



Success Story: Partners Student Chapter Leaders Hold Colombia's First Regional Convention

Background

Universidad Eafit students Sara Ochoa and Julio Daniel from Medellín, Colombia were among ten leaders from Partners of the Americas' (Partners) student chapter network to travel to Portland, Oregon for Partners' bi-annual *What Works!* conference on September 10, 2015.

What Works! brings together Partners' traditional chapter members, student chapter members, and community organizations from the host city (which changes for each conference) to connect and share best practices for implementing development projects and building partnerships through seminars and group discussions. Over 100 traditional chapter members from across the Western Hemisphere and six community organizations were also in attendance.

The ten student leaders, who traveled from Colombia, Panamá, and Argentina, spent two days networking, building alliances, and even came out with a plan of action for new inter-student chapter projects.

“ *It felt good to know that we're not alone in making a difference. There are other people committed to volunteerism and social change.* ”

- Monica Peñuela, Partners student chapter member, Universidad de La Salle, Colombia

Partners' Approach

Ochoa and Daniel returned to campus committed to replicating and sharing the impactful experience of *What Works!* with their student community. In one month, with no budget, and the support of nine other Universidad Eafit student chapter members, they planned their own Partners convention. Partners Alliances: The First Regional Convention for Partners' Student Chapters (Partners Alliances) took place October 16-17, 2015, with the purpose of strengthening student chapter relationships across Colombia and with Partners' international office.



The convention attracted more than 20 participants from across Colombia, including students interested in implementing a Partners student chapter at their own universities, as well as representatives from Colombo Americano in Medellin, a non-profit that supports development between Colombia and the United States through multicultural academic experiences. It was the first convention of its kind in Colombia.

Using a similar structure to *What Works!*, students engaged in workshops, sharing tools for effective communication and the importance of volunteerism. Each participating chapter gave a 10 minute presentation about its structure and current projects. Students also shared their chapters' best practices, how other student chapters can adopt them, and proposals for collaborating with other Colombian chapters.

Impact

As a result of Partners Alliances, students took steps towards new collaborative projects, including an English tutoring program for youth, jointly implemented by the Antioquia-Massachusetts traditional chapter and the Universidad Eafit student chapter. They also discussed implementing a project that would use social media campaigns to generate awareness of Colombian educational issues, as well as new collaborative volunteer-based projects between Universidad Eafit and Colombo Americano.

The participants created opportunities to strengthen their collaborative efforts in the future. They established a committee responsible for maintaining communication with Karen Guzmán, Partners of the Americas' campus engagement officer. Both Universidad de Envigado and Universidad de San Martin initiated the process of chartering student chapters, expanding the Partners network.

All Partners student chapter leaders left Partners Alliances determined to hold an annual student convention, proving that all that is needed, proving that anything is possible with dedication, commitment, and passion.