



Summer 2004

MIRT News

Multidisciplinary International Research Training Program, 206-543-7559

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Scenes from Cuernavaca, Mexico



Dr. Annette Fitzpatrick, Simone, and Gabriela at the Grand Mercado, Mexico

MIRT 2004 -- Work in Progress

We launched two new training sites (North Vietnam and Bangkok, Thailand) this year!

MIRT 2004 was officially launched June 28th. Twelve undergraduate and graduate students initiated their fellowships in Mexico, Peru, Thailand, & Vietnam. The latter two sites were new for the Program.

This year, MIRT fellows were selected from a large number of universities including: the University of Washington, University of California, Berkley; Villanova University, Xavier University, Johns Hopkins University, Rice University, and Michigan State University.

On June 28, the Thailand group left from their home towns met their colleagues and UW-MIRT Mentor, Dr. Michelle Williams in Tokyo's Narita Airport. From there the team traveled to Bangkok. The group will participate in an "Epi-Biostat and Research Writing" boot-camp led by Dr. Williams. They will also study Thai language and culture and attend the International HIV/AIDS Conference.

Three additional MIRT fellows traveled on June 28th to meet up with two of their mentors, Dr. Sixto Sanchez and Dr. Julio Perez at Dos de Mayo Hospital in Lima, Peru. The doctors and their colleagues at Dos de Mayo Hospital will mentor this team.

On June 29th three fellows met UW MIRT Mentor, Dr. Annette Fitzpatrick

in Mexico, where they then traveled onward to Cuernavaca, Mexico to begin their research training at the Instituto Nacional de Salud Publica (INSP).

The fourth MIRT 2004 group, comprised of two undergraduates, traveled to Thai Nguyen, Vietnam where they joined Dr. Tu T. T. Phung, a recent graduate of the UW Epidemiology Department and Assistant Professor at Thai Nguyen Medical School. The fellows began work on a study entitled: "The Epidemiology of Adverse Pregnancy Outcome" with Dr. Phung and her colleagues at the Medical School.



Enter the Grand Palace, Bangkok, Thailand



Gabriela and Simone with their host parents, Magdalena and Gustavo, along with other family members



Simone, Gabriela and Benjamin shopping at the Central Market (Zocalo); deciding that it's time for new hats!

Benjamin Vazquez

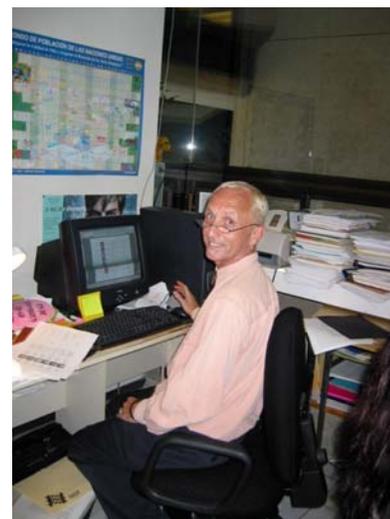
Hola from Cuernavaca, the Cuernavaca group is having an amazing time. We share a two bedroom bungalow attached to the main house, and the owners of the house are wonderful. Our house mother, Malena, treats us like her own family. The whole family is a wonderful cultural resource for us; they give us information about the area, help us hone our Spanish skills, and provide a safe area for us to ask our questions about Mexico. We've traveled just about every weekend. So far, we've been to Tepoztlan, Mexico City, Teotihuacan, Taxco and Grutas de Cacahuamilpa. Simone even made it to Acapulco for a weekend!

We've learned a great deal about the rich history of the area. The ruins are amazing, and they are an inspiring testament to Mexico's complex history.

INSP is treating us well. We've had to adjust to the way things are done here, for it is quite different than in the United States--the pace, the system, etc. We've been set-up with our projects, and, for the most part, we've had to work on them independently. It's been a good opportunity for us to develop our independent study skills. At times it has been frustrating, but it is slowly coming together. Overall, it's teaching us a valuable lesson, and it will contribute to our future careers as researchers.



Gabriela Saenz and her mentor, Dr. Nelly Salgado, of INSP



Ken Morrison, Director of Department of Economics and Politics, INSP Mentor of Benjamin Vazquez

Jose Flores



Emma, Kathryn and Jose at the Rotunda of Dos de Mayo Hospital, Lima, Peru

I have to admit that arriving in Lima as a researcher-in training was an intimidating task. Never in my life had I carried out actual research, but my worries were calmed knowing that the MIRT staff would be training me and that I would have support on the way. I knew that MIRT had high expectations for its students; therefore I knew I had to come with an open mind and high goals set for me. Being a part of the research team, and knowing that each member is an integral part of the project has taught me a lot and I now have a grasp on how population based research is carried out. Working at Dos de Mayo Hospital in the center of Lima has been a great experience. Seeing so much poverty and observing the health needs of the population in Lima have given me great insight in to how medicine is carried out here as opposed to in the US. Since Peru is still a developing nation, it seems that the most basic health care is crucial. Seeing that research is not a major priority here has reinforced the fact that many Latin American people suffer from poverty and that there is little access to capital for these people. For this reason, research is not stressed at hospitals and more basic health needs have to be addressed. Like one of the doctors said, "The biggest problem here is social problems that deal with the uneven distribution of resources."

Getting to know the city has been awesome. Lima has so much history and there is so much to see. The food is delicious and the people are all very nice. The transportation system here is like no other. Getting in to a taxi is an adventure every time. The drivers here don't follow the rules of the road, and I feel as if I am going to be involved in a traffic accident before I leave.

A bad thing about the city is that there is too much smog and dust, but I guess that's a problem with every urban area.

Having the opportunity to travel within the country has been fun. So far I've been to Pachacamac, an ancient ruins site that was inhabited by three different indigenous cultures and Chosica, a town right outside of Lima where one can find sun, swimming, and great food. In August, I will travel to the city of Cuzco, which leads to the world famous "Lost City of the Incas," Machu Pichu. I will also visit Ica, a city south of Lima from which I will travel to the mysterious Nazca lines and to Huacachina, a place known for its sand dunes where visitors can sand board. My final destination in Peru will be Mancora, where one can find some of the most beautiful beaches in Peru and enjoy delicious seafood, while relaxing under the sun which rarely is seen in the winter of Lima. Peru has to be one of the greatest places in South America to travel in. It's been great so far.



Incan stone idol: The Idol of Pachacamac - Lima, Peru.



Office of the Department of Epidemiology in Dos de Mayo Hospital in Lima, Peru



April, Ribka, Chinyere, and Linda (left to right)

April Noble

My overall experience in Thailand has been remarkable. In the beginning, I thought that it would be extremely difficult to adjust to the pace of the Thai culture and definitely the language. However, the people here are very friendly and helpful. They help you adapt to the culture by teaching you various words in Thai. Most of the words that I have been taught have helped me get around the city easily.

In Thailand, we have traveled to Pattaya and Chiang Mai. The culture here is very rich. The beaches, mountains, and temples are incredible. In addition, we have learned much of the history that surrounds the Thai culture. The XV International AIDS Conference was held in Bangkok, Thailand as well. This event allowed my colleagues and me to experience a huge conference. The Conference allowed us to learn more about the AIDS epidemic, what steps are being taken to help individuals infected by the virus, and what we can do individually to prevent this virus from spreading.

Ribka Ayana

So far, Bangkok has surpassed my expectations. This city is much more developed than I ever imagined, but at the same time, Thailand is a country that has retained a lot of its rich culture and traditions. This are extremely proud of their royal family and their culture. You see temples and pictures of members of the royal family just about everywhere in the city. Another thing that is quite unique to the Thai people is their friendliness and their hospitality.

So far we have had a chance to visit many historical sites, temples and palaces, both within and outside of Bangkok. Although there are temples everywhere, each temple that we have visited has its own story and is unique in its structure.

It is also very encouraging to see a developing country, which is doing so well economically. The government seems to really care about the growth of the country. You see evidence of that in the projects and the civic activities that are taking place, at least in the areas that we have visited so far.

I am definitely happy that I came to Thailand and I wouldn't trade this experience for anything!



Chinyere - not scared at all!



Chinyere Ogonna & Linda Pham

Thailand has been an absolute delight. Bangkok is like the "New York City" of Thailand. Arriving at the city of Bangkok, we did not expect the roads and highways to be packed with cars more than with motorcycles and bicycles. The city is a real hustle and bustle, full of day and night time excursions. One unfortunate aspect is the literally "bumper to bumper traffic," enhanced by the adrenaline rush received by monitoring the reckless driving. We have been scared many a times by the reckless, yet skillful navigating of the taxis. One way to escape the craziness on the road is to ride the accessible sky train. The sky train is pretty economical and safe.

Other than that, the Thai hospitality and manner is absolutely endearing and welcoming. Being surrounded by the warm language, we have absorbed the same quaint and polite manner. The culture of Thailand is dominated by religion (there are Buddhist temples everywhere), royalty, tourism, and the emerging issue of modern technologic times versus well-preserved tradition. The royal family is highly respected here, and their presence through banners and huge pictures and paintings is definitely felt. The people here dress quite well and are equipped with cell phones at every corner. From street vendors and markets to huge malls, shopping has become the city's biggest market. We here have given a good share to the market ourselves.

Tourism has been THE number one market for the Thai government and people. The Thai people know so many languages to accommodate for people all around the world who come to see the beautiful country.

Time has really flown by here with all the activities that our group in Bangkok, Thailand has been involved in. The 15th International AIDS Conference was the most interesting and eye-opening event. The scale of the AIDS pandemic really has been a human rights issue, and the issue of culture and people. Standard morals and ignorance of the causes and meanings attached to AIDS hinders the successful prevention and elimination of the number one killer in history. Politics was a huge aspect in the conference, rightly so, and the voice of the people was heard. All of the major leaders and players in the world against AIDS were there to share their reports and opinions. We were absolutely honored to be in the presence of UN Secretary General Kofi Annan and former South African President and wonderful leader, Nelson Mandela. Many other highly respectable and admirable leaders shared their thoughts and their promises to fighting the war against AIDS.

Along with this very important conference, we have had some fun too: We went to tour the city, Chinatown, Pattaya beach, Chiang Mai & Chiang Rai, and the Golden Triangle (the triangle border of Thailand, Laos, and Burma). We will be going to Phuket Island and its beaches as well, and maybe Singapore if money is still left. Also, one last thing, the Thai language classes are very fun and intensive. We are learning how to communicate in Thai, which has been a great help.

Our time at the Union Language School, though intensive (four hours of training each day!) is immensely enjoyable. We are fortunate to have Mrs. Nareeboon Rachkeeree, the principal of the language school as our teacher (*khruu* - in Thai!).



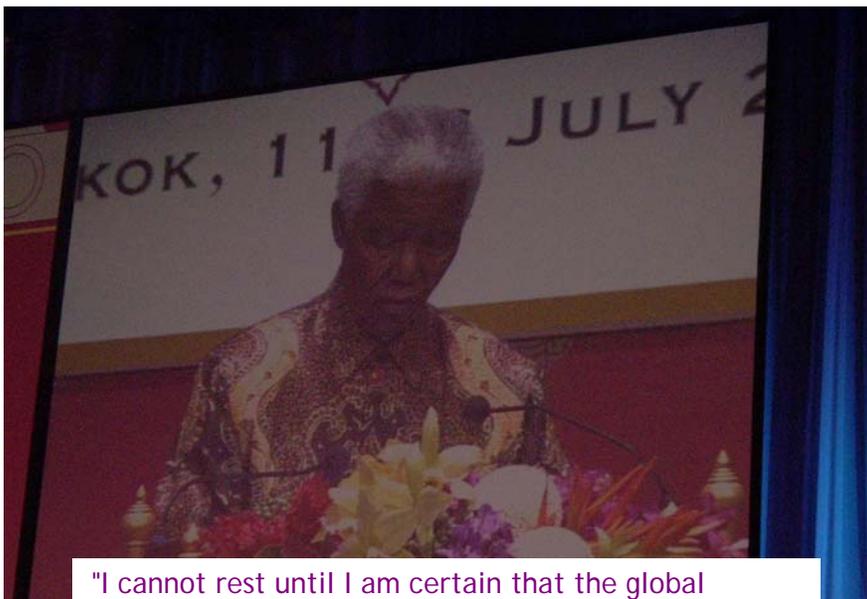
Getting around via Bangkok's Water Taxis

MIRT FELLOWS ATTENDED THE AIDS CONFERENCE



The XV International AIDS Conference - Opening Ceremony

The XV international AIDS Conference, held in Bangkok, Thailand, was attended by MIRT-2000 alumni, Carolina Mejia, the MIRT-2004 Thailand Fellows, and Dr. Williams. The biennial International conference was also attended by heads of states, senior scientists and health administrators from around the globe, politicians, political activists and celebrities. Those in attendance included: Kofi Annan, Nelson Mandela, Sonja Gandhi, and Richard Gere.



"I cannot rest until I am certain that the global response is sufficient to turn the tide of the epidemic." Nelson Mandela

Carolina Mejia- MIRT 2000 Alumna

MIRT Alumni Carolina Mejia attended the XV International AIDS Conference in Bangkok. She describes her experience as follows:

"It was really invigorating to be in Thailand, in a country that has in the past experienced and responded to the most widespread epidemic of this region. Presenting my thesis on the *"Acceptability of Female Condom among Sex Workers in Three Regions of Peru"* at the conference was a professional experience for me. I had the opportunity to talk with other researchers who are doing similar HIV/STDs prevention work with sex workers in India, Africa, and Latin America. I also had the wonderful opportunity to hear President Nelson Mandela's inspirational speech. This was probably one of his last public-speaking appearances since he's retiring from public life. Overall, this experience was an unforgettable experience and I thank the MIRT Program for providing me with the opportunity to attend the conference".



Carolina presenting her poster

Kelly Bui and Lisa Nguyen



Lisa, Kelly, Dr. Tu Phung with the research team at Thai Nguyen Medical College (second from left to right)

Mortified by the blunt comments about our weight and facial acne, we didn't know what to do except looked at each other sheepishly. After awhile, we learned not to take these comments too personally, comprehending that people's frankness was simply a part of the culture.

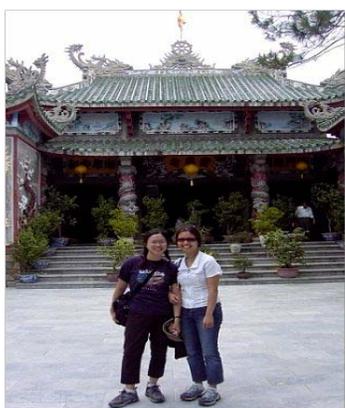
An amazing aspect of our experience is that our research has not been limited to just bookwork. We have also been immersed in an extremely enriching clinical setting that has shown us the motivation behind our research. Attending lectures with medical students, accompanying doctors on rounds for post-natal care, and spending time in the delivery room has allowed us to witness the difficulties of delivery and pregnancy firsthand. For example, viewing several C-sections and the number of hours women often spent in labor gave us a numbing awareness of the difficulty of childbirth. Therefore, we are extremely motivated in this research, which can provide potential preventions for various complications in pregnancy.



Kelly and Lisa - Martial arts, NOT their strong suit!

We are working with faculty members and staff of the Thai Nguyen Medical College and the Thai Nguyen General Hospital. We are studying the risk factors of adverse pregnancy outcomes including preterm delivery, stillbirths, preeclampsia and fetal growth retardation. We have been working with study principal investigators and research interviewers. Our participation has allowed appreciate the importance of real-life experiences as they relate to the development of a comprehensive data collection method. Nurses and doctors provided in depth feedback and comments concerning our questionnaire. Translating the questionnaire has been quite an experience!

Overall, our time here has encompassed more than learning statistics or how to conduct research in a developing country. It has also included clinical experiences and cultural lessons of Vietnam. From being in this surrounding, we have become more adapted, independent, understanding, and flexible individuals. We are looking forward to many more valuable experiences before our trip is over.



...site seeing in Danang, Vietnam

In addition to exercises in translation, our bi-lingual learning extended to lectures on our research topics on preterm delivery, stillbirth, preeclampsia, and birth defects. Taught in Vietnamese, we had to translate the lecture to English in order to fully comprehend the lecture. Not only did we learn completely new concepts, but we also learned them in two different languages!



..free piggy back rides!

MIRT FACULTY AND ALUMNI ATTEND THE SER CONFERENCE

- Dr. Tu T. T. Phung Wins Epidemiology Research Poster Prize



Roberto presenting his poster



Dr. Tu T. T. Phung

Two MIRT 2003 Alumni, **Roberto Orellana** and **Sergio Tovar**, presented their research poster in the Society of Epidemiological Research (SER) Conference held in Salt Lake City, Utah, June 14-June 18, 2004.

The fellows reported some findings from their research entitled: "Risk Factors of Physical family violence in Lima, Peru".

Their Foreign Faculty Mentor, **Dr. Sixto Sanchez** (Professor of Epidemiology at Dos de Mayo Hospital in Lima, Peru) was on-hand to support the fellows. Dr. Sanchez also gave an oral research presentation of his recent paper on the epidemiology of preeclampsia in Peruvian women. In the spirit of being a "hi-level multi-tasker", Dr. Sanchez also met MIRT-Peru 2004 fellows (Kathryn Sinclair and Emma Moreno) to go over final plans before they departed for Lima late in June.

New MIRT-Foreign Faculty Mentor, **Dr Tu T. T. Phung**, (Assistant Professor, Thai Nguyen Medical College) and recent UW MPH presented her research entitled "Risk Factors Associated with Low infants Birth Weight in Thai Ngyen, Vietnam" and was an award winning poster. Congratulations to Dr. Phung! And Welcome to the UW-MIRT team!

Last but not least, we are happy to report that the UW-MIRT Program is fortunate to have **Mr. Bizuayehu Gelaye (Bizu)** as a new member of the administrative and teaching team. Mr. Gelaye, a Mechanical Engineer by training, is a skillful and compassionate administrator who selflessly supports program faculty and students.

Please see our next issue (Fall issue) for more on UW-MIRT Program's students, staff and faculty.

A Successful MIRT-2004 Pre Departure Orientation

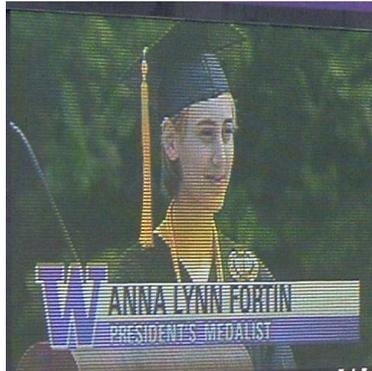
MIRT faculty and staff collaborated to host a successful orientation program for twelve MIRT Fellows for the MIRT 2004 Program. The Orientation Program was held for two days on May 6 and 7 in South Campus Center. So that students would have had a good opportunity to take care of last minute details before leaving home for their respective foreign research sites.

Helen McGough, Director of the UW Human Subject Division, provided students and faculty with a lecture on bioethics and responsible research. **Patrick Giles** of the UWMC Travel Clinic shared his expertise on travel health with fellows and faculty.

The MIRT Advisory Board Member and Director of Health Sciences Minority Students, **Karlotta Rosebaugh**, lead a group discussion on cultural competence. MIRT Co-Directors, **Drs. Michelle Williams and Virginia Gonzales** led small group discussions and shared experiences gained from international research and travel.

MIRT Faculty Member **Dr. Annette Fitzpatrick** introduced fellows to the joys (Yes. JOYS!) of Epidemiology and Biostatistics.

All in all it was a successful pre-travel orientation. MIRT 2004 Fellows took advantage of the opportunity to meet their colleagues, share their concerns and anxieties and begin to take definitive steps towards attenuating those concerns and anxieties as they worked with MIRT staff, faculty (and most importantly) each other as new-members of the UW-MIRT team!



Graduating Honors

MIRT Alumni 2002, **Anna Fortin**, won the UW's highest academic honor, the President's Medal

Anna's undergraduate GPA was 3.99. Remembering her MIRT experience she said "What great memories I still have about that summer".

She added, "I also want to let you know how greatly (and positively) my MIRT experience impacted me both as a student and as a world citizen".

Congratulations Anna! Best of wishes in medical school.



Fellows in a Biostatistics training session led by Dr. Fitzpatrick.



Fellows in small group discussions



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ALUM-NET

Let us know how you're doing and what you've been up to!

Name _____

Mailing Address _____

Home Phone Number _____

Work Phone Number _____

E-mail Address _____

Affiliation with MIRT _____

About You: (awards, honors, publications, employment, personal, etc)

Permission to use this information in future newsletter Yes ___ No ___

MIRT is a national program designed to encourage students from underrepresented groups to pursue careers in biomedical and behavioral research. This program provides support for undergraduates and graduate students to receive research training in an international setting. Conceived and funded by the Fogarty International Center of the National Institutes for Health, the

UW MIRT Program has been developed in collaboration with Dillard University and Western Washington University. The program focuses on population-based health research in developing countries and builds on established linkages with academic institutions in Zimbabwe, Vietnam, Thailand, Ecuador, Peru, Argentina and Brazil.



Elephant on parade in Bangkok, Thailand