Kezia Matson’s Field Report

This summer, I was planning to travel to Guatemala to conduct research within rural areas of the country. The plan was to work remotely the first part of the summer, and then travel to Guatemala. Unfortunately, not all plans stick to schedule. We ran into several issues, including with our partners in Guatemala and issues with the Ministry of Health. Developments within our study also posed problems. Initially, this research would be conducted and processed within the summer, but after many discussions we decided to expand the study, into what is likely going to be a 5 year project. I will talk about why we came to that conclusion now.

The original project design involved conducting a survey in rural areas of Guatemala to gather data about conceptions and barriers in cervical cancer prevention. The long term goal would be to use this data as an argument towards implementing the Callascope, a device created within another faction of my research team. To do this, we created a survey that is long enough to gather detailed data, but short enough to be conducted in a concise manner. From the US branch of the research group, we planned to partner with local NGOs, to prompt community focus and also stay away from clinical regulations. The team in Guatemala, however, prefered we work within hospitals. We compromised and prompted to conduct the survey within clinics. That change resulted in other major changes in regulations and ethics, as well as some large fees incurred in working with the Guatemala Ministry of Health. While this was happening, I was staying with family in Puerto Rico and working remotely, as well as practicing Spanish and doing some rudimentary research into the possible Puerto Rico branch of this project that should begin in the spring.

The project continued- but with hiccups. Eventually, through conversations between our Guatemalan partners, FUNDEGUA, and my PI, they decided to begin the project in Guatemala City, and only then move out into the rural area over the next year. Unfortunately, due to Duke’s travel ban, I am unable to travel to Guatemala City at this time. I continued to work remotely, now from Durham so I could work with our team at Duke. I continued working from Durham for the rest of the summer, editing the current project to fit the needs of Guatemala City, as well as planning towards conducting the project in rural areas of Guatemala. Currently, there is a local university intern conducting the survey in the city, who I have trained via facetime. While not ideal, this is exciting in the sense we could involve a local female student who may not have had an opportunity to participate in research otherwise- and I still feel very involved in her process. While the project was delayed by a couple of weeks as we waited for clearance and other legislative things, it is currently underway. Soon I will be processing the data, and hopefully traveling over winter break to meet my peers in person. It is unclear if we will continue working with FUNDEGUA as we orient the project rurally, or we may conduct it more independently, because we believe some of their adjustments were in the best interest of the government rather than the communities we’re serving. But overall, when the project is done we will have more thorough information than first planned, as well as a current and informative comparison to to present in tandem with the rural data, where my interest lives. Funding through DUCIGS has
allowed me to support myself while waiting for changing logistics, and will support my eventual travel to meet team members in person—when Duke regulations and my school schedule allows. In the winter, I hope to conduct research in person, as well as train a group of local researchers to continue the study when I leave, through a workshop I’ve designed over the summer. DUCIGS funding has allowed this project to grow beyond what we initially thought was possible, and will expand our reach immensely.