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Colombia Purdue Initiative — CPI (/CPI)

For Colombian Professors, Purdue is the PLaCE

PLaCE is an acronym for the Purdue Language and Cultural Exchange program (<http://www.purdue.edu/place/>) that is housed in the Department of English. Its mission is to provide international students and scholars with English language instruction and assessment that will develop their academic, linguistic and cultural competencies. This program is incorporated in the university's core curriculum for first-year international students to improve their English skills.

The Colombia-Purdue Initiative (CPI) and PLaCE partnered to design a four-week intensive summer English Language Program, which would fulfill specific requirements for faculty and administrators from Colombian institutions. "A main goal of our program is to enable the faculty to improve their ability to use English in their work as researchers and professors," explains Matthew Allen, Assistant Director of PLaCE.

The first version of this program was piloted in 2015 with 18 professors from Universidad Nacional-Bogotá.



Colombian professors who participated in the June session of PLaCE this summer.

(https://engineering.purdue.edu/CPI/en/newsletter/june2016/newsletter_june16_englishlearning) It was repeated in 2016 with a similar number of participants.

In 2017, however, attendees were divided into two 4-week sessions, which guaranteed the educational advantages of smaller group learning, while enabling a larger enrollment of 45 participants. The first cohort (June 3 to July 4) was composed of professors from Universidad Nacional- Bogotá (11), Universidad Nacional-Medellín (8), Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana (4), and UniMinuto (2), and the second cohort (July 6- August 6) consisted of representatives from Universidad de Caldas (10), Tecnológico Comfenalco (5), Universidad Tecnológica de Pereira (4), and Ruta N (1).

PLaCE classes focused on improving speaking, listening, academic writing, and reading skills through networking, oral presentations, and evaluation of peer-reviewed journal articles – all activities that professors and researchers conduct daily as part of their jobs. Colombian faculty members also had the opportunity to practice the English lessons learned in the classroom by exploring professional connections with academics at Purdue. Thus, this program is both an opportunity for Colombian faculty to improve their English proficiency and to network with Purdue scholars and explore potential collaborations. “We really value the PLaCE program, because it combines English classes with an academic agenda,” explains Maria Cristina Valderrama, Director of the Office of International Relations and program facilitator at Universidad Tecnológica de Pereira. “Moreover, Purdue has been our partner in several projects and we wanted to strengthen this academic cooperation between both institutions by sending some of our faculty to participate in PLaCE.”

“The biggest challenge of the course, was meeting with Purdue professors and using the English communication skills learned in the classroom,” explains Luis Fernando Castillo, Dean of the College of Engineering at Universidad de Caldas. “This however, was one of the highlights of PLaCE because it was also an opportunity to establish academic relationships between both institutions,” he adds.

Juan Camilo Restrepo, Associate Professor in Architecture at Universidad Nacional de Colombia-Medellín, participated in PLaCE this summer. His motivation came from the academic need of learning and using English as a second language. “I liked absolutely everything about the course: from the assistance and thoughtfulness of Juan Diego Velasquez (Managing Director Strategic Initiatives, College of Engineering and program coordinator) when we arrived at Purdue, to the course methodology, and highly qualified professors and staff.”



Professors from Universidad de Caldas, Universidad Tecnológica de Pereira, Tecnológico Comfenalco, and Universidad de Cartagena that participated in PLaCE this summer.

With only four weeks of intensive classes and immersion to the American culture, Colombian participants showed an increase in their English language skills. “The participants have consistently told us that they feel more comfortable and confident in English, and that they understand much more of what they hear than when they first started,” explains Matthew.

Participants recommends PLaCE to others without hesitation. “It was a privilege to have participated in this program, not only because of the wonderful people I met along the way, but because I was able to improve my English proficiency,” says professor Restrepo. Similarly, Dean Castillo believes this course was a life-changing experience and should be part of other professors’ professional training. “The College of Engineering at Universidad de Caldas supports the 2018 version of PLaCE. It will expand the academic and personal vision of other faculty members and strengthen their English communication skills,” he adds.



Teachers and participants start each week with a Monday morning social hour of "Coffee and Conversation."