip. As I was zip lining, I enjoyed scanning the land, seeing the beautiful views, and feeling the wind blow through me.

From early morning fireworks to zip-lining to navigating conversations in Spanish and English, all of these experiences made for a unique and unforgettable trip. I was spiritually refreshed after my time at the UAC. I saw how deeply faithful many of the Bolivians were and how they lived their faith day to day. Our evening reflections gave me the opportunity to reconnect with God and see things in a new and refreshing way. I highly recommend for others to get involved with Campus Ministry's Service Immersion program!

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