Over Winter break 2015, I had the opportunity to complete part of my international experience at Aquiares Coffee Estate. The largest coffee plantation in Costa Rica in one single place. Due to my experience with video production, my main assignment was to create a Promotional Documentary on the different aspects of the plantation. I also got the opportunity to shadow Innovations manager Diego Robelo to learn about every aspect of coffee production.

Coming from Colombia, and a family that had been involved in the coffee industry, I was excited to get my first look at the coffee industry. While I had been at coffee plantations in the past, I never had the opportunity to completely involve myself in coffee production.

The production of the video began a month or so before my arrival in Costa Rica. I began prep by coming up with a production plan full of who I wanted to interview, different shots that I was going to take, and overall, came up with a plan that matched the vision that Aquiares had. Once in Costa Rica, production began with taking some video of different farms around the capital city of San Jose. When I arrived at Aquiares, production quickly picked up. Everyday consisted of waking up around 7, eating a traditional breakfast, and hours of learning about coffee and shooting for the promotional documentary. Countless hours of interviews, time lapses of the sunset
taken at five in the morning, and even a ride in the collecting tractor and the shooting of the video was complete.

Interviews were an integral part of the production of the video. Everyday I would search for new people to interview so that a new perspective could be shared. I had the opportunity to interview retired workers, workers as they picked coffee, the president of the company, and many more. Every interview gave me a unique perspective on the life of the people that made the coffee production at Aquiares possible. I learned about the days prior to current president, Alfonso Robelo, and how times changed quickly in a positive way when he took over. I learned about the love and compassion that people in this community have for each other. Most importantly I learned that the coffee industry was what I wanted to work in.

Once the production of the video was done, I spent countless hours shadowing Innovations Manager, Diego Robelo. Every day we would go to a different area in the plantation. From the nursery where coffee plants began to grow, to the roasting room where coffee was roasted for local sale. Every aspect of coffee production was shown to me, and day by day, I felt more certain that this was the industry that I wanted to involve myself in, in the future. I spent some time becoming familiar with the roasting process. This was the last step needed before distribution for consumption locally. It consisted of having a careful eye for the color of bean that you are aiming for, and careful time management and multitasking to ensure that the bean does not over roast. The aroma that filled the room during the roasting process was one that I will most likely never forget. While at the nursery I was taught about the recent progress that has been made in the grafting of Robusta coffee roots into arabica plants. This was used to fight a
disease that ruined the plants that in Spanish is called Corchosis in which most of the damage was done to the roots. The higher caffeine content and other differences between the two varieties makes it so the robusta roots can be more resilient to the disease.

The international experience of interning at Aquiares did not end when I came back to the states. The last part of the producing the video, the post production (editing), still needed to be done. For a couple of weeks, I worked on putting the finishing touches on the promotional documentary. This part required hours of editing and paying special attention to detail. Once the video was published, it received great reviews. The Rainforest Alliance shared it on their site and twitter page, international programs also shared it on the site and social media pages, and in just a few days the views were over 100.

In the end I finished my first international experience with a final product that was received exceptionally well by the public, and the knowledge to begin to involve myself in the coffee industry. Since arriving back in Ithaca, my experience has led to me making contacts with Cenicafe, a coffee research institute in Colombia, and with AEM professor Miguel Gomez. Both of which may result in further international experience and research opportunities here at Cornell. More importantly however, I became acquainted with an incredible community in a small town in Costa Rica, a place filled with love, care, and compassion. Not just for each other, but for every person who enters the lovely community.