

# A World of Possibilities

One of the key cornerstones of the university's ambitious vision—to become one of Canada's top five research universities by 2016—is internationalization. This means increasing cultural diversity on campus and improving global opportunities for international partnerships to leveraging expertise in order to engage in international development.

In other words, the University of Calgary is aggressively building more international networks, or bridges of "brain chains." Think interlocking global jurisdictions that are stronger together. Six of these key jurisdictions include **China, Germany, Mexico, the Middle East, Tanzania** and the **United States**. Forging networks with partners in these areas will strengthen

the University of Calgary's reputation as a global university, both through scholarship and teaching and in the composition of its faculty and students, attracting the best from around the planet.

In this series, writers **Jennifer Allford** and **Jacquie Moore** met six international students who are connecting to communities in ways they might never have imagined when they started at the university. Whether it's shooting hoops with a posse of new Canadian friends, heading an international design competition or selling goods at a craft sale—what their narratives have in common is that of travel, of the importance of education and of simple good fortune.



## Elizabeth Romo-Rábago

### turning trash into treasure

Mexican student keeps environmental social enterprise venture going

By the time Elizabeth Romo-Rabago moved to Calgary with her husband—a PhD candidate investigating the extinction of Alberta's ice-age horses—she'd done her own fair share of digging, before she even left Mexico.

The master's student in Sustainable Energy Development at the Haskayne School of Business went online to find where she could continue her work in environmental education once she arrived in Canada. "I just started looking for groups that shared the same vision and values that I hold," Romo-Rábago says. "I found Calgary Dollars online and they connected me with Green Calgary."

Since arriving in the fall of 2009 and studying English—"my first goal"—she's lent her time to several organizations that share her passion for environmental education and sustainable development. And, through her



supervisor at Haskayne, Irene Herremans, Romo-Rábago has met other people with similar values.

"For me, the adaptation process in Canada was much easier than I thought because I got involved in different communities and organizations that made me feel like I was back home—valuable and alive," she says.

Romo-Rábago has been involved in sustainable development since 2001 while studying biology in Aguascalientes, Mexico. A year later, she and a friend started Ciclománias, a social enterprise that continues to operate, providing environmental workshops for children and schools and producing and selling hand-crafted goods made from recycled cardboard and plastic. Ciclománias visits schools and takes part in a number of craft and cultural fairs in both Alberta and Mexico.

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"It's been a great experience and I feel very, very proud of what I have done," she says. "I wouldn't be able to do this without all the people who have helped me create a new life, here in Calgary."

Aside from running a bi-national business out of recycling post-consumer materials (think pop bottles and corrugated cardboard), Romo-Rábago's research also aims to convert waste into energy. With a BSc in biology, she started studying different biodigesters that turn organic waste into environmentally friendly fuel for use in remote areas.

"Rural communities produce a lot of organics because most of them also have animals and farms," she says. "They generate a lot of organic materials that are perfect food for these specific microorganisms that release a biogas that we can capture and connect directly to the stove."

Working with the non-profit organization, Eco-Village of Hope Society (EVHS), she's hoping to raise money to install a biodigester in a tiny leprosy community in China that has limited access to power. The villagers have to spend most of their time looking for wood and agricultural residue to burn, so they can cook and heat their huts.

Romo-Rábago wants to build a career in providing renewable energy to different communities, helping them become self-sufficient, but she's not sure quite yet where that work might take her.

"I think that, wherever I will end up, I will always take with me all the beautiful moments and great experiences that I have had during my time at the University of Calgary, and I would love to continue collaborating with the valuable people I have met," she says.

"I am sure this is just the beginning of a great and amazing journey." —Jennifer Allford



*Elizabeth Romo-Rábago will be selling her recycled wares at the Telus Convention Centre during Teachers' Convention, Feb. 13th and 14th. Or, you can check them out online at [www.ciclománias.com](http://www.ciclománias.com)*