

# Hampshire in Havana

## Cuba Project Abstracts

### Theme: **Nature and the Environment**

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The abstracts listed here are for projects done on the Hampshire in Havana Cuba program, related to the theme of **Nature and the Environment**. Projects are listed by year beginning in 2008, with the most recent year first and then in alphabetical order by last name. For questions about specific projects, please contact the Global Education Office.

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**Name:** Yasmina Mattison Sudan

**Year:** S2018

**Tutor:** Armando Fernández and Lisette Solozarno

**Title:** “Research on the Cuban System on Education and Prevention of Natural Disasters: Facing the Inevitable”

**Topic:** Hurricane Education and Prevention in Cuba

**Medium:** Essay and Photo series

This past semester in Cuba I have studied the country’s singular defense system against hurricanes and other natural disasters. I have found a five-fold answer to my research question, why is Cuba the safest place in the world during hurricane while is located in the sure path of hurricanes and continues struggles meteorologically? 1. The Revolutionary government’s commitment to defense, 2. hydraulic development plans and infrastructure, 3. meteorological accuracy, 4. educated and informed public and 5. dedicated sense of solidarity. During my investigation I traveled to coastal towns and areas effected by tropical storms: Cojimar, Guanabo, Santa Fe, Jaimanitas, Central and Old Havana. I also noted the level of consciousness and education surrounding tropical cyclones in less effected, higher elevated areas such as Vedado. I embarked on this work with two tutors well versed in two seemingly distinct forms: environment science and research, visual arts and photography, who advised and guided my research.

**Name:** Sophie Holin

**Year:** S2017

**Tutor:** Armando Fernández

**Title:** “Closing the Gaps in Urban Agriculture, Havana Cuba”

**Medium:** Ethnographic Essay and Visual Book

This is a history of congruent government and agricultural changes since the 1950s (with a focus on the emergence and development of Urban Agriculture). I analyze interviews with scholars of and workers in Cuban Agriculture in light of this history. How do differing forms and levels of state-management and funding of an agricultural project affects how workers see themselves and their work? In the process of exploring this question, I identified: 1. A paradox surrounding socialist state reliance on civil society's trust and motivation yet simultaneously undermining civil society's autonomy; 2. Spaces of agricultural production that are marginal to broader state goals remain in an institutional blind spot; and 3. Widely varying forms of agricultural producers self-identification. This a work in progress. I use a soft ethnographic lens to transcend the hard science bias, as well as create art that is accessible to anyone. As Cuban agriculture has institutionalized over the 20th century, workers have lost agency over their work. However, the origins of Urban Agriculture and the perseverance of workers today, creating their own spaces within institutional and material limits, remind us of the power of individual agency in the face of obstacles and scarcity. Urban Agriculture has a permanent function in the creation of sustainable cities, ecosystems, and social systems.

**Name:** Everett Defieux

**Year:** S2012

**Tutor:** Mavis Alvarez

**Title:** "(Agri)cultos, la Fuerza de Supervivencia Autóctona: A Socioeconomic Analysis of Cuban Campesinado"

**Medium:** Essay

Everett's field work research project consisted of an examination of the following: the origin and evolution of campesinos and their organizational structures in the context of Cuban agrarian history, an investigation into campesino cultural and socioeconomic identity, and an exploration of the role of small farmers and campesinado in national food sovereignty, agroecology, the cooperative movement in Cuban society. This investigation consisted of textual research in books, scholarly articles and publications, government reports, and roundtable discussions. For another facet of his research, Everett conducted a series of interviews with eminent agrarian scientists and representatives from a number of relevant organizations, including The National Association of Small Farmers (ANAP), and the Fundación Antonio Núñez Jiménez del Hombre y la Naturaleza; small farmers; and members of cultural institutions which manage the preservation and development of distinct campesino artistic tradition. In his final research paper, Everett analyzed how the campesinado facilitated the agricultural transformation during the Special Period and sustained the ongoing development of the current model of agricultural production founded on the valorization of cooperatives, environmental sustainability, and small scale cultivation.

**Name:** Rebekah Olstad

**Year:** S2009, F2010

**Tutor:** Margarita Mateo

**Title:** "Plants Speak and other Stories," "What Comes from the Sea: A Division III"

**Medium:** Essay, Creative Non-Fiction

I came to Cuba to study human relationships with the natural world. The questions guiding my work were "How do we define nature? How do we view ourselves as separate or within the 'nature' context? How can we communicate with what might seem separate, like the plant world? What are some of the distinctive features of city life and the context of 'nature' found within the city? How might the distinctive geography of Cuba influence its people?"

These questions were developed and addressed in conversations and interviews; in trips to Pinar del R'io and an excursion to Trinidad; in reading Cuban literature and viewing Cuban art; and in walks down the streets of Havana observing flowers crawling over the fences and soda cans ringing down the street. In my work I use a combination of personal experiences, research, and the voices of the interviews. The end product is a series of essays centered around caves, plants, the island, and the blurring separation between ourselves as humans and the natural world.

**Name:** Cassidy Schlager

**Year:** S2010

**Tutor:** Adrián de Souza

**Title:** "Equilibrio y contradiccion: La medicina completa de Ifá"

**Medium:** Essay

My love affair with plants and work in alternative healing have collided in Cuba, provoking an unconventional journey into the philosophy (Ifá) and medicinal practices of the African-based religion of Yoruba. This philosophy is the successor to many Afro-Cuban practices, such as Santería. At the core of my studies are the healing beliefs and practices, which are deeply rooted in mythology, ritual, and divination. The medicine of Ifá functions on a much deeper level than its allopathic counterpart. Rather than relying on pills or even herbal preparations to suppress superficial symptoms, Ifá implements the divination, sacrifice, ritual, and application of the word through songs or incantations. Combining these components with the preparation and application of the medicine that an individual needs addresses the root cause of disease and restores the necessary balance to their body, mind and spirit. This is complete healing.

**Name:** Barbara Da Silva

**Year:** S2011

**Tutor:** Juan Valdés Paz

**Title:** "La Dimensión Socio-política de la Agricultura (Sub)urbana en La Habana"

Medium: essay

Urban agriculture became a relevant alternative in Cuba during the acute food crisis that resulted from the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989 and the sudden loss of a secure market for food and agricultural inputs. Initiated as a strategy of survival by the population, the activities of urban agriculture have contributed, although modestly, to the availability of food at a local level, demonstrating a growing capacity of grassroots, community and family-based organizing in the solution to their problems. Today, as part of a governmental program that functions at national, provincial, municipal, and local levels, Urban Agriculture provides a fertile ground for the exploration of changes in the agricultural and economic priorities of the country, in the revolutionary discourses, in political-administrative organizing as well as in relations between government institutions, NGOs (both national and international), community groups and residents.

This study attempts to examine these transformations and socio-political organizational relations that are manifested in various urban agriculture spaces in the city of Havana, where the study was conducted. Through theoretical and statistical research, visits and interviews with agricultural producers in the city, along with participation in relevant events, Barbara was able to explore the varied and transitive relations of power and the new role of the local community in the development of Urban Agriculture in the last twenty years. The final objective of this paper is to begin to examine the possible applicability of similar community projects on urban agriculture in selected communities in Brazil.