

# NICHOLS HUMANITARIAN FUND



# 2013

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# About the Nichols Humanitarian Fund

The Nichols Humanitarian Fund was established in 2006 by the E.C. and Lucile Hamby Nichols Trust, and by Edward C. Nichols, Jr. (JD '70) and his wife, Janice Nichols. The Fund encourages Vanderbilt students to become better citizens of the world and to broaden their thinking by volunteering for humanitarian efforts. The Fund enables students to volunteer for local, domestic, or international humanitarian service opportunities by making support available for educational, travel, and living expenses during their time of service.

All currently enrolled Vanderbilt students are eligible to receive assistance from the Fund, provided that they are citizens or permanent residents of the United States. Preference will be given to undergraduate students who have not yet completed their baccalaureate degrees.

Students are encouraged to develop their own service opportunities in communities where they can work to address an area of need. In past years, students have served in communities all over the world, including Australia, Costa Rica, New Orleans, and India. Funding can also be used to participate in established Vanderbilt offerings, including:

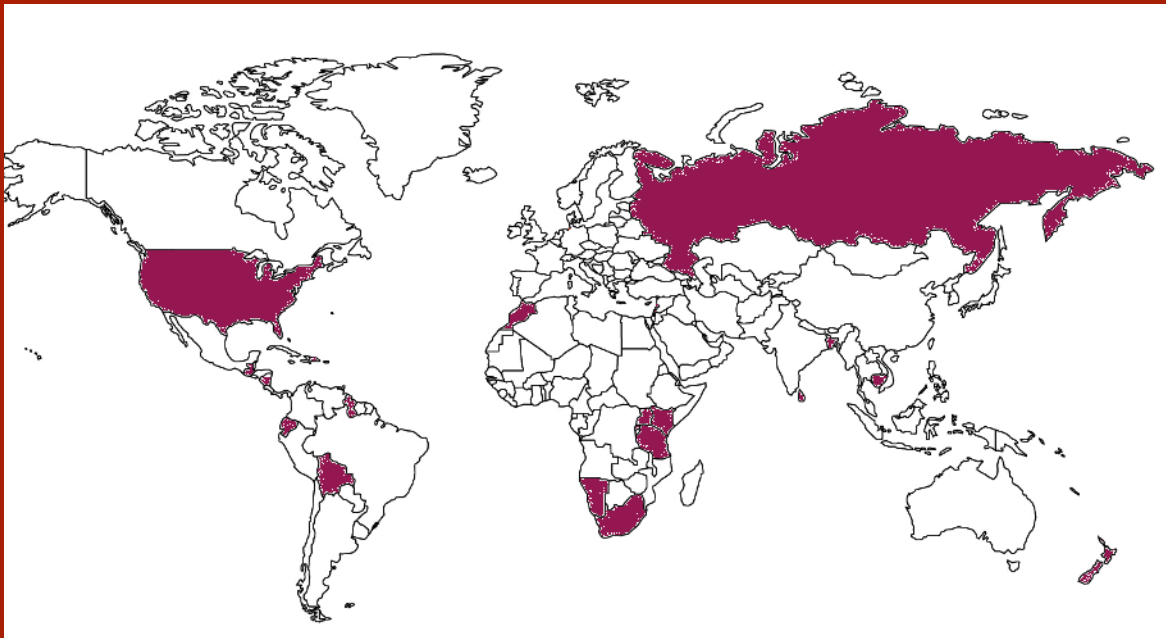
- The Office of Active Citizenship and Service (OACS) summer programs in Ecuador, London, South Africa and Morocco
- The Vanderbilt Initiative for Scholarship and Global Engagement (VISAGE)
- Chinese Studies and Service Learning in Beijing
- Service Learning at the University of Cape Town
- Summer Public Health in the Dominican Republic



*"Demand things of the world and if they don't do it  
then change the world to suit the demands."*  
Nichols Chancellors Medal Recipient, Bob Geldof

# Nichols Humanitarian Fund Statistics

## MAP OF THE WORLD: NICHOLS FUND RECIPIENT SERVICE LOCATIONS



It was an exceptionally humid Cambodian Wednesday afternoon when the tuk tuk I was riding in veered to the left, the gas-powered chariot approaching a large gate off the side of the road that was partly hidden by the clumps of coconut trees that dominated the landscape. Knowing that Wat Opot was near, I could feel my heart beating faster and my mouth steadily becoming drier. Mere minutes separated me from the orphanage that I had been reading about for the past semester. One of its kind in Cambodia, Wat Opot catered to a very special clientele—children who were either HIV-positive or orphaned due to the devastating impact of AIDS. As the tuk tuk crawled to a stop, only one thought kept running through my head. Will the kids like me?

Short answer? Yes. Longer answer? I definitely needed to brush up on my football (soccer) skills. If there was one thing the Watopotians enjoyed, it was showing up the foreign volunteer twice their size in football (something that happened every time we played). Though it did not take long to adjust to the daily routine of caring for the kids, it was the really exceptional days at the orphanage that stand out when I think back to my time in Cambodia. There was that one day that I climbed up the mountain with visiting students from Hong Kong. The climb itself took about ten minutes, though a lot of the children raced up in a much shorter time than that. Once on top, the view was magnificent! One could see the skyscrapers of the capital and miles upon miles of Cambodian countryside in between.

Even though it was the end of the dry season, an unusual amount of rain the past few weeks had left many of the rice fields a lush green, a color that complimented with the dark hue of the afternoon sky. That moment captured a tropical beauty intrinsic to Cambodia that could never be matched back home.

In the end, what I took away from Wat Opot was seeing and realizing just how much like us these kids are. The little children were constantly running around, playing with their toys, while the older kids sat in their respective areas and texted their friends, some chatting on the phone for hours with a boyfriend or girlfriend. Aside from two minutes spent in a medicine line every morning and evening, your average Watopotian is indistinguishable from any other child in Cambodia. When learning about HIV and AIDS, it is something that one hears all the time in a textbook or documentary. “Look how normal these children are! Look how much they are like you!” And here I am now, saying the same with an unwavering confidence that I did not have before. “Look how normal these children are! Look how much they are like you!”

Fast forward a couple of weeks and I found myself in a situation where I had no hair. Or eyebrows, for that matter. As the tuk tuk that had picked me up from Wat Opot pulled into the grounds of a monastery several hours later, I did not have the faintest idea that within the next day I would be completely bald. Venerable Metapolo, the head monk, proposed ordination when he visited me in the guest room that first evening. Doing so would immerse me fully in monastery life, enabling me around the clock interaction with monks and participation in daily rituals and tasks. I said yes almost immediately. The next morning rolled around within a heartbeat, and I was sitting in a plastic chair having my head shaved with a razor and watching as black clumps of my hair fell neatly into a giant water lily. Soon I made the traditional vows in the Pali language, the ceremony concluding with a presentation of a new set of orange robes for me to wear. In a surreal haze, I had entered monkhood.



Much time as a monk was occupied with learning about Buddhism through books and conversations with the other monks who could speak English (a surprisingly fair amount). I would spend time each evening teaching English to the monks who were less proficient in the language, an enjoyable service that I happily provided to the monastery in exchange for the new outlook I gradually formed with each passing day. Looking back at it now, the immersive experience of living among the monks helped me to learn more about Buddhism in a couple of weeks than I possibly could learn from a semester in the classroom.

The latter half of my summer in Cambodia was spent in the heart of the country's capital, Phnom Penh. A stark contrast from the rural countryside of Wat Opot and the symmetrical, carefully-crafted buildings of the monastery, the urban hodgepodge of the booming capital provided me a third perspective to Cambodian life. My work in Phnom Penh was with the slum community, where I volunteered with Riverkids, an organization whose mission was to alleviate the pains of child trafficking and poverty. Designing preventative healthcare workshops and providing basic care to slum community individuals who normally would not have access to antiseptics or antibiotics, my time with Riverkids offered a way that I could make a sustainable impact in a clinical context.

Immersion is powerful and an excellent conduit of service learning. From my summer in Cambodia, I really came to experience how providing service to others is a two-way street. From donating my time and providing services to the community, I learned so much about HIV, Buddhism, and Cambodian culture in return. Through the support of the Nichols Humanitarian Fund, I have gained immensely. With the utmost sincerity, thank you Mr. and Mrs. Nichols for the life-changing experience.



The overall state of healthcare is considered to be poor throughout the country of Bolivia, but especially in rural areas. It is estimated that 10 percent of all children will die during their first year of life. The average life expectancy is about 55 years, compared to 70 to 75 in most developing countries. Currently, the Bolivian government has a social health and welfare system. Health care is purportedly free but more often than not physicians are not available, and, if service is provided, no supplies or medications are available for treatment. In order to provide the quality of healthcare that this Bolivian community deserves, more willing and able hands are needed in the hospitals and clinics. Hoping to play a small role in helping to meet the demand for medical services in rural Bolivia, I decided to partner during the summer with an organization called Hospitals of Hope.

After its founding in 1998, Hospitals of Hope began work in and around Cochabamba, Bolivia. The hospital that was built by the organization in 2003, La Hospital de Esperanza, is currently the primary site where over 2000 volunteers, both medical and non-medical, have been sent. Volunteers with medical training - including medical professionals, as well as medical and premedical students - can work around the hospital, with varying degrees of responsibility, based on their experience and on the amount of time spent in Bolivia. Non-medical volunteers can spend time shadowing specialty physicians as well as participate in community outreaches, work with orphanages, and work on the hospital grounds. As a full-time medical volunteer at Hospitals of Hope in rural Bolivia, I found a passion for learning about and helping to improve healthcare in international communities. The hospital in which I worked for six weeks provides healthcare to both the indigenous population that lives at the base of the Andes Mountains as well as residents of the poorer outskirts of urban Cochabamba.

Each morning I chose to observe a doctor in the hospital, spending the majority of my time with the trauma surgeon and obstetrician/gynecologist. The afternoons were dedicated to a community service outing. A group of volunteers, including a supervising physician, would provide free clinics to isolated villages, giving basic physicals, medication, as well as dental and hygiene education in an attempt to address preventative care. Additionally, volunteers could walk to a nearby orphanage to play and build relationships with kids in need of love and attention.

My time spent interacting with patients of a culture and socioeconomic background different from my own taught me much about the powerful and universal impact of a compassionate and patient disposition as a medical professional and, more generally, as a human being. I learned firsthand that by attempting to be sensitive and knowledgeable of different traditions, giving dignity to every human life, and meeting the needs of others to the best of one's ability, it is possible to rise above barriers of culture and custom to change the lives of others for the better.

While I absorbed much knowledge about the human body and how to better treat those who need medical attention during my experience there, I was all the more impacted by shadowing and listening to the stories of physicians who have dedicated their lives to serving a diverse and culturally-rich community. It is my hope that as a future medical professional (I am applying to medical school currently), I can continue this interest in global health through volunteerism and research.

Spending six weeks in a third-world country is an experience that brings perspective and spirit of gratefulness. I distinctly remember looking out from a bus at the obvious poverty of the Bolivian countryside. Sixty percent of the population in Bolivia is indigenous, many living far removed from the luxuries of city-life.



There are no grocery stores, movie theaters, libraries, or clothing stores in sight. The houses are simple, brick structures, surrounded by dirt and the land to be farmed. There are rarely cars or an obvious means of transportation. The average family makes less than \$10,000 USD a year, but still supports five or more children. As the bus passed by, I couldn't help but feel a sense of discomfort as I observed such an unglamorous, harsh lifestyle. It's the kind of poverty that made me realize that, just by being born in the United States, I have won the jackpot of life. I didn't earn it. I am not entitled to it. But somehow, by the grace of God, I was born in a country rich with opportunities and goods and services unavailable to the majority of the world's population.

As I sit in my chair, typing this essay and reflecting on these things that I have learned, I realize that I am a changed person – changed by the experience of interacting with other cultures, changed by the doctors who so generously allowed me to see medicine at work, and changed by a renewed definition of the word “privilege.” Yet, I only had this opportunity to both learn and practice compassion in Cochabamba, Bolivia because such kindness was first given to me through the Nichols Humanitarian Fund. The scholarship made possible this incredible, transformative experience, and for that, I am truly thankful.



*At “Remar” Orphanage in Cochabamba, Bolivia*



*After observing a C-section at La Hospital Esperanza*



*Taking a child's pulse at a free clinic given at a local orphanage.*



*Taylor Hannigan*  
*Costa Rica*

This fund enabled me to engage in this service opportunity in an enormous way. If I was not granted the scholarship from the Nichols Humanitarian Fund, I would not have been able to participate in the trip at all. I was given the chance to travel out of the country to learn, serve, and grow for a month. The experience is something I will never forget, and will most definitely stay with me for the rest of my life. Without the funds from the Nichols I would not have been able to connect with others on a whole new level, serve people in need in a different country, and learn how to travel as an ecotourist.

As a result of my experience in Costa Rica for a month, I began to understand the very large issue of the Costa Rican healthcare system. Although I also learned a great deal about ecotourism and sustainability, I felt as though what I learned about the healthcare system was most shocking and impactful to me. I learned what I know about the healthcare system through volunteering with special needs adults at an organization that works for the human rights of people with disabilities called the Consejo. I learned that the healthcare system in Costa Rica does not do a great job about integrating those with disabilities into the real world. It was shocking to see that aside from the Consejo, there were no other efforts to include people with disabilities into the professional world. However, it was reassuring to know how much progress has been made in the past few years.

I hope to go back one day, and see that people with disabilities are finally treated equally in the professional world as well as in all other ways. It also helped to know that I had an impact on the success of this journey by volunteering at the Consejo. About half of the group I traveled with went to the Consejo to hang out with the special needs adults, and assist them in their environmentally friendly crafts such as lamps made of recycled soda liter bottles.



I had never spent time with special needs adults, and the experience was incredibly special to me. It helped me reaffirm my passion for working with people with disabilities as well as help me realize that I want to be working in the healthcare system. In addition to volunteering at the Consejo, the entire VISAGE group traveled to plant mangroves that were previously destroyed by construction. I had never done manual labor service before, and it was extremely humbling. I realized that the people who work there do the same intense labor every day for an even longer amount of time, and I was only a small part of their long journey towards replanting the mangroves.

Although the service of the trip impacted who I am today, a quote that I was told on the trip has impacted me even more. While on our weekend trip to Hotel Punta Islita, we went to a lecture by hotel manager about what it means to be a sustainable and ecotouristic hotel. He opened the talk with the quote, "The greatest good you can do for another is not just to share your riches, but to reveal him to his own" (Unknown). To me, this quote means that it is not enough to just give people money or do their work for them, but that it is more important to give them the knowledge and information they need to sustain themselves when left to their own devices. This really hit home with me because I realized how important it is that the quote guide me through my everyday life. Whether it is volunteering with children or helping a friend out with homework, I know now how important it is that I help guide the people in my life by teaching them rather than by just doing it for them, and handing them an easy way out. I am so beyond thankful for the opportunities that the Nichols Humanitarian Fund gave me, and am excited to see how my experiences volunteering abroad will continue to positively affect my everyday life.



The human ability to adapt to one's environment is absolutely amazing. Perhaps I could be labeled another spoiled American because I was not prepared for the raw state of Quito; a city full of unfinished construction, unsafe transportation, filthy streets, and an overpopulation of homeless dogs. There were also several immediate mandatory adjustments to my personal hygiene and sense of security, that weren't so minor and I remember wanting to go home as my romantic view of Ecuador was shattered. But as I stated before, humans have the incredible ability to adapt to their environment, and adjustments that seemed insurmountable become second nature. In four short weeks I grew to love a land I initially hated. I was able to walk through the streets in confidence rather than confusion, communicate with native people, and smile at the imperfections of Quito. I would like to sincerely thank the Nichols Humanitarian Fund for opening the door to this incredible experience because without its financial contribution, this would not have been possible.

The warmth of the people of Ecuador made an incredible impact on my life as well. Their willingness to embrace me, despite my lack of fluency in their native language, my lack of cultured behavior, and my American perspective; planted a seed of patient tolerance and appreciation for foreigners in my own country. I have a newfound respect and not disdain for people in America who do not speak the language or understand the culture.

I was also exposed to a whole new dimension of poverty. There were men, women, and children living far below any poverty line America could construct; having nothing more than the clothes on their backs and the items that could fit in one cold dark room, struggling to survive against the intoxication of drugs, and impaired with all types of malnutrition and biological defects.

I was challenged to describe what poverty looks and feels like, and what I have to give to this community.

These questions challenged my understanding of myself, poverty, my perspective as an American and the concept, purpose and impact of international service. Once again the human ability of adaptation amazed me, because in the midst of poverty there was an incredible richness in the joy and culture found amongst the people; it was as if the spirit of the people was untouched by the brokenness of their environment.

I was inspired by the peace and joy possessed by the women and children living deep in the jungle, the warmth and resilience of the women working in the market, the perseverance of the people in the mountains.

This experience brought about enormous self-evaluation. I was forced to confront and evaluate my identity as an American, a woman, an African-American, a volunteer, and middle class citizen, and how those identities shape my perspective, how I am perceived, and what I have to offer in international service. Although uncertain of my qualification to serve and the strength or importance of my impact, I was determined to make a difference, even if in a small way.

I learned humility, positivity, and willingness are essential in service. I arrived focused on having only medical experiences, but my site called for some adjustments to my vision. While I wanted to play doctor, there were children in need of love and attention in the market programs. I was able to engage in hygiene and tutoring programming in two local markets. My determination to engage in some health related activity persevered and I was granted the opportunity to work with the school nurse and volunteer medical students on a project to update the medical records of the children in the Camal and Rescate market programs.



I, along with three other members of my group, were responsible for giving basic physical check-ups which consisted of; recording height and weight, counting cavities, discussing their daily practices in regards to hygiene and nutrition, and checking hair for lice, ears for cleanliness, and limbs for bruises.

We were also able to participate in the street clinic taking and recording the weight and blood pressure of the market vendors as well as talking to them about their health practices and concerns.

While volunteering at the Cenit School for the working Girl in Quito, Ecuador, the members of my group and I were eager to engage in research. After inquiring about opportunities, we were teamed with two gap year medical students, Megan and Fabio to initiate a public health research project. This project highlighted biological and social awareness of and stigma against diabetes among women and men in the local Camal market. We designed, tested, and administered a 15-question oral survey in Spanish in the market, and formalized our methods and results in a written document to be kept on file at Cenit.

Service is about planting a seed that will blossom and grow during and after your presence. But humans are not catalysts and should not operate as such. Service is not about speeding up progress without being changed or consumed in the process. I hope that I made an impact in the lives of my host family, the children I worked with, or the men and women in the market. But unlike a catalyst I was completely consumed in this experience and underwent several changes, improvements, life lessons, self-realizations, accomplishments, and expanded my personal limits. I am now confident in my ability to adapt to uncomfortable situations, keep a positive mindset regardless of the circumstances, and fully engage in every experience. I am certain that I learned more than I taught, but I did teach, and I did touch, and I did share all of myself with Quito.





*Mahaliah Hyde*  
*Costa Rica*

I am normally the type of person who is very rarely brought to tears. When asked, I often tell people that the only time I ever really cry is when saying goodbye to people that I love. This past summer, however, I had an entirely new experience with saying goodbye. As my plane took off from the San José, Costa Rica airport one sunny June afternoon, I was brought to tears as I left the country I had called home for the past month. I realized that, despite having traveled to many different countries, this was the first time I had actually cried when leaving one, and I immediately understood why. I had developed an attachment to Costa Rica: to the people, to the culture, to the volunteer work I had performed, to the unforgettable experiences and adventures I had had. Just like any relative or dear friend, I had a true love for the country of Costa Rica, and parting with it was a bittersweet ending.

I spent my time in Costa Rica in a variety of different environments: living and bonding with my homestay family, exploring the cities and attending various lectures with my classmates, traveling around the country to experience all of the beautiful sights and activities, and volunteering through two meaningful internship opportunities.

The first volunteer project was through Fundación Neotrópica in the Osa Peninsula. This non-governmental organization focuses on the economic and sustainable use of natural resources. Through this experience, my classmates and I learned about and addressed conservation and sustainability efforts related to surrounding areas, communities, and indigenous populations by visiting these places and people ourselves. Additionally, we participated in the organization's Blue Carbon mangrove reforestation project and traveled to the wetlands of the peninsula to spend time planting mangroves.



Despite the physical exertion of carrying and planting the mangroves, the deep mud that often captured us like quicksand, and the dirt that covered all of us afterwards, this experience may have been the most rewarding and one of my most favorite from the entire month-long trip.

The second service project in which I participated was through Fundación Acción Joven, a non-governmental organization that works to improve problems and conditions within Costa Rican educational facilities. This service internship provided a variety of different opportunities to get involved.

Many days, my classmates and I participated in workshops in a Costa Rican public high school outside San José to mentor students and help them formulate plans to address school issues and make necessary changes. We wanted to empower and educate students so that they could realize the problems within their own schools and come up with ways to address them. Additionally, we led activities during the students' free time to showcase outside cultures and stimulate student participation and enthusiasm. So many of these students face harsh conditions—whether within the schools themselves, at home, or even while making the journey to and from school every day—that can deter them from attending.

We wanted to engage them in the school day and show them that despite harsh conditions, attending school and receiving an education is so incredibly important.

Finally, we also mentored students in the school's English classes by participating in-group conversations, which allowed us to not only help students, but learn more about them and their daily lives.

Because my time spent in Costa Rica was so multifaceted, I was able to learn about a wide variety of issues in such a short amount of time. From educational issues to environmental issues to corporate social responsibility to reforestation, the topics that my classmates and I were exposed to were all so different, but all so important.

The trip has further shown me how necessary it is to protect our natural environment and promote the need for proper education for all people. Furthermore, I believe one of the greatest benefits of travel is to gain greater open-mindedness and love for life and adventure, and this trip allowed me to do so in many different settings. I value my time in Costa Rica so much because it gave me the opportunity to perform service and learn about important issues, but also to immerse myself in such a beautiful country. Costa Rica is so environmentally focused, and I treasure the time I was able to spend in nature. During the month I was abroad, I saw some of the most beautiful sights and views in the world, which has taught me how necessary it is for us to stop and pay attention to the natural beauty around us despite our rapidly advancing, technological society.

I am so thankful for the Nichols and the fund that they provide for such meaningful purposes. Without the funding I received, I would have faced difficulty in financing my trip and would not have had as full of an experience as I did. My time spent in Costa Rica has become one of the most important, valuable, educational, and unforgettable experiences of my life, and for that I am unbelievably grateful.



Costa Rica is famous for its biodiversity and level of environmental concern. Being an environmental studies major, I was strongly compelled to visit Costa Rica and study its culture and environmental habits, as well as witness its beautiful landscapes. With the help of the Nichols Humanitarian Fund, I was able to visit this wonderful country alongside a group of other likeminded students and a professor native to Costa Rica.

During my stay in Costa Rica, I traveled a great deal, experiencing the diverse landscapes of the country. My course travels took me to the Atlantic Coast, the Pacific Coast, a deciduous forest, a rainforest, mangroves, a plantation, a volcano, and a university. In just a month's time I was able to visit all of these magnificent places, due mostly to the small size but large variation of Costa Rican lands. My course in Costa Rica consisted of short lessons on Costa Rican culture, history, business, government, activism, and more. All of this information was extremely helpful during the trip, because it allowed me to better understand the significance of what I was doing and seeing. Some activities I participated in during this course included planting trees in the mangroves on the pacific coast, taking pictures to help a rural tourism group with advertisement, and working with high school students helping them with English skills and learning from one another about our respective cultures.

My experience was rewarding for more reasons than I can say, but to name a few I was blessed to travel with my VISAGE 2013 classmates, whose assortment of backgrounds allowed for a thriving space to learn and explore.

Additionally, my professor did a wonderful job of varying our experience during the trip so that we were able to view many different aspects of Costa Rica.

Each of my classmates was from a different locational and educational background, which greatly influenced the manner of conversations we had over our mutual experiences during the course. Additionally, my professor made conscious efforts to schedule our course so that we could see different Costa Rican landscapes, as well as different cultures that exist within. Examples of this include staying near the Pacific coast where we were able to visit an indigenous community and learn a little bit about their beliefs and daily activities, as well as how they cooperate with their environment.

Comparatively, we also visited a first class resort that was known for their luxury and their commitment to sustainability.

Overall this experience provided me with an enlightened outlook on methods of environmental action and concern, as well as an introduction to the beautiful country of Costa Rica. Seeing the way that these citizens respected the environment and worked with instead of against it to achieve their goals, I was happy to think that I will be spending my future promoting environmental awareness and respect. Traveling to Costa Rica with VISAGE not only gave me new experiences but also new outlooks on the importance of diversity and of working with others as well as the environment.

I would like to thank the Nichols for allowing me this wonderful opportunity. I intend to take my new understanding and reverence for different cultures and our planet and share it with others in the United States. I can only hope that everyone has the chance to experience and learn as I have, and I intend to share all that I have gained.



*Rohan Kedar*

*Ecuador*

*The Journey into International Medicine*

Imagine a bustling city that mixes the stores and buildings of the developed world and the chaos of the developing world. Imagine that this city is divided into the rich Northern sector and the poor Southern sector. Imagine the short, tanned citizens; clad in American apparel, running around using USA currency to pay for the crowded buses and talking about the upcoming election, one of the few stable elections in their history. Now, imagine their shocked faces when they see tall, strange-looking Americans taking the North-South bus to the outskirts of their city to assist at a medical clinic named Subcentro de la salud San Martin. That was my perspective of Quito during my first week in Ecuador. Through the Vanderbilt Ecuador Project, I worked at the Subcentro San Martin to help the impoverished people of the outskirts of Quito.

The Nichols Humanitarian Fund helped me tremendously, since I could not afford to pursue this opportunity without the funds. The fund went directly into paying for the Ecuador Project and associated expenses, such as living costs and transportation. My goal as an aspiring doctor is to integrate medical missions into my annual cycle of work. This trip not only gave me first-hand experience for this goal but it also taught me valuable lessons on how to serve people for their sake rather than just gain experience in the field I want to pursue.

Dr. Gloria Lema, director of the Subcentro San Martin, described the experience well. Translated into English, she said with tears forming in her eyes, "I have never seen such dedication from foreigners to our people. You have come in and really helped these people. We could not have done many of the projects without you.

You even spent your own money to help these people with food and toys. You are welcome to come back to Ecuador at any time".

My friends and I augmented the workforce of the Subcentro San Martin greatly. They had many little projects, such as checking the vaccination records of every child in the whole mountainous region of Southern Quito outskirt and administering vaccines to those without the proper ones, which they could not do safely without the accompaniment and physical strength of men to traverse the dangerous areas and carry the heavy vaccine freezers. I additionally helped with a lot of administrative work to make the clinic run smoother and helped the dentist and general physician manage patients, take vitals, and even pull teeth. As a group, we did many visits to local schools to update the students' vaccines and perform general checkups. I even took over for the absent dentist during a visit to a nursery at the top of the mountains.

This trip gave me greater insight into the field of global medicine. Working in Latin American medical clinics is nothing like American clinics. The trip enlightened me to the difficulties that language and culture play on doctor-patient interaction. A doctor really cannot visit for just a week and provide proper care to patients. Additionally, the standard of care differences were made more apparent during the trip. Even though the clinic is run by the government, there is not necessarily enough tools to use completely proper sanitation techniques, for example. However, using the limited resources that we had, we managed to help every patient while still maintaining a high level of care. The trip also provided insight into the intricacies of the health field in Ecuador and how the Ecuadorian government plays an important role in raising standards of care and nationalizing the health sector.



Lastly, I came to understand the attitudes and mentalities of the patients who visited the Subcentro. I learned about the mistrust of doctors, the apathy that some patients feel, and the way poverty severely affects the ability of people to make health a top priority. I have also seen how a dedicated group of medical workers can serve these people, at the cost of their own financial gains, to make a real impact on the community, measurable by both volume of patients seen per day and the quality of life increase they receive.

This trip was transformative for me. I can honestly say that it secured my desire to work in global health, especially in Latin America. I have seen the need and also seen how much help a pre-medical student can offer. I am excited to see the impact a full-fledged doctor can have on an in-need community. To conclude, I would like to thank the Nichols for making this trip possible. Through their contributions, they have helped the rural impoverished of Quito, Ecuador find higher quality health care and an aspiring doctor find his future niche in the field of medicine. I can say without hesitation that they have impacted my personal development in an indescribable manner. Thank you, Nichols family!



When I got back from my summer in Lwala, Kenya, people kept asking me: “How was Africa?” Honestly, I had no comfortable answer for them. The tendency people have of generalizing the continent of Africa has always bothered me. I think now that I’ve been on the continent it bothers me even more, though I might be able to understand it. My experience there was reaffirming and educational on so many levels. I was very quickly exposed to the problems one might expect to see in Africa. Yet, I nearly immediately also learned that the struggles facing the people of Lwala are not African problems, necessarily. They face human problems; problems that people in America face. The major difference is that the consequences for not resolving the problems faced by those living in rural Kenya are much more dire. The significance of context was made abundantly clear to me early on. I would not say that my experience was “life-changing” but it certainly was profound – academically, professionally, and personally.

Without the Nichol’s Humanitarian Fund, I cannot be certain that I would have made it overseas for my practicum experience. Being in the International Education and Policy Management program, it was especially important for me that I was able to have an international experience. Even with the award, I had to live frugally this summer.

I wasn’t able to comfortably afford much travel while in Kenya. In fact, I never really left the little corner of North Kamagambo. The constrained ability to travel actually was a blessing, though. The more time I spent within the little village of Lwala, the less I wanted to go anywhere else. I wanted to spend as much time in that place as I possibly could, even in my free time. I consistently worked over 40 hours during the regular workweek and often put in time on the weekends too. They say time flies when you’re having fun though, and my time at Lwala Community Alliance (LCA) certainly did.

I never thought I would end up teaching computer skills to anyone, but the most critical element of development work is listening and responding to the community’s needs and desires.



At LCA there was a clear need and strong desire to build the capacity of the staff and interns in data collection and reporting, and to develop computer skills among the clinical staff especially. I also helped develop some monitoring and evaluation tools with the economic development, community health, and education departments and was intending to work more with a sexual and gender based violence program that was recently launched in local schools, but the month long teachers strike put a stop to that. So, instead I focused on a crash course in Excel and a data collection and analysis workshop. Through the trainings, I discovered there was also a need for basic computer skills training. The organization is hoping to get an electronic medical records system in the near future, so the clinical staff needs to be at least familiar with basic computer functions. I’d never worked with adult learners before and maybe my students were simply the best students on the planet (which I’m positive is true), but their eagerness and perseverance were refreshing.

I went into my internship with an open mind and flexible attitude, only hoping to grow academically and professionally while also making a real impact on the organization I was working with. My role was constantly evolving. I learned a lot about what needs look like and how people identify their own needs in the context of development work. I also learned how much I love working in locally focused holistic community development organizations. I also found another place to call home. While I never brought myself to eat a chicken head, I did try some chicken blood. Most importantly for me though, I left LCA a little stronger than I was when I arrived.

Receiving the Nichols Humanitarian Fund allowed me to participate in the Ecuador Project, assisting with my travel and living expenses while in Quito, Ecuador. Due to the gracious assistance from the Nichols Family, I spent a month in Ecuador this summer volunteering at the Subcentro San Martín Clinic in Quito, a government-funded operation that serves less fortunate families in the southern part of the city who cannot afford traditional health care.

In addition to working and volunteering in the clinic, I traveled outside the clinic with the nurses to administer vaccinations to children in local schools as well as visit families in their homes to make sure every child's vaccinations were up-to-date. I will never forget the looks of gratitude on the mother's faces and the school children as we walked through the streets as they realized someone was there to help and care for them. There was even a polio scare in the area while I was there, so we spent a week administering polio vaccines to any young children we could find. While it turned out to be a false alarm, I really felt that I was making a difference by preventing the possible spread of this terrible disease among people who normally cannot afford or are aware of such vaccinations. I also had the opportunity to work alongside the physicians in the clinic, including an obstetrician and general practitioner, taking vital signs of incoming patients as well as comforting the young children who had to visit the dentist.

While there were many children who had teeth riddled with cavities, I could at least help assuage their pain and fear while the dentist began working on them by simply holding their hand during the procedure.

The first thing I noticed when I walked into the clinic were the dog's running through the hall. While the limited medical technology was relatively up to date, sanitation was a problem. The government even shut the water off to the clinic in the afternoon. Yet, I was impressed at just how effectively the doctors there were able to treat their patients.

This was the main revelation I had while in Ecuador. While the people of Ecuador certainly had a lower level of medical technology and treatment capabilities, there was no lack of compassion and care provided to patients to help set their minds at ease. I noticed a very strong emphasis on the family and admired the support the doctors and nurses provided to families, even if there was not much physically they could do to help. While there is a strong emphasis on treating the disease back in the United States, my experiences in Ecuador have taught me to focus more on the patient's needs when I become a doctor in order to ensure their happiness and promote a speedy recovery.

As an aspiring physician, I was thrilled to be interacting with patients firsthand and assisting in medical procedures. I experienced the more personal side of medicine as I talked with the patients who came to the clinic each day. It was obvious that the people of Ecuador looked up to their doctors and were thankful for whatever care and assistance they were given. I realized that being a doctor comes with a sense of respect in the community. Doctors are in a position to impact the lives of others in a positive way that extends beyond medicine and treatment plans and my experiences in Ecuador have taught me to always keep this in mind in the future.



While I was attempting to help the people of Ecuador, I also had to undergo the challenge of adapting to a new culture and learning to effectively communicate with the people I was there to help.

While I had taken Spanish courses in the past, it had been several years since I had spoken the language. In order to not let this detract from my experience, I sought help from my peers who were fluent in Spanish and constantly talked and worked with the employees of the clinic to help improve my Spanish. Lunch at the clinic turned out to be a very enjoyable experience where I could eat, laugh, and practice Spanish with the members of the clinic each day. In the meantime, I discovered that I could communicate through other means. When trying to comfort patients, I learned that something as simple as a smile, which has no language barrier, could do **the trick**.

As I began to speak more with the employees and patients at the clinic in their native language, I realized the importance of effective communication between a doctor and his or her patients and will carry what I learned from these challenges into medical school.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the Nichols Family for providing me with the funds necessary for me to undergo this opportunity. This has been an experience I will never forget and has transformed me as I look to continue on to a career in medicine. I will continually look to provide for the less fortunate. Without the assistance of the Nichols Family, I would not have been able to travel to Ecuador and help change and improve the lives of others, and myself as well.





*Bobby Lux*  
*Bangladesh*  
*Grameen Microfinance Bank, Dhaka*

This trip had quite a few motivations behind it. One was microfinance and the issue of extreme poverty. Another was for me to be placed into a completely new environment. My ability to communicate with other people makes me comfortable. Easy access to information makes me comfortable. Prior knowledge and experience makes me comfortable. All of these were stripped away when I went to Bangladesh. I didn't have a support base, I didn't have working technology, and I didn't have an easy way of communicating with others. My priorities rapidly shifted so that my main concerns were food, water, and safety. I experienced quite a bit of culture shock, but the great thing about the trip was that I had plenty of time to reflect on the experience.

The poverty and microfinance aspect of my trip far outstripped my expectations. The country is much poorer than anything I had ever seen before. People beg in the streets. Not like Saint Louis, where you see able-bodied people sitting on a few corners. Every one hundred feet there's a pencil-thin, starving old man with only one leg, crawling across the sidewalk asking for money. Many people are barefoot, walking through mud, trash, and broken glass. Children run naked with stray dogs. The pollution and filth are terrible. People pee into the open sewage system, there are piles of trash everywhere, and thick smog covers the city. Your lungs are constantly assaulted by the air, which is a combination of car exhaust, people smoking, and the spicy smoke that rolls off the open fires in the streets. At the Grameen Bank, things looked a little more promising. I learned about the structure of the microfinance bank, and what allows it to so effectively serve so many people. It was amazing to see what some of the borrowers had done with such a small amount of credit. The bank has different types of loans that cater to different types of borrowers, and one of the reasons that the bank has experienced such success seems to be because of the social structure and incentives that come with

Loans are given out to groups of people instead of to individuals. This means that people in your community are able to hold you accountable for your project. They are able to support you during times that you struggle, as well as lend ideas and capital to your small business. This social network is absolutely critical to the structure of the Grameen Bank.

In addition to working in the city of Dhaka, I also had the chance to work in some of the surrounding villages. The village areas were very different from the city slums. Although poor, they were not nearly as crowded or as developed. Wild dogs, chickens, goats and cows roamed the villages. The roads in places looked more like large streams because the frequent heavy rains. Streets had muddy banks and often coursed with water more than half a foot deep.

A few days into the trip, it really hit me. I was sitting barefoot on a straw mattress in one of the villager's homes. I was listening to the translator as he told her story. Before becoming a member of the Grameen Bank, she lived underneath two large pieces of tin with her husband and their two children. Now she has a small, two-room brick house with a stove to boil water. I could see the pride shining through her face as she spoke rapidly in Bengali. Kids from the neighboring houses kept running in to wave at me and sit next to me. I'm pretty funny looking; I'm probably the tallest and palest person they had ever seen. I kept thinking – I can't believe this is happening. I can't believe I'm here. This is amazing.



*Katherine Sentell*  
*Nicaragua*

For as long as I can remember, it has been a dream of mine to travel outside of the United States, and the Nichols Humanitarian Fund helped me accomplish that dream this past May. With the financial support of the Nichols Humanitarian Fund, I was able to visit Nicaragua where I experienced a world so different from my own. The experience was life changing. My trip to Nicaragua opened my eyes to see how fortunate we are to live in the United States and to have so many opportunities -- including the chance to attend a university like Vanderbilt. But this trip taught me so much more. I can say with certainty that this trip has changed not only my perspective on the world, but changed my life. I hope one day to use the opportunity the Nichols Humanitarian Fund provide me to "pay it back" and make a meaningful impact in the world.

I went to Nicaragua for 12 days in May as part of an organization called Project Nicaragua, which is a national organization with the mission to improve the quality of life and access to health care for Nicaragua's poorest citizens. Last year was the founding year of the Vanderbilt chapter of Project Nicaragua, and the service trip to Nicaragua in May was our inaugural trip. To prepare for the trip, the organization spent the entire 2012 school year fundraising and collecting supplies to help meet some of the most common needs of Nicaraguan people. While in Nicaragua, we spent many days in local hospitals and clinics passing out the supplies we collected, including over 1000 pairs of eyeglasses and over 700 pairs of dental supplies like toothpaste and toothbrushes.

We also used the \$2,000 we raised through fundraisers and a letter writing campaign to fund construction of a house for a family in need. While in Nicaragua, we met the family receiving the house and worked alongside them in beginning construction on the house.



Finally, we spent several days visiting local middle schools and high schools to teach students about nutrition, the importance of exercise, and sex education. For me, the most eye-opening experience was the time spent in the local hospitals and the people I met during that time. We would arrive at the hospitals early in the morning to find a crowd of people already waiting, some having traveled for hours to arrive. The hospitals were often overcrowded and stretched to the absolute limits in terms of capacity and availability of medical supplies and doctors. The number of patients that visit the hospital each day far exceeded the capacity of the hospital, and many of the patients who sit in the waiting room all day are never seen by staff; they simply pack up at the end of the day and return the following morning for another day of waiting.

Because Nicaraguan's access to health care is not guaranteed each day, the remarkable sense of gratitude in the patients was astounding. The interactions with some of the patients -- seeing their conditions and health challenges -- shocked me to the core.

Moreover, it made me realize how grateful we all should be to have the advanced healthcare we do in the United States, and the necessity of helping providing adequate healthcare to those who do not have this opportunity.

Month's after returning from my trip the memory of one woman sticks in my mind each day. I met her during a day spent volunteering at CENAO, Nicaragua's National Eye Hospital and the only public ophthalmology hospital in the country. In Nicaragua, eyeglasses are a treasured commodity; for most people, the cost of eyeglasses far exceeds what they are able to pay. Throughout the school year, we collected over 1,000 pairs of eyeglasses, identified the prescriptions on those glasses, and brought them to Nicaragua to donate to those in need. While in the capital city of Managua, Project Nicaragua spent two days volunteering at the hospital handing out eyeglasses for free to those who brought in their prescriptions. For many of the patients visiting our station, this was the first pair of glasses they had ever owned. Seeing a light come over their face when they put on a pair of working glasses and could finally see was amazing. One woman in particular stood out to me.

The glasses we gave her were not the first pair she had ever owned; however, the pair that she was wearing was broken and missing the nosepiece. When she took off that pair of glasses to try on a new pair, I could see a problem far worse than vision. On the side of her nose, at the place where the nosepiece of the glasses should have rested, there was a large scar formed from many years of the unprotected glasses frame scraping off the bare skin deep into the side of her nose. The gratitude this woman expressed for receiving a new pair of glasses that would not require her to accept the pain in trade for eyesight overwhelmed me.

There were many similar stories during our time in Nicaragua, and I wish I could talk about each and every moment that touched me so deeply. In every way that our group gave to the people of Nicaragua, I received more in return. From this experience, I came to understand the true scope of poverty in the rest of the world,

something I needed to see to truly understand. Only when driving by bus through the streets of Nicaragua and seeing people living in neighborhoods of houses built with tarps could I begin to comprehend how much of the rest of the world lives. This experience has truly shaped the direction of my life because it helped me find a new passion and something that I truly want to dedicate my life to: global health.

Without the Nichols Humanitarian Fund, this trip would not have been possible for me. After returning to the Vanderbilt, I am motivated now more than ever to use the incredible opportunities I have at this school to be able to give back. Project Nicaragua is going strong in its second year on campus, sharing what we learned while in Nicaragua with the rest of campus and planning our second trip coming up next year. The opportunity to serve those less fortunate has awakened the desire to take my life in a new direction, and I can't wait to take part in experiences like this in the future. I am so grateful to the Nichol Humanitarian Fund for helping me take part in an experience that has truly changed my life.





*Sean Sookhoo*  
*Guyana*

The country of Guyana is tucked away in South America's Northeast corner and claims a unique Caribbean culture amongst its primarily Spanish identifying neighbors. Unfortunately, the tiny country of less than a million people has never quite climbed out of economic disparity despite an overwhelming amount of natural resources, including gold. Stemming from this third-world status, the people of Guyana share a plethora of diseases due to their lack of health resources and education. Of these afflictions, diabetes mellitus (Type-II) ranks as one of the highest morbidities within the country. Although the exact prevalence of diabetes mellitus is an understudied area, the disease has caused enough concern that the Guyanese Ministry of Health has recently instituted a special diabetes clinic in the capital city, Georgetown.

Although diabetes has been one of the biggest factors of poor health standards in Guyana, little is actually known as to why this population has poor control over their affliction. My research aimed to help shed some light into the reasons for poor glycemic control among the diabetic population in the region.

In conjunction with Vanderbilt's Department of Emergency Medicine and the generous grant offered by the Nichols Humanitarian Fund, I was able to provide on-site Hemoglobin A1c testing, random blood sugar testing, as well as purchase materials necessary for diabetes education. Individuals that presented with abnormal Hemoglobin A1c results indicated a history of uncontrolled blood sugar that often leads to other afflictions such as retinopathy, neuropathy, and other vascular diseases.

Patients that exemplified these criteria were given personal coaching in areas such as good diabetic practices, healthy diet and exercise routines, as well as a list of common local foods that were carbohydrate rich.

From my experiences in Guyana, I was not only fortunate to extend my knowledge of medicine and humanitarian service, but also help a very underprivileged population of diabetics that were under-resourced and uneducated. After helping 196 individuals, I am compiling a report to submit to the Guyanese Ministry of Health for further study in to helping mitigate some of the determinants that were highlighted as a result of the study. As my career in medicine progresses, I hope to continue my passion for this field even further, both increasing my knowledge of global humanitarianism and expanding the provincial perspective of a kid from the rural, small town USA.





*Omega Tennant*  
*Kenya*

This past summer I was fortunate to be recipient of a Nichols Humanitarian Award to serve in Kenya. Immediately after a semester abroad in China, I flew to Kenya to spend five weeks working with missionaries in Nairobi. My initial impression of the country was of vague familiarity due to its similarities with Zanzibar, where I had volunteered the year before. After adjusting to time and cultural differences, I embarked on an experience in Kenya that would forever change my life.

The first two weeks were training and preparation to lead a team of youth that would be coming to Kenya. Twice a week, I attended Swahili classes at the Language Center where each day at 11:45am we would break for tea and coffee and talk with students from all over the world. "Habari yako, dada yangu?," they would ask. *How are you my sister?* "Nzuri sana!," I'd respond as I accepted the milk they offered. I then joined my group of friends to discuss what we were covering in class. Two from Angola, one from Brazil, and two from the Congo were in English class. A woman from Japan, another woman from Congo, two Americans, and I were studying Swahili. There were also students studying French, Chinese, and Portuguese, so conversations typically took place in a variety of languages. The friendships and linguistic abilities I developed during that time have shaped my academic interest, as I now study foreign language education independently.

I also taught English at an elementary school in the Marurui slums approximately thirty minutes outside of the city of Nairobi.

Each day I would walk into class to the sounds of "Good morning teacher, how are you?!" I would respond accordingly and the students- all standing at their desk- would say "Thank you, teacher!" as they sat back down in their desk. Reflecting on those sounds and sights still causes me to smile as I remember the afternoons I spent playing duck-duck-goose and head, shoulders, knees, and toes, with the students. The joy that they derived from those songs and the other activities we did impressed upon me the importance of education. Even there in a place that the world would portray under the veil of poverty and sadness, I found great joy and hope. Yes, there was much that needed to be done and much that still needs to be done in Marurui, but the community I found in the slum was one of the most vibrant and engaging I have ever had the honor of participating in.

When the team arrived two and a half weeks after my arrival, I taught them Swahili briefly each morning and as they requested during the day and coached them as they prepared skits for Marurui primary school and other elementary schools we would be visiting in Isiolo, Kenya. Leading a team of youth from the age of thirteen to seventeen was a growing experience for me, because I was able to mentor students who were at a stage in their life where most of their development and life exploration begins. Accompanying them for two weeks in Kenya was one of the most challenging but rewarding experiences of my time in Kenya, as it forced me to address American and Kenyan stereotypes and cross-cultural misunderstandings in a way that was sensitive to both cultures.

My last week in Kenya, I traveled to Kisumu in western Kenya at Lake Victoria. There, I stayed with a Kenyan friend that I met while volunteering in Peru in 2011. Those four days were surely the most enjoyable and eye-opening days of my time there. Sitting with Mama Dacha practicing Swahili and learning some Luo phrases as she made chapatti, walking to the market with Ben and then seeing his new ten by eight foot home in the slums that was only slightly larger than my dorm room, riding on the unpaved roads with Tom towards his family's land, sucking juice from raw sugar cane as I waited in the shade of a *jua kali* car shop, eating fish and sakuma wiki with my hands on the bank of Lake Victoria...these were the raw cross-cultural experiences that opened my eyes to the everyday lives of the people in Kenya.

I am so grateful to have received the Nichols Humanitarian Fund. Without it, I would not have been able to encounter a culture so different from my own, yet with human beings so similar to myself. I made friendships that will last me a lifetime and saw needs that cannot go ignored. I will continue serving communities around the world, including those in China this summer. Thank you all for the service that you provide the students here at Vanderbilt. Without donations from kind-hearted people like you, students such as myself would not be able to engage in the life-enriching experiences service provides.



*Dolapo Olushola*  
*Nigeria*

During my 5-week internship at the Nigerian Federal Ministry of Justice, I was fortunate to work in the International & Comparative Law Department. I applied my legal research and writing skills whilst helping the attorneys in the department as they prepared advisory memoranda for different arms of the government concerning their international law obligations and interactions. For example, I was assigned to work on a memorandum to provide legal advice to the Nigerian Government concerning a request from the Brazilian Government for service of summons on a Nigerian to take a paternity test in Brazil. I drafted and vetted an international agreement between Nigeria and Japan on drug trafficking laws and also drafted and vetted another international agreement between Nigeria and Argentina on the promotion of arts, culture and tourism. In addition, I got to work with Nigeria's representatives to the United Nations, African Union and Economic Community of West African States and discuss strategies for promoting Nigeria's interests in the international community.

By offering my time to work at the Federal Ministry of Nigeria, I was able to further the mission of the Ministry to efficiently, effectively and equally extend the arms of justice, not just to the government but also to the people of Nigeria. Administration of justice is a major component of public interest as it allows for the population to pursue their livelihood with confidence that they would be protected by the justice system.

Such confidence in turn allows for increased economic and commercial activities and would foster growth of the Nigerian Economy. My work at the Federal Ministry of Justice ultimately was a contribution to the present efforts to ensure efficient, effective and equal justice for the Nigerian populace that would ultimately enhance the common wellbeing and general welfare of every citizen.

The Nichols Fund afforded me the opportunity to learn hands on, how the law is administered, how the law works and how the law affects the lives of my people. In addition, the Nichols Fund provided me with the opportunity to hone my desire for attaining a well-rounded education. For these opportunities I am very grateful.

*Sarah Walker*  
*Ecuador*

The Nichols Humanitarian Fund helped me to afford my two-month stay in Ecuador this summer, where I participated in Manna Project International's service site in Sangolquí (a smaller town outside of Quito). My main contributions to the site included creating a dance program in the community that offered free ballet classes, working on the Small Business Development Project, and teaching adult and children's English classes.

One of my fellow interns and I shared a passion for dance, as it has been a huge part of our lives since we were children. We took the initiative to start a dance program in Rumiloma, another town where we spent a lot of our time working. These dance classes were a creative outlet for children who were not able to participate in the arts at school due to lack of funding. The dance program was also a form of exercise for the kids that is not offered in their school or home lives. The attendance and enthusiasm in the program was so overwhelming that we had to recruit more dance teachers, and I am happy to say that the success of the program allowed it to continue even after I left Ecuador.

The Small Business Development program was a microfinance project that allowed my fellow colleagues and I to go into surrounding communities and seek out potential business candidates that needed help with their start-ups. This included some of the poorest residents in the greater Quito area, but also some of the most diligent and enthusiastic people that I have ever met.



That drive in these spirited souls led them to participate in our Small Business Classes that we taught, which then allowed these candidates to apply for a loan for their respective start-ups. After reviewing the applications, we had a very difficult time making the decision of who we would be giving loans to because all of the candidates were so qualified and eager to work. Finally, we presented the loan to a group of 10 overjoyed people who could officially start their first businesses. The feeling of handing them those checks was incredible. To this day, we have had a 100% loan repayment and the businesses are expanding with great success.

My final contribution of service work was teaching both adult and children's English classes. Not only was I able to interact with many community members and form great relationships with my students, but teaching English also improved my Spanish more than I thought possible.



*Rebecca Wang*  
*Nicaragua*

I am forever grateful to the Nichols Humanitarian Fund and its donors for allowing me to travel to Nicaragua, an experience that was undoubtedly one of my most memorable and invaluable experiences during my first few years at Vanderbilt. This trip was especially meaningful to me because it was the first trip for Project Nicaragua's Vanderbilt chapter, which I founded in the fall 2012. I have always been interested in service, medicine, and global health, but this trip solidified my vision of influencing broader health policy in Nicaragua and beyond.

Our trip took place in May 2013, and we decided to focus our efforts in two cities, Managua, Nicaragua and León, Nicaragua. In Managua, the largest city in Nicaragua, we worked closely with the Centro Nacional de Oftalmología (CENAO), the only public eye hospital in the nation. Throughout the school year, we collected gently used eyeglasses to donate to the eye hospital. We ended up with over 1,000 pairs to be handed out for free to patients in Nicaragua who cannot afford them. When we arrived in Nicaragua, we had the arduous task of sorting out the glasses by prescription as well as training staff members on our method of distribution so the eyeglasses could be continuously given to patients throughout the remainder of the year. Some of the most touching moments of the trip came from our short time at the eye hospital. All of the recipients were so kind and grateful, and seeing their smiles light up their entire faces after finding the right pair of glasses was both so incredibly encouraging and motivating.

An older woman took my hand, looked me in the eye with tears brimming in her own, and thanked me profusely for being able to see her husband's face clearly for the first time in years.

We also worked closely with La Mascota Children's hospital, the largest public pediatric hospital in the country.

Families sometimes travel days to get specialized treatment and care that only this hospital can provide. We donated some needed medical supplies as well as focused on our primary task of addressing dental health, one of the most prominent and growing health issues in Nicaragua. We were able to bring over 800 dental supply items to Nicaragua, including toothpaste, toothbrushes, floss, and mouthwash. Rather than simply giving out supplies to patients, we went around to families in the waiting room that were interested and taught mini dental health lessons to children and their parents, after which they were given dental supplies as prizes.

For the second half of our trip, we worked with a small community called Chacraseca, a small village located in rural León. The poverty in Chacraseca is very apparent; the majority of its citizens live in small houses with dirt floors and no indoor plumbing. Only a third of its youth is educated and all of its schools are severely lacking in space, materials, and qualified educators. Their poverty and under-education has led to a variety of health problems, so we chose to work in León with the objective of addressing these issues holistically.

We raised \$2,200 to build a house for a family of five that was previously sleeping on the floor of an uncle's house. We worked on the construction of the house for a few days and during that short period of time, most notable to me was the fact that besides the family, many other non-related, non-paid community members came out to help with the house every day we were there, even under extremely hot and dusty conditions. The amount of support and generosity the community showed for each other despite their poverty was truly inspiring. During the Q&A session, it became clear to me how truly little the students knew about sexual health and their own bodies. I later found out that sex education is not addressed in their schools at all not only because of the lack of materials, but also because teachers have little to no education themselves in the subject.

This is undoubtedly one of the many factors that contribute to the community's early and high pregnancy rate, as well as the high prevalence of sexually transmitted infections. Although we left the teachers with all of the sexual education lesson materials we brought with us, we knew that the community needed much more improvement in this area. In fact, I have already made plans to add another education component next year that trains teachers on how to educate their students on sexual health as well as a long-term research component to measure the effects of our lessons on the health and wellness of the community as a whole.

I founded this chapter with the unique vision to address the physical needs and social determinants of health in both urban and rural Nicaragua. It is my hope that I can empower the communities in which I serve to create sustainable change and long-lasting improvements in their health status and care. I am thankful to the other selfless Vanderbilt students that contributed their time and efforts to this project, the hospitality and appreciativeness of those we served, and to the Nichols Humanitarian Fund for making this first trip possible for me to lay the foundation for Project Nicaragua's future years at Vanderbilt. Being able to supplement my education at Vanderbilt with such a unique opportunity has so incredibly and unforgettably enriched my college experience.



Hannah Woodward  
Tanzania and Guatemala

*"Being a teacher means more than teaching class. You are teaching life. We need to be committed to supporting each other in giving our students the best we can." – Mr. Jonas, history teacher at Mary and Joseph Secondary School in Kitongo, Tanzania.*

This summer, the Nichols Humanitarian Fund allowed for me to have the experience of a lifetime. It seems difficult to call it a singular experience, because what I had was a million little experiences compounded on top of one another that taught me many little lessons, and one big important lesson. I went in with a plan to help as much as possible, and came away with invaluable knowledge. This summer was all about the unexpected. I had set plans in mind but learned that nothing goes according to plan. The summer I had had a much greater impact on me than the summer experience I had planned. I intended to spend May in Tanzania, observing the successful techniques at a school near the Kitongo village, then in July, take my new knowledge to help improve the shared Montessori techniques at a school in Santa Maria de Jesus, Guatemala, where I had previously volunteered.

Things didn't really go according to plan. The first few days in Tanzania, I started to think, "What am I doing here?" I felt outside of my comfort zone, I felt overwhelmed, I felt awkward and out of place. As Chris, the director of the Janada Batchelor Foundation for Children, began to explain to Cara, a fellow Peabody student, and me what he wanted us to do with the teachers, I definitely became anxious. He wanted us to run a teacher development program with teachers who were meeting all of their requirements and goals. Cara and I felt like we were overstepping a boundary and intruding on something in which we had no right. How could the two of us, as college students, have anything valuable to offer to these teachers who seemed to be doing far better than most teachers in their country?

And more than that, what gave us the right to swoop in and tell them what they are doing wrong after a week of observation. And then there was the overwhelming question that we faced... How in the world can we make a difference? But in the end, it turned out very well. Cara and I did have knowledge worth sharing, and there were so many conversations worth having. We approached it as an idea share, not a lecture. We became confident in what we knew and what we have had the opportunity to learn in Peabody. But we also became interested in and aware of issues that we haven't come across before this trip. No education system is perfect. Not one. Every system has its issues, whether it be resources, funding, testing, or quality. In our discussion of student engagement, we realized how difficult it is for these teachers to teach critical thinking to their students when they were never taught or encouraged to think critically themselves. Many of these teachers brought up the idea of a lack of resources, but once we started talking, they started to think outside the box, something they haven't been pushed to do yet. Towards the end of the trip, I saw my shared ideas of student engagement through movement put to use by the physics teacher. To teach his students electron configurations, he took them outside, formed circles, and let them represent electrons with their bodies. The best part about it was his excitement in teaching this way. These teachers have a desire to change the education system in Tanzania, and I was inspired by their grace and acceptance in the aspect of trying something new, and while my ideas were helpful, I know I got so much more out of this experience. I learned the universality of education as well. The teachers discussed their students and the problems their students bring with them to school because of their home life. The history teacher made the point that we are all human beings and need to connect with our students on a human level and be there for them as people first and foremost.



He then said, "being a teacher means more than teaching class. You are teaching a life. We need to be committed to supporting each other in giving our students the best we can." This certainly rang true when I got to Guatemala. Not long after I arrived back in Guatemala, and back in my comfort zone where I had worked before, Joe Collins, the founder of the organization I was working through, From Houses to Homes, passed away after a long fight with colon cancer. This devastating news took a toll on everyone at Escuela Kemna'oj. To these students, Joe was like a second father, and their guardian angel. These children are receiving a free education with teachers who are trained, something that would not have been available to them without Joe. They come to school everyday in this beautiful building with resources that are unimaginable. They receive two meals a day that are full of the right nutrients. They have access to check ups with a pediatrician, a psychologist to talk to, and a dentist. All because of Joe. Plus, many of these children live in houses that have been built by Joe's organization. Because of Joe and all the people at From Houses to Homes, these children have a place to learn and a place to rest, feel safe, and grow up with their families. Joe is their hero. Up until Joe's health declined, he was down here all the time. The way that these children would light up when Joe came by was magical. They loved to give him hugs. After the principal talked to them, we all returned to our classrooms in tears. I felt helpless as Seño Maria, the third grade teacher, and I walked around, trying to fight our own tears as we comforted the children. The classroom that is usually filled with giggles was filled with crying. I walked from child to child, just holding their hands, rubbing their backs, or wiping away a few tears. I felt helpless.

I didn't know how to help. But Seño Maria explained that what I was doing was right. We just had to be there, and try to be strong. This is what teachers do. This is what humans do. We care for one another.

Mr. Jonas' words resonated here. Being a teacher is more than instructional techniques. Being a teacher takes so much more. I think I would have learned this lesson very differently, and almost too late, if it hadn't been for this summer. This summer helped me to learn more about how to be a teacher and what my role means, but it also taught me more about the importance and necessity that we, as a human race, care for one another.

That is universal. That doesn't vary by country or region. That should be the norm no matter where you are. Spending time with the girls in the orphanage and school in Tanzania and the children at Escuela Kemna'oj in Guatemala were experiences that has shown me the resilience of people and the amazing children around the world that have faced so many horrible challenges, yet they have the ability to forgive, appreciate, and trust when they have every right to want to hate, give up, and hide themselves from the world around them. The trials and challenges that we face, whether it be impoverished education systems or the death of a personal hero, can be made a little bit easier when there is human compassion within a community. This makes all the difference. I am still in shock that I was able to learn and experience so much this summer. My passion for teaching and service has been set on fire and is burning brighter than ever before.





Michelle Zavislan  
Washington, D.C.  
American Bar Association

I had the privilege to work for the American Bar Association in Washington, D.C. this summer. I worked in the human rights center, specifically working on the International Criminal Court Project. This project is striving to strengthen the relationship between the United States and the International Criminal Court (ICC) as well as help the ICC become more efficient and effective as an international court. Through this project I helped design training protocols that would be used by trainers that went to the ICC and helped the different departments of the Court to improve. I also helped create a comprehensive plan for educating United States politicians on the ICC in an effort to build support for the Court in the United States. My final task was to help write grants proposals for the project. Overall, I had a very diverse and unique experience in Washington and with the ABA.

This was very useful to my education and my future goals because I plan to work for a human rights organization after graduating from law school. This helped me learn my way around these types of organizations and I learned valuable skills that I can take with me in the future. Grant writing is something that I had no experience with, but I learned so much from my colleges at the ABA. Moreover, I learned a lot about the politics that come with any type of policy work and how to delicately handle those politics. I also learned how important the team around you is and how much you can learn from your colleagues. I am an independent person and like to work on my own, but the people at the ABA helped me to become more of a team player and through working with them I learned so much more than I would have on my own.

Overall, this experience was so incredibly helpful for my career and I met so many wonderful people .I am very grateful to have had this opportunity and I know it was the first step in getting to where I want to be.

As a senior in high school, I made a Bucket List of all the things I wanted to do before I died. The items rang from “give blood” to “watching the sunrise on the beach” to “swimming with dolphins”. While making this list, one of my friends suggested, “go on an African safari.” This seemed so far fetched that I did not even consider it. A year and a half later, I’m sitting on a safari Jeep in the Kenyan flatlands staring at a massive lion suspended in a tree eight feet above me. And she looks hungry.

During the spring semester of my freshman year, I was enrolled in an independent study class. My professor’s daughter and son-in-law were living in a small village just outside of the Kenyan capital, Nairobi, and were working with an organization called Uhuru Child. Throughout the spring semester, our class, divided into three groups, came up with projects that we could implement in Kenya, in conjunction with Uhuru Child, that would both help the people and attempt to lift them out of poverty. Using the money awarded to me by the Nichols Fund, I was able to participate in a two-week trip, during which we implemented our educational project at Uhuru Academy, the all-girls boarding school established by this organization.

Uhuru Child is a non-profit organization that uses sustainable social business to both pull Kenya out of poverty and create educational opportunities for high school-aged girls. With this organization, a group of nine Vanderbilt students, including myself, taught ten different lessons at Uhuru Academy, worked on the lettuce farm that funded the school, lived the lives of our resource families, went on an African Safari, hiked a volcano, and learned more about the Kenya culture, and ourselves, than we could have ever hoped.

While each day was filled with different experiences, we typically alternated days working in the school with the girls or spending time with our “resource families.” Because of the 2007-2008 post-election violence, many families and individuals were displaced from their homes and forced to find new places to live. Some of those people sought refuge in the internally displaced persons (IDP) camp called Jikaze. This is also where Uhuru Child has created a gourmet lettuce farm, the proceeds of which fund Uhuru Academy. Uhuru employs the impoverished individuals in the camp to work at the farm in addition to accepting many of the girls from the camp to be taught at Uhuru Academy. When we were not working in Jikaze with our resource families, we spent the day working at the school, teaching lessons to the girls, or playing games with them. I loved the time I spent with my group of girls at Uhuru working with my resource family in Jikaze.

My resource family was a family of seven, living in a small mud shelter divided into three “rooms” using hanging sheets. The total area of their home was smaller than most Vanderbilt dorm rooms. Spending time with Herron and Grace, our host dad and mom, was probably the most rewarding part of the trip. We learned cultural and social norms that pertained to everyday life, while also sharing our experiences from the United States with them. We shared chai and boiled potatoes each morning before our long day of work and learned so much about their lives and perspectives.

For example, one of my favorite topics we discussed was love. While we said that Americans typically display love by saying “I love you,” Herron explained that he preferred to show his love.

By putting a roof over Grace's head, providing food for their family, and occasionally bringing her home a new pair of shoes from the Bata Shoe factory, he sufficiently displayed his love and, thus, would never verbally say "I love you" or "Nakupenda" in his native Swahili.

Another extremely memorable experience was our wood-gathering adventure. One day, our whole group walked for 45 minutes to a field full of small, fledgling trees. We proceeded to cut down those trees with machetes, and the help of older Jikaze women, tie them in bundles using rope, and carry the wood back to the camp on our foreheads. Little did we know that many of the women did this task while also nursing a four-month-old son strapped to their chests. This experience was particularly eye opening with respect to gender roles in Kenya as compared to those in the United States. While we might assume that the male members of society would be in charge of chopping and obtaining firewood, these women performed the task without hesitation. In fact, they were almost appalled when we suggested that their husbands would be joining us on our hike. When comparing this to our American culture, in which the man would almost always chop the wood, we realized how many of our ideas we assume to be "correct" and how many of those same ideas are completely subjective across cultures. We continued to discover differences in cultural norms throughout our two-week stay and continued to be surprised regarding how many of our norms we assumed to be true or fact that are, in reality, universally accepted truths.

Despite my fear of sounding too cliché, my trip to Kenya changed my life. I have found myself to be more accepting of ideas that contradict my own, understanding that my opinions, or those of my society or country, are not objectively the correct ones.

Additionally, I learned to appreciate how truly blessed I am in every aspect of my life, especially with respect to receiving this funding. Without the Nichols family, I would not have met Herron and Grace, I would not have gone on an African safari, I would not have met my students at Uhuru Academy, and I would not have the desire to devote more of my life to continued service and learning. Thank you so much for giving me this opportunity- I truly appreciate it more than I can describe.



*My "Gold Group" outside of Uhuru Academy (Josephine, Lucy, Christine and Teresa)*



*Teaching the girls about the spreading of bacteria as part of the hygiene*



*Our last day with our resource family (Dana, Haley, Joseph, Christie and Grace)*

*Ryan Hess*  
*Costa Rica*

I went to Costa Rica last summer, and I would like to thank you all—the Nichols Family—for your support, because without those funds I would not have been able to make the trip.

Not only did I see some interesting things, I was able to make some close and meaningful friends, fleshing out my experience at Vanderbilt. One of my favorite experiences during the trip was one of the first things we did, involving a photography class at EARTH University followed by a tour in the community of Guapiles. The photography class was very enlightening, as it gave some basics on composition. After the class, we journeyed from EARTH on a short drive to the village, where we walked down the small main road, snapping photos of what we could see from the road. We saw many farm animals and houses, and very picturesque farmland further down the sloping hillsides. During the walk through the village, we stopped briefly at a school that had recently been fixed up from the state it had been in before, though still needed much work. The money to fix the school came from tourism in the area to a business located near a waterfall several minutes into the forest adjacent to the village. We visited that forest shortly after, and that was an exquisite experience for me because I got to take a lot of photos of some of the plants I saw there, close up. Most of the significance of that trip was the photography I brought back. The forest portion of the trip was memorable because it was an adventure, entering this rainforest. We walked on a very steep, muddy path downhill, slipping and sliding through the dirt down the path, avoiding the plants along the way that were poisonous to the touch. We noticed a few poison dart frogs in the shadows, and we spotted a few inch-long ants which, too, were poisonous.

We ended the walk at a small lean-to style outpost in the middle of the forest, where we ate lunch, which was served at the outpost. We had stopped next to a waterfall, and chose to go down and check it out. There was a rope set up and someone was there to belay us down the waterfall, one by one. Only a few of us could do it, however, before a torrential downpour brought us back to the shelter of the lean-to, at which point we decided to head back to the road.

This experience was an interesting form of understanding that I hadn't had in the class before we went on the trip. I wish there had been more of an opportunity to talk to villagers and hear about what the experience of tourism must be like for them, but it no doubt provides a decent level of support for the community. The experience of witnessing the outside of this economic system was a good summary of the other experiences I had on my trip in Costa Rica, and they are things that will always shape my worldview. Small-scale enterprise, in the hands of the people in the village, seems to bring about a sense of well-being and self-determination in this quiet village, when surrounded by a larger, booming world economy. Eco-tourism is definitely a unique and interesting industry, and I am glad I got to see it firsthand.





In the summer of 2013, I embarked on what was to become one of the greatest service experiences of my life. During the Spring semester, I had spent 3 hours every week with 12 of my fellow classmates and peers who would later accompany me on the trip, preparing for our service experience by educating ourselves on different aspects of Costa Rican life and culture such as the economy, the healthcare system, the education system, and much more. By the time the trip came around, I was armed with the theoretical knowledge that would contribute to my gaining a thorough understanding and appreciation of the experiences I would have in Costa Rica.

When I first arrived in Costa Rica, I was greeted by my Costa Rican host family, which consisted of a couple in their mid-sixties to early-seventies. They spoke only Spanish and I knew I was in for quite the adventure since I barely spoke the language.

In the following weeks, I would participate in numerous classroom discussions before our service excursions and classroom reflections after completing them. Service excursion included working with high school students in the San Jose area to reduce dropout rates, working in rural communities in the province of Limon to develop rural tourism opportunities, and volunteering in the Osa Peninsula to preserve the mangroves that sustain the environment.

During my time in Costa Rica, I made long-lasting friendships with my classmates, professors, host family, and the many other people I met while I was there. This trip not only provided me with the opportunity to further my academic ambitions of examining economic development tools for growing economies but also provided me with the opportunity to enrich my life by interacting with exceptional individuals who have significantly affected my life and reinforced my belief in the importance of community and service.

*Paige Lambert*  
*Ecuador*

Receiving the Nichols Humanitarian Fund Scholarship greatly funded my participation in the Ecuador Project 2013. Before receiving this scholarship, my parents had volunteered to finance one-third of the trip while I was to provide two-thirds of the cost. In order to finance my portion of the cost, I planned to use my summer savings in addition to picking up extra shifts at my part time job during the spring semester. After receiving the Nichols Scholarship, I calculated that this scholarship would finance approximately one-third of the total trip cost, leaving me to finance the remaining third. While the monetary funds of the Nichols fund were and still are greatly appreciated, what this scholarship really afforded me was the opportunity to remain actively involved in the other campus organizations I was apart of during this time, instead of needing to dedicate the remainder of my free time to my part time job. This is truly what I would like to say thank you for.

Traveling to Ecuador with OACS was one of the best experiences I have ever had. As someone who had never been over seas prior to this experience, being immersed in Latin American culture was a truly original experience that I am incredibly grateful for. I was fortunate enough to witness some of the most beautiful and most tragic images I have ever seen. Being in Ecuador has given me a new appreciation for all of the luxuries I have been fortunate enough to access, as well as to help me re-evaluate which of these luxuries are really necessary at all – which, as it turns out, are not that many.

While in Ecuador, I worked with three of my cohorts at the Centro Infantil Mundo de Juguete, an infant center serving local children ages 1-5 under the umbrella of the K-12 school, INEPE. The mission statement of INEPE focused on the holistic education of its students, including their physical, psychological, and spiritual wellness, while emphasizing the importance of giving back in a sustainable fashion.



Our project at Mundo de Juguete was building a seed bed that would be used not only to supply fresh vegetables for the school, but also to provide educational opportunities for the students to learn about sustainable practices from a young age. Our service time in Ecuador was spent between planning and physically building the seed bed. Planning for the seed bed included plotting the location and size of the garden, taking soil samples to determine which crops would be most successful given the location and soil nutrient, and gathering the materials (lumber, nails, tools). Physically building the bed included digging up the plot of land, constructing the wooden parameters, and planting the first crop with students from the center. Sporadically, our group would participate in other activities with the school including reforesting the plot of land near the school which students and staff had already planted 4,000 trees in 2-3 years and teaching English to students at the infant center. While much of my experience from the Ecuador Project stems from the activities I did and the sights I saw, it would be unfair not to mention the people I had the privilege of sharing Ecuador with. I believe that OACS did a phenomenal job of selecting candidates for this trip who came from diverse economic, educational, and cultural backgrounds, resulting in a number of unique perspectives on the issues we discussed as a group and experienced in real life. Some of the most valuable lessons I learned were the result of conversations I had, not only with my cohorts, but with my host family as well. Thanks to the Ecuador Project, I know I have a more worldly view on global citizenship, poverty, and what it means to be rich – not necessarily from a monetary standpoint – but traditionally, culturally, and spiritually.

Jarrold Smith  
Ecuador

"Perhaps travel cannot prevent bigotry, but by demonstrating that all peoples cry, laugh, eat, worry, and die, it can introduce the idea that if we try and understand each other, we may even become friends." Maya Angelou

Throughout my life one of the surest and most important lessons my experiences have taught me is that true personal growth can only occur through pushing the boundaries of one's comfort zone. After spending a month in Quito, Ecuador living, working, and learning with the Office of Active Citizenship and Service's Ecuador Project this belief has only been reaffirmed. By confronting linguistic, cultural and systemic barriers and reconciling our preconceptions with the realities we witnessed, my fellow participants and I were able to broaden our worldviews and come closer to being truly global citizens. None of this would have been possible for me had it not been for the generosity and support I received from the Nichols Humanitarian Fund. By removing financial obstacles for a diverse group of individuals, the Fund laid the groundwork for a unique service learning experience that forged bonds not only between the participants but also between the participants and those we met in Ecuador.

Putting such a rich experience into words is easier said than done, so I have selected two photos I took during the trip to aid in the telling of my story. Both pictures speak to a different aspect of the diverse experience that was the Ecuador Project, from our service work to daily life in Quito.

I took this photo from the top of La Basílica del Voto Nacional by far the largest church in Quito and one of the largest in the Americas. For me it demonstrates a number of the important dynamics at play in the metropolis that is Quito.

First off, it is easy to tell that we were there during the rainy season and being a little less than cautious at several hundred feet off the ground! This picture also displays the organization of the city, which is divided into north and south districts by El Panecillo, the statue of the Virgin Mary visible between the spires. Northern Quito is the more recently developed, affluent section of the city where the majority of the participants lived in homestays; southern Quito (to which the Virgin displays her back) is the older and more economically challenged region where many of our service sites were located. From this vantage point, one can easily see how the northern district contains many newly constructed office buildings while the southern district is mainly home to more traditional, simple houses. This dynamic can create a sense of disunity in Quito, but this is why service work in some of the poorest areas is so essential.

Forming the core of my experience in Ecuador was the service work I did at INEPE, a community organization in southern Quito that focuses on education and sustainable development for a wide variety of quitenos. Our main task was constructing a garden near one of the INEPE's partner organizations, a small daycare center. The objective was to provide the children with a sustainable source of food that could also serve as an educational resource, as knowledge of agriculture is important to the way of life for many in the area. Initially I didn't believe that building a garden would take an entire month, but after running diagnostic tests on the soil, planning the space it would occupy, acquiring the necessary tools and supplies, and preparing the land for digging, my site partners and I had more than enough on our plates! All of our hard work paid off on our last day, pictured below, when we worked with the school children to complete the last step: planting the seeds. For me, this moment had some metaphorical significance, because it had become apparent that no one volunteer or group of volunteers can solve all of a region's problems, but it is still vitally important that we contribute whatever we can with the limited time we have so that subsequent volunteers can build off our work.





When I applied for the Nichols Fund I really did not know what my project would be; I just knew that I wanted to go to Rwanda. With an invitation to live with a family of missionaries in Musanze for the summer, the Fund provided the link to make it happen. I proposed two projects, prayed they would come together, and submitted my application. After receiving the funds necessary to cover my travel expenses I had both the will and the resources to go.

I am usually quite the planner, unwilling to accept the big picture until I've settled every logistical detail. However, in the months following my receiving the Nichols Fund, I was forced to choose between my love of details and desire to serve in Rwanda. With funding to cover my travel expenses the trip was possible, but my first attempt to find a project seemed to reach a dead end just after I'd received funding. My primary interest was a local organization called Spark MicroGrants, but the Rwandan manager sent a very apologetic response to my inquiry saying that their summer programming had already been finalized. Almost as an afterthought, she included that they could always use extra hands in photography and blogging, and I jumped at the chance to be involved even in a small capacity. I continued to correspond with her throughout the spring concerning the details of volunteering, and eventually my persistence paid off. In late March I received an email that a scheduling conflict led to much of their summer programming being canceled and offering me a phone interview if I was interested in filling a position. After being chosen, I thought everything was taken care of. However, when I arrived on the ground I quickly came face-to-face with just how little I knew about Spark and the bottom-up development movement. Founded in 2010, Spark partners with vulnerable rural communities in Rwanda and Uganda to support locally-led social impact projects.

The mission is two-fold: to create material change and inspire mindset change. A staff of Rwandan facilitators works directly with the communities, while a small American team manages communications, fundraising and training. On my first day the Spark Rwanda team traveled to Lake Kivu for a retreat to kick off the summer and discuss our goals for the summer. As we shared our expectations, every one of the facilitators listed "new ideas from the interns" as what they were most looking forward to for the summer. Inside, I panicked. I was just learning the Spark model, and I had next to no outside experience. I felt under-qualified and out of place, and I began to doubt whether I would be able to make any significant impact for the organization. I had no choice but to push ahead and trust that I'd learn the specifics in the process.

One of the benefits of Spark being such a young organization is that the permanent staff really trusts and values the interns. We did not spend our time making copied and inputting data, but were instead given the opportunity to do meaningful work. As a team we restructured the fundraising and outreach sections of the website to include specific and tangible ideas. From there, we each carved out our own niche to fulfill the needs of the organization, mine being in communications and media. I took close to 2,000 photos during community visits, developed a new Pinterest account to increase search engine optimization, and maintained pre-existing social media accounts for Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. I also conducted a photo and video training session for the facilitators, concentrating on capturing stories with footage. As part of the new outreach materials, I put together a guide pamphlet for groups to raise awareness for Spark through social media solidarity campaigns, including sample photos, captions, and tweets.

In addition to these outreach and support tasks, I spent 2-3 days a week shadowing facilitators on field visits in order to see the model in action. Following each visit I gave brief remarks to the community with a few words of encouragement. At first I felt unworthy and uninformed when talking to them.

I learned everything I could from the facilitators, but even so I knew so little. My talks always centered around the importance of sharing ideas and working together, encouraging the community that they would be able to achieve unlimited change for their village if they continued to do these things. As I saw the reactions of our community members day after day, my initial feelings of inadequacy faded. This was an opportunity for me to change the conversation from, "Here I am, an American, to fix your problems," to "Here I am, an American, and I believe in you and want to support you." This shift in dialogue is essential if we aim to empower communities to drive their own development.

While Spark traditionally has worked with rural villages, this summer I was part of starting an initiative to include "special groups" – communities that shared a common identity even if they did not live in the same geographic area. One such community, Kinoni Community, was made up of about 200 HIV+ patients who attended a rural medical center for weekly treatment. From their very first meeting, this community grasped the real purpose of the Spark project. When we asked what they hoped to gain from the partnership, they asked for knowledge and skills and immediately began discussing how this would shape their community in the long run. If they could solve their most pressing problem (inadequate nutrition to withstand the debilitating HIV treatments) they would be able to help their children in school, aid other communities in need, and fight the stigma of HIV by educating other people.

The passion and ideas of this community were infectious, and their community meetings quickly became the highlight of my week. As we walked the final stretch to the health center before my last visit, I felt the most sincere and full joy, knowing that in that moment there was no place in the world I would rather be. That day they elected their leadership committee, and I saw community members who had taken active roles in the planning process beaming as their community openly placed confidence in them.

When I told them at the end of the meeting that it was my last visit before returning to America, they broke into a song meaning "it would be good for you to stay." Despite a tremendous language barrier, I built relationships with these people by simply being present, and that made it enormously difficult to walk away.

Returning to Vanderbilt this fall, I did not anticipate a difficult transition. I had been exposed to extreme poverty previously, so I believed I was prepared. A few weeks into the semester, I realized just how heartbroken I was to be so far away from people I had grown to love, both the people in the communities and the Spark facilitators themselves. I saw two options going forward: keep these memories acute and fresh while distancing myself from my Vanderbilt community, or assimilate to my normal life here at the expense of sustaining my connections to Rwanda. Moving forward I have seen that the impact of working with Spark is not so black-and-white; it is less about choosing a side than living changed. I discovered a people and a place that I love, and I know I will be back. For now, however, I am learning to apply what I learned in the way I think and the way I treat people every day. This is a spark that will last.

# Office of Active Citizenship and Service

The mission of the Office of Active Citizenship and Service (OACS) is to create a culture for exploration and learning followed by critical reflection and action for the common good.

*OACS empowers students and their service organizations to become involved in the community through volunteerism, issue awareness, education, advocacy, and activism. OACS offers a growing number of experiential learning opportunities locally, nationally, and globally. We encourage and support students to become more engaged in the community through active citizenship.*

We encourage all students to EXPLORE. ACT. REFLECT.



The Office of Active Citizenship and Service (OACS) provides programming that encourages students to engage with the local and global community with the mission to create a culture for exploration and learning on campus followed by critical reflection and action for the common good. In the summer of 2014, OACS will offer opportunities for Vanderbilt students, including a diverse array of global service projects and internship programs. OACS Internship Programs facilitate the placement of students in competitive public service internships in government, media, public policy, social justice, education, science, environmental policy, and the arts, which help to pave the way for networking opportunities for future internships and jobs.

OACS's suite of Global Service Projects provides students with an opportunity to engage with critical issues of inequity in a globalized world through engaging in community-based service. Beginning in the summer of 2014, accepted students will participate in projects in Ecuador, London, South Africa, and

Morocco where they will work in focal areas such as public health, education, environmental conservation, community development, recreation, youth engagement, special education, activism, and advocacy. Through each of these service-learning projects, students will develop an understanding of the importance of contributing meaningfully to the global community and will gain a greater respect for different cultures and viewpoints. Traveling and sharing experiences with a Vanderbilt cohort provides students with a safe and supportive environment in which to learn about themselves, each other, and the world.

To find out more about each of the local, national, and international service opportunities offered through OACS visit [www.vanderbilt.edu/oacs](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/oacs).

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