



To the Max Rady College of Medicine, Rady Faculty of Health Sciences:

My name is Allison Balasko, and I am writing to thank you for the financial support the Rady Faculty of Health Sciences provided the International Infectious Disease and Global Health Training Program (IID&GHTP), where eleven University of Manitoba students were sent to Medellín, Colombia, to partake in an IID&GHTP Major Course, “Practical Epidemiology”. IID&GHTP is a multidisciplinary program (sited in Canada, Kenya, Colombia and India) focused on addressing the spread of infectious diseases and the impact they have on global health. A major benefit of IID&GHTP is that often these multi-site interactions lead us to draw parallels with our own communities at home as well as shape our understanding of diverse global health issues, identifying and enabling opportunities to collaborate on select health issues. When evaluating course feedback, UM PhD candidate Breanne Head expressed, *“in this course, I was able to meet other IID&GHTP trainees to help build my international network, something that I feel is very important for a new investigator.”*

“Practical Epidemiology” was a two-week course hosted in collaboration with the University of Antioquia, University of Pontificia Bolivariana and Uniremington University Corporation. The course was led by three professors specializing in Health Sciences, Epidemiology and Biomedical statistical analysis. Eleven PhD students attended from the University of Manitoba along with 7 University of Antioquia students, 3 University of Nairobi students and 1 student from Bangalore, India. A unique aspect of this course was the hands-on statistical learning that directly applied to our PhD projects. The expectation is that UM students return to Canada to support the Department of Medical Microbiology and others with guidance on statistical analysis of their research. At the end of the course, we partook in a Scientific Symposium where experts in our field joined us during our individual presentations. This experience was transformational for many of us who had not presented internationally and sparked multiple discussions of potential future collaborations between PhD presenters and those professors acting as examiners. Personally, one professor suggested we collaborate on one of his future projects, and I believe this demonstrates the significance of such international opportunities for the UM and its students.

Further, an extremely unique hands-on experience was our visit to a rural neighborhood up the mountainside of Medellín (called La Cruz), during which we toured the community and primary care facility with two physicians. Sometimes, in research we can be caught up in our own context of solving a problem at the bench; we may not be exposed to the realities of many social circumstances people live in that influence the susceptibility of the infectious diseases we study. Experiencing the context of La Cruz first-hand provided profound enlightenment of the reasons why we do the work we do and has further motivated us to continue in the pursuit of excellence to support our global community. UM PhD student Abu Bakar Siddik wrote, *“this experience will help me in the future when thinking of delivering healthcare among inaccessible communities.”* Another UM PhD student Monika Kowatsch wrote, *“this course taught me so much about new ways of working with and empowering community.”*



On behalf of the IID&GHTP trainees, coordinators and supervisors, I want to extend an immense “Thank-You.” The experiences gained through this course, facilitated by the financial support of the Rady Faculty of Health Sciences, were invaluable and we hope to continue this collaboration in future IID&GHTP endeavours.

Sincerely,

Allison Balasko

IID&GHTP Trainee
MD/PhD Student
Vanier Scholar

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Students visiting local health advocate in La Cruz. He and his family grow food for the community.



Students performing “risk-mapping” exercise with two local physicians in La Cruz.



Typical course day. Applying statistical analyses on individual PhD project databases.



Group photo of the 2019 IID&GHTP Major Course “Practical Epidemiology”, Medellín, Colombia.