“E gendu gagu yet dau?” asked my great-grandmother as the aroma of freshly hand-made tortillas filled the dimly lit kitchen. She spoke in our native Zapotecan language, asking me if I wanted to eat one of her warm tortillas. Memories like these in my beautiful mountainous small Oaxacan town of San Francisco Cajonos, Ljxill, make up my earliest childhood memories. This small town, with its beautiful people, rich history and culture, was all I knew as a child, it was a simple and happy life. There was not much to worry about; we were fortunate enough to always have food on our table and a place to sleep.

Unfortunately, not everyone living in Oaxaca is as lucky. Walking down the streets of Oaxaca, I have seen dozens of people living in the streets, hungry children begging for a piece of bread, and disabled individuals dragging themselves across the street simply to get home. Being able to go back to my parents’ homeland and work with the people who are native to the area is what has made the UC Davis Quarter Abroad Latino/a Health Internship Program in Oaxaca the ideal program for me. Not only are the descriptions of the classes fascinating, intriguing, and relate to my interest in public health but the program as a whole with its integration of presenting at local schools and physically working to build infrastructure and ultimately working in a clinical rotation, is all encompassing and allows for direct interaction with the community which is something I love.

Growing up in the Los Angeles area as a Chicana, I have seen many from the Latino/a population suffer due to the lack of access to health care, lack of money to pay for medications and suffering of chronic diseases due to the lack of preventive care. It has always been astounding to me how one of the richest countries in the world, the U.S., allows for this to occur. Presenting on sexually transmitted diseases at the middle school will allow me to directly and proactively spread and highlight the importance of the preventive care needed in order to put at least a small halt in the repetitive cycle of sexually transmitted diseases.

The Indigenous Healing and Biodiversity in Latin America class will allow me to learn more about traditional healing methods utilized, which is of particular interest to me since my great-grandparents were curanderos during their younger days and solely utilized natural herbs and other natural methods to heal others, thus allowing me to become more knowledgeable about my culture. These classes offered in the program will truly allow me to integrate and learn more about my two worlds. And even though there is a great deal of skills, knowledge, and experience that I will gain through my participation in this program, I hope that through my clinical rotation, I will be able to give at minimum, half of what I will gain, back to the community.

Lastly, not only did I choose this program because of how extraordinary I think all of the components of it are but because I know that this program will allow me to further gain experience and insight that I will utilize to integrate into my studies and future projects as I pursue my Masters in Public Health. I am ready to face and work with the challenges that my fellow Oaxacans endure everyday and take a step towards the right direction.