Thanks to the Wellman Hill Grant, I had the opportunity to work this summer with Fundación Alma, a non-profit organization that seeks to improve the quality of education for children and teenagers in vulnerable regions in Bolivia by enhancing teacher’s ability to implement critical thinking, creativity, and community values as part of their student’s learning goals. This opportunity allowed me to better understand the external aspects of my home country’s education system, while also contributing to Alma’s mission of ensuring educational progress in Bolivia.

Throughout my internship at Alma, I undertook a wide variety of responsibilities. The first part of my internship consisted of a series of individual sessions where I received training in various aspects, such as the Bolivian education system, modern teaching methods, and workshop facilitation. These training sessions were crucial for the second and most important part of the internship, traveling to Alma’s focus regions in order to carry out mass training workshops for teachers in vulnerable areas. This was a most impactful experience for me, as I got the opportunity to interact with teachers and students from rural areas in the country, and hear about their experiences, which immediately brought me back to my background as a high school student in a rural town. We ended up visiting three different regions: Pando, considered the least developed area in Bolivia; Beni, a region characterized by being a part of the Amazon rainforest; and Tarija, an arid region also called the Bolivian “chaco”. Traveling to these areas involved some challenges, as most of the towns we visited were highly inaccessible due to poor road infrastructure. This part of my internship took place in 3 separate weeks between June and July, and it was most certainty the toughest part of my internship, yet the most rewarding.

The final part of my internship consisted of detailed analytical work, in which I helped the foundation’s director, Andrea Fernández, to identify key collaboration areas between Alma
and the Bolivian government. In this process, we identified the ESFM - Escuela Superior de Formación de Maestros (Higher School for Teacher Training), a subdivision of the Ministry of Education, as a potential actor with which Alma could collaborate with in the future. Once the ESFM was identified, we engaged in thorough research about the organization’s, how they train their teachers, what norms do they abide by, and their short and long term goals. This information was crucial for Alma’s final decision, which was to formally approach the Ministry of Education with the intent to find a pathway for future collaboration. Once the request was approved, I engaged in the creation of documents that would form the structure of Alma’s collaboration with the ESFM. This part of the internship ultimately concluded in planning out future mass workshops in various ESFM centers around the country, to be carried out in December 2023 - January 2024.

Every wonderful part of my internship at Alma would not have been possible without the Wellman Hill grant. I extend my gratitude to the Hill family for their great contribution in allowing me to work with Fundación Alma and explore pathways for improving rural education in my home country. This experience has only strengthened my motivation to engage in public service and positively contribute back to the place where I was born and raised.