While visiting Barranquitas we did a beach clean-up and were surprised by the amount of microplastics.

INTRODUCTION
The Puerto Rico service-learning trip began in Barranquitas, Puerto Rico. Here we explored their biotechnology facilities and aquaculture interactive museum. We then drove three hours to Playa Sucia (Playuela) to clean up on the walk to the lighthouse and beach. On my journey to the beach, the amount of microplastics I saw was intense. Bigger pieces of plastic would crumble at the touch because of how long they have been in the hot sand. However, tourism isn’t the main cause of microplastics in Puerto Rico. Puerto Rico was hit with three hurricanes in the past seven years, hurricane Maria, Irma and Fiona. These natural disasters flooded the streets and took away electricity, food and water for months. The purpose of our beach clean-up was to help the natural life near the shores and become aware of the amount of garbage.

WHAT ARE MICROPLASTICS?
Microplastics were explained to us by Dr. Alok Arun during the trip as debris from the hurricanes and people who litter and leave garbage behind when they visit the beach. Microplastics are a big concern right now due to the large amount we are seeing washing up on shores. We wanted to tackle the problem by conducting a beach clean-up. We were able to fill multiple bags with straws, bottles, and other single use products.

PLAYUELA (PLAYA SUCIA)
This is a beautiful beach in Puerto Rico, here we were able to learn so much about the aquaculture and the species in their coast. While visiting this beach we were able to see hermit crabs, a species also affected by tourism pollution, and sea anemones.

PAINTING ROCKS PROJECT
As part of our education project, I pitched decorating the garden we started building in InterAmericana de Puerto Rico Recinto de Barranquitas, with natural décor such as rocks. Out of desire for the younger students to feel involved with the garden and leave a part of themselves in the garden we are having them paint rocks from their backyards to place in the garden. The rocks’ purpose is to express what Puerto Rico means for them and a memento of their high school time.

The educational part of this project was very eye opening. Once again, I was able to work with students who speak Spanish and connect with them through agriculture. I found that I really enjoy working with students, especially when I am able to speak Spanish with them as there are limited opportunities where I can do so.