1. Description of Grant-Supported Activity

My research project involved a trip to conduct research at the well-renowned Latin American Collection of the University of Florida library in Gainesville, FL. In addition, I proposed to use some of the remaining time over the summer to engage in an analysis of the materials collected, as well as additional primary sources I have already obtained from archives in Colombia. The ultimate objective was to use the new sources obtained at the University of Florida’s Latin American Collection to revise and enhance a conference paper which I could hopefully then transform into an article to submit for publication.

The project was entitled, “The Quest to Progress: Public Health, Race, and Nation in Colombia, 1910-1940.” In previous work, I have shown that beginning in the 1880s, medical, political, social, and intellectual elites, who were influenced by Social Darwinism, became increasingly preoccupied about the degeneración de la raza, the degeneration of the [Colombian] race, a mestizo or mixed race. As the population of Bogotá expanded after 1910 and the magnitude of perceived social and health problems increased in the capital city of Bogotá (increasingly being equated with the nation), higienistas gained influence. Higienistas were a growing group of educated professionals from a variety of disciplines that included medical doctors, public health officials, social scientists, and engineers, who engaged in public health studies and projects. In their numerous scientific studies of diseases, the filthy urban environment, the aqueduct, and the poor, these higienistas proposed several solutions to confront the dangers posed by disease and other social problems, such as prostitution and vagrancy. I proposed to use the collection at the University of Florida because it contains sources that would help me flesh out the numerous proposals offered by various eugenicists and higienistas and determine how such proposals differed from those advocated in the late nineteenth century. I also hoped to find documents at the University of Florida’s Latin American Collection that would allow me to analyze the developments in Colombian public health in an international and comparative context. Social Darwinism, positivism, the use of science, eugenics, and the related increasing emphasis on public health and sanitation were international movements. Particular questions I hoped such documents would help to answer include the following: To what degree did Colombian medical doctors, higienistas, and eugenicists participate in international debates? In what ways were they influenced by the recommendations of others in Europe, the United States, and other Latin American countries? Overall, the sources I hoped to encounter at the University of Florida would allow me to analyze the increasing importance given to individual health as it relates to the nation, as well as the role of higienistas during this important period of growth and “modernization” in early twentieth century Colombia.
2. Were you able to complete the project? Describe any difficulty you had.

I am very grateful to have had the support of a Faculty Research Grant that awarded summer salary replacement that allowed me to complete this research trip to Gainesville, FL and work with these documents. Originally, I proposed to stay for two weeks, but ended up staying a bit longer. This allowed me more time to locate important sources, but cut into the time I had to read through and analyze all of the documents, especially since I found so many! The fact that I found so many documents is a blessing. Of course, it provides the additional challenge of finding the time to read, analyze, and write new material that incorporates these sources. I located (and photocopied) numerous sources that have been so helpful and will continue to be as I continue to analyze and incorporate these sources into a larger book project. The most important documents I located are those produced by a number of international health and sanitary conferences held between 1910 and 1940. These include several “Reports,” “Proceedings,” and “Resolutions,” of the Pan American Congress, the Pan American Medical Association Congress, and the Pan American Sanitary Conference. I was really hoping to find a document I have been unable to locate anywhere else that stemmed from a very little known society and its conference, entitled, “Actas de la primera Conferencia Panamericana de Eugenesia y Homicultura de las Repúblicas Americanas,” held in Havana 1927. Indeed I found this document. Unfortunately, as it turns out, Colombia did not send a delegate to that conference nor send a report from a Colombian representative. Nonetheless, this may be significant in and of itself and I’m hoping to find evidence that may indicate why such is the case. All of these documents, including the fact that no Colombian representative participated in the latter conference, have helped me to answer some of the original questions posed, as stated above. In particular, though, these documents will be invaluable in allowing me to analyze the Colombian case in an international context, which will enhance the scholarly contribution of my work.

3. Did or will the project result in a specific product—a manuscript, composition, syllabus, etc.? If so, please describe and indicate state of development.

As stated above, I was able to photocopy numerous primary sources. As I continue to read and analyze these documents, I hope to incorporate them into a previous conference paper/partial chapter of a book manuscript. Once I do so, I hope to present the revised work at the annual meeting of the Southeastern Conference on Latin American Studies in April of 2009. I would then also like to revise the conference paper based on the continued analysis of these sources and feedback I receive from colleagues at this conference.