Before this summer, I can’t say I had much prior experience with edible insects to put on my resume. I also hadn’t gone to Latin America without the intent of visiting family, but interning with MealFlour quickly familiarized me Guatemala, a country I had never been to before. Our work took us to various parts of the country to meet a diverse set of people: women in Candelaria, Rotary Club members in Antigua, community health promoters in Santa Apolonia, and so on. I met a lot of exceptional individuals over the course of the summer, most especially the women who got involved in our programs because they wanted to enable themselves to improve nutrition for their families.

We also held journal clubs to discuss a new theme each week between the interns and directors. Using a variety of media, we went at length over Guatemalan history, malnutrition, global health, and volunteering in developing countries. I found these discussions immensely useful because they definitely made me think about topics that every health worker and foreign volunteer should consider. What is the local context and the nature of the problem we’re trying to resolve? Are we bringing about change ethically, responsibly, and respectfully? It informed the way I interacted with participants and partners, and I’m proud to say that these principles guide MealFlour’s actions.

On top of my MealFlour duties, I got to work with two clinics. First, I volunteered with Primeros Pasos, located just outside of Xela. Along with doing tasks like data entry and recordkeeping, I assisted the outreach director with talks on dental hygiene, handwashing, and breastfeeding as well as distributing vitamins and vaccines to children and mothers. I also worked as a translator for a week with Boston College’s chapter of Timmy International. Each day we brought our mobile clinic to a new community, all of them with limited access to healthcare. In the consultations, I provided Spanish/English translations between the doctor and patient. Between those two clinics, I got to learn a great deal about the problems afflicting Guatemala and the difficulties of serving disadvantaged, often rural communities.

As simple as it sounds, I have learned so much this summer. Not just writing grants or doing literature reviews, though I am very glad to have gotten some experience with them, but things like how to salsa and what pupusas are. I learned how to navigate the chicken buses and which foods not to buy off the street. I learned how to swallow my bitter, bitter tears when France won the World Cup. And in all seriousness, I learned that Guatemala is a beautiful country filled with genuinely kind people. I feel so grateful to have been able to spend time there, and I am so glad that Elizabeth and Gabby gave me the opportunity to work alongside them in MealFlour.