

## Service Learning in Haiti

This is a brief synopsis of some experiences that I gained while on a study abroad service learning trip to Haiti over this past Christmas break. During the trip, I traveled with nearly 20 students from Purdue University to work in teams to prepare and deliver informational presentations at a symposium that took place January 2-4 at Université Anténor Firmin (UNAF) in the city of Cap-Haitien. My team worked on developing a method to test water quality in and around Cap-Haitien, and then presented our information during the symposium. This abstract is a small taste of the learning experiences that I gained while in Haiti.

My initial thought of the country was one of disrepair, poverty and a lack of opportunities for those who lived in Haiti. After I traveled to Haiti, I gained a completely new view about the actual country and the people who live there. This new view was one of faith, confidence and hope. Faith that



the people in Haiti are working day after day to improve their way of life, confidence that they will be able to make lasting changes for future generations of fellow Haitians, and most importantly hope that I can join in on their efforts and use my God-given talents to help them make a difference along with the citizens of Haiti. This change in views is due to spending time with many students from the universities in Cap-Haitien. During these interactions, I was able to attain a grasp of some of their hopes and dreams for the future. Many of their aspirations consisted of continuing studies towards a master's degree at a school in the U.S., and then returning to Haiti to either teach or implement their newly gained knowledge towards bettering the lives of their fellow countrymen and women. Some other Haitian students had goals of completing their





undergraduate career in Haiti, and then start working on a farm to help improve farming operations around Haiti. I also met other students who wanted to start a business to help their local economy after their college studies.

The service learning project that my team created to present during the study abroad trip was very moving for many of the university students we taught while in Haiti. My team's project consisted of developing a method to test for the presence of E. coli in water samples, and giving demonstration so that the Haitian students will be able to conduct their own tests. During the demonstration, we were able to teach some of the students about the basics of microbiology. My team was also able to take some basic lab safety supplies to Haiti to help demonstrate how to safely perform experiments in a lab. This was a

great learning experience for the students, but also for myself. It was eye-opening to be able to see almost one hundred students and faculty members from many universities in the Cap-Haitian area get excited to learn about how to test for the different types of bacteria that can be found in water samples. As my team continued with the presentations, many students were thinking of the possibility of making a business out of testing water supplies for the local community. These experiences will help inspire me to give thanks for the blessings and resources that I am fortunate to work with here in the U.S.

This service learning trip was a very humbling experience. I was able to see how people living in Haiti still strive for their own dreams without all of the luxuries and resources that I take for granted. I also gained a greater appreciation for the gift of readily available high quality water. This



increase in appreciation for sources of clean high quality water helped me gain awareness of why I went on this study abroad trip, as well as why I am studying to become an Agricultural Engineer. This trip ultimately helped me gain a greater appreciation for the gift of time with friends and family.

During my service learning trip to Haiti, I learned how to work around and through challenging language barriers to pass information to students with limited English proficiency. I also developed the skill to perform laboratory oriented experiments with limited space and supplies. This skill arose when my team conducted tests on water samples to search for harmful bacteria.

This service learning trip has helped me find better ways to develop and pursue my education goals in a more efficient manner. After seeing the determination that many of the students in Haiti had for learning, I reviewed and improved my goals to become a better student, much like the way that many of the Haitian students did when they attended the presentations with the service learning class. These improved goals have helped me prepare more effectively for my post-undergrad career.

Some of the goals that came from this service learning trip helped me develop a better plan to use my time while studying to the best of my ability, set more short term goals, continually review how my performance changing, and foster better communication with faculty and peers.

This study abroad service learning experience really opened my eyes to a huge world outside of the U.S. I gained a greater understanding of the importance that a quality education can have on someone's life, and an increased respect for those who work so hard to provide high quality education. I also value the impact that teamwork can have on a community.

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*"Do Something. If it works,  
do more of it. If it doesn't,  
do something else."*

*~Franklin D. Roosevelt*

