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IRIS Award Report

During the summer of 2023, I made use of my IRIS award funds to travel to Mexico City for six weeks to conduct archival research in preparation for my masters dissertation and other research writings. As someone studying early 20th century Mexico, finding primary sources for my courses was often a challenge during my first year in the program. Yet I was able to consult some sources online last semester and through some of these I encountered mentions of hygiene practices and midwifery training being incorporated into rural schooling programs. Interested in learning more, my goal for the summer was to find documents relating to these programs. With the help of the IRIS funds, I was able to do just that and more.

I had planned to visit various archives though ultimately focused most of my time at the General Archive of the Nation which housed several collections on the specific educational project I was looking for. In these collections I found several documents relating to maternal health and child care in rural schools during the 1920s-1930s. These documents include medical reports, photos of these practices, and inventory of class reading materials. Unfortunately, this was the only collection that had a reliable guide to its contents which meant I had to take risks in looking through the other collections. Though a methodological challenge, I'm very happy I ventured into these collections because they held correspondence belonging to the teachers of these rural schools, providing me with very localized perspectives that I can include in my historical analysis. Additionally, I spent a day visiting some nearby antique book stores and actually found a few textbooks that were used by these programs during the 1920s! Thanks to the IRIS fund, I was able to purchase these books and I look forward to including them in my research writings.

Other than the national archive, I also got to visit the archive of the Secretary of Public Health. Though I did not find much on the specific rural programs I was looking for, I took close notes of what they held and was able to collect contextual information regarding health and medical practitioners for the regions worked by the rural educational programs. I made attempts to get in contact with other archives but I did not get a response from them as it seems they were not in operation for most of the summer. That experience taught me to make calls to archives far in advance of a research trip to plan accordingly.

In addition to archival research, I was also able to connect with well established academics in the field of history of science and medicine. I took several trips to the National Autonomous University of Mexico to meet professors and researchers interested in the social studies of science in Mexico. This part of the trip challenged my professional Spanish speaking skills to a degree I have not experienced before. Though somewhat stressful, these professional encounters provided me with a great amount of contacts in Mexico City and the professors introduced me to Spanish-written historical literature that are hard to access from the USA (monographs published by the Universities of different states in Mexico).

Finally, while in Mexico I got the opportunity to go on several cultural excursions. These experiences spanned from visiting a museum, talking to a stranger in the streets, or trying amazing and unique street food. These moments gave me a greater sense of appreciation for the history that I am studying and hoping to share with the world. In doing so, this trip also inspired in me a great deal of confidence and appreciation for my graduate studies. I look forward to continuing my journey and am grateful for the professional, research, and personal growth that was made possible with the IRIS award.