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A Life of International Women's Health, Service, and Poetry

BY JEWEL PEREYRA

THIS PAST SUMMER I had the incredible opportunity to attend UCLA's Global Women's Health and Empowerment Summer Institute sponsored by the UC Center for Women's and Reproductive Health. I met an eclectic assortment of women, from recent graduates, PhD students, doctors, and community activists from across the world, including South Africa, London, United Kingdom, Vietnam, and the Philippines. My classmates were so inspiring and passionate, and I had the pleasure of working with UCLA professors Dr. David Gere and Dr. Paula Tavrow on a grant proposal to establish a doula health program in South Metro Manila, Philippines.

During the weeklong institute, I learned about the intersections of



crisis, empowerment, community organizing and international women's health. One such international program is the Social Work and Research Centre, popularly known

as Barefoot College, which is a non-governmental organization in Tilonia, India that provides services, education and vocational training to women in rural communities. The



Samantha Hogan (left), student advisor in the Department of Gender Studies at UCLA with Jewel Pereyra at CSW Awards Luncheon, June, 2013.

college, founded by Bunker Roy, offers programs that train and educate women on solar electrification, clean water, education, livelihood development and activism so that they may empower themselves by working and teaching in their communities in sustainable ways. One of my classmates was also a project manager for Sonke Gender Justice, an NGO in South Africa committed to promoting gender equality, preventing domestic abuse and rape and reducing the impact of HIV/AIDS in Africa.

One essential take-away I gained from the summer institute, my colleagues and from Constance Coiner, is to commit myself to service, community building and education. After attending the UC Global institute, I turned in an application to serve in the U.S. Peace Corps. I am very excited to announce

that starting July I will be serving as an Education volunteer in Cambodia and I cannot wait to gain skills in grassroots organizing, learn Khmer culture, history and language, develop cross-cultural community skills, and form amazing friendships during my service abroad.

Alongside my community work, I am still following my passion for literature and poetry. In August I started a poetry journal The Pear Trees Review (<http://peartreesreview.wordpress.com>.) The online journal features essays, book reviews and interviews with contemporary American poets. So far I have interviewed poets from across the California coastline including Camille Dungy, Robert Hass, Sholeh Wolpé, Brenda Hillman, Brian Stefans, Eric Gudas, Amy Gerstler, Harryette Mullen and Douglas Kearney. I am

currently transcribing the interviews for publication, and in the coming months, I hope to expand my project to the Midwest and east coast!

Having graduating from UCLA, I am excited to start my professional career in international affairs, public service and writing. After the Peace Corps, I plan to continue my graduate studies in American Studies or Comparative Literature and aim to enhance my research and studies in world literatures and languages, contemporary poetry, diaspora and migrancy studies and critical race and feminist theories. I am very grateful for the Center for the Study of Women's support and hope to carry on Constance Coiner's visions of social justice, gender equality, education, and global community engagement.

Jewel Pereyra received CSW's Constance Coiner Undergraduate Award in 2013. She was born in Okinawa, Japan and grew up in Oceanside, California. She graduated from UCLA with a double-major in Gender Studies and American Literature and Culture. Passionate about social justice, feminism, and LGBT rights, she co-founded UCLA's first "Gender, Sexuality and Society" themed floor community that, along with gender-neutral housing, became a housing option for students in the 2013-14 school year. She completed her departmental honors thesis with Professors Jenny Sharpe and Harryette Mullen. Her research explores European colonial travel narratives, post-colonial counter-narratives and myths, and the intersections between the nation, erotics and the queer diaspora in Caribbean and African American women's literature (1980s to present).