It was politics that initially interested Thomas Laffay. Then, he spent time studying and traveling in Cuba and Central America. Those experiences whetted his appetite to learn about the entire region. Fortunately, the Latin American and Caribbean Studies (LACS) major offered him a unique opportunity to do just that.

“The LACS classes I’ve taken have all been great. The introductory course piqued my interest, but the ones that really stand out are those that I took during my semester in Cuba. That experience was phenomenal. It really opened up a whole new world for me. As a result, I ended up volunteering at a remote orphanage in rural Nicaragua the summer before my sophomore year.”

Thomas found himself involved in something called the Pulsera Project – a nonprofit organization that connects the Los Quinchos orphanage with a growing network of high school and college students in the U.S. “The kids in the orphanage weave bracelets – pulseras in Spanish – and the students stateside sell them to raise funds for the orphanage.” He and another student from the College documented their experiences in a film about the project, which later premiered at the College.

To complement his studies, Thomas participated in Model Organization of American States, and served as a Spanish interpreter at a rural medical clinic near Charleston.

Through the LACS courses, and outside reading recommended by his professors, Thomas has devoured information about the politics of Che Guevara and Fidel Castro. He’s read the poetry of Jose Marti as well as the novels of Gabriel Garcia Marquez. “The LACS program has really been intellectually invigorating for me. And all my professors have been amazing.”

Thomas’ experiences in Latin America, and his studies, have made him appreciate the “culture of revolution.” In Nicaragua, he says, he senses “an earnest desire for change, a yearning to develop as an environmentally appropriate, functioning democracy.” It won’t be surprising to some day learn that Thomas is using the background from his LACS major to accurately portray aspects of this socio-political dynamic on video. Watch for it.