In October 2009, a group of Translation and Interpretation students from UEES, in which I was included, traveled to New York City to attend the 50th Annual American Translators Association Conference. Our Dean, Monica Reynoso, along with other members of the School of Translation and Interpretation took the opportunity to plan a tour of some of the most important places for a T&I student to visit in the city, so we could get an idea of how different our profession is there than it is in our country. Some of the places included in the visits were the United Nations Headquarters, where we were able to visit both the translation and interpretation divisions; the Federal Court of New York City, and the Bank of America.

Due to schedule conflicts, I was unable to attend the first two visits (UN Translation Division and Bank of America), but I did go to the two others. My first visit was to the New York City Federal Court. We were allowed entrance into a trial for which Spanish-English interpretation was needed. I was very impressed by the accuracy of the first interpreter, and the natural quality of his interpretation. It sounded quite normal and there were very few pauses, despite the difficulties presented by the topic.

A few hours later we visited the United Nations Headquarters, where we were greeted by two UN interpreters who facilitated our visit. They took us to the General Assembly meeting room, where they gave us an overview of what their job entails and what it is like to work for the UN. Thanks to them, we were able to visit the interpreting booths and even enjoy a tour of the UN building. We learned a lot about the organization and were even encouraged to apply to become UN interpreters.
The next day we attended the ATA Conference Welcome Cocktail, where we were able to enjoy a few hours with our fellow UEES classmates, as well as mingle with our fellow interpreters. There were as many as 2000 people attending, all from different countries and with different language combinations. It was our first glimpse at what the ATA conference really was. We did not expect to find so many people, but instead were pleasantly surprised to find so many people who shared our same interests and worked in the same field as we are trying to break into. Here in Ecuador it is very unusual to find people working in our field, as it also is to explain to people what our profession is about, so finding so many people who not only understood but could engage in interesting, rich conversation with any of us about our profession was a new, exciting experience for us.

The conference officially started the following day. We could choose from a wide variety of lectures based on our needs, interests and abilities, and were welcome to visit the exhibit hall where we could find many interesting stands, from universities offering T&I programs, translation agencies, products for translators/interpreters, etc. At the lectures, we were able to test our knowledge and rise to the level of the many experienced professionals we encountered. I realized that, no matter how unprepared I have always felt, I realized I might be ready to work in the field. My classmates and I were already familiar with most of the topics presented in the conference, while some of the more experienced interpreters seemed not to know about them. This made me feel very good about my professional development, as I have always felt insecure about my abilities in T&I. We also learned very interesting, useful things to make our work easier, such as computer tricks for translators, how to prepare for the ATA certification exams, and many others. Sadly, some of the lectures I was interested in attending were given in foreign languages, or had a different focus than what I had expected. Overall, the conference was well organized, useful, and was a great learning experience for us students. It gave us many ideas as to what to expect when entering the field, and gave us tools that we will use when working as professionals.

This experience has given me a lot of new ideas regarding my career, I am now more focused on the areas I would like to pursue to specialize in, and by learning a lot about different markets
from different regions, I now know how to handle myself within my market. I think that, one of
the main differences between the Ecuadorian and U.S. markets is that the profession is more
recognized in the latter, while it is practically new in ours. Given that the U.S. is a much larger,
more economically developed and culturally diverse country than Ecuador, they have different
perspectives regarding the work of translators/interpreters, and they understand how
important they are in all aspects of life. In Ecuador, people have yet to understand the
importance of translators and interpreters, as we are not needed here the way we are in other
countries. With my studies at UEES, and this new experience abroad, I now have the tools I
need to deal with my market and perform well under the circumstances.