

*For Immediate Release*

## Students from Woodbury University's Media For Social Justice Program Visit Cuba and Experience Healing Power of the Arts

***As the U.S. and Cuba Seek to Normalize Relations,  
Graduate Students Document a Country and a Culture on the Brink of Massive Change***



LOS ANGELES (August 18, 2015) – For the members of “La Colmenita,” an internationally known Cuban children’s theater group, a recent gift by [Woodbury University](#) Adjunct Professor Jeannette (Cookie) Fischer of a restored guitar once played by “the Cuban Bob Dylan” was every bit as exciting as U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry’s raising of the American flag over the U.S. Embassy.

In fact, the presentation was the highlight of a two-week adventure for seven students and three faculty from Woodbury’s master’s degree program in Media for Social Justice that began as an opportunity to document a unique cultural exchange between two Los Angeles-area high schools and the 25-year-old [Havana-based theater group](#). This student motivated initiative resulted in the cultural exchange, the Woodbury students had the opportunity to work with faculty to design and document their own unforgettable lessons in the evolution of Cuban and American politics, culture and social change.

In a country where new or “gently used” items of any kind are impossible to find, the gift of a guitar owned by singer Silvio Rodriguez was “priceless” to every member of La Colmenita, according to Fischer. A native of Peru, Fischer frequents Cuba and, on a previous trip, discovered the instrument had been nearly destroyed by one of the younger children in the group. She returned to Los Angeles with the guitar in hand and took it to a local luthier, who repaired it.

Fast-forward to May and a scheduled presentation of videotaped theatrical performances featuring students from Los Angeles County High School for the Arts (LACHSA) and Sequoyah School of Pasadena (collaboration directed by Woodbury and LACHSA instructor Susie Tanner), and a live theatrical performance by La Colmenita. There to document the Cuban students’ performance for replay to the two American groups when they returned to the U.S. were the Woodbury students, Fischer, and adjunct professor and photographer Rose Eichenbaum.

“At the end of the performance, Cookie brought out the guitar and presented it to them,” recalled Woodbury documentary film student Monique Lyons. “There were people in the audience who were crying. They felt very moved that Americans were interested in helping to preserve their culture. I felt very proud to be able to participate.”

“La Colmenita is a remarkable illustration of children in a society with very little in terms of possessions evincing great joy and celebration,” added fellow graduate student Phil Gibbons. “I think the performers and parents in attendance were thrilled to see Americans not only watching but also filming La Colmenita.”

Lyons used the remainder of her time in Cuba filming two dozen interviews for her Master’s thesis film on low-income women in Latin America, while Gibbons spent his free time developing a podcast featuring little-known facts about Che Guevara. The students also visited and participated in the production of “Canal Habana,” a public television channel, and Escuela Internacional de Cine y Television, a Cuban film school.

Accredited by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges, Woodbury’s Media for Social Justice program was founded in 2014 and resides in the university’s [School of Media, Culture and Design](#). During a two-year Master’s program, students learn how to create and leverage media for social change, explore their commitment to social justice, develop skills in transmedia production and entrepreneurship, and work closely with award-winning producers Harry Wiland and Dale Bell of the Media Policy Center in Santa Monica. The program is chaired by Nicole Keating, Ph.D.

### **About Woodbury University**

Founded in 1884, Woodbury University is one of the oldest institutions of higher education in Southern California. It offers bachelor’s degrees from the School of Architecture, School of Business, School of Media, Culture & Design, and College of Transdisciplinarity, along with a Master of Arts in Media for Social Justice, Master of Architecture (MArch), Master of Interior Architecture (MIA), Master of Science in Architecture (MSArch), and Master of Leadership. The San Diego campus offers Bachelor of Architecture and Master of Architecture degrees, as well as an

MSArch degree with concentrations in Real Estate Development and Landscape + Urbanism. Woodbury ranks 15th among the nation's "25 Colleges That Add the Most Value," according to *Money Magazine*. Visit [woodbury.edu](http://woodbury.edu) for more information.

**Media Contact:**

Ken Greenberg  
Edge Communications, Inc.  
(323) 469-3397  
[ken@edgecommunicationsinc.com](mailto:ken@edgecommunicationsinc.com)