

2011

# Nichols Humanitarian Fund



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*Sarah Aronow*  
*Africa*



Due to the generosity of the Nicholls Humanitarian Fund, I was able to assist the people of Mangapwani, a rural village in Zanzibar, Africa. While in Mangapwani, I focused on helping to improve classroom instruction and English proficiency. In Zanzibar, there is an increasing demand for fluency in English as mastery of the English language is necessary in order for students to continue secondary education and to obtain many jobs. Unfortunately, many youth do not acquire the adequate knowledge of English needed to pass national exams or to hold extensive conversations in English. This is due to several factors, including classroom instruction of and in English. Throughout primary school, classes are taught in Swahili, but as soon as students enter secondary school, all of their instruction is in English. This can be a very jarring experience and a transition that I attempted to ameliorate for my students. By providing me with the opportunity to travel to Zanzibar, the Fund also provided me with the opportunity to make a lasting impact on the education of my students and of the whole community, to immerse myself in Zanzibari culture, and to learn about Zanzibar's educational system.

For one month, I taught classes at both the local primary school and at Creative Solutions, a community learning center that hosts foreign volunteers. At the primary school, another Vanderbilt volunteer and I had two very interesting tasks: we taught teaching methods and English to a cohort of teachers, and we taught English to the schoolchildren. By working closely with teachers, I gained a greater understanding of the overall educational system of Zanzibar as well as specific concerns, such as the low number of high quality textbooks. Working with the teachers also highlighted cultural influences on education, such as a substantial reliance on rote memorization. My conversations with and observations of the teachers furthered my understanding of both the similarities and differences between educational practices in Zanzibar and in the United States. While teaching the children, I was able to experience very similar interactions to those that my teachers faced daily, which expanded my awareness of the atmosphere within



classrooms and the challenges facing teachers. Moreover, teaching at the school gave me an insightful perspective on larger aspects of Zanzibari culture, such as the strong regard for respecting one's elders.



At Creative Solutions, I co-taught an introductory-level English class to young adults with varying levels of formal education. For instance, one student had almost no formal school experience while others had hopes of going to university. This class helped me to understand better the importance of English within Zanzibar. Many of my students were learning English in hopes of being able to find a good job such as being a tour guide, which is a highly coveted occupation but requires fluency in English. Tourism is a booming industry in Zanzibar, but only if natives can communicate in English do they have a chance of working in this desirable field. Since conversational English is vital to some occupations and formal English is vital to proceed through secondary and collegiate education, the future occupational success of many people depends heavily on the teaching of English that they receive. Unfortunately, English instruction is not meeting these demands, leaving many students unable to continue school, to communicate in English, or to aspire to eminent occupations, feeding into rather than combating the widespread poverty of Zanzibar.

While teaching was my main service activity, I also helped Creative Solutions and the local community with its newest project of updating a public well. While learning about water access and helping to construct the well was unbelievably fulfilling, observing the community work together towards a common goal was incredibly enlightening and inspiring. Throughout the construction, the community structure was implicitly defined as male elders organized the process and younger adults did the heavy lifting, showing tenderness and respect towards the elders. This project underscored the communal respect, affability, willingness to help one another, and de-

sire to improve their community and living circumstances.

I would personally like to thank Ed and Janice Nichols for awarding me the Nichols Humanitarian Fund. Without this funding, I would not have had this wonderful opportunity to learn so much about education and culture. The Fund truly sculpted my cultural awareness and service by making my eye-opening, month-long service project financially accessible. I am immensely grateful that I was able to positively affect the Mangapwani community and my students, which in return enriched my understanding of Zanzibar, as well as my understanding of my own culture and education.

*Alayna Boland*  
*Sri Lanka*



Sri Lanka is one place that had never crossed my mind. I knew nothing about its history, people or traditions. When I heard about Vanderbilt's service program, I discovered a lot about this over-looked country: Sri Lanka is finally at peace after a civil war spanning decades. Its land area is about the size of West Virginia, but it is home to some 21 million people. Overpopulated, to say the least. Most people are Buddhist, with a small Catholic minority congregated near the coastline. The south was ravaged by the Indian Ocean tsunami in 2004, leaving many people still living in severe poverty. Vanderbilt offered students the chance to make a difference for students in a school south of Sri Lanka's capital. I was eager to jump on board, and the Nichols Humanitarian Fund made it possible for me to participate.

The primary motivation for this trip was to teach and assist with conversational English in the school. Before signing up to spend a month in Sri Lanka, I was curious as to why the children there need to speak English. The answer, though, is in the history of the country as well as the future of the students. Sri Lanka had been at civil war for decades until very recently. The two groups that exist on the small island are the Tamil and

the Sinhalese, each of which have their own language. Now that the war has officially ended, I believe that English is being taught as a means of bridging the two groups together with a common language. Further, business communication around the globe is primarily in English, so achieving fluency will drastically increase job opportunities for the students. Realizing these purposes for speaking English and believing them to be very worthwhile, I was very excited to spend a month in Sri Lanka.

During the weekdays, we worked at the school Moratu Maha Vidyalya. This was Vanderbilt's pilot program in Sri Lanka, so we learned much about the school in the first weeks. The facilities are largely open-air, with each classroom having only two full walls. This allows the necessary cross-breeze in during the hottest summer months. Although this is needed, it creates an extreme noise issue. Over two-thousand students, grades one through thirteen, attend this school and each class has at least forty students with a single teacher. You can imagine the noise that results from having four consecutive second-grade classrooms with only two full walls and so many children. Finally, there was no electricity in the classrooms. Most days that was not a problem, but during monsoon season it is likely to be cloudy and overcast, making the classrooms quite dark without a light bulb.

In spite of these obstacles, however, the students' respect for their teachers and eagerness to speak with us was much greater than the physical challenges of the building. The students were quite shy at first, which made us question their back-



ground knowledge of the English language. Our job was to encourage and improve conversational English since they already have a background of writing and reading in the language. The English teachers at the school were thrilled that we would be able to help the students and encourage them to speak English. They went out of their way to be sure that we had everything we needed; their passion for all the students to do well was evident. It was a struggle getting the students to converse in the classroom, so we began simply: reporting the weather, explaining transportation, and rhyming words. It was so rewarding to hear them speak more freely throughout the month as they gained confidence in their English conversational skills. Although I doubt they learned much vocabulary or grammar rules, their confidence and willingness to speak up increased dramatically.

The timing of our trip was perfect. In addition to immersing ourselves in the school, we were able to witness the country's most significant holiday, Vesak. With a population of seventy percent Buddhist, this week-long event celebrates the birth, enlightenment, and death of the Buddha. This was also the 2600<sup>th</sup> anniversary, which calls for an even grander celebration since it is a one-hundred year mark. In the evenings, our host family took us around town to *dansal*, which is a time when people set up stands by the side of the streets and offer free food to everyone. We would wait in long lines (even in the rain) and eat our entire meal off the street; bags of chick-peas, rice, potatoes, ice cream. Our host family was very careful to have us eat only at booths they knew were sanitary and safe for us.

How can I describe our marvelous host family? Vindya, the mom, was always so happy to embrace her "new daughters" – all five of us! She told us stories about

growing up and living in Sri Lanka, took us shopping for local souvenirs, dressed us in our sarees, and made sure we were never hungry (one meal she made us each eight sandwiches!). The three daughters Athrima, Malithya, and Pavithma were so much fun to spend time with. They attend a private school in the capital, and their English is significantly better than the students' at our school. We bonded over commonalities such as Justin Bieber (crazy, I know), but also through learning about each other's culture and traditions. They gave each of us a Sri Lankan name and taught us the alphabet and many words in Sinhala; they explained to us about Vesak and let us help make lanterns to decorate the house for the festivities. Anil, our host father, was greatly outnumbered living in a house with ten girls, but he was an excellent host and passionate about our project with the school because as a child he himself was a student there. Last, but not least, is Lalitha. Vindya calls her their "helper" and she lives with them during the week to help prepare meals, clean, and look after the girls. Although she speaks only Sinhala and I speak only English, we had many incredible conversations and she taught me how to cook Sri Lankan specialties. This host family made the trip for me, as the days at school were long, hot and sometimes challenging.

This trip was an opportunity of a lifetime. What a blessing it was to experience Sri Lanka, give confidence to school children and hopefully open doors for them. There were many students at the school and I was so happy to meet them and talk to them, but I know that my lasting friends in Sri Lanka are the people who generously hosted us. All I can say, Mr. and Mrs. Nichols, is *bohoma stuti*, thank you very much.



*Brant Bonetti*  
*Guatemala*



For years I've been driven by a desire to help people in the developing world, and since studying international development with Brian Heuser in the Human and Organizational Development program, I have wanted to experience development work on the ground in a foreign country. Classroom learning is one thing, prolonged experience in the field is another – at least that's what all of my friends said after they visited other countries to do service work. But as much as I've wanted to pack my bags and travel the globe, I also knew that I needed my summer to earn money to help pay for school expenses the following year. It looked more and more like serving abroad would continue to be a dream.

However, last Spring the Nicholas Humanitarian Fund granted me a scholarship of \$2,600 to serve the underprivileged in the rural areas surrounding Xela, Guatemala. Before leaving for Guatemala, I was able to work at home and save money for the upcoming school year. Then, with that money safely stored for the upcoming semester, I could leave for Guatemala to work in a local health clinic for seven weeks. It was truly an answer to prayer.

When I was leaving California for Xela on June 10<sup>th</sup>, I thought I knew what I was getting myself into. Like usual, my abroad experience involved letting go of those expectations. I thought that I would be grant writing for *Primeros Pasos*, a health clinic that serves one of the most malnourished areas in the world. While I did work with the administrative team of the clinic, I never saw a grant application. Instead I undertook a variety of other projects that included comparing the prices of medications across the area and in the United States, writing the quarterly newsletter in both English and Spanish, and creating an iPhoto book to thank donors. In an organization with limited resources, I learned the importance of stretching those resources in the most efficient way possible. This involved the wise allocation of both financial and human resources. I have also been considering pursuing a career in the international non-profit world, and the experience of working in another country provided invaluable insights into both the joys and challenges of this kind of career.

I was also given the opportunity to participate in 'mobile clinics,' a unique kind of community health outreach. Because improving the health of a community is so complicated, *Primeros Pasos* has developed a variety of programs to target vulnerable segments of the population. The Healthy Schools program educates children on a variety of topics, from healthy eating to good hygiene, and provides annual checkups.



Most children visit the clinic from surrounding schools, but some schools are simply too far away. In those cases, staff and volunteers take the clinics and classes to the children. These 'mobile clinics' were a great opportunity to serve and interact with some of the most needy children in Guatemala.

The first week in Guatemala I lived with a host family, but after the first few days I began to search for an apartment with two other students from Vanderbilt. The apartment that we eventually found ended up fostering a host of learning experiences. Although I've visited other countries, I have never *lived* in another country for an extended period of time. From learning to cook meals on a daily basis from foods discovered in the market to my adventures navigating a new neighborhood, all of the small lessons added up. While I would not claim to be an expert in Guatemalan culture, after seven weeks I was able to piece together a much more complete picture of what life is like in a very different region of the world. It's hard to put what that means into words. The best I can say is that I have a better understanding of how culture affects individual people and a deeper appreciation for our cross-cultural commonalities as humans. Those are lessons that have profoundly affected my world view, probably in ways I don't even understand yet.

On a more academic level, I ended my seven weeks with a much greater understanding of the issues surrounding global health in particular. Working in the mobile clinic, I was exposed to children with all kinds of health issues. I also spent many nights with other volunteers: a few worked as health educators with other children, another worked in administration, some in the pharmacy, and one in the women's health program. From our

collective experiences, it became more and more clear to me that no development issue stands alone. For instance, malnutrition is closely linked to a lack of maternal health, family planning, and adequate education. But the family as an institution is influenced by a variety of external pressures, like religious convictions and male dominance. The complexity of something that seems relatively simple on the surface can feel overwhelming. Yet there is hope. There are organizations doing amazing and creative things to address the multiple facets of health issues in Guatemala.



Of course, not everything was serious. I found time to hike a volcano, visit one of the most beautiful lakes I've ever seen, and take in a few soccer games. I already miss Guatemala and am so thankful for the opportunity that the Nichols scholarship gave me to live and serve in such a picturesque country with such warm people. It was an experience that changed my life – in both big and small ways.



*Sharda Fields*  
*South Africa*



Ever since I went on my first mission trip to Venezuela during my freshman year in high school, I have had a passion for global engagement. When the opportunity came for me to participate in the Vanderbilt Initiative for Scholarship and Global Engagement (VISAGE) program I was hesitant about applying because I did not think it would fit into my academic schedule, and I did not think I would be able to afford the trip. After attending the information meeting I learned that the South Africa site could count toward my major, which allowed me to squeeze it into my schedule. I also learned of scholarship opportunities that would ease the financial burden. With a hopeful heart, I applied to both. I was elated when I was accepted to the program as well receiving the scholarship.

As I thought about my other trips out of the country, I wanted to make sure I had a new experience while in Africa. On my VISAGE trip, I wanted to try something different, step outside my comfort zone, and live in the moment; but most importantly, I wanted to allow this experience to change my life. I have been given opportunities to start the path on living out my dream of changing the world, but too often I allow fear to get in the way. I want that to end on this trip. For the next

5 weeks I planned on stretching myself and soaking up as much as I can. I refused to let fear or excuses stop me from allowing this trip to transform my thinking, my perspective and from allowing the wheels to start turning on my journey of doing what God has called me to do.

During my trip I grew a lot spiritually, physically, and emotionally. There were parts of this trip that was very challenging for me. However, through prayer and talking to others I learned how to overcome these obstacles. I learned to focus my attention on what mattered most.

During our trip, we taught 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grade students Math and English skills for two weeks during their Winter Break. When I had a rough day or was frustrated about something, those kids helped motivate me and help me push through those moments. When it was time for the summer program to end, the Lord placed it on my heart to write personal letters to all of my students. At first I was only going to write to certain children, but I ended up writing a letter to every student in our class. I have been to summer camps before and the counselors all wrote us notes. It made me feel special to know



that someone took the time to write a note specifically for me. I know how much it could mean to these youth to get something like that. After I wrote most of the letters I prayed over them and asked that

they be used as a seed to plant in the child's life. After I passed them out, the kids that I talked to the least were the main ones that came up and gave me a hug. It made me feel good to know that the letters were appreciated. Later that week, when we went back to visit the school for the final time, we saw some of our students from the program. One of the girls that I worked with a couple of times came up and gave me a hug and handed me a note. I wasn't expecting it at all and it really showed me how much the letter had meant to her. When I wrote the letters I didn't write them expecting anything in return, but this note is definitely something that I will keep as a reminder of how big of a difference the little things make.

Participating in the VISAGE program really put a lot of things in perspective for me. I have always wanted to work in a non-profit organization. Being a part of this program helped me realize that the

issues that people face in Africa are the same issues that people face in America. While it may not be as intense in the United States, there are more similarities than differences. Participating in this program helped me remember that while I should continue to be globally minded, I must also remember to take my experiences from Africa and apply them to communities like Edgehill, here in Nashville. If the people who are fortunate enough to have adequate resources can give back to those who are not—regardless of race, nationality, or origin—the world would be a much better place. My goal in life is to change the world, one person at a time. While I may not be able to go back to Cape Town, South Africa and find the kids I worked with this summer, I know that I planted a seed of hope in their lives. If those kids can join together and encourage each other, there is no limit to what they can accomplish.



*Chivon Ford*  
*South Africa*

This summer I had the pleasure of participating in the greatest experience of my life thus far. For six weeks I was challenged, inspired, and emerged in the culture of South Africa, while participating in the VISAGE 2011 South Africa Program. Participating in VISAGE 2011 has made me a better person in so many ways and has taught me so much about myself. In Cape Town, I was forced to live in a house with sixteen other students and interact with them from dawn to dusk. This was by far the most challenging part of the experience for me. I am typically a person who stays in a tight knit circle of friends. However, with this program I was forced to break out of my comfort zone; to my surprise, this was not as hard as I thought. I came out of this experience with sixteen more friends than I had, and found that my circle has grown tremendously.

I am grateful for this opportunity and studying abroad made me realize how patriotic I am for my country. While I was honored to experience community service and academia in another country, it made me realize how lucky I am to call America home. The basic necessities that I continuously overlook have become so much more important to me. However, though studying abroad has brought many great experiences, it has brought me personal guilt as well. In South Africa, I faced guilt of having to go abroad to fully immerse myself in a community service activity. Community service has always been a very important aspect of my life, but I often find it hard to stick to one community service activity. In South Africa, however, I was totally focused on one community service activity and this is something I wished I would have done prior to South Africa. I found out that, as a

philanthropist, I will give financially to less fortunate countries while I will "get my hands dirty" in America. There are neighborhoods in America that face some of the same problems as less fortunate countries that I feel are sometimes overlooked; I want to change this, yet ironically I had to leave my country to realize it.

In addition, this trip has possibly steered my career path in a new direction. Instead of pursuing corporate law, I am thinking about using a law degree to help the impoverished with such things as affordable education and health care. I am not sure if this will steer me into the political route, but after this trip I would not be opposed. Aside from a new potential career, my academic path has not changed; I am still happily a Philosophy and English major. This trip helped me to find my own life philosophy; in this pursuit of my personal philosophy, I realized I would like other students at Vandy to know that every student should study abroad at least once. To see another culture in its everyday life was something I will never forget and, as an African-American, this experience was that much more meaningful. To see what I consider to be a branch of me in person has completed a life goal of mine.



*Alexandra Hall*  
*Sri Lanka*



My interest in travel, world cultures, and cultural exchange motivated my decision to engage in a service-learning project abroad during the summer of 2011. I had chosen, in fall 2010, to go to Sri Lanka for the month of May to teach English at a public Buddhist school. I was to be a member of the first group of students to do a service-learning project in Sri Lanka, and this was exciting to me. So only two days after I had completed my spring semester finals at Vanderbilt, I boarded a plane in my hometown of Atlanta, GA to begin my day-long journey to Colombo, Sri Lanka. I had been planning for this trip for nearly a year, and so when the time finally came for me to leave my home and travel across the world, I could not have been more ecstatic.

**May 7, 2011:** After an exhausting full day of travel, I and six other Vanderbilt students landed safely in Colombo. Immediately upon stepping out of the Sri Lanka airport, I found myself very warmly embraced by the Ceylon humidity. In retrospect, I believe that I only needed to take a hint from the extent of travel that it took for us to get to Sri Lanka. Something great was going to occur... I just had no

idea the magnitude of the journey I was about to embark on.

I had some idea of what I would face in my first trip to South Asia. In the spring, I had made an effort to do all the suggested preparation activities. These were activities to assist us in adapting to the culture and environment. No. 1: "Try spicy food." For this I didn't do very much, I figured that the frequent Indian restaurant trips of my youth and having grown up eating my Mother's curries would suffice. No. 2: "Learn new words from the main language." I was more proactive about this one. I purchased a cheap travel guide to Sri Lanka on EBay studied new words and phrases every night. No. 3: "Begin to prepare for the weather." I think it was only briefly mentioned to our group that we would be going to Sri Lanka during the hottest month of the year; either that or I just didn't pay enough attention to this pertinent bit of information. I, unconventionally, brought a rain coat and umbrella expecting monsoons in May. Go figure.

**May 8, 2011:** We took an early morning bumpy ride from Colombo to



Moratuwa, the location of our homestay. Upon arriving at the house, our host-Dad, Anil, greeted us all with a warm smile and an "Ayobowan." After settling in and rest-

ing for a bit, we were called to eat our first meal there. I quickly realized that I should have incorporated red chili peppers into my diet as a part of the trip preparation. The food was so delicious, but it also warranted innumerable glasses of water. Food, as it were, would come to play a significant role in our interaction with the people there.

**May 9, 2011:** The group successfully boarded a city bus with the guidance of our homestay families. We arrived at the school where we would spend the month teaching, and we were met with stares and hordes of children around us. I can recall vividly that moment of excitement, as we attempted to determine where we should go while close to fifty children surrounded us and said, "Hello. How are you? What is your name?" So even as chaotic as that moment was, in the midst of it all we were able to get an idea of the level that these students were at in their English conversation skills. The seven of us stuck together and attempted to ask around. In brief communication with the faculty around the school, I quickly discovered that it was futile for me to practice the little Sinhala that I had tried to learn in the spring. No one seemed to understand my pronunciation. It would be best for me to learn everything anew.

**May 14, 2011:** We had finally made it through our first week in Moratuwa, and our first few classes at the Moratu Maha Vidayalya School. In our initial days with the students, we found that they were quite reserved and hesitant to practice speaking English with us. Our classes were extremely well behaved and polite, but the students seemed to do much more observing than participating. It would be our challenge as volunteer English teachers to change this. We wanted to instill confidence in these students

and to encourage them to practice what they learned. In order to do this, we realized that we needed to take a different approach. We needed to understand them in order to teach them.

The following week was Vesak, the largest holiday in Sri Lanka, the celebration and commemoration of Buddha's birth, enlightenment, and death. We had the opportunity to experience this holiday and learn more about the culture of Sri Lanka from our homestay families. When we returned to our classes a few days after, we had a new starting point.

**May 20, 2011:** By incorporating more of the local culture into our lesson plans we found that we were able to connect to the students in a way that we could not before. On this day we did a lesson about transportation in which we referenced the common Tuk-tuk or three-wheelers that can be found on the streets of Sri Lanka and other South Asian countries. Earlier we did a lesson about ordering food in a restaurant and mentioned foods that they were very familiar with, such as sting hoppers and dal curry. The students seemed to really enjoy laughing at our Sri Lankan references, but I could tell that they were becoming more comfortable with their new American friends. I think that working to overcome the cultural barrier by incorporating cultural exchange into our daily interactions and lesson plans was the most crucial "learning" part of our service-learning experience.

**June 2, 2011:** By this time, I think that all of us Vanderbilt students had just started to get the hang of things here. From navigating the local transportation to eating with our hands "the correct way," we'd been able to adapt to Sri Lanka in a way that many of us thought impossible at first. This final day of teaching at the school brought much sadness for us and the students. As the pilot group of

this Sri Lanka service-learning project, we were met with a plethora of challenges and surprises during our time there. Although we had set out to do a splendid job in teaching the students English, I think that what we were actually able to accomplish was more valuable. Our small group established relations in Sri Lanka with our homestay families, with the faculty members, with the students, and with local community members that will last. We developed a sort of network that will help the service-learning program in Sri Lanka thrive in the future.



**On the Nichols Humanitarian Fund:** The Nichols Humanitarian Fund enabled me to be a part of this service-learning project to Sri Lanka in two ways. For one, the fund provided me the financial support to make a life-long dream of travelling to South Asia and engaging in my passion, doing service projects abroad, a reality. But also, being a recipient of the Nichols Humanitarian Fund motivated me even more to make my service-learning experience a meaningful, nay even life-changing one. I am so grateful to the Nichols Family and their fund for providing me with the opportunity and the means to make my incredible service-learning trip to Sri Lanka possible.

*Dear Nichols Family,*

*I would like to express my greatest thanks to you for providing me the means to pursue a service-learning program in Moratuwa, Sri Lanka this summer. Throughout the month of May and into early June, I spent my time there teaching English at a public Buddhist school. If not for the funds that I received, I would have not been able to engage in such a meaningful and life-changing service project abroad. I learned so much about the country, culture, and people of Sri Lanka and realized my passion for promoting education abroad. I hope to return to Sri Lanka next summer to continue the work that was started in May of this year. I thank you immensely for supporting service programs for students and for providing me the financial support necessary to engage in one. May God bless.*

*Sincerely,*

*Alexandra B. Hall  
Vanderbilt University  
Class of 2013  
College of Arts & Science*



*Amishi Kumar*  
*Costa Rica*



This past summer was one of my greatest memories, and I'm absolutely certain I would not have been able to have it unless I received support from the Nichols Fund. I was involved with VISAGE-Costa Rica. VISAGE is a very comprehensive school program that incorporates lectures during the typical school year along with a summer program. Our VISAGE group focused on sustainability and eco-tourism in Costa Rica; this was a perfect fit for me as I'm an Earth and Environmental Science major with a minor in Corporate Strategy.

My experience with VISAGE started last spring semester when I was introduced to 15 other students who would be traveling to Costa Rica with me in a few months. Everyone got along nicely and some students actually became really good friends of mine during the semester. Our professor, Chalene Helmuth, instilled all the values and tenets of being a true Eco-tourist into our brains. From our individual and group projects, every class member became an expert on different aspects of Costa Rican culture or government. By the last month, every class increased our excitement for the upcoming trip.

Once May rolled around, my bank account and all the money I had received from the Nichols Fund was drained paying for the program fee, airplane ticket, and tuition for summer credit, but I was on my way to Costa Rica!! We knew the general outline of what was in store for our trip but the written itinerary in no way prepared me for my experience. Every day was one of the most happy and informative I've ever experienced in school. We learned how to dance and cook with our host family mothers. We learned all about the healthcare system of Costa Rica-not from books, but from the doctors and nurses that help shape it. An organic coffee farmer taught us about his techniques and problems, and even showed us his farm. After all my countless hours of ecotourism research, nothing compared to the wealth of knowledge and expertise the managers at the Eco-lodges in Monteverde shared with our class.

These were just a few of my learning experiences from my short trip abroad but one thing more profound than my increase of knowledge was how much my sense of belonging increased. While we did something educational each day, our group also partook in service projects nearly every day. Many of the projects involved planting trees or hard manual labor, something you wouldn't expect more than 10 fragile Vandy girls to be able to do. However, never once did we quit. Two schools were spruced up with a completely new yard from us. Our group planted hundreds of baby trees in a biological corridor and we even planted hundreds of coffee seeds for an organic farmer. We grew to be a family and all worked together the entire time to finish a project. No one took a break until our project was done, no matter how tired we were. Our group's determination grew from the people we helped.

One school in particular was a defining moment for our trip. These children didn't have a playground; instead, they played in a patch of dirt littered with broken tiles and bottles with open grey wastewater from the school running down the middle. That day we worked for hours to cover the ground with sod and then spent a few hours planting flowers with the kids. The children were hilarious! All they wanted to do was talk with us and help us. One thing a group of hyper kids cannot do is plant flowers. I think their help cost a few extra hours in the hot sun, but we loved every second with them. One of my favorite memories was of two little boys that designated themselves as my hole-diggers (they thought it was a manly job). I kept complimenting how great they were doing. I lost track of them for little bit but I thought they maybe had taken a break. Oh, I was so wrong! They came running back to me after a little bit and dragged me to the little bush they had just planted. Far away from where the bushes were supposed to be. Smack in the middle of where the grass had to be. Of course they were ecstatic when I told them how great of a job they did. They epitomized what I learned from the trip: everyone wants to help and feel like a part of something great, and it doesn't matter how you contribute but just that you try.

Please extend my sincere and huge thanks to the Nichols family for providing this fund because, financially speaking, I would not been able to have this great experience!

Thanks,  
Amishi Kumar

Jenna Lesser  
Ecuador



For four weeks in May and June of 2011, I lived in a hostel in Quito, Ecuador with twelve other Vanderbilt students, spent my weekends traveling the incredibly beautiful country of Ecuador, and worked full time with underprivileged children with disabilities. I have always had a passion for working with those with disabilities, which is why I am studying special education. To be able work with, help, and hopefully improve the lives of children with severe special needs while simultaneously learning about and immersing myself in an amazing, rich culture is an unbelievable blessing that I would not have been able to experience were it not for the support that I received from the Nichols Humanitarian Fund.

While in Quito, the majority of my time was spent working at a foundation called Camp Hope, or, *Campamento Esperanza*, where approximately 80 local children attend school. These children either cannot afford the expenses (books,

uniforms, etc.) of the supposedly free public schools, or they have some sort of disability that the public school system does not provide services for. I worked in a class with eleven students with severe disabilities. Most had cerebral palsy, a physical disorder due to neurological damage before the completion of brain development that results in little to no control of one's body. Others suffered from intellectual disabilities; one in particular was epileptic and, at eight years old, suffered from a stroke that eliminated much of the abilities she had developed before the stroke. When I met her, three months later, she was somewhat reminiscent of a one and a half year old. Despite the fact that most of my students could not walk, eat, or speak, they each had their own bright and inspiring personalities and I developed strong connections with each of them.

I find it to be extremely unfortunate that there is a financial burden inflicted on those who wish to travel the world and help others. Whether a person wishes to feed the hungry in Africa, educate the illiterate across the United States, or help those with disabilities in South



America, to travel somewhere and volunteer requires a monetary commitment. In my case, my university offered me the opportunity to go to Ecuador and work with people with disabilities, something I already know I have a passion for, and this opportunity was unique because the children in Ecuador do not generally have



access to the resources and attention that those children with disabilities in the United States are required by law to receive. Luckily, the Nichols Fund allowed me to go to Ecuador and provide my services.

Although the fact that I would be providing service to others is what made me eligible to receive the support of the Nichols Fund, it was what I received during the trip that made the experience so incredible. Every time I work with people with disabilities, I feel an incredible sense of achievement for having enriched the lives of others in addition to developing a strong connection to these individuals which drives me to do more. Before my work in Ecuador began, I had hoped that I would once again feel the strong sense of connection and fulfillment that has never failed to occur after I work with people with disabilities.

By the end of the trip, I wanted anything but to have to part with my new companions, the children in my classroom. All of the students at Camp Hope planned a celebration for the three other Vanderbilt volunteers and me on our last day. I was choked up the entire time as the six year olds sang to us, the director made a speech, and the children swarmed us and hugged us. I felt connected to each and every one of the students.

One girl, Mariuxi, was blind in addition to having cerebral palsy. She could barely move or chew and had the least capacity to communicate in the whole class. She would lay at her spot in the afternoons, often laughing to herself, making whatever sounds she could. I loved her and thought she was beautiful but spent much of my time with the more interactive children. I did not consider myself most attached to her out of all of the children, but when we were hugging all of the students during our farewell celebra-

tion, it was when I went to hug her that my few tears turned into a real, uncontrollable cry.

During my trip, I learned about Ecuadorian culture and saw many incredible cities and landmarks, but it is not a connection to Ecuador that made me want to stay. It was instead a connection to my students, who could not talk to me at all, but I know that they love me as much as I love them and I long for the day that I can go back and see them. I could never express the appreciation I have for the Nichols Humanitarian Fund because without the support of the Nichols Fund, I would not have gotten to love, and be loved by, my students.

I would like to personally address the Nichols family and thank them for helping me to have my experience in Ecuador. I have only developed a greater passion for working with people with disabilities after going on this trip and I will think of the children I worked with in Ecuador for the rest of my life. I cannot find words to express my gratitude and can only hope that I was able to represent the Nichols Family well and help to accomplish what it is that the Fund has set out to do.

*Chelsea Lunn*  
*Costa Rica*

This summer course has inspired me to travel even more. It has allowed me to discover that I value more quality time spent in one place over quantity in destinations. I will always be aware of the level of commitment to sustainability in my future travels. In addition, it will always be a priority of mine to invest in the local community as much as possible by consuming at local restaurants, stores, and other organizations. I loved the home stay experience I had in Costa Rica and would love to do it again in another country. In addition to being in a better position for authentic cultural immersion, the family can benefit not only from the money, but by also learning about another culture. It is an ideal reciprocation of exchange and respect for other cultures that I believe is a vital part of sustainable tourism.

Upon my return home, I found myself automatically questioning the environmental standards or level of social corporate responsibility in businesses I consume from and of companies I have applied for jobs. The most important thought that ran through my head upon my return was that I hear so much about green efforts in the United States, but I rarely see any of it in my daily life. I am currently looking for more ways to increase my family's level of commitment to sustainability beyond recycling bottles and cans. In watching the news since I've been home, I have heard a lot of discussion about the economy and jobs, but little discussion of green jobs or investment. In a country that is desperate for jobs and economic growth, it is alarming to see what is either just a lack of media coverage and/or lack of interest and investment in this sector. As corruption in politics comes to light, and more of my gener-

ation enters the job market, I hope to see and be a part of an increasing amount of innovation and commitment to sustainability and green efforts within all aspects of society.

While in Costa Rica, we engaged in a range of community service activities ranging from reforestation projects and working on a local, family-operated coffee farm to educating school children on International Earth Day about the importance of sustainability and the simple changes they could make in their everyday lives. One of my favorite service activities was the beautification of the front yard of a local elementary school for children who were from low-income families or had issues requiring additional attention from teaching staff. When we first arrived and saw the enormous lot of dirt, a few trees, and an excessive littering of trash for a school yard, we knew we had our work cut out for us. Although it was unbearably hot and we were exhausted from traveling from the previous day, I was so proud of and grateful for the positive attitude that was maintained by everyone. We bonded with the children who helped carry the flowers and bushes to the holes we had dug. Although I originally grimaced at the sight of dirt and mud on some of the white uniform shirts, soon that feeling was replaced by a warm satisfaction at the eagerness and excitement on all of their faces that stemmed from playing an active role in bettering their school. By the end of the day, endless piles of sod had been laid, flowers had been planted, and the schoolyard had been weeded and rid of trash. The transformation was incredible and the experience was unforgettable. What stuck with me most was the unselfish attitude many of us carried, despite our own discomfort and weariness. It was a great lesson and reminder that we can and should main-

tain the same compassion and generosity at all times, no matter our circumstance.

I will be forever grateful to the Nichols for affording me the opportunity to study abroad this past summer. It truly was an eye-opening experience that has already changed the way I approach my studies and my life. Through the VISAGE program, I have been able to develop relationships with professors that I truly cherish for being genuine and bonding us through our experience while abroad and our common interests on the issues we discussed in the classroom. Since my return, I have been appointed Vice-President of the newly found Vanderbilt Garden Initiative, along with a member of my VISAGE group who is Secretary. Our goal is to maintain the Vanderbilt Community Garden in organic and sustainable ways. We aim to spread awareness about and to spur the growth of more community gardens through partnerships with other community gardens and organizations like Mobile Market and Community Food Advocates. I'm sure you are familiar with the saying by Lao Tzu, "Give a man a fish, feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish, feed him for a lifetime". By empowering members of a community with the ability to grow and sustain themselves through the planting and nurturing of their own food, ideally the same mind-set will encourage them to become more actively engaged members of their own families, communities, and this world. Community gardens have the power to generate more interaction between members of a community, encourage self-reliance, beautify neighborhoods, provide a source of fresh and nutritious produce, conserve resources, and create limitless opportunities to educate others on the importance of sustainability in all aspects of life. In addition to collaborating with Mobile Market to sell our first harvest, we

hope to partner with other similar organizations to educate both youth and adults about sustainability and the benefits of consuming locally produced organic foods.

The VISAGE Costa Rica trip has enabled me to contribute so much more to organizations like VGI than I would have been able to had I not been able to afford such an amazing educational experience. The Nichols scholarship was truly a blessing for me by at least making it a possibility for me to study abroad and work to pay for the additional costs neither my parents, nor I could have afforded without it.



*Mallory Messenger*  
*Italy*

The Nichols Humanitarian Fund allowed me to complete two service projects abroad. Without the support of the Nichols Humanitarian Fund, I would not have been able to participate in these service opportunities. For the first three weeks of my trip, I volunteered on a whale and dolphin research boat off of the coast of Italy in the Mediterranean Sea. I helped the research assistants by taking shifts at the sighting point on top of the boat to help spot the animals. Once the whales or dolphins were found, we followed them with the boat and took data on their respiration patterns and dive times. I learned a lot about marine biology and the unique cetacean populations in the Mediterranean Sea. There are eight regular cetacean species in the Mediterranean Sea including fin whales, sperm whales, striped dolphins, and Risso's dolphins—all of which I was fortunate enough to observe and study. I was saddened to learn that human pressures are the most serious threats to the animals in the Mediterranean Sea. Boat traffic, overfishing for commercial purposes, and the use of drift nets are the main culprits to the declining population of some of the animals in the Mediterranean. Tethys, the research institute I volunteered for, conducts research and educates the public on what we can do to decrease the number of animal deaths caused by boat strikes. They even lead conferences for sailors to help them learn the safest speed at which to travel and how to best estimate the direction an animal is swimming when they encounter them to help reduce the number of accidents. The waters we surveyed during my time on the boat are included in the Pelagos Sanctuary which is a marine protected area (MPA). This means that France, Monaco, and Italy

have agreed that the portion of the Mediterranean Sea in which we were working needs to be monitored more closely by experts in the field. MPAs are created to help protect the biodiversity, ecosystems, and the animals in the area. Beyond learning the research techniques and valuable information about the animals and the environment in which we were working, I had the privilege of working and living with people from all over the world. I acquired a global perspective on many issues through conversing with new friends from places such as Italy, France, Germany, and Australia.

The other service opportunity I was able to participate in thanks to the Nichols Humanitarian Fund was teaching English to Italian children at summer camps. I had the wonderful opportunity of staying with host families during my teaching duties. I spent one week in Pisa, Italy, and one week in a small village outside of Turin, Italy, teaching in a summer camp. I planned and implemented lessons for the five days the children attended camp. At the end of the week, the students put on a show—all in English—for their parents. The experience of staying with host families opened my eyes to the way in which people live in Italy. I observed first-hand how their culture and way of life differed from my own. There are many aspects of the Italian way of life that I will take with me and try to incorporate into my own life. Since I am studying at Peabody College to become a teacher, this teaching experience was directly relevant to my career path. I learned a lot about teaching and specifically teaching a foreign language through this experience. I was forced to be creative in my teaching—going beyond using traditional words and assignments. My lessons incorporated songs, hand gestures, and universal games to help ensure

that my students understood me. I have a greater appreciation for teachers who have students who speak English as a second language (ESL) in their classrooms. This is a current issue in the U.S. school system today as the immigrant population grows along with the number of students who do not speak English in the home. A language barrier puts another stress on teachers who already have a multi-faceted and challenging job. I think I will be a more patient and understanding teacher after my experience teaching English to Italian children. I am grateful to the Nichols for their generosity, and I am impressed by their kindness and willingness to provide students with opportunities to travel and complete service that they otherwise would never have.

Rosamary Ochoa  
South Africa



This summer I spent 40 days in South Africa. Two months ago I would have said that 40 days is not a long time at all. However, in this seemingly little amount of time, I was able not only to see this country's beautiful landscapes and experience its culture, but also meet its wonderful people, and have a life-changing experience. 40 days was enough time to make me want to come back and learn more of the different languages, their incredible diversity and their living customs.

I traveled to South Africa with the VISAGE (Vanderbilt Initiative for Scholarship and Global Engagement) Program. Through this program, I took on a regular academic curriculum administered in part by the University of Cape Town (UCT), where we further studied the history, economic, social and political issues of Cape Town and its surrounding areas, as well as broader issues like international development and the role of Human Rights in this development. The purpose of this program was *Community and Youth Development*, so our service projects consisted of an Adult IT Training program and an English and Math tutoring program for 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> graders. Both of these programs were implemented in the Manenberg community (a township in the outskirts of the city) with the help of

SHAWCO, a student-run NGO based at UCT.

Through these service projects we got to know the people of the Manenberg community, their stories, their joys and fears, and their needs. I thoroughly enjoyed teaching computer skills to my IT learner, Dora Ngcaba. More than just teaching her how to highlight and use the **Bold** and *Italic* icons in Microsoft Word and how to surf the web, I worked with her in a partnership, where I learned as much if not more from her as she learned from me. I learned to have more appreciation for the little things I had generally taken for granted, and be conscious of the opportunities that I am given every single day. Dora taught me the true meaning of perseverance; getting to know her story, the dangers that she encounters on a daily basis, and her worries of not being able to provide for her family really gave me a completely new perspective with which to look at my life. The realization that I have been so fortunate in having had life easily handed to me every day in contrast to the struggles that I was witnessing Dora overcome to obtain the simplest of things, like toilet paper and potable water, provided the basis for my growth as a



global citizen and highlighted even more the responsibility I have as a human being in lending a hand to people who are not as fortunate as I am.



Overall, however, I would say that my ultimate learning this summer came forth through the Holiday Project (the tutoring program). As a group, I would say that we struggled the most in dealing with the uncertainty of the positive impact of our service: are we making a difference? Working at Manenberg for such a short period of time didn't allow us to see the large-scale changes most of us were imagining our service projects would bring. There was really no way for us to exactly measure how much we helped our learners, and in this way, I sometimes did feel powerless. However, I now look at the 560ish pictures I took of these kids, some candid while they were at the board solving math operations, or when everyone was out playing Red Rover Red Rover, and others posed with smiling eyes, and I realized that we had to have had some impact in their lives. As Mother Theresa said, "In this life, we cannot do great things. We can only do small things with great love." Maybe I am being naïve, but I truly believe that these small things will add up and eventually bring a great change. I hope that they learned more than just the different parts of speech or the multiplication tables with us; I hope this experience enabled them to see the importance and the power of knowledge and the self-recognition of their true capability. I do feel fortunate to have had the chance of (possibly) impacting someone's life in this way.

This eye-opening experience would not have been possible without the endorsement of Mr. and Mrs. Nichols through the Nichols Fund, for which I will be eternally grateful. The fund enabled me to absorb the cost for the program fee, making the airfare and other costs affordable to me. I recognize that this was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, and thanks to the Nichols Fund I had the

means to take it. The service and educational components of my journey to South Africa tremendously enhanced my academic development and personal growth. This trip gave me the chance to fully engage in a cause that impacts our potential as youth and promotes cultural understanding. These 40 days were a life-changing experience that I shall never forget.

*Jose Onate*  
*Ecuador*



From May 17 to June 21, 2011, I stayed in a hostel with eleven other Vanderbilt students in the touristic city of Quito, Ecuador. We were all in four different service groups working with unique social issues. Four of us worked at Camp Hope, which is an integrated school that works with underprivileged families and orphans with special disabilities. The grade levels ranged from first to eighth grade where the classrooms contained students with and without disabilities; there were three other classrooms for students with special disabilities. In these three classrooms, one focused on teaching students to be independent, to develop technical skills such as making crafts, and the other classroom focused on students who need intensive care. I worked in the classroom where students used recyclable material to construct home decoration items. In the classroom, I had six students, three boys and three girls, with unique disabilities. Half of my students were orphans and the majority of them had mild cerebral palsy. For two hours each day, I taught English to five students.

I rode the bus at 8:30am every day in order to arrive to school by 9:30am. I worked on building some art crafts and finished some of the students' work. They could only perform particular tasks such

as paint, mold clay, and make bracelets. I was required by the teacher of the classroom to draw large pictures so that the students were able to paint the drawing with minimum error. For the first two weeks of June, we created eighty father's day cards where I drew the picture and made finishing touches while the students painted. This task required teamwork from each member in the classroom. For lunch, we all sat together at a dining table where I served a plate of food to each one. Only two students knew how to eat with a knife and fork whereas the rest could only eat with a spoon. I would smash the food to make it easier for the students to eat. Afterwards, I would assist them in brushing their teeth and finishing any of the arts and crafts before they went home. The students from the orphanage always left early on a bus. As a group, we decided to leave with the students to their house to hang out. The students were very excited because they were able to show us their rooms, beds and toys. The following day they would brag to the other students about how we came over to hang out.



Another task I had around the school was to fix the playground. The playground was in such horrible condition that one of the volunteers and I brought the rest of the Vanderbilt group to help fix it. In two days, we were able to finish the playground. The students were very excited, especially the students with disabilities because they were able to access new swings and slides. The teachers were very proud of us because they were

limited in the resources to fix the playground, but we were able to use our own skills and resources.

Spending time with students taught me some special educational knowledge. One thing that stuck out was how a person in a wheelchair is limited in accessing areas when there are only stairs in a building. While fixing the playground, we were thinking of how we can make the playground more accessible to students with disabilities. Some of the students in wheelchairs would report how the playground limited activities. A few teachers would assist us on how to make the equipment more accessible. It was difficult making accommodations for the students, but at the end of the day the students were happy when there were tools accessible to them. Although I am a secondary education major, it was interesting being placed in a different area of education; there was so much that I learned regarding special education.

I appreciate that I am a Nichols Humanitarian Fund recipient because the grant paid for all fees regarding the trip. If it was not for this grant, I would have been unable to attend Ecuador. This grant allowed me to travel to an unknown country of which I had very little knowledge and be able to apply my skills and learn new skills. Also, this grant allowed me to see the Galapagos Islands during my last few days in Ecuador. This trip to Ecuador is a highlight of my college career all thanks to the Nichols Humanitarian Fund.

8/7/11

*Dear Nichols family,*

*Thank you for assisting me in paying for the costs of my Ecuador trip. For five weeks I was able to explore Ecuador by serving the community. I enjoyed my experience and learned a lot about special education and poverty. This experience occurred because of your aid. Thank you for everything.*

*Sincerely,  
Jose Ignacio Onate*



*Laura Regan, Nikita Rodrigues*  
*India*

The Nichols Humanitarian Fund provided the two of us an extremely unique and profound experience. We traveled to Mumbai, India in the winter of 2010-2011 with hopes of starting up a psychology experiment we would continue in the spring of 2011. We arrived in India and started our trip touring orphanages in Mumbai and speaking with orphanage directors in a variety of different institutions in the city. Our initial project idea was to start a program with infants in an orphanage in hopes of changing the long-term outcomes that institutionalized children have been shown to develop. After visiting several orphanages, we realized that this plan could not come into fruition due to the lack of infants in the many different organizations we saw. We would visit orphanages with hundreds of children, but there would only be five or six children under the age of 3. When we probed further into the issue we found some heart-rending information. We found out that the majority of children that were abandoned in India were given up at an older age, for two main reasons. The first being that mothers could at least provide breast milk for the first year or two of life, and the second was because begging with an infant usually provides greater monetary results. In fact, we found out that there is a type of "underground market" where mothers can send their infants off with other beggars during the day and make a profit from that. While that is a very disturbing idea, we were constantly faced with the reality of how difficult these people's lives were in the "lower class" of India's social system and we gained some understanding of what people do just in order to survive.

After giving up hopes of completing our project, we decided to spend our time volunteering in two different orphanages in the city. We first went to Mother Theresa's orphanage in Mumbai which only hosts children with disabilities. These disabilities ranged from mental disorders to physical abnormalities and we really struggled with the images and realities we faced upon entering the orphanage. A couple of the children eventually warmed up to us as we started teaching them songs and playing tickling games. We found that the language barrier didn't seem to be an issue with young children who just wanted to be played with. We also got to watch the older girls in the orphanage taking their dance class, which was so beautiful and something we'll both remember for the rest of our lives. The other place we volunteered was a daycare for children in the slums. We entered a tiny room, where twenty-or-so 2-to-3-year-olds would get dropped off each morning. From the moment we entered we were surrounded by children grabbing our clothes and pulling us to play with the few toys scattered around the room. We quickly realized that the children did not have diapers and would instead just wet their clothes and wait until one of the two teachers would notice and switch their shorts without cleaning or wiping them. Both of us have worked with children in America and baby-sat, and we couldn't believe the vast difference between daycares in America and the one we were in now.

While the experience in general was very hard to process and emotionally draining, the thing that upset us the most was the under-staffing in the daycare. While we knew this organization was providing such a great service to the community and doing the best they could, some of the images we saw there still

haunt us today. Kids would bully and bite each other like kids do, but there just weren't enough eyes to take care of the many situations that arose. We were constantly pointing out kids with wet shorts and kids who were bleeding or crying because someone had bitten or hit them. It was hard to imagine the kids without our extra hands there, but we knew that's how it was every other day. We both came to a realization about the huge difference there is between giving money to those in need and going and giving your time. We could not be more grateful to the Nichols Foundation for giving us that opportunity and for realizing the importance of that difference. We now, more than ever, realize what an amazing organization the Nichols' have created because, instead of sending money to various organizations, they are sending hands that want to help and are benefiting both groups tremendously by doing so.

The Nichols' provided us with an opportunity unlike any we had in college. We were given the immensely valuable chance to volunteer in another country and an experience we probably never would have had otherwise. We are so grateful that this amazing program exists at Vanderbilt. Especially as nostalgic new alumni, we know that programs like these are what made our college experience so unique and so wonderful. We cannot thank you enough.

*Allie Scalf*  
*South Africa*



It seems that everyone desires that their summer consist of eventful occasions that instill lessons and provoke a new perspective, surround you with wonderful people, and ensure great adventures. Fortunately for me, my summer studying abroad in South Africa with Vanderbilt's VISAGE program provided all of this and much more. With the financial gift I received from the Nichols Humanitarian Fund, I was able to embark across the globe with fifteen other Vanderbilt students to engage in service learning surrounding the issue of community development. In Cape Town, our study abroad program provided my group the opportunity to work at a center founded by an organization called SHAWCO in the Manenberg township. Here, we worked for two weeks teaching computer skills to adult learners and for two more weeks tutoring middle school children in this community. Working in the Manenberg SHAWCO center with various people of differing ages awakened me to the people, the rich culture, and some of the limitations facing this poorer community in a developing nation. By receiving a scholarship from the Nichols Humanitarian Fund, my summer granted me the wonderful opportunity of immersing myself in another culture and putting my efforts to-

wards making an impact through service learning in Manenberg.

Through this experience, I obtained much information and great insight about the issues affecting developing countries and South Africa specifically. The VISAGE program allowed me to perceive these issues through academic lectures from American and South African professors and through direct interaction with people living in communities similar to the ones we were studying. Learning about the circumstances of people living in a low-income community, where race also remains a major identifying factor, greatly opened my eyes to one of the major sources of conflict in the South African nation still present today. My experiences in Manenberg allowed me to directly witness some of the problems and inhibitors which keep people of color living in lower income areas. My own observations with



individuals there were also balanced out with academic lectures which allowed me to hear what programs the government and organizations were devising to help these people. Witnessing the issues from both sides gave me a valuable understanding of the complications surrounding community development, and it also revealed to me that a myriad of solutions exist to bring some promising solutions to these problems. Also, while South Africa remains a unique nation, several of the issues I observed and learned about correlated to issues that our country faces



today as well. Observing these issues in another area and in somewhat differing circumstances shed new light and understanding upon how our nation also needs to work on these issues. It also allowed me to reflect on how I can help these issues in the states as well as in a community across the world.

The knowledge I gained from classes and from the community remain very valuable and I feel that the insights I gained from this trip will remain with me for quite some time. While these opportunities remain extremely important, the chance to live in a small house with twenty peers also remained a very memorable and important aspect of my trip as well. I really appreciated living and working with a diverse group of peers throughout this service learning project. With all of our different backgrounds and knowledge, our group was able to create many different solutions and ideas towards some of the problems we faced. For me personally, hearing everyone's ideas and perspectives on the issues of community development greatly improved my trip and allowed me to perceive the issues on various levels which I would not have seen individually. I feel that Vanderbilt organized an excellent group where members came from various majors and various parts of the country, and this diversity allowed our group to bring so many fresh and different views and opinions to discussions and reflections. While constantly being in a group has its difficulties, our group learned how to establish solutions in order to live and work together in a productive manner.

As a student coming to Cape Town seeking to offer skills and hope for a more prosperous nation, one special event sticks out as an extremely memorable event during my trip. During our first week in Cape Town, several students and

I attended a night of comedy at the Baxter Theater where the Archbishop Desmond Tutu would be attending and performing. Before the event began, our group was fortunate enough to share a few words and a handshake with this iconic figure for South Africa and the world. I highly cherish this night as I was able to greet this man of excellent wisdom and morals who has positively affected the world. His performance, along with all of the excellent comedians and skits for the night, revealed the positivity and the hope that exists in so many South Africans as this country continues to develop. Witnessing this hope and many inspiring people makes me excited to see how the people in Cape Town and throughout South Africa place their hope and ambitions within their various fields and continue to establish their country. There remains so much rich diversity, vibrancy, and hope in Cape Town, and I feel so fortunate to have been able to enter this community and city and witness it for myself.

Marwah Shahid  
Morocco



This summer, I was humbled by the opportunity I was given by the Nichols Fund to volunteer at two service sites in Tangier, Morocco. This service opportunity was an incredible experience that helped me grow and mature not only as a young adult, but also in ways I never thought about. I became more culturally sensitive, globally aware, and I began a life-long drive to seek out opportunities to connect with people of different backgrounds through selfless service and humility.

I worked at the Gzeneya Girls School, my primary service site, teaching English and French to girls aged eight to eighteen and engaging in a community setting centered on female empowerment. Originally, our Gzeneya service group, which consisted of me and four other girls, was told that the girls spoke French and Arabic fluently. After taking French classes and feeling prepared to create programs for the girls at Gzeneya, our group was excited to work with such a tender and impressionable population. I was especially looking forward to applying the French and Arabic that I had learned in school to a common everyday setting. Upon arriving at the service site, we quickly learned that none of the girls had any level of proficiency in French. Because of this, we had to change our curriculum to adapt to an Arabic-only group

of students literally overnight. During the first week of working at Gzeneya, I felt frustrated and hopeless because of the communication gap. I had studied classical Arabic but it was fruitless in comparison to Moroccan Arabic. As the weeks went on, we adapted by relying on my basic Arabic, the girls' basic French, but most importantly, all of our basic instinct to connect with other people nonverbally.

Reflecting on this idea of communication across cultures, I learned the power of the human spirit to connect across any barrier. A smile, a frown, a tear all translate no matter what language you may speak. This inspired me to redefine communication. As I connected with these girls in ways I have never felt before, I learned what it meant to be passionate. I defined passion as both an *impulse* to take action and an *opportunity* as an outlet for this action. On the last day of my trip, the girls threw us a party and gave reports on what they learned from us. I was instantly overwhelmed by the mutual gratitude that transcended the room.



The girls were so ecstatic to learn in any setting, an opportunity they would not have in a few years when they were to get married. Yet, I don't think they realized that the experience I gained from them was far greater than the few common English greetings I taught them.

Along with working at Gzeneya, I worked with students at a local university to promote environmental initiatives around their campus. During that time, we designed and built a solar shower, a compost bin, and started a campus-wide

planting project. Although I had done a lot of service in the past, this was the first major project I worked on that was focused specifically on environmental issues. I found myself being called to action to advocate for environmental issues after this trip. Seeing weeks of intense manual labor turn into a tangible testament of energy and environmental promotion made me feel accomplished about our goals and inspired me to continue developing similar projects elsewhere. Also, working with college-aged students was rejuvenating because we were able to connect on a personal level. It was surprising to find out that we had very similar tastes in music and literature, even though we were raised in very different cultures. This too affirmed my belief that people can connect with one another no matter how varied their background may be.

I thoroughly enjoyed my time with the girls at Gzeneya and the college students at AMED because it made me appreciate a life full of opportunities. The presence of opportunities indicates that people have choices. Interacting with girls who would get married during their teenage years while I was living out my twenties traveling and discovering the world for myself made me so incredibly grateful for my power to have a choice. In a similar manner, having the opportunity to find a hidden passion in environmental promotion made me appreciate my choice to serve in Tangier this summer. In a roundabout way, the Nichols Humanitarian Fund enabled me to have a choice, an opportunity to travel across the pond and try to leave a ripple in someone's life. For this, the Nichols family has my lifelong gratitude.



Christian Simoy  
Sri Lanka



Two years ago, I left my island of Guam to transfer to Vanderbilt University. I rationalized that the obstacles from making such a significant move were beneficial not just for my self-improvement, but for my community's as well. Since then, I have had many incredible opportunities that reinforce my belief in the importance of education, access, and people who serve to eliminate educational inequity in underserved communities like mine.

One of those opportunities manifested in the form of a service trip to Sri Lanka. With the generous support of the Nichols Humanitarian Fund, I travelled half way around the world to teach English at Maha Vidyala Buddhist School, a K-13 public institution in the city of Moratuwa. In short, it was an amazing, beautiful, intensely hot, and challenging experience— one that I appreciate for inspiring some much needed clarity.

As a rising senior uncertain of my future, I wanted, or, I *needed* my summer before graduation to be transformational. I needed an epiphany... or three, and I just yearned for the sky to open and the seas to part and show me what to do next. With the approach of senior year came the challenge to ensure I made each moment count. So just five days after my last

final exam, I hopped on the first of three planes to Sri Lanka to try and do just that.

The first day in the classroom was intense. The heat was sweltering, teaching six forty-plus student classes was formidable, and it became clear very early on that the language, cultural and socio-economic differences would not be easy to navigate. Moreover, I saw a few of the many serious obstacles that stand in between a student and their success in the classroom.

"One of our brightest students died yesterday," a professor mentioned, "of dengue." I still remember how she said it, with a hint of sadness but also an unfortunate understanding of its typicality. And I thought, *How can I expect these students to want to create Haikus in a foreign language when they have other concerns like battling poverty and disease?* Even then, however, I saw how the desire for familial and community development fueled many students to continue despite extraordinary challenges.

With some words of encouragement and a couple of nudges, a tall, quiet boy in the fourth grade walked up to the front of the class and shared his Haiku on the board: "I love my country. My country



is Sri Lanka. I am Sri Lankan." He was just one of many who expressed similar sentiments in their conversations with me. In addition to being sometimes overwhelm-

ingly hospitable, most of the Sri Lankans I met during my trip possessed a striking pride in their country and a commitment to its improvement. And it is one of the reasons why students like this young man spend hours after school in special private classes designed to compensate for public education systems that are underfunded and in serious need of support.

In Sri Lanka, I saw firsthand the many obstacles underserved, low-income communities face in trying to provide the best educations for their youth. Children raised in these communities clearly have bigger problems than educational inequity. They face unsafe streets, malnourishment and other ills of poverty. However, I met many with the raw talent and work ethic needed to succeed as productive members in society. These children need the chance to first improve themselves, and then to improve their communities.

We must understand that our biggest resources are not measured by the depths of our pockets, but by the efforts put forth by every individual member. My experience in Sri Lanka helped me to realize that my passion is in education and ensuring that students are equipped to make their own contributions- whatever they may be- to the betterment of their communities.

*Christina Snider*  
*Costa Rica*



It was only two weeks since I came home for the summer after my first year at Vanderbilt, but I was already packing up my suitcase and preparing for a new adventure. I was a participant in the Vanderbilt Initiative for Scholarship and Global Engagement (VISAGE), a program that sends students all over the world both to learn in a unique academic setting and also serve communities abroad. As part of the VISAGE program, I had spent the previous semester learning about tourism, civic engagement, and social corporate responsibility in a classroom setting. Equipped with extensive background information and new perspectives, I was ready to integrate my classroom experiences with a four-week journey in Costa Rica.

Before I arrived in Costa Rica, I imagined that the country would look like almost any other exotic tourist destination, complete with perfectly manicured white sand beaches and pristine resort complexes. However, after spending four weeks exploring the cloud forests of Monteverde, the Pacific coast at Playa Sámara, and the capital, San José, I realized that Costa Rica possesses a unique and natural beauty. Our VISAGE professor travelled with us, and she arranged a wide variety of lecturers to come in and speak to our

group. We gained the perspectives of a diverse group of community leaders and learned about the factors that allowed Costa Rica to develop such a strong ecotourism industry and the ways that responsible corporations counter the harmful effects of tourism.

In addition to learning about ecotourism and corporate social responsibility, I also had the opportunity to serve local communities in Costa Rica. My group participated in many service projects that improved the environment and educational resources. For example, after learning about the importance of biological corridors for the survival of certain species of birds, my group transported and planted hundreds of saplings in a deforested area in Monteverde. Additionally, my group had the opportunity to visit several local schools and meet with the students. When we visited Escuela Llorente, a primary school in a suburb of San José, I was shocked by the conditions of the school's outside courtyard. In many places, the grass was completely worn away, exposing rocks, tree roots, and dirt. Our group completely changed the outside of the school by planting flowers, trees, and sod. Our garden will



continue to grow and benefit the students for many generations, and in this way, the work of our VISAGE group will continue



to have a lasting impact for many years to come.

I am confident that in future years, I will remember VISAGE Costa Rica as one of my best college experiences. Thanks to the support of the Nichols', I was able to participate in a program that combined an authentic study abroad experience with the opportunity to serve Costa Rican communities. This program is truly unique to Vanderbilt University, and I hope that all future Vanderbilt students make the most of this opportunity and consider making the VISAGE program a part of their travel abroad experience.

*Kacie Steinbrecher*  
*Costa Rica*

This summer, the Nichols Humanitarian Fund enabled me to travel throughout Costa Rica and engage in the most rewarding and educational service of project that I have yet to participate in. Upon arriving to San José, our group traveled three hours up a mountain to a small, close-knit community named Monteverde. Since the original settlement, founded by a small group of Alabama quakers, many Costa Ricans have settled in Monteverde to escape the crime and business of the big cities. Although the community first thrived on dairy farming and agriculture, in recent years the tourism industry has brought the most profit to the area as Monteverde is known as one of the premier "eco-tourism" destination. While this transition has proved profitable for some, others who can't speak English struggle to get jobs. While in Monteverde, our group volunteered at schools (both private and public), helped the children with English, and helped a variety of companies with their green initiatives by planting trees, recycling, gardening, etc.

Following our two-week stay in Monteverde, our group traveled back to San José. It was amazing to compare life in a rural setting and life in the city- both containing their own positives and own drawbacks. In the city, we again volunteered at a variety of schools: from a struggling community plagued with violence to one of the most elite schools in the world. Interacting with the children and seeing how thankful they were for something as simple as flowers in a schoolyard, or painting hopscotch on the playground, was something I will never forget in my lifetime.

Without the Nichols fund, all the volunteer work with the local businesses and schools I completed would have been impossible. As my dad recently lost his job due to the struggling automotive industry in Detroit, my family certainly did not have the extra money to spend to cover travel expenses, food, and lodging. However, because of the extreme generosity of this fund, I obtained the financial support necessary to travel to Costa Rica.

Throughout the month long trip, I learned a great deal about a variety of topics. Firstly, I was exposed to the injustices of the public education system. In Costa Rica, there was a night and day difference in the level of education between the private and public school systems. Those who were fortunate enough to afford a private education were fluent in English and very well prepared for future careers or higher education. In contrast, many public school teachers failed to show up for class and the classes were strictly vocational. Once in their second year, students pick a specialty such as "food and beverage" or "dairy farming" rather than emphasizing the importance of college (which is fairly cheap in Costa Rica.)

When we first arrived to Costa Rica, the program director of our partner institution, the Monteverde Institute, said "live simply so that others may simply live." I have never forgotten this quote and think it serves perfectly as the motto to my trip. Here at Vanderbilt, we live in excess. We have so many extra material items that we don't even realize. In Costa Rica, they live off the minimum. If every person just gave a little bit more to others, the world would be a better place for everyone.

*Mr. and Mrs. Nichols-*

*I can't thank you enough for allowing me to participate in this extremely rewarding experience. You guys are really making dreams come true by allowing college students to participate in community service around the world. THANK YOU, I am SO appreciative!!!*

*Kacie Steinbrecher*



*Tiffany Tieu*  
*Ecuador*



Even after an entire school year of anticipation and a semester's worth of group seminars, preparation, and research, I still had some lingering questions about what I would experience as a volunteer at Campamento Esperanza (or Camp Hope) for a month. I was traveling to a foreign country in a continent I had never been to, and would be in a culture and society entirely different from mine. For the first time in my life, I would be working with children with special needs, children who had been abandoned because of their special needs, and children who were considered impoverished by Ecuadorian standards. I had a plan: I would teach music classes and English classes, and was going to teach basic solfege system and piano skills. I would see what kinds of instruments they had once I arrived in Quito and would adapt my plan accordingly.

I came home from my first day of work completely overwhelmed. I was assigned to teach music classes in the morning, assist in the Cerebral Palsy classroom in the afternoons, and teach English lessons at the end of the day. The music classroom was rudimentary, and the teacher had very limited time and resources to teach the structured and long-term projects that I had originally planned. The Cerebral Palsy classroom

consisted of twelve children ages six to twenty-one with disabilities ranging from cerebral palsy to severe mental handicaps. I knew I had a lot to learn, and that my previous lesson plans and goals had to be changed in order to best fit with the mission and needs of Camp Hope, which is to provide an integrated, loving environment for children of all backgrounds, regardless of physical or mental handicaps, and to provide the best resources and care for these children.

My days at Camp Hope were long, exhausting, challenging, physically demanding, and filled with trying moments. I taught three music classes each morning, which varied in level and ages, and my goal was to introduce each class to basic piano skills and to help them learn new songs and dances. I was incredibly humbled to learn that Camp Hope, with such limited financial resources, includes music classes in their curriculum for each and every classroom because they recognize the inclusive and far-reaching effects that music-making can have on a child's development and social acculturation. The eagerness and excitement the children had for the opportunity to learn how to play piano or recorder was the most validating and encouraging part of my



day. After music classes I helped feed the twelve children in the Cerebral Palsy classroom, and the rest of the afternoon consisted of changing diapers and clothes,

physical therapy and massage, and rest for the children. This part of my day was the most challenging, physically in that for the first time in my life I had to do absolutely everything that required physical movement for another person, and emotionally because all of the children in this classroom are orphans and their stories of abandonment, abuse, and neglect affected me on a deep and personal level. Additionally, no one at the school spoke any English, so while the immersion in the language benefited our speaking skills greatly, the language barrier slowed communication and learning.



But for each difficult moment, for every bowl of soup that was spit up, every story of heartbreak and unbelievable tragedy, there was a learning experience and moment of growth. I was astounded by the way the teachers lovingly spoke to all the children, referring to them as “mis hijos” or literally, “my sons and daughters”, and their patience toward me and the other volunteers in showing how to properly feed the children or massage their feet or tell them a command. I was able to use my music and my Spanish skills, both of which improved immensely over the course of the month, but what I was able to offer them was minute in comparison to the perspective and insight on special education, social reform, and non-profit management I gained through my short time in Quito. I saw the way the

teachers and directors coped with extremely limited funding and social stigmas and somehow still manage to feed and clothe and educate and above all, unconditionally love eighty impoverished and handicapped children who most likely would otherwise become part of the fringe of Ecuadorian society that is cast-off into the shadows, forgotten and neglected by even their own parents.

I was fundamentally moved by my month at Camp Hope. I found myself in situations entirely outside my comfort zone, and I thrived. I changed diapers for grown men and women with the mental capacity of a five-year-old, I fed children food that had been expired for two weeks because that was the only food available, and I picked lice out of a little girl’s hair. I laughed when David cackled after getting changed, I was overjoyed when Brighth smiled for the first time, I cried when I heard how eight-year-old Gloria was sexually abused by her father. There were times when I felt pushed beyond my limits, when I did not know if I could clean up another accident or lift another child out of a wheelchair, and when being away from all the comforts and luxuries of the American lifestyle became difficult. But as I quickly learned how limited material possessions and access to basic services like physicians or modern healthcare my children had, and compared that to the endless love and attention and happiness they were given and surrounded by, I knew I had learned a rare and valuable lesson on selflessly committing oneself to service.

The director of Camp Hope, Rita’s parting words to me were “Díos le pague.” or “God will repay you.” Because of their affiliation with the Catholic Church and the strong religious faith that most Ecuadorians have, initially I gave little thought to what she said. Now I realize how im-

pactful and meaningful, and how perfectly those words describe how one short month changed me forever. It captures the perseverance, the advocacy, the patience, the love, and the undying faith and belief that there is a higher purpose and reason for what Camp Hope does, that we are never alone, that justice will prevail, and that every child deserves to be loved. And it is that which I will carry with me for the rest of my life.

*Dear Mr. and Mrs. Nichols,*

*I am writing to thank you for your generosity and support in funding my trip to Quito, Ecuador to teach music and English classes at an elementary school and orphanage called Camp Hope. Without the support from the Nichols Humanitarian Fund, my trip would not have been possible, and I would not have been able to participate in a truly transformative and eye-opening experience.*

*The perspectives and personal experiences I gained from my month working and living in Ecuador have given me insight on what it is to be a global citizen, and has sparked a passion and interest in me to travel more and to learn more about different cultures and traditions through serving other communities and peoples. I am extremely humbled to have had such an experience at an early point in my life and in my development and transition into adulthood, and my experience has only validated my previous beliefs of the importance of global conversations and cross-cultural experiences, particularly through service.*

*Thank you again for your continued support of the Nichols Humanitarian Fund, as the opportunities that are made possible through these grants, as in my case, have the potential to transform not only the lives of the students who are able to work*

*and do service abroad, but also the Vanderbilt community and the lives of all those who come in contact with these students.*

*Tiffany Tieu*



*James Tiller*  
*Northern Ireland*

My name is James Tiller; I am a sophomore at Vanderbilt University and this summer I went to Northern Ireland on the Nichols Humanitarian Fund to study and enact sustainability. This was done during the month of June 2011, through Vanderbilt's VISAGE program. I spent five weeks in Belfast, Northern Ireland attending Queen's University studying green and economic solutions to both the structural and political problems with Northern Ireland's architecture. During this period, I was also able to interact with citizens living in the conflicted areas as well as offer support to help improve their conditions. While there was not enough time to make a significant change in the overall state of Northern Ireland, I was able to help several individuals and learn about solutions being put into place by Northern Ireland's citizens to improve their own environment.

The Nichols Humanitarian Fund allowed me to go to Northern Ireland and participate in this program. I am a second generation immigrant from Derry, Northern Ireland, but this is the first time I have ever stepped foot in my grandfather's country. My family is not poor, but we're not rich either. My father also recently suffered an injury which prevents him from working. As a result, my dreams of studying abroad were almost put on hiatus. However, the VISAGE program, while funded by the Nichols Scholarship, allowed me to learn and help give support to my cousins abroad through community service. Support projects included providing interaction and support to the mentally handicapped, encouraging children to live a safer lifestyle without violence, developing social skills with abused

and neglected teenagers, all while cleaning and improving the environment.

The VISAGE Northern Ireland Program also gave me access to learning about sustainability, which is the conservation of economic and ecological resources while still maintaining a certain output of functionality. The Northern countries in the United Kingdom, Northern Ireland and Scotland, both have enormous potential for ecologically safe and economically viable energy production. They seek to become the "Saudi Arabia" of green energy. As a result of this phenomenon of clustered potential energy, several experts in the field have both emerged and gathered in Northern Ireland in order to conduct research and implement solutions to the energy crisis. I, along with other Vanderbilt students, was given access to lectures by these experts. Topics ranged from sustainable design, to political effects, to the overall effect on the environment. These are resources that the United States can simply not provide due to the overall lack of American interest in these energy sources. I plan to become a Biomedical Engineer; I would have never learned the needs for and effects of sustainability without attending this trip.

But Ireland was so much more than lectures and service. We climbed mountains. We met new friends. We witnessed incredible beauty and wonder. I even got to meet my cousins and aunts and uncles for the very first time in my life. We helped Belfast, for sure. But I also was able to see the Cliffs of Moher in Galway. I got to ride trolleys in Dublin. I was able to watch the European Football Championships with REAL Irishmen! This wasn't just a trip for learning about sustainability. It was an adventure where I learned about myself, and about the

world. And none of it would have been possible without the Nichols Humanitarian Fund.

*Dear Mr. & Mrs. Nichols,*

*My name is James Tiller, I am a sophomore in the school of engineering at Vanderbilt University. I recently was able to journey across the Atlantic to visit Northern Ireland through Vanderbilt's VISAGE program, where I learned about sustainability while engaging in service projects with the community and the environment. This is an accomplishment that would have been impossible to achieve without your donation, and I thank you for it.*

*There are photos on our blog as well as tons of stories of our adventures! I hope you enjoy them!*

*<http://vuvisageni.wordpress.com/>*

*Thank you so much for your donation, words can simply not describe how thankful I truly am. I hope you have a wonderful year! Your donation has certainly made mine wonderful!*

*Sincerely,  
James Tiller  
Vanderbilt Class of 2014*

*Laura Young  
Zanzibar*



This summer, thanks to the Nichols Humanitarian Fund, I had the opportunity to travel to the island of Zanzibar, off the coast of Tanzania. For one month I lived in the rural village of Mangapawni and taught English to the students who visited Creative Solutions, a grassroots organization that promotes community development and empowerment through art, education, and self-help. While living in Mangapawni, I learned about the importance of education and the desperate need of it in developing countries. I gained lifelong friendships and developed my own skills as an educator.

Every day I taught English to a class of about twenty students, ranging in age from fifteen to nineteen. Most of the students attended a secondary school in a different village, but came to Creative Solutions after school for some extra help and assistance learning English. Although English is a subject in primary and secondary school, the students only had a very basic understanding of the language. They could say "Hello, how are you?" and respond mechanically, "I am fine." They had a basic store of English vocabulary, but could not move beyond present tense. My fellow Vanderbilt students and I spent one month teaching the students new verbs and those verbs' accompanying

past, present, and future tenses. We worked with them on sentence structure and question words (who, what, when, where). Day after day, we practiced sentences with them, played word games, and assigned homework to quiz them on their knowledge. The students struggled, but continued coming to our class every day. I will always respect them for their determination. I recognized early on the challenge that our class must have been for the students. We spoke very little Kiswahili, and the students spoke very little English. Sometimes we were aided by the help of a translator, but most of the time we spoke very slowly and used simple words to convey the meaning of new words. Repetition, we learned, was an important key to our success. We had to remember not to feel frustrated when we taught the same lesson four days in a row. The language barrier was big but the cultural barrier was even more imposing. In America, education is one of the most important assets we have; therefore we tend to prioritize it above all else. In Zanzibar, although the students clearly felt that education was important to their future, they had other priorities. The boys would help with the farming, and the girls had



cooking and other chores to attend. We learned not to expect the kind of results you might see out of an honors class in



America, but we also learned to respect our students for the hard work they put into both their families and their education.

While living in Zanzibar, I learned more about the educational progress of the village. Mangapawni has its own charter school built by the village of Mangapawni for its children. It is a wonderful accomplishment because the villagers raised the funds and built the school themselves. There is tuition, but it is only 3,000 shillings a year (\$2 US) per student. The school day begins at 9:00am with the students doing chores to clean up the grounds. Boys and girls weed the gardens, clear debris/dirt, care for the plants, clean the classrooms, and fetch water. The



school is one story and has 4-5 rooms; there are walls and a roof but no windows (except the office). The children wear the same uniform to school every day. The boys wear a blue shirt and blue pants, and the girls wear a blue dress and a cream colored headdress. The "bell" to signal changes (the start of class, recess, lunch, etc.) is a small cowbell attached to a tree limb by the school. A little girl or boy gets a stick and hits the bell loudly when it is time to change. The chalkboards are large pieces of black slate attached to the wall. The eraser is a piece of foam, like mattress stuffing. The uncomfortable wooden chairs are attached to the desks like those

found in historic one-room schools in America. Pens and paper are commodities and very rarely in new condition. However, the community takes great pride in its school. We heard the story of the school's inception countless times during our visit. The village had wanted a school for years, but the government of Tanzania refused to build one for them. After much time and effort, the villagers managed to raise enough money to buy the supplies, and many of the village men provided the labor to build the school. Today the school has nine teachers and serves over two hundred children. The story of the Mangapawni school is one of dedication and community empowerment from which I believe we can all learn.

These pages only contain a few of the many lessons that I learned while traveling abroad. I am forever grateful to the Nichols family for their generosity and for making their fund available to students. My time in Zanzibar has inspired me to continue my education so that I can one day return to Africa and empower communities to create sustainable solutions that meet the educational needs of their children.

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