Nichols

Humanitarian Fund

2014/2015

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The Nichols Humanitarian Fund

What Is It?

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 programs 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)
- Summer Public Health in the Dominican Republic

Nichols Humanitarian Fund

Global Coverage

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The Students

Thirty-six students were selected to receive the Nichols Humanitarian Fund Award to pursue humanitarian projects during the summer of 2015. The award enabled students to work with communities on humanitarian efforts including human rights, public health, immigrant rights, early childhood education, microfinance, and environmental sustainability. The average GPA of the 2015 student recipients is 3.5 and the countries where they worked included the United States, South Africa, Morocco, Thailand, Guyana, Vanuatu, Ecuador, Russia, India, Nepal, and England.

Rhiana Anthony

South Africa

The overall purpose of the trip was to understand the multi-dimensional nature of the stigmatization of HIV/AIDS in South Africa, but also expanded to include understanding the racist and classist elements that have contributed to health disparity and the South African fight for liberation. The first week of the trip was characterized by visits to historical sites, museums, and meeting with community leaders so we could begin the process of grounding ourselves in the context and history of South Africa. I felt myself changing and learning within days and was excited by the possibilities of growth I would experience over the month. For two weeks, I was placed with Tsosoloso Support Group (TSG), a community based organization, in the Orlando East township, which acts as a support and care group for young children, elderly, and people directed affected by HIV/AIDS. TSG partners with various care-providing institutions within their community to provide wrap around support for anyone who needs them. During my time, I began to feel a part of this community because of their overwhelming hospitality and the activities that we were allowed access to. I fostered relationship with the people by engaging in house visits, producing beadwork along the gogos (grannies), and playing soccer with local children and staff. I grounded in a relationship with the land by walking the neighborhood and tending to the community gardens. I established relationship with the country at large by participating in a sex awareness and health campaign in the bustling Bara Taxi Rank, hearing the various languages and interacting with people from all walks of life. I was given the honor to build relationship. Over the course of the last week, we delved into the complex and deep past of apartheid and the black consciousness movement led by Steve Biko. This week was extremely pivotal for me, because of my own involvement with the current Black Lives Matter

I looked upon the lessons of the past for guidance and sat with uncomfortable questions of how to move forward in the present. Some of questions I have taken back home with me and flushing out. This experience was life changing and mind altering for me. I loved so much about the experience, even the tough days when it was hard to grapple with myself. I will surely return.

Each moment in South Africa I was receiving a lesson, but there are three lessons in particular that were a constant thread throughout my journey. First, the importance of radical hospitality and care are crucial to fight against stigma of all kinds. Stigma is rooted in loss of community and loss of social connection. As humans, we need each other to survive. Expressions of hospitality and love without pretense and judgement are what connects us to our humanity. This is true for all of us, not just those living with perceived maladies. Second, each step into the future must be grounded in an acknowledgement of the past. There is no tabula rasa. The history and culture of the country and the continent is heavy and tangible. You can feel it. Trauma is suspended all around. How can you move forward with such a heavy fog? See it, acknowledge it, honor it, learn from it, and listen to it. Notice the ways that old forms are still embedded and interfering with the present and could be obstacles to the future. Lastly, solutions must be rights-based and policy-based. Policy cannot be the ultimate decider. Human relationship, interaction, rights, and dignity must be struggled with. It is not enough to tell someone to “pop a pill” or “just change” without context and experience. We must uphold a standard of care that always asks “Does this intrude on personal dignity and

self-efficacy" or "Is this solution or policy going to limit and be oppressive in nature. short and long term". In order to create change that benefits all we must think of the most marginalized and stigmatized first.

Not only was I given the opportunity to work and learn with a new community, but also received answers to personal questions I was asking about my own community work. It is my goal to work in the Black community to deconstruct stigma around help-seeking, implement communal and spiritual healing practices, and create community collaborations/partnerships with service providers. I was able to observe and think about the ways I could translate strategies to work for the Black American context. Tsosoloso modeled perfectly a balance in partnerships with more formal organizations, while also doing more informal community building.

I have begun to imagine the ways in which regular folks can model this and the American norms that need to be changed in order of this model to flourish. By learning the histories of South Africa, I was also sparked to think of new ways to adjust the American justice system and racial injustice here in America and in other post-colonial sites across the Diaspora. Overall, I was deeply moved and empowered. I was reignited to believe in myself and my personal potential to affect change. "A Luta Continua". "The struggle continues". This phrase loomed bright in red neon at the entrance of the South African Constitutional Court. It hit me to my core as I digested its political and personal significance. This phrase is the perfect way to encapsulate my final sentiments. Much work has been done, but there is still more to do.

Daria Burstell

RUSSIA

The Nicholas Humanitarian Fund allowed to me to travel to Vladimir, Russia as part of the VISAGE program. The trip was a service-learning venture, focused on giving us insight into contemporary Russia through service in a regular community. We spent most of our time in Vladimir, a city about 3 hours away from Moscow. Vladimir was an average-sized city, not the sprawling metropolis of Moscow or St. Petersburg. While in Vladimir we planted flowers at a veteran's home, spent time in a school for disabled children, and helped students studying English practice their English conversational skills at many different levels.

I had never formally studied Russian before, so I joined the other first-time learners in our group in beginner's Russian lessons. We learned the basics, especially "no," "yes," and "thank you" in Russian, three words we would use over and over again during our month in Russia. While most language professors seem to think the alphabet, basic grammar, and some vocabulary make up the start of learning the language, I have found that it is really "no," "yes," "thank you," and nervous laughter that propel one to basic proficiency.

A month in Russia was the perfect amount of time to spend there. I got accustomed to Vladimir, to using the public transportation there; and to making sure to dig through my change before the bus conductor got to me, lest she fix me with her death stare; to having dinner and talking to my host mother about our days; to mixing English and Russian to get our thoughts across; and to simply living in a city I had never lived before. I experienced having to communicate in a language I do not speak, a task that at times seemed impossible and at times seemed as easy as speaking English.

One of my favorite experiences was talking to university students in Vladimir. They liked to hang out with their friends, shop, watch TV, and listen to music. Many did not know what they were going to do with their lives or degrees. I am not sure what I expected. However, what I found was a group of teenagers not that different from myself and my friends from the United States.

My month in Russia taught me that the differences that separate me from my Russian peers are small at best. I also learned that relationships between governments do not equal relationships between people. The people I met while in Russia were patriotic, but they were not anti-American. They questioned their world and their government while still being loyal. My time abroad allowed me to forge connections with people my own age from the other side of the world. I learned the incredibly important lesson that we are all people, no matter how cultural differences may divide us. I also got a small taste of how large the world outside the United States is, compelling me to explore and to reach even further outside of my comfort zone, something that would not have been possible without the Nichols Fund.

Logan Brown

ENGLAND

For a month of my summer, I had the incredible opportunity of living, working, and exploring London, England and its many boroughs. The experience was life changing and would not have been possible without the Nichols Humanitarian Fund and the Nichol's generosity. In January, when I was first brainstorming possible options for how to spend my summer, the prospect of going to London seemed extremely exciting but also unfeasible. I applied to the Nichols Humanitarian knowing that it was my only option to make a summer volunteering abroad an option for me. The excitement, gratitude, and relief I felt when I received the award notification did not dissipate as I traveled to London for the first and experienced helping and interacting with so many individuals. I cannot thank the Nichol's enough for the life changing experience and lessons that their generosity has provided me.

As I prepared to leave America and embark on my European adventure, I had no clue what I was in for or what it would be like. Prior to the summer, I had never left North America and I had a sparse background in living in urban, diverse areas. I knew that I was going to be living in one of the most diverse, poor, and unhealthy neighborhoods in the world. And I knew that I was going to be volunteering in a role that allowed me to interact and delve into the problems of the community. However, I had very few specific details of what I was doing or in what capacity I would be helping. I embarked on my 8 hour IcelandAir flight excited and nervous of what lay before me.

Prior to our work placements, we had the opportunity to receive a guided tour of the Tower Hamlets and Newham Boroughs. Walking through these streets for several hours, I was able to get a glimpse into the diversity and struggles of the area residents. I was incredibly excited to get to know and work with this community. The Vanderbilt cohort worked with the Newham Government and the St. Barts Trust to be matched and placed with various non profit and social enterprise groups throughout the London area. I was matched with JamPot, an organization that assists in helping women of various backgrounds, including violence, return or enter the workforce.

As my workplace partner, Grace, and I boarded the double decker red bus the first day of work, we had no idea what was in store for us. After a 45 minute bus ride into the heart of east Newham, the most poor and unhealthy area in London, we exited the bus ready for the day. Jampot was located in a church that you had to be buzzed into and the car park was gated. The area was rough and unlike anywhere I had spent much time. In the office, Grace and I were able to meet with the office staff, Sue, Asma, and Jeannie. The office staff, their stories and lessons, are what truly made my site and work experience. Each lady had overcome their own adversity and were working to support their families, I learned much from each of them.

Logan Brown

ENGLAND

At JamPot, Grace and I were able to watch the business and organization struggle to survive. With recent elections in London, there were many funding gaps and differences. Jampot was drastically affected and had to let go many of its office staff and cut many of it's problem. We were able to intern at a unique time as the company was transforming into a woman's center and taking on many new programs. Grace and I had the opportunity to create a unique and lasting impact but creating curriculum that will be used by the center for years to come. The curriculum will help women adjust to the workplace and prepare their resumes. We were also able to interact with woman. Sue explained to us that many of them are in or just getting out of abusive relationships and violent pasts.

Working with and in the London government system had a larger impact on me than it possible could on the woman or organizations. I learned about the complex and unthinkable struggles that so many face. I learned how to deal with adversity, how to have patience, and how to learn about others cultures. I brought back many lessons that will last me a lifetime. I can wait to use what I have learned as I go forward in life.

Eli Byerly – Duke

ENGLAND

This past summer, with the generous assistance of a Nichols Scholarship, I served at a local school in Quito, Ecuador. My trip was ostensibly arranged through Vanderbilt and the Office of Active Citizenship and Service, however my connection to the school and resource in country was an Ecuadorian Organization named Yanapuma. Based in Quito, Yanapuma raises money by connecting international volunteers with local organizations and teaching Spanish lessons as well as setting them up with Ecuadorian families to stay with. That money is then spent to assist a variety of different programs in Ecuador. While they were an invaluable resource, I did not work for them. Instead I served at INEPE, a school on the outskirts of Quito that teaches children from 6 months to 18 years old.

It is worth beginning with some background on INEPE. Quito is situated at the bottom of a valley in the Andes, which means that the edge of the city brushes up against the base of mountains. In general, the higher up neighborhoods are poorer. INEPE is in just such a neighborhood, populated mostly by the lower working class. In fact, the school is so far from the city center that many of the residents of the neighborhood had livestock, as well as small plots of land for growing some food. Similarly, INEPE has been granted a large plot of park land by the city, partly to reforest, and partly to use as farmland. My primary role at INEPE was working on this land, mostly the part used for farming. Compared to the Missouri farm that I have worked on in the past, the soil on INEPE's farm was astonishing. However, it was incredibly hilly. This meant that only minimal machinery was used: a tractor came only once a month.

As such, I primarily assisted in work that would be done by machine in the states. Because Ecuador does not have true seasons there was both planting and harvesting going on at the same time. The INEPE farm primarily grew vegetables including cabbage, lettuce, tomatoes, onions and potatoes. The first day INEPE's farmer taught me to plant vegetables in the farms premade rows. After that I (along with three other volunteers) were simply given seeds and told where and what to plant. Additionally, we would periodically harvest vegetables from around the farm, a far less involved process. We also sometimes went into the actual school building, where we would assist with teaching English across age levels, primarily focusing on the oldest students as well as the preschoolers.

Eli Byerly – Duke

ENGLAND

It would be disingenuous to claim that our assistance made a fundamental difference to INEPE. Although the school serves fairly poor students, they are well funded and had sufficient labor to operate their farm without us. However, we did give them breathing room. Because of our presence the farmer and his Ecuadorian assistant were able to focus on the more technical projects that allowed the farm to increase productivity in the long run. For example, maintaining the terraces that allowed effective agriculture on such hilly land and upgrading the farms irrigation system. This breathing room also allowed the farmer to focus more on teaching agriculture to the students, a job is usually unable to spend much time on.

This trip certainly had plenty of intrinsic value, I was able to serve in an Ecuadorian community which made a small but appreciable impact. But, of course, I also learned a tremendous amount. This can be sorted into two categories, cultural and practical knowledge. As this was my first trip South American culture was totally new to me and so the exposure to the culture was of tremendous value. By the end of the month I found myself better able to navigate social situations with Ecuadorians to effectively communicate and plan, a task that was far harder than I thought it would be. Communication was made more difficult by my lack of practical knowledge, specifically Spanish. I went in to the experience moderately capable with Spanish, but with fairly minimal conversational experience with native Spanish speakers. That changed rapidly. I am still not fluent in Spanish, but I have improved dramatically.

Additionally, while I went into the program knowing how to work a farm in the American style, I now have the practical knowledge to operate an organic farm at 10,000 feet. I intend to go into public service, and the increased perspective of this trip can only help me in my future. Please feel free to contact me with any additional questions.

Jami Cox

South Africa

My time in South Africa significantly altered my views on poverty and oppression. There I observed issues similar to those that we face here in America, but I also observed programs from which America could take a lesson. Words such as freedom and community had a new meaning for me upon my return. I was thoroughly inspired to take my new understandings and channel them into efforts to enact change here at home.

Being African American gave me a window into South African culture that my peers could not see. Before people heard my accent, they often would address me as if I was South African. It felt great to be welcomed and referred to as "sister" even in a foreign country. My sense of belonging, however, left me with an even stronger ability to relate to the harsher realities we observed. The lighter one's skin got, the larger one's house and the greener one's surrounding area became. For a nation celebrating being post-apartheid, economic disparity between races was highly prevalent. Seeing someone whom you would call sister begging on the street is much more painful when their face is similar to the one you see in mirror. It hurt more to hear the history of this country, compare it with the history of my own people, and know that at some point they were linked. The pinnacle of my experience was traveling to Robin Island. I learned how all of the black leaders were trapped there, how they continued to spearhead the movement from behind bars and how Nelson Mandela served as a political activist from his cell. These things made me realize just how powerful the South African people had been, and even more so just how far the people whom I'd been living with and observing had come.

From this trip, I have realized just how much privilege I have here in America. As an African American my ancestors had to fight for rights in a country to which they had been brought against their will, but in South Africa they had to fight for their rights in their own land which had been stolen from them. A concept I heard a lot in South Africa is Ubuntu. It means, "I am because you are". The idea has spread to America, but it has so much more meaning back there. After watching the people in the townships it seems hard to imagine how they could survive their conditions each day. It is because of Ubuntu that they are inspired to share with each other the little resources that they have. In America we often discuss our privilege, but we rarely discuss ways to use it to assist others. If Americans valued each other the way South Africans do we would have a much easier time working together to improve the entire country.

During my sophomore year I am determined to use my involvement on campus to put into action some of the lessons I learned from my experience in South Africa. So far my trip has already come in handy. I am a student VUceptor and one of my VUceptees, is South African. He was very nervous about coming to Vanderbilt and wasn't familiar with all of our customs. Having spent a month in South Africa, it was easy for me to use the knowledge I gained about his culture to help explain some of the similarities and differences in American culture. I was even able to say some words to him in Afrikaans to help him feel more at home. Bill and I are both black, but being African American is a privilege that I have and he does not. I believe the concept of Ubuntu can be used to help us channel our privileges into positive action. Before this trip, I never saw my ethnicity as a privilege. Now, I know that it is something to be proud of and something that I can use to relate to, help, and inspire others.

Jami Cox

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Riley Dankovich

Russia

I was unsure what to expect of life on the VISAGE Russia trip, and went in with as few preconceived notions as I could manage. Growing up, I had a few friends who were born in Russia or Ukraine – they were the only people on which I could base any knowledge. One of the few expectations I had about my trip was that I would be doing work in the community of Vladimir, the city in which I stayed. Before I went, though, I could not have understood the nature of that work. I thought that the work we would do that would have impact would be at the Veteran's Home, and helping paint classrooms, or gardening at churches. What I came to understand, however, is that the most important work I could have possibly taken part in was in my interactions and conversations with the Russians I encountered everyday.

In Vladimir, there were often tourists, but very few of them were English-speaking, let alone American. I did not expect that such a large number of people would want to meet us, but group after group did, especially students! We sat in on the English class of 3rd Form students in their second year of English as they learned how to talk about seasons, and they were completely taken by surprise when I responded to one of their questions to us in my basic Russian! The smiles that lit their faces were huge; later, their teacher told the group of us that we were the first foreigners many of those eight-year-olds had ever met, and that we'd given them a great impression! The high school students with whom we met wanted to practice their English, and the university students wanted to discuss the American legal system and hear about the way higher education works in America. Everyone was curious about something, and it felt incredible to share our culture with them, as they shared theirs with us!

Riley Dankovich

Russia

The greatest outcome of the entire experience is much deeper cultural understanding and acceptance. I was invited into the homes of several Russians, some in high school, some in their 30s or 40s; we would discuss my studies and my knowledge of Russian, sing nursery rhymes or folk songs in both languages, and ask questions of each others' language and culture. I left every home feeling enriched, as well as understood. Quite often, I was asked, "Why don't Americans like Russians? Here in Russia we don't dislike Americans, so what is it that Americans don't like?" This question often reached the conclusion that people listen to governments, and while Americans might not like the Russian government, and Russians might not like the American government, American people do not have problems with or dislike individual Russian people, and vice versa. I felt very quickly accepted, and people were happy to let governments and individuals be completely separate entities.

These outcomes and lessons may not seem earth shattering, or as though the VISAGE Russia group made a huge impact, but it felt like we left the same amount of knowledge about the world (and America) in the minds of our Russian friends as we gained of Russia. I strongly believe that people become better contributors to the world community when they understand other cultures, especially when they disagree with other cultures. Learning little things such as cultural expectations and mannerisms as well as big things such as the history of Vladimir (and Russia) left me feeling as though I had stretched my understanding to encompass the Russian culture. The work we did in the Veteran's Home was important and impactful, as well as with the Handicapped Children's Association, in that we were able to contribute in tangible and meaningful ways to the community hosting us, but the most impactful experience, hopefully for the Vladimir community as well as for me, was the almost constant cultural exchange and growth of understanding.

Sarah Doner

Russia

I am extremely grateful to have had the opportunity to travel to Vladimir, Russia thanks to the generosity of the Nichols Humanitarian Fund; it was a life changing experience and I learned so much during the month that I spent there. I wasn't sure what to expect initially, as I had no experience with the Russian language before my trip, but we had incredible Russian teachers from the American Home in Vladimir and our professor, David Johnson, who taught us the basics as quickly as possible to help us overcome the language barrier.

Our time in Vladimir consisted of long days filled with Russian lessons and lectures, local excursions, volunteer work, and weekend excursions to major cities, including Moscow and St. Petersburg. We stayed with host families, allowing for additional language and cultural immersion and providing a more complete picture of everyday Russian life. Every morning, we would use the bus system to get from our respective hosts' homes to the American Home, our hub for all of our Vladimir-based activities. A typical day would begin with an hour long Russian lesson, followed by a lecture or two from visiting local scholars and concluding with volunteer work and attending a folk concert. Our program consisted of a nice variety of activities and left me with a true appreciation for the city of Vladimir and a love for its citizens, but the most meaningful experiences by far consisted of our service work.

During our time in Russia, we volunteered with many groups around the city, including a nursing home for veterans, a school for mentally and physically handicapped children, churches that had fallen into disrepair, and several preschools and elementary schools, completing maintenance tasks such as gardening and painting fences. For me, the most memorable organization that we volunteered with was the veterans' home, which we visited on three separate occasions. They showed immense gratitude not only for the work that we were doing around the property, but also for providing companionship for the residents, who rarely receive visits from family. We sang songs with them and shared photos representative of our lives back in America. Although we had difficulty holding lengthy conversations and discussing matters in Russian, we were able to communicate without words, overcoming the existing language barrier by communication through smiles, hugs, and a willingness to help and learn about local culture. It was frustrating not being able to communicate everything on our own without translation, but I discovered that not everything needs to be expressed verbally. I learned a valuable lesson about the things that transcend language barriers and unite us as a human race: love, joy, and compassion.

Sarah Doner

Russia

Over the course of the trip, we got to truly experience and integrate ourselves into Russian culture. During our first full weekend in Russia, we were treated to the legendary Russian banya experience, which is a sauna-like bathhouse involving being beaten with birch branches in the intense heat followed by getting doused with freezing water, all intended to cleanse. This occasion marked our transition from visiting foreigners to active participants in the Russian culture, something that I kept in mind during all activities that we participated in from that moment on. We painted matryoshka dolls, attended folk singing and dance performances, made nails at the local Blacksmith shop, and participated in so many more meaningful local activities. I gained a true appreciation for the Russian culture, steeped in tradition and focused on strong familial bonds.

Before my trip to Russia, I was rather apprehensive, expecting the people to be as cold and standoffish as the stereotypes make them out to be; that was not the case. I found some of the most welcoming, kind individuals that I have ever met. I am so grateful to the Nichols Fund for making my participation in this trip possible. The experience and the memories that I now possess are unforgettable and I will cherish them greatly for the rest of my life.

Banita Giri

Nepal

"The oak fought the wind and was broken, the willow bent when it must and survived" (Robert Jordan, The Fires of Heaven). My service in Kathmandu, Nepal in the aftermath of the April 2015 Gorkha earthquake gave me a deeper understanding on human resilience in the face of adversity. My initial plan for the Nichols grant was to teach in a boarding school serving untouchables in Bangalore, India. However, on April 25, 2015, when I woke up to 15 missed calls from various numbers from Nepal, my plans changed. Confused, I consulted social media and confronted heart-stopping news: Kathmandu had been rocked by a devastating 8.1 magnitude earthquake. Although my family and friends were unhurt and their homes stayed intact, the thought of thousands of Nepalese suffering from damage gnawed at me. That weekend I contacted Vanderbilt's SACE to plan an impromptu fundraising initiative for the Nepalese earthquake victims. Many students from MLC's umbrella of clubs such as AASA and VUCA volunteered any time they had to spare from studying for finals to help make bubble tea, sell donuts and coffee, and ask for donations from students and staff. Together we raised over $2000, an extraordinary feat considering the timing, lack of a rigorous advertising campaign, and abruptness of the event. It was this money along with the Nichols' generous award that enabled me to change my plans and serve earthquake affected areas in Nepal.

I spent my time in Nepal volunteering for two organizations: a foreign task-force group funded by the Salvation Army and a local organization run by Nepalese people called Help Nepal Network. I also donated the fundraised money to the Prime Minister's Earthquake Fund for its commitment to transparency and ability to influence sustainable change for the Nepali people.

Through Salvation Army, I travelled to remote, affected villages on helicopters and acted as a translator, helping distribute food such as rice, lentils, oil, salt, water, and various supplies like tarpaulins and mosquito repellants. The most severely affected district, Sindhupalchowk, is made of countless villages dispersed along the tall mountains surrounding Kathmandu valley. The struggle these villagers faced was that they weren't able to receive aid from Nepali government because of their hard-to-reach, remote locations and distance from major roads. In fact, they would have to walk for more than 2 days to get to major hubs for aid. Fortunately, the Salvation Army concentrated its efforts on these communities and was able to give out aid to these forgotten villages. During my time in Nepal, I participated in more than 10 such trips and helped prepare distribution supplies in between trips. I traveled to Sindhupalchowk, Ramechhap, Gorkha, and Thame valley as well as many scattered communities on the edges of Kathmandu valley. When I left Kathmandu, we had distributed a total of 110,000 kg of rice, 36,000 kg of lentils, 7,000 liters of oil, and more. We also provided 10 water filters, 3,000 tarpaulins, 904 solar lamps, 440 hygiene kits, 800 school kits and other supplies.

Banita Giri

Nepal

As a Nepali, I was able to contrast the experience of my people through the eyes of foreigners. A major lesson I learned is that there is a paradox in foreign aid. I realized that volunteerism has become a trend, a romantic ideal that westerners dream of while perusing their iPhones in sleek air-conditioned homes. Unfortunately, I saw some of this well-meaning ignorance while working with the Salvation Army. For example, I was one of the only translators in the group. One complaint I frequently heard from villagers was that foreigners would distribute supplies with no knowledge of the politics and ethnic hierarchies stirring the communities. If a certain member in the community steps up and understands English, he/she would serve as the primary liaison between us and the villagers, smiling, nodding and promising to distribute precious supplies such as medicine to everyone in the village. However, as soon as our group left, this liaison would succumb to the powerful families of ethnic "superiority" (Nepal is still affected by the caste system) who would hoard these precious supplies leaving poorer families, single mothers, and the disabled to fend for themselves. As a Nepali, I understood these struggles but was unequipped to do more than voice warnings. Many of my foreign team members were oblivious to these ethnic strains and left the villages with a romantic view of pastoral life, unwilling to admit that human errors like greed and trickery runs through every community. After several such trips, I came to the realization that when serving in foreign communities, oversights such as these are inevitable – there is only so much one can do before leaving it up to the communities. We must trust in the overall goodness of the people during emergency aid scenarios. However, I think there is a lot of room for improvement such as employing skilled translators, communicating with several village leaders frequently, and doing follow-ups to ensure fairness.

I also worked with Help Nepal Network to make sure I had a holistic understanding of the differences between international and local aid. The headquarters for Help Nepal was simplistic. The earthquake had rendered their office buildings inhabitable, pushing the employees to work in the front lawn of a house under hastily made tarpaulins, sipping mint water while batting away mosquitoes. This organization has been a fixture of the community for over 15 years, building schools, libraries, and running youth programs all over Nepal. Help Nepal asked me to create a database of supplies, contacts, and districts they had aided since the earthquake. Their method of record-keeping until then was a notebook which didn't allow for efficient analysis. I created a database for them, documenting over 20,000 entries. I gave the spreadsheet to an employee when I left and trained her on how to use Excel for record-keeping.

Help Nepal collected relief supplies but relied on community leaders from rural parts of Nepal to travel to Kathmandu to pick up and transport the supplies themselves. Due to their presence in Nepal and connection with locals all over the country, this method worked best for them and allowed them to keep administrative costs low. However, the same problems of accountability remained because there wasn't a system that ensured that the supplies were distributed fairly in the communities. Due to the staff shortage, frequent "check-ins" were not possible. I liked working with Help Nepal because it was Nepalese people helping other Nepalese people. The leaders of this organization knew the customs, dos, and don'ts of the people they were serving better than foreign organizations could.

Banita Giri

Nepal

My time in Nepal was invaluable because both organizations gave me tremendous insights into how emergency service works. I count myself very lucky to have been able to explore my country, meet new people and encounter different ethnicities and customs in a way that I had not been able to before. I also found it rewarding to witness the resiliency of the Nepali people. Despite being a time of stress and panic, everyone maintained a light-hearted, can-do attitude. One thing I loved was to hear people making funny quips about the earthquake so as to chase away the tension and foster community. No matter what, everyone kept a smile on.

As a young Nepali living abroad, I was taken aback by the mobilization of the youth to fundraise and their dedication to serve. Organizations like Help Nepal and Salvation Army were filled with young people ready to take time to help each other.

Nepali youth like me often fall prey to cynicism about our country because of the decade-long civil war, unstable government, corrupt politicians, lack of electricity and water that have plagued our country. However, it was refreshing to witness so many helping hands come together in a time of need. I left Nepal with a hopeful heart after witnessing a nation of young people unburdened with the caste prejudices and narrow-mindedness of our elders, willing to serve and mend the cracks of the earthquake.

I give my sincerest thanks to the Nichols Fund for allowing me to partake in serving the victims of the Nepal Earthquake. My experiences have led me to continue helping Nepali refugees (and refugees from other countries) through the Nashville International Center for Empowerment (NICE) where I volunteer on a weekly basis to educate refugees on their health.

Safiah Hassan

Morocco

My journey in Morocco was exactly that—a journey, of finding myself outside the contexts and constricts of the United States and strictly Western ideals. I learned so much from the trip, whether that was from our sessions, from my placement, or from those around me.

From my placement, I learned that feminism, especially non-western, religious, or intersectional feminism, is even more diverse in thought than I originally knew. From those around me, I learned that friendships don't have to be long to be genuine, and that cultural exchange, especially about current issues, is incredibly valuable.

In fact, I vividly remember one conversation I had with a Moroccan friend of mine. He was telling me that in Morocco, secularism is a form of racism. He told me that he had grown out his beard and although this is an Islamic thing to do, his job at a hotel mandated him to shave it. He mentioned that this was a religious thing, but it was not considered "professional," even in a country where the majority of people using the service are Muslim. I told him that this reminded me of the plight of black women in the united states, and how often times their natural hair is considered unprofessional for the workplace, which is a form of racism. We both walked away from the conversation enlightened.

I learned that life exists far beyond and far from Vanderbilt, which was difficult for me to imagine before the trip, as I have put so much of myself into this institution. It made me realize that there is so much to do, see, and learn outside of the Vanderbilt bubble and it reminded me that I needed to take time to occasionally do things for myself, and have time outside of the stressors of university involvements, rather than constantly doing things for others.

I learned that my style and personality is different when exposed to different sights. Never have I felt more self-confident or beautiful as when I was in Morocco, and I think it is because I've never been in a majority Muslim country or in a majority POC country in my adult life, and being free of exoticization and tokenization (besides my American nationality) while being considered beautiful was incredibly freeing. Seeing different models, actors, and every day people that looked so different from those in the United States showed me that beauty is far from one-dimensional. Lastly, I learned that service learning is incredibly eye opening and important, especially for students bringing their new knowledge to their future careers. I came into the program skeptical of the process, but came out a complete believer. I think this is a testament to how strong of an impact a service learning experience can have on a person. Morocco was a complete journey in every way for me, and I am incredibly thankful that I was afforded the opportunity to go. It made me realize that there is so much to do, see, and learn outside of the Vanderbilt bubble and it reminded me that I needed to take time to occasionally do things for myself, and have time outside of the stressors of university involvements, rather than constantly doing things for others.

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Emily Hebert

South Africa

My experiences in South Africa were eye-opening in a multitude of different ways. Even though I had already researched and conceptualized the systematized racism in theory, I was still astonished to actually see how the overt, cruel discrimination during the time of apartheid not only left behind scars evident today, but also how obviously it formulated the country's current division of wealth and demographic settlement patterns. I marveled at the thoughts shared by Clive Mentzel and his colleagues, people who crafted a constitution in a time when peaceful reconciliation was unanimously recognized as necessary. They had to answer the much murkier question of how to implement that process and usher in a new democracy.

As I witnessed the everyday life in cities I visited in South Africa (Port Elizabeth and Cape Town), I was fascinated at how they varied widely but were still connected by their shared national history and certain cultural norms.

For instance, while Port Elizabeth was much more industrial and Cape Town was much more geared toward tourists, both cities exhibited clear segregation between townships along racial (though non-mandated this time) as well as economic lines. Also, in both cities, everyday life was saturated with religious sermons and gospel music pouring from the radio, and conversations with locals frequently turned to how faith would help them overcome any struggles they were facing.

The whole experience threw into sharp relief the need to create more equitable societies worldwide, so that people don't need to demonstrate such mental strength in order to carry on, but instead have the resources to thrive and cooperate together. At the Missionvale Care Center, the holistic community center in which I worked, I most often helped to sort and compile hundreds of food and hygiene products into weekly parcels to community members in need, but I also distributed TOMS shoes to local children, organized prescription medications in the clinic's pharmacy, and collected footage and interviews for inclusion in a promotional video for a center.

Emily Hebert

South Africa

Another activity, which was perhaps my favorite, was wrapping Christmas presents for the local children. Seeing the sheer number of entirely donation-based gifts that were in demand – so many that the staff sort and wrap gifts year-round -- was truly staggering. Similarly, visiting the Sapphire Road Primary School outside Port Elizabeth and Monte Christo Miqlat non-profit in Paarl imprinted lasting memories of how big a difference individualized attention to children can make but also how resilient people can be, particularly when families and communities pull together. In addition, across all our travels, one of the culturally immersive experiences that I most deeply appreciated was the reverent celebration of Youth Day, which commemorates the power of youth to speak out and was established in response to the awful violence during the 1976 Soweto uprising.

Ultimately, the trip has made me feel more capable of quickly determining how my skills would be applicable to implementing a plan that could help a community in need of change. Also, the program definitely influenced how I interpret both the meaning and the importance of global citizenship. In the way that only travel can, the trip provided me with an understanding of how, in different locations, the same issues arise, although they might manifest themselves differently. In addition, I am now more committed to actively participating in my community and staying abreast of public opinion regarding problems and solutions that are proposed through legislation. Overall, the trip certainly helped lay the groundwork for building the skills to facilitate positive community interaction and for strongly motivating me to employ thoughtful solutions and a sense of fairness to improve people's lives directly through policy, my career interest.

Madeleine Hebert

MOROCCO

For a month of this summer I had the incredible opportunity to live and work in Rabat, the capital of Morocco. I was able to wander this unique city of Berber and Arab culture and volunteer in rural areas with both an HIV/AIDS non-profit and a free community preschool. Living in a homestay in the old medina, I was able to experience some of traditional Moroccan lifestyle and on the weekends explore other Moroccan locales of Marrakech, Essaouira, Fès, and Chefchaouen. Overall, I was able to immerse myself in the day-to-day tasks and challenges of international non-profits as I crossed into a new world and learned about the impact of culture—what seems to separate us, but most of all, what unites us.

Lying at the intersection of multiple worlds, Morocco is a nation of dualities: historic and modern, Arabic and French, Islamic and westernized. Although located squarely on the western African coast, the country culturally straddles the borders of the Middle East and Africa. I was glad to be able to wander its marchés, medinas, and even—at top speed—its taxi routes crammed in Cadillac taxi cabs with seven other passengers. Perhaps the most immersive experiences were my interactions with my beautiful host family, who live a more traditional lifestyle in the old medina (but with Wi-Fi). Although the parents spoke only a few words of English and no French, our host brother and sister were fluent in English and extremely kind in translating for us. I loved in particular the warmth we felt from our host mother despite the language barrier from her constant daily tending to us with her refrain of "Kuli! Kuli" or "Eat! Eat!" I also particularly enjoyed the unity and kindness people displayed leading up to and during the month of Ramadan (the beginning of which coincided with the last few days of our trip). The Moroccans showed strong solidarity in their time of fasting and showing compassion to others, and their bountiful late-night meals to break their fasts (especially the traditional soup harira) were delicious!

My volunteer experiences in Morocco allowed me to delve into a few different perspectives —particularly on health care, education, and the role of community outreach. First, my colleague Alva and I volunteered with OPALS, Organisation Pan-Africaine de Lutte Contre le SIDA (HIV/AIDS). We were stagiares (French for interns) with the Rabat chapter of this pan-continental organization that treats HIV as well as does advocacy and education on HIV/AIDS and reproductive health. Their current goals are to expand their advocacy division and to widen their publicity, especially by increasing their social media presence. Though there were significant language barriers with the largely Darija-speaking OPALS staff, Alva and I had valuable discussions with them about the role of OPALS in improving health in Morocco through HIV outreach and the impact of cross-cultural differences on access and approaches to reproductive health care. One of the things I was most fascinated to learn —both from OPALS staff and other interns we met working with reproductive health nonprofits—is that the stigma of HIV/AIDS is strong in Morocco but more or less equivalent to that of the U.S. Traditional gender roles and cultural values of purity do not always prevent Moroccans, especially younger generations, from seeking care. We were even able to assist in record-keeping for a program through OPALS to provide regular STI testing and care for sex workers, a system yet to exist throughout the U.S. Alva and I were able to assist in several organizational tasks at the chapter, and our greatest accomplishment was increasing the reach of the OPALS Morocco Facebook page. We updated it to provide thorough news and information on HIV/AIDS

treatment, particularly in Morocco and worked closely with the communications director to discuss ways of drawing support for the page and keeping it relevant.

During the last week of our trip, Alva and I transferred work-site placements to a non-profit preschool in a rural area called Youth Takkadom Association (YTA), where we were able to experience new perspective and enriching direct service as English teachers to young Moroccan toddlers ages 2-5. It was a wonderful experience to teach and play with a group of kids who will grow up to be trilingual (at least) and to see them take their first stumbling steps to absorb Darija, French, and English by learning three different versions of the alphabet, numbers, and colors. I recognized the difficulty of this task as the Darija lessons flew quickly over my head, and through their language introductions I came to appreciate the importance of being facile in multiple modes of thought (i.e. for Moroccans—knowing Darija for conversations, standard Arabic in school, French and English for international affairs or academics).Overall, my experiences during my month in Morocco taught me a lot about living in multiple modes of thought. Switching back and forth from Darija, French, and English is a powerful example (of which I will never be capable), but the demands of both my life in Morocco and my life post-trip require a lot of code-switching as well. I only hope I can hold on to the lessons of cross-cultural communication and adaptability in leadership enforced by my adventures in Morocco as I take on my current adventure of medical school and all adventures to come.

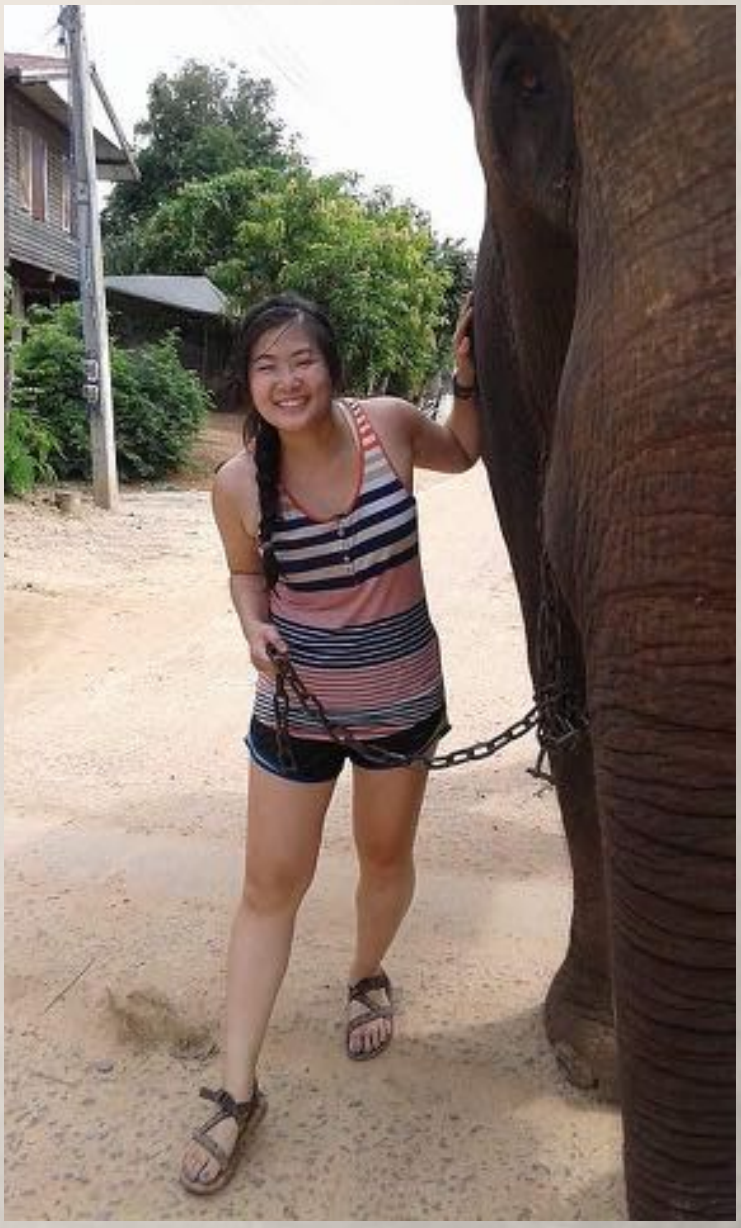
Charlotte How

Thailand

"This one has mushrooms growing in it!" "Sweet, I found a pile that's still warm." "Do I pick it up with my hand?" These are all phrases that I'd never in my life expected to hear in casual conversation, much less say myself—and yet these are all phrases that were commonly used one muggy afternoon, as my team and I collected elephant dung for papermaking. At that point during my time in the village, however, I'd become quite accustomed to having my expectations defied. The phrase, "expect the unexpected," once a trite, flippant saying, had become my dominant mindset. Over the course of two weeks, I'd become prepared to be unprepared as I faced each new day.

This summer, I spent fourteen days in a small village outside of Surin, Thailand. Baan Ta Thit, is colloquially known as "the Elephant Project Village"—an apt name considering its contents. Everything, from the wide streets suitable for the elephants to parade along, to the sugarcane growing by the riverside, has been strategically designed to accommodate the town's largest inhabitants.

In the 80s, the Thai regime changed laws governing the use of elephants, restricting logging activities that once generated income for farmers. The mahouts, Thai owners of these three-ton, voracious creatures, suddenly found themselves as caretakers of these giant pets that no longer could earn their keep. The Elephant Project was formed in order to provide the mahouts with an economically sustainable, and profitable, way to keep their elephants. It creates the infrastructure and means by which mahouts can make a living from the elephants, without having to engage in illegal logging activities



My team and I worked specifically with the Elephant Study Center, the hub of activity for the village. I was surprised by how much fun it could be to spend hours picking through big piles of poo. After gathering a large quantity of dung, we would pull on heavy rubber boots and stomp around the pile, as if we were winemakers dancing through a tub of grapes. After several rounds of rinsing and bleaching, we'd use a rectangular filter to gather the wet fibers.

Charlotte How

Thailand

The hot Thai sun would dry the soupy mix into large, soft sheets of white paper In the afternoons, we sat under the shade of the tropical trees, talking and laughing as we glued our handmade paper onto small wooden picture frames, which would one day be purchased by visitors coming to see the gentle giants. I wondered many times how many of my frames would sit on the mantle, or work space, of mothers and fathers and teachers and friends. While the intent of our volunteer work was to help jump-start the village's "poo paper" business, I felt as if I gained far, far more than I gave. I came in as a first-world college student, accustomed to perfectly manicured lawns, climate-controlled shops and restaurants, a plush bed to sleep on, and an agenda consisting solely of lectures, homework, and time with friends. The prospect of sleeping on thin bamboo mats, taking bucket showers, and spending the majority of my waking hours handling the waste of nature's largest land animals, frankly, was not in my comfort zone.

I quickly learned, however, that what I once considered crucial to having a "good" life —modern amenities, perfect hygiene, and lavish wealth—when removed, were not missed. There was so much joy in the simplicity of going to bed when the sun when down, and waking up when the sunrise illuminated my mosquito-netted room. It was liberating to spend the day covered in sugar cane juice and sweat and mud. I thought that I'd do work in the village, but the village did work in me. Perhaps I will return to Baan Ta Thit someday—there is much work to be done, and as the operation grows, more and more hands are needed. However, one thing is certain: a part of that country will always remain in me. I'll recognize Surin in my life, by the way I face this semester with a can-do attitude, excited for any environment, ready to work hard, and able to laugh about even the poo on my shoes.

Kristin Ingram

SOUTH AFRICA

Never would I have thought that in my senior year at Vanderbilt I would have the opportunity to travel abroad again. But thanks to those at the Office of Active Citizenship and Service and especially to the Nichols, I found myself once again packing my bags for an international trip. And this time to a place I had always dreamt of going, the Motherland, specifically to South Africa. My interest in international travel is a result of my semester abroad in the spring of 2014. I had the opportunity to spend time in Santiago, Dominican Republic and to visit Haiti as well. Learning about the African diaspora from a completely different perspective drove me to want to learn and travel more, and South Africa provided me with the perfect opportunity. From the first time I arrived at my volunteer site at Missionvale Care Centre, the people of the community welcomed me as if I were their own. But it wasn't just my skin color or looks that made it feel as if I belonged but similar experiences and humor and values and ways of living that connected me to the people of Missionvale. One great example of this is my relationship with the women of the nutrition unit. I got along with them so well with that they offered to cook me and the other Vanderbilt volunteers a home-cooked meal and we were able to bake apple pie and chocolate chip cookies to return the favor. Another time I can remember feeling at home was when I was able to visit a local church on Sunday morning. Memories and fellowships such as these are ones that I will never forget.

I was able to apply this knowledge and experience of the African diaspora to form stronger relationships, which in turn allowed me to make stronger humanitarian efforts. Forming these relationships, gave me the opportunity to have real discussions with South Africans about their community and concerns. Through these conversations, coupled with our reflection sessions and lectures, I gained greater knowledge about the history and present circumstances of the country, which provided me with the tools, language, and sensitivity to better tackle the volunteer work that we were doing. Before my trip to South Africa, I had not done humanitarian work outside of the United States or even outside of communities that I identified with, but as a global citizen learning how to do community work with others different from yourself is most important. My time in South Africa provided me with the exposure and experiences to learn how to do this, and I look forward to using these lessons to impact other communities in a way that is mutually beneficial.

Lastly, understanding the community in which I worked helped me to better understand myself. Taking a closer look within myself, as suggested by my one-on-one meetings and reflection sessions, I was able to identify how my talents and interests could align with the needs of the community. As a result, I was able to use my major—marketing and communications—to help Missionvale. Myself and another student, who's minor was film, decided to collaborate to create a video for Missionvale—which is currently still in the works. I will never forget my time in South Africa and the impact that its people had on me. I am so blessed to have had this experience before finishing my undergraduate career. Now, as I go out into the 'real world' I commit to continue to learn more, see more, and hopefully to travel more so that I can use my talents to help our ever-changing global society in whatever capacity that I can. This trip has proven that I am capable of doing so.

Brittany Jackson

ENGLAND

On the first tube ride out of Heathrow to our "home stop" of Mile End, I sat exhausted by the trip from Nashville. International flights are not my thing, which I knew before leaving. Even so, I was ready to engage with the new environment and dive fully into the opportunities available. Day one involved a standard lunch of fish and chips, and settling into the flat that we would share for the next thirty days. The experience in London mostly challenged me in communicating with others, building and maintaining personal relationships, and cultural competence. Working primarily in Tower Hamlets placed us directly within a predominately Muslim population. While I was comfortable navigating a new culture and had awareness of this faith tradition, the depth with which I was able to engage and encounter Islam were critical as I prepare to pursue a master's degree in theological studies. The organization I was placed with, Social Action for Health (SAfH), provided multiple conversation partners who were as interested in honest dialogue about faith, culture, and community as I was. This cultural exchange was extremely powerful as we discussed issues of extremism, health care failures, and prejudice. Being the time of Ramadan, I was able to bear witness to the faithful observation of tradition within the workplace, the community, and home of a diverse collection of Muslims. Although Londoners have a reputation for polite distance, my engagement with all residents proved to be quite the opposite. The openness of dialogue, sharing of personal stories, and thoughtfulness of questioning impressed and engaged me deeply.

Beyond the experience of the workplace and community, our cohort was able to gain a wide of understanding of politics, business, and government activities within the local and national spheres. Meeting with government officials representing different municipalities provided our group with a deep understanding of the challenges facing multiple levels of government. In Newham, London, we were able to meet with the dynamic Sir Robin Wales, Mayor of the borough. Not only did he meet with us directly and speak with us about challenges, successes, and difficulties in his job, his staff, and council members were welcoming and open in providing us information related to their roles in enacting change. At Parliament, we were greeted by Lord Patel, who provided us with information related to our individual interests within the House of Lords and personally gave us a tour. This tour included entering the private waiting area for the Queen, fascinating details of the history of his role, and a viewing of one of the original eight copies of the Magna Carta.

Our cohort also had fun! We attended many of the famous attractions around London. On the second day after arriving, many of us attended a parade for the Queen, where we were waved to by members of the royal family. Following this event, we joined a walking tour that gave us a wonderful tour of central London that highlighted major historical events and unique facts of the city. Our group went to pubs, weekend markets, and famous museums. We went to a restaurant launch for Jamie Oliver, a famous British restaurateur and chef, and took the tube to Royal Observatory at Greenwich. A friend and I walked through the Queen's rose garden at Regent's park. We got lost multiple times walking through central London and quickly discovered that the tube closes after midnight and bus routes change during nighttime hours. This opportunity was significant for me for many reasons. First, it is likely the last time I will be able to stay abroad for a significant amount of time without moving. This experience provided me with the opportunity to practice consultation skills in the nonprofit setting, which is a personal goal of mine post graduation.

Brittany Jackson

ENGLAND

Additionally, the direct engagement in a foreign workplace addressed my interests in human resource management and understanding of workplace culture. Two weeks prior to leaving for London, I got married. A special outcome of this was that my husband was also able to travel to London, his first time leaving the country. We visited his cousin and her family who lives in Belfast. I was also stretched personally, having to manage a significant personal relationship in addition to navigating a new experience. While I would not suggest this method to others, the adjustment and challenge provided the opportunity to focus heavily on communication and foundation of a strong marriage.

Thank you, Mr. and Mrs. Nichols for the financial support that allowed myself and so many other students to have these amazing experiences. I appreciate all that you have done for the OACS programs and your dedication to community service.

Deron Johnson

Appalachian Citizens' Law Center

For the portion of my summer funded by the Nichols Humanitarian Fund, I worked as an intern with the Appalachian Citizens' Law Center in Whitesburg, Kentucky. ACLC is a small nonprofit law firm that employs four attorneys and two policy analysts. The lawyers employed by ACLC work in three areas, all related to coal mining. First, the majority of their work consists of representing miners and their families seeking black lung benefits in administrative proceedings. Second, they represent miners in mine safety whistleblowing cases who have reported or refused to work in unsafe conditions and were discharged or retaliated against by their employer as a result. Third, they work on environmental cases involving individuals harmed or threatened by mining. As the only legal intern with the organization, I was fortunate enough to assist the attorneys in each of these three areas.

First, I was able to assist on several cases of individual miners and miners' widows who were seeking black lung benefits. Doing so was eye-opening on several levels. First, I gained exposure to a self-contained universe of law that very few, if any, law students have an opportunity to see. Under the Black Lung Benefits Act of 1973, the United States Department of Labor set up a federal tribunal solely committed to adjudicating black lung benefits claims. Because of the specific nature of this body of law, very few lawyers—and even fewer law students—can claim experience practicing in it. Second, some of these cases involve the practice of law at the highest levels. For instance, I was able to help with research for a filing in the United States Supreme Court, which is presently considering whether to take up an appeal from a black lung benefits claim filed by a miner represented by ACLC. Third, and most importantly, this was the area of law that gave me the most face-to-face contact with the clients represented by ACLC, and thus it was the area in which I saw most clearly the impact that ACLC has on the lives of everyday people. I was able to meet several of the clients whose cases I was working on, and got to talk to them about how ACLC was able to meet their needs. Having been born and raised in an area of eastern Kentucky not too far from Whitesburg, I cherished getting to meet these people—who reminded me so much of those from my hometown—and helping them get benefits for the sickness that their career had given them.

Deron Johnson

Appalachian Citizens' Law Center

Second, I worked on a case of a miner who had been fired after reporting unsafe working conditions in his mine. While it might not have seemed so at first, this is a crucially important part of the work that ACLC does. Most of my travels involved in my internship took me by the site of the Scotia mine disaster, which is located just outside of Whitesburg. One of the worst mining disasters in American history, the Scotia mine disaster killed 26 miners and rescuers as a result of methane build-up in a poorly ventilated mine. And while the accident eventually led to the passage of the Federal Mine Safety and Health Act of 1977, Scotia and its victims—many of whom have descendants in the area to this day—stand as a stark reminder that it is crucial to make sure that miners who report unsafe working conditions feel confident in doing so that they won't be fired or retaliated against.

Third, I worked with ACLC attorneys on environmental cases to ensure that coal companies are living up to their environmental expectations.

I grew up in a part of Eastern Kentucky where there wasn't much mining. So while I had heard my entire life about mountaintop removal mining, I had never seen a strip mine until this summer. It was incredible—you could see miles and miles of mountains that had had their entire sides removed for as far as you could see. The environmental impacts were enormous. Nothing so much defined the impacts as a trip I took to Black Mountain, the highest mountain peak in Kentucky. The summit is located less than a mile away from the Kentucky-Virginia border. Because of its significance, Kentucky has taken steps to protect the land on its side of Black Mountain from mountaintop removal mining; however, the Virginia side enjoys no such protection. Standing at the summit and comparing the Kentucky side of the mountain, still lush, green, and protected from development, with the Virginia side, which had largely been stripped away, provided an important example of why environmental protections seeking to protect the mountains of Appalachia are so important. Working for ACLC was an experience that I'll treasure. It was wonderful to be able to go back to the area that I call home and make a difference, and I'm thankful to the Nichols Humanitarian Fund for helping to make it happen.

Marley Kern

At the beginning of the trip, we were to write down things we wanted to do or keep in mind while we were in Ecuador. Each of these words played out over the course of the trip through my volunteer experience at Camp Hope, a school for children with special needs, and through my adventure in the Ecuadorian culture I had dropped myself in. Although I had several words written down, here are the ones that stood out to me during my powerful time in Ecuador.

Take opportunities: one of the first nights in Quito, I decided to go talk with my host family out in the dining area in order to practice my Spanish. The man who is about my grandfather's age went and brought out a scrapbook. In it contained all of these articles and newspaper clippings about missing hikers. After talking for a while, I finally understood: he was one of the missing hikers. For eight days, he and the others survived in the Andes Mountains. His mother put together the scrapbook for him, complete with letters from important, powerful, and famous people. If I had not taken the opportunity to talk to my host family, I may never had known that about his life, and this conversation opened the door for more conversations about his adventures.

Accept others: I learned that many of the prejudices we have about different races also exist in Ecuador. While watching the news, our host family often warned us about the different groups of people to be wary of, making me slightly uncomfortable because of my appreciation for diversity. From the Columbians to the Africans, my host family educated us on the stereotypes that existed in their culture. Although my host family did not accept everyone, I tried my best, especially when working at Camp Hope. Some of the children had disabilities so severe they could not hold their head up or eat independently. Yet when they smiled, they could light up your day. Full acceptance of these children was difficult for me because they had such extreme needs. However, I learned to accept these children by watching the other teachers at the school, the ones who considered them as their own children, who loved them despite their disabilities. If only everyone in the world was as accepting as the teachers at Camp Hope…

Obedience: My main purpose was to be the teachers' assistant at Camp Hope. Whatever they told me, I did to the best of my ability. Although there was a language barrier, as my Spanish was terrible when I arrived in Quito, I was able to deduce what my teacher was trying to express to me. Had I decided to do my own thing and disobey the lead teacher, it could have been perceived that I felt their instructions were not applicable to me, that I was above that. In reality, I was their guest. I was their student. Originally, their activities were strange to me, ineffective, yet I realized that was my ethnocentrism telling me that. As I continued to work and obey, I began to probe about the reasons for these activities, to learn their reasoning where I saw little. It was a humbling experience to be in that position, especially in the beginning when I felt that my 2 years of education on students with special needs eclipsed their education in the area. Yet they had years of practical experience, and they did what worked for them and their students. I was not there to radically change their school. I was there to love and to learn.

Positivity: Positivity was crucial when working at Camp Hope. The majority of the children are orphans who were abandoned by their parents because they could not afford to care for their child. The majority of the students require wheelchairs. Most were non-verbal. They were unable to get a decent education because the government did not have the resources to provide services for these children.

Marley Kern

However, they were lucky enough to have been placed in Camp Hope's care. They were lucky enough to have food and people to assist them. They were fortunate enough to be surrounded by positivity and love, and I was able to be a part of that family, even though it was only a month. The place these children were in went from being an inferior place when compare to what we have in the United States, to the best place in Ecuador for these kids. And the positivity and love the teachers and volunteers had at the school is what changed my perspective.

These were the words that stuck out to me when I reflect on my time in Ecuador. Although I had kindness, freedom, education, respect, and selflessness written down, my thinking was not radically changed in regards to that word, or it went along with another category I have already touched on. Overall, my experience in Ecuador was informative and formative, as my perspective has changed for the better.

Christine Lim

MOROCCO

When I first walked out of the Rabat-Sale airport in Morocco, I could not believe that I was in the continent of Africa. This was the first time that I was in a country where I didn't speak the main languages of the country, Moroccan Arabic (also known as Darija) and French. In addition, I knew the culture, food, and religion was different; but I knew for sure that I was ready and excited for the challenges in the upcoming month. Morocco was the perfect place for this. Bread was a stable component of their diet. Waking up to rooster calls, five times of Islamic calls of prayers (including one that was approximately 3:30AM), the smell of fresh bread, and the sweet scent of Moroccan mint tea became part of my daily norms.

Rabat is a beautiful city that has a big beach, palace, lighthouse, and traditional markets. The members from our cohort from the Vanderbilt Office of Active Citizenship and Services stayed with homestay families in the old Medina of Rabat so we could be fully immersed into Moroccan culture. The Medina is a neighborhood that consists of colorful walls, hallways, outdoor markets, and no street signs. When our tour guide and site leader, Lauren Moon, taught us the way to get to the Center for Cross-Cultural Learning, (CCCL), our directions were to turn right at the pink wall, remember the fountain, and make a left at the coke sign. Every day, as I walked through the Medina, I felt as if I was walking through a maze full of wonders.

For a month, I was working as an English teacher at an association called La Fondation Orient Occident with another student from my cohort, Jamal. La Fondation Orient Occident is an association that provides many opportunities and classes to every one of different backgrounds (especially immigrants). You didn't have to be Moroccan to participate; we had many Sub-Saharans in our class.The organization seeks to help bridge the gap between different cultures and "serves as a bridge between the two shores of the Mediterranean." I admired the organization's mission so much and it touched my heart to see how they bring so many people together by opening its doors to classes, a space to study, play music, and community activities. I was glad to see many associations and organizations exist that were similar to this one in Morocco. The sense of community was so inspiring and it made me think of how we can bring the collaboration from place to place.

Every morning, Jamal and I had quite a scenic and adventurous ride to our service site. We took a white taxi for approximately 20 minutes to get to the NGO (non-governmental organization) in Al-Manal. The white taxis were no ordinary taxis. It was a small Mercedes-Benz car, which in the United States, would legally fit a driver and 4 passengers. However, the Moroccan way consisted of squishing 4 passengers in the back, 2 passengers in the front, and the driver As Americans, Jamal and I looked physically bigger to Moroccans and several times, they would laugh at us and try to speak to us in Darija. In response, we would use charades as our form of communication and laugh along. It would always be a hot, sweaty, and compacted ride until we felt the breeze of the beautiful ocean.

Every morning, we would pass by the ocean as the sun was shining and the best part was when we were going home from work during sunset.

When I found out that I was working as an English teacher at La Fondation Orient Occident, I was so excited. As a child, it was my dream to be able to teach and I have such a big passion for teaching. On the 1st day of working at La Fondation Orient Occident, I wasn't sure what to expect and in fact, I was nervous to teach English to a class of Moroccans. I questioned myself, "How am I going to teach English when I don't speak Darija or French?" It didn't help much that on the 1st day, our supervisor was sick and a staff in the organization pointed to the group of students and told us that's our class. It was a bit unorganized because we never had a permanent classroom, a whiteboard, marker, or eraser. In addition, the supervisor didn't split the students into a beginner and advanced class. At first, it was a bit frustrating because we weren't sure if the students understood that we were dividing the class into 2 classes: Beginner English and Advanced English. Although the English classes were registered programs in the organization, there weren't enough resources there. Therefore, there weren't enough rooms to accommodate all the programs and activities and time to time, we would be asked to move somewhere else.

By 2002, 58% of the population in Rabat, Morocco said that English was their favorite language. The percentage has only increased since then. The official languages of Morocco were Berber, Arabic, and Moroccan Arabic. English was an important language to many people and I don't think I realized that until I came to Morocco and saw how much English was valued there. On the 1st day of class, I asked my students, "Why do you all want to learn English?" There were so many inspirational answers, including Elias (13 years old) who said, "I want to be an engineer and go to the United States and find engineering jobs there." Some students said they wanted to travel the world and English would be very useful for them. It felt very important to have a role as a teacher, especially in Morocco. The students were hard workers and English was their third, fourth, or fifth language. Jamal and I were very inspired and we came up with lesson plans the night prior to our class and I realized, this was hard work and took a lot of effort and planning. It made me appreciate my professors at Vanderbilt more than I already do, when I came back to school because I understood how hard it was to be a teacher. The job isn't as easy as it looks and they educate and change many lives.

On the 1st day, I was already impressed by their eagerness and determination to learn English. They call us "Teacher." Many of them said that "English is a beautiful language" and they hope to be able to communicate and help the world with their knowledge of English. I'm glad that I was able to build meaningful relationships with my students as well as seeing the progress made. A student, Yolande (22 years old), couldn't even pronounce the alphabets. By week 2, she spoke sentences such as, "Thank you, teacher. I have to go to the supermarket later." It was such a wonderful experience planning such as Jeopardy and Pictionary lessons because we wanted to make them fun. It was a little heart-breaking when our students asked, "How long is this program and when will it be your last day?" Sadly, we told them that we weren't sure if the program would continue, but as teachers, Jamal and I would have to leave after 4 weeks. Although I know that the service work made a great impact, I still feel that not much is done and only a bandage was put on the problem. However, I know it was a positive experience and it will continue to improve.

When I first walked through the Medina, I felt a bit awkward and uncomfortable with the culture shock I was facing. As an Asian-American female in Morocco, I always felt like an outsider no matter how friendly and kind Moroccans were. I learned about Moroccan culture and catcalling for woman and how it started because Moroccan women had chosen marriages

or couldn't as a part of their culture. Therefore, the streets were a place of dating. I also learned that giving someone eye contact meant saying yes to a guy. There wasn't a day where I couldn't walk through Morocco without hearing "Konichiwa, Ni hao, Hello Beautiful." In addition, there were little children on the streets begging because instead of going to school, their parents raised and taught them to beg. It broke my heart to see how parents would beat their children if they didn't bring enough money or food back. However, I knew that the culture shock and language barrier were the fun parts about traveling because I was able to see how I responded to the challenges.

Living in the Medina with wonderful and generous homestay families was an experience that taught me a lot about Moroccan culture. I am thankful that I was able to interact with Moroccans, practice my Moroccan Arabic with them, help them practice English, play charades, and share meals with them. It came to my surprise when 5 of the 6 siblings spoke good English. My host mother and father do not speak English which led us to use charades, laugh, and smile all the time. However, we shared our laughter teaching each other Darija and English. After dinner, my roommate, Camille, and I learned the word for "I'm tired" in Darija, "Ana digadiga," from our host sister Fatiha. When we practiced the word, we said "Ana diga-diga-diga" with extra -diga because it was such a fun word. Our host mother and father came into the salon (living room) and laughed for 5 minutes straight.

As I struggled to find myself in this trip but accomplished it, I must say that something I learned many things about myself. I'm glad I put myself in an unfamiliar place in Morocco and allowed myself to grow as a person and to immerse myself into the new culture I was learning about. The language barrier didn't stop me from following my passions. In fact, I learned a bit of Darija and a bit of French from my students and from my daily interactions at the markets, restaurants, and with my host family. In my Sociology class, I learned a lot about many negative images and representations of Arabs and Muslims that exists in this world. I was glad to be able to directly interact with many Muslims in Morocco and bring back the knowledge that many negative stereotypes about Muslims are misconceptions and false in my opinion. I can say based on my experience, they are very generous and kind.

Thank you so much [Shoukran bzaf in Darija] Mr. and Mrs. Nichols, for this gracious gift and opportunity of allowing me to immerse into a culture and religion that is so different than my own. The support from the Nichols family meant a lot to me and I couldn't have been a part of this phenomenal culture and expose myself to something very different than what I was used to. It was a colorful experience and I took many risks. I rode my first camel ever and I even crashed a Moroccan Gnawa Party with my host brother, his friend, and my roommate, Camille. I saw goats on Argan trees, saw and smelled a real leather tannery, held a baby goat, made a tagine out of clay at a Pottery Studio, and visited a mosque in Casablanca even though I'm not Muslim. I miss Morocco, the local Moroccan friends I made in Morocco, playing soccer at the beach, which was the most popular sport in Morocco, bargaining with shopkeepers, even though they were persistent about purchasing their products, and most of all, staying with my wonderful host family (the Abahlous family). Till this day, I still keep in touch with my Moroccan host family and the students in my English classes, which touches my heart.

Connor McWade

GUYANA

Worldwide, road traffic injuries and fatalities occur at "epidemic" proportions, especially in low- and middle-income countries (i.e. eighth leading cause of death worldwide, and leading killer of those ages 15-29). Road safety is increasingly recognized as being among the world's most pressing international health and development concerns. Beneath the shocking fatality statistics are the roughly twenty-fold greater number of injuries sustained from all road traffic crashes. Further beneath these statistics lays the economic and social impact for individuals, communities, and entire nations. The global number of road traffic casualties is expected to significantly increase, as current trends project crashes to become the fifth leading cause of death worldwide by 2030 due to rising levels of vehicle ownership as a result of economic growth and development. The road traffic casualty situation in Guyana is abysmal, representing a considerable public health concern for a country already lagging behind its neighbors in health indicators. In recent decades, Guyana and Venezuela have alternated holding the title for the highest traffic fatality rate in the Western Hemisphere, each with more than 20 to 22 per 100,000 inhabitants per year (Guyana's rate seems to have peaked in 2007 with a rate of 28 fatalities per 100,000.) With a 2014 Human Development Index ranking of 121 out of 187 countries (on par with Vietnam and Iraq), Guyana cannot afford to lose productive members of society to preventable accidents, especially given its small population of roughly 750,000.

As part of my Masters of Public Health practicum, I spent several months working with the Guyana Police Force (GPF) to study and map serious and fatal road traffic accidents that had occurred since 2012

My objectives included the following: (1) to conduct the first scientific spatial analysis of fatal and serious road traffic casualties in Guyana; (2) to describe the circumstances and potential contributing factors involved in these fatal and serious road traffic crashes; and (3) to report epidemiological data on crash patterns. To do this, I collected and recorded data from handwritten police reports for roughly 1,400 casualties from three police divisions covering a majority of the country's population. Once the data was collected, cleaned, and mapped on Google Maps, a Vanderbilt engineering PhD candidate and I used a GIS (Geographic Information Systems) mapping software to create spatial and temporal maps of these casualties. "Behind" each mapped crash location exists all the features of a given crash and the resulting casualties. Thus, we could begin to answer questions about where exactly casualties were occurring. We assessed for patterns that could be found (e.g. time of day, day of week, rainy versus dry seasons, year, etc.), and we completed extensive descriptive statistics about the casualties and other involved parties (e.g. age, gender, ethnicity, mode of transportation, role in the accident, severity of injury, etc.). We collected data for road conditions, alcohol use, speeding, and other potential contributing factors. All of this data was entered into the mapping software to create "layered" maps where these patterns can be analyzed together or separately for the different regions of Guyana. The analysis possibilities are vast. For instance, I could produce a map showing all the crashes occurring after dark, involving pedestrians, at various types of intersections, or involving people of a certain age range. These descriptive statistics and powerful maps are in the process of being finalized and handed over to the GPF and other road safety stakeholders, such as Guyana's National Road Safety Council. Road traffic casualty data is collected by a number of governmental agencies, and there are often discrepancies between final reported figures.

Because this project involved data collection from various agencies, it acted as an independent measure to validate the counts and estimates that have been made since 2012. Also, because we identified some major "holes" in the data, we were able to make meaningful recommendations to the police and Ministry of Home Affairs regarding the data collection process.

Besides providing the information previously unavailable to the police and policy makers, I believe the project created additional avenues for improvement. Throughout the duration of the project, I facilitated impactful collaborations between the police and several other stakeholders: the University of Guyana Public Health Programme, the National Road Safety Council, and the Accident and Emergency Department of Georgetown's main public hospital.

All parties played various roles in understanding the data and determining how to analyze the data. These various agencies – each with their specific impact on public health – have grown in their ability to monitor and approach this issue in their country. Now comes the time for these stakeholders to disseminate the findings and collaborate with one another to implement highly targeted changes based on quality evidence. This project could contribute to fewer serious and fatal road traffic crashes and less money spent on healthcare and rehabilitation.

Melanie McWade

GUYANA

Centralized planning, management and decision making is increasingly important in developing nations in order to efficiently allocate scarce resources. Often developing countries suffer from lack of sufficient and accurate information, thereby hindering development efforts. Geographical Information systems (GIS) is an attractive and powerful tool that has the potential to provide spatial data that can inform the decision making of developing countries on a local and national level. This summer, the Nichols Humanitarian Fund Award granted me to opportunity to bring GIS to Guyana in two ways. First, I implemented GIS to analyze road traffic injuries across the city and surrounding rural areas. Second, I had the unique experience of teaching classes to two different groups: University of Guyana Public Health Masters students and members of the Guyana Police Force. This six week experience was the culmination of a Certificate of Global Health through the Vanderbilt Institute of Global Health, which I have been working towards alongside my PhD in Biomedical Engineering.

Georgetown, Guyana has a very high mortality rate as a result of road traffic injuries. This provided the justification for the first aim of my project, which was to provide a spatial analysis of the types and frequency of road traffic injuries in urban and rural areas Guyana using road traffic data collected by the Guyana Police force from 2012 to 2015. GIS is a well-suited software to tackle this problem because it provides a rich tapestry of information that allows one to visualize, question, analyze and interpret data to understand relationships, patterns, and trends. I was able to input a dataset of over 1,000 road traffic injuries into this software program and generate maps that clearly showed “hot-spots” for road traffic injuries that could be filtered by time of day, day of the month, driver demographics, and many more factors. The process of collecting and analyzing the data was a very eye-opening process for me. Having spent many years doing biomedical research at institutions like Vanderbilt, I was able to see how much I had previously taken for granted the rife infrastructure at Vanderbilt that makes research run easier. In Georgetown, lack of infrastructure such as outdated satellite images (which I needed to create GIS maps), inconsistent or non-existent road names (which I needed to correlate police records to locations on the map), and patchy internet connections made this project frustrating at times. The experience showed me what road blocks local people in developing countries face when trying to make changes.

Ultimately, I was able to work around these obstacles and provide the Guyana Police force with a set of maps describing the locations of different kinds of road traffic collisions. The members of the police force we were working with were very eager to work with us and get the information we could provide. My hope is that they will use these maps to inform changes that need to be made to roads and intersections or laws that could minimize serious injuries and fatalities in the future.

With our help, the Guyana police force was able to get access to a version of the GIS software that I was using. Their goal was to continue using this software to track road traffic injuries as well as crime hotspots long after we had left the country. This led to the second part of my project during my time in Guyana, which was to teach classes to select members of the police force on how to use the software. I taught a group of about 9 police members how to use the software.

Melanie McWade

GUYANA

The GIS software is a very large complex tool, and because of that, I made a strong emphasis on the different ways to troubleshoot their problems such that they could be self-sufficient GIS users in the future. During these classes, I was inspired by the passion that these men and women had to make change in their country. I was grateful that I was able to contribute to this effort through building capacity via teaching these police members how to use a program that is potentially transformative to the way their police force operates.

In addition to teaching the Guyana Police force, I taught Masters of Public Health students at Guyana's premier institution, University of Guyana. I taught a class of 14 Masters students who were interested in learning this program for applications in their own public health projects. Their applications included correlating water sources with hot spots of gastrointestinal diseases, tracking the prevalence of chikungunya, and mapping out distances of neighborhoods to nearest health centers. One student in particular was hoping to use his newly acquired knowledge of GIS to create partnerships across Guyana to expand uses of GIS.

Overall, my experience in Guyana was unlike anything I had previously experienced. I believe my time there was well spent by passing of informative maps to the Guyana Police force that will dictate changes they make to their road systems as well as building capacity through teaching the police force and Masters of public health students how to use GIS for data analysis. Personally, this was the first time I have gotten a chance to see what it looks like to use a subset of the skills I have learned during my PhD training at Vanderbilt in a low resource setting. The experience helped me imagine the possibility of working longer term in a developing country after graduation. I am extremely grateful to the Nichols Humanitarian fund for giving me this life changing opportunity to do work abroad. I feel extremely blessed to have been given the funds to carry out this work.

Bianca Mgbemere

ENGLAND

This summer was my very first time ever getting on an airplane. It was a momentous occasion that was a long time in the making. This trip, however, was important not only because it was my first time flying, but also because I was able to embark on my first ever adventure abroad. I traveled to the wonderful city of London where I spent a month living and volunteering in the eastern borough of Tower Hamlets. Getting the chance to knock out two huge milestones in one amazing summer was all possible thanks to the Nichols Humanitarian Fund. During my trip I got to explore the city, learn about problems plaguing London, and work at an amazing community center.

London is an amazing place full of history and wonder. During our time there, my cohort and I got to do a lot of sightseeing. We visited Big Ben, The London Bridge, The London Eye, Buckingham Palace, and the Olympic Village. We got to see the Queen wave from her carriage during her birthday parade in the park. We sat in on sessions of the House of Lords and the House of Commoners in Parliament. We embarked on various walking tours where we learned about the history and culture behind all of London's breathtaking architecture. We dined like true Brits on authentic fish and chips and Sheppard's pie. Most important of all, we mastered the public transportation system including the Tube, DLR, and buses that took us everywhere we needed to go.

On the more serious side of our trip, we learned about a few issues that plague London. Like America, they too struggle with immigration issues and working to build inclusion for diverse populations. Language barriers play a large role in the inclusion battles as law makers argue over whether to provide resources in multiple languages or to force non-natives to abruptly learn a new language. Along with this immigration battle comes the problem of gentrification of lower income ethnic neighborhoods. These centrally located, historically ethnic neighborhoods are increasingly being turned into high price apartment living due to their proximity to central London. This drives their current immigrant residents away from their safe havens which leaves them on the outskirts of the city with little to no resources to find other arrangements.

We also learned about London's health care systems and the benefits and shortcoming that accompany it. The National Health Service, NHS, is the publicly funded healthcare system of England. Initial healthcare is payed for through taxes and is generally free on site for those who need it. Overall, the British system seems to be more cost efficient and effective than the American system. It increases availability to those who truly need it, and is generally seen in high regard by the public. This system does, however, also create an environment where healthcare can be readily abused by some, making it slower for those who actually need it. Many immigrant populations have lower health outcomes due to language, culture, and religious barriers when seeking medical attention. It is an ongoing struggle to find new ways to educate the entire communities about proper health while making the healthcare system as accessible and open to people of all cultures as possible.

Bianca Mgbemere

ENGLAND

The last portion of my time was spent volunteering at Spotlight. Spotlight is a community center focused on the lower income youths of East London. It caters to children ages 11- 19 and works to foster their creativity and develop their talents. While here I worked with and learned from staff and teens from numerous different backgrounds. Everyone was extremely open and welcoming and I instantly felt right at home. I worked heavily with the kids in the game room: getting to know them, offering advice, and telling tales of life in the US. Other times I worked with different programs such as Street Dance, Theater, Radio, Cooking, Boxing, and Music Production. The kids always seemed to get more excited and into their projects when they saw that I was genuinely interested and engaged in what they were doing. I was able to see and encourage talent in children who never thought they had any and that was probably the most rewarding part for me. It was amazing to see how this center was able to keep kids off of the street and out of trouble while inspiring them to use and improve their natural gifts.

All in all, my time in London was unforgettable. I am so fortunate that I had the opportunity to live and learn in such an amazing city. I hope that I made even the slightest impact in the community during my time there, because I know that it surely had an impact on me. I am so thankful for the Nichols Humanitarian Fund because this trip would not have been possible without them. I cannot express my gratitude enough. I can only hope that others get a similar opportunity to leave their comfort zones and explore new locations while attempting to make the world a better place one step at a time because it is truly life changing.

Noemi Monnerville

MOROCCO

During the spring semester of 2015, I was able to conduct an independent study at Vanderbilt that considered the nature of Moroccan democracy. More specifically, I focused on the success of the Equity and Reconciliation Commission, an entity formed as an avenue for truth and understanding in the aftermath of the thousands of human rights abuses committed at the hands of the previous King to protect the Moroccan Monarchy. While I was generally able to conclude that the structure of the process proved ineffective in reconciling the parties involved, I felt that I needed a more concrete understanding of the situation. When the opportunity arose to travel to Morocco and experience the people and culture firsthand, I could hardly resist.

While in Morocco, I served as a volunteer for the Moroccan Organization of Human Rights. Here, I was able to gain insight into the sociopolitical system of the constitutional monarchy, working on projects involving Moroccan and Islamic family law and the abolition of the death penalty in that country. Amazingly, it so happens that the movement to abolish the death penalty finds much support in the historical misuse of the death penalty by the Monarchy to commit grave human rights abuses. In the most miraculous stroke of luck, my supervisor at the organization introduced me to his dear friend and coworker on their project to abolish the death penalty; this man was himself a victim of the abuses I so pored over the semester previous.

At age 20, Ahmed Haou was sentenced to death for spraying graffiti against the terror tactics of the previous Moroccan monarchy, that of the current King's father. After being tortured and spending 10 years on death row, his sentence was reduced to life in prison. He finally received a royal pardon five years later and now works for the National Human Rights Organization. Mr. Haou spoke with me for three hours, detailing his experience as a political prisoner - his six-month torture, his 45-day hunger strike to demand better conditions, his incredible relationship with guards, his eventual reputation as king of the prison, and his difficulty assimilating into society as a free, innocent man.

Although his position toward the Equity and Reconciliation Commission reflected disappointment in its structural lack of resources to truly repay injustice, Mr. Haou's attitude toward the Monarchy remained one of faithfulness. To me, this forgiveness of injustice and hope in a system that so harmed an innocent man as himself was inconceivable. The more I attempted to understand his position, the more I came to understand just how large a role the Islamic faith plays in all facets of Moroccan society. I came to find that because the Moroccan King, considered to be a descendent of the prophet Muhammad, holds great religious authority, Moroccan Muslims often esteem highly the efforts of the Monarchy. This became most obvious as I asked people I met through service or my homestay community about their opinion on the Equity and Reconciliation Commission and the abuses of the previous King. Many had no idea what the former even was, and all defended the Monarchy in saying that as terrible as the abuses were, they were necessary to protect the functioning of society and the Monarchy. This was my nugget of gold.

Noemi Monnerville

MOROCCO

In researching Morocco, a country with a significant authoritarian nature, the purely academic realm offered me colored information – never daring to overtly deprecate the Monarchy. This incredible opportunity to live and work in Morocco and become familiar with its people and culture allowed me to see beyond this bias and consider the real situation that would never be blatantly published. This program bridged the gap between academic theory and practical application as it permitted me to hear the voices of those directly involved and affected and form my own opinion. And for that, I am forever indebted to the outstanding generosity of the Nichols family. Thank you.

Jennifer Neczypor

Vanuatu

Due to the generous support of the Nichols Humanitarian Fund, from July 26 through August 14, 2015, I had the opportunity to provide health education and nursing care to women and children at three schools and two rural villages on the South Pacific island of Espiritu Santo in Vanuatu. When I initially developed this project, I intended to focus primarily on maternal and pediatric health initiatives; however, my plan changed when the country was devastated by Cyclone Pam, a Category V hurricane, in March of this year. During my pre-departure discussions with current Peace Corps volunteers as well as local Ni-Vanuatu teachers, healthcare providers, and village chiefs with whom I am acquainted, it became clear to me that many of the current difficulties facing the people of Santo, including malnutrition, cholera and other water-borne illnesses, outbreaks of malaria, a lack of sanitation, and a dearth of medical supplies and necessities of daily living, could be directly attributed to the effects of Cyclone Pam. I therefore modified my original workshop design, incorporating disaster relief as well as health education and the provision of much-needed healthcare services when indicated.

I began my work in Luganville, the two-street town that serves as the main hub for the island. I visited Rowhani Baha'i School, where I taught classes on nutrition to the kindergarten class, working with them to develop nutritious meal ideas utilizing the available island foods and emergency ration supplies. The children were extremely creative with their menu selections, drawing pictures of dishes such as coconut crab and roasted octopus alongside the more traditional fruits and vegetables. I also spoke to the students about the roles of nurses and midwives and engaged them in medical play in an effort to combat the inherent fear of the healthcare system that contributes to dangerous delays in seeking care in Vanuatu.

Furthermore, I volunteered as a nurse in the Children's Ward of the island's Northern Provincial Hospital, where one of my Peace Corps host sisters, Cindy, currently works as a RN. This was a fascinating experience for me, particularly as I had just completed my first year of master's-level nursing training at Vanderbilt, a state-of-the-art teaching hospital with vast resources available to offer patients. In a quiet moment, while rocking an infant who had been severely burned at only two days old when a candle, his family's only source of light, toppled over on top of him, I reflected on the heartbreaking reality of injustice, not only socioeconomic injustice, but a less obvious inequity related to mere geography. If the baby lived in the developed world, he would have been taken to a burn unit immediately; however, since he happened to be born to a poor family living on an island in one of the most isolated parts of the world, he cannot receive the care he needs. Even if his family was able to afford to take him to Australia or New Zealand for treatment, the child could not go, as the flight would cause potentially lethal increases of intracranial pressure inside his brain. He is, quite literally, stuck on the small island of Santo, in a hospital with limited resources, no burn specialists, and hygiene standards that are minimal at best, fighting for his life one breath at a time.

My next stop after Luganville was Tata School, where I lived while serving in the Peace Corps. At Tata, I volunteered at the rural health clinic, where I dressed wounds, cleaned out sores caused by Yaws disease, which is endemic in Vanuatu, and educated patients and nurse aids on hypertension, malaria, basic sanitation and hygiene, and infection prevention. I was able to gift a

large quantity of bandages, tape measures, scissors, and nursing textbooks to the grateful staff at the clinic, thanks to donations contributed by my fellow Vanderbilt nursing students. I also developed a brief, one-page health assessment questionnaire, written in both English and the national language of Bislama, for the nurses to use with patients. The staff did not have any comprehensive way of tracking patient care prior to the development of this assessment; ideally the health assessment will serve as the initial starting point for the creation of permanent medical records at the clinic.

I had the chance to participate in Family Planning day at the clinic, and was very excited to discuss reproductive and sexual health with the young women of the nearby Vinapisu village. Every time I visit Vanuatu, I discover new things about the culture and about myself, despite the fact that, in many ways, the islands feel like a second home to me. While working at the Tata School clinic, I discovered that the older nurse aids who staff the clinic are under the impression that contraceptives actually cause women to become pregnant. I realized that many of the girls and women seeking birth control encourage this view of family planning, as the social and religious values of their culture do not promote reproductive rights.

Although I, by virtue of my "insider-but-outsider" status, was able to initiate isolated discussions with women about STIs, condom use, sexual health, and childbearing, a much larger conversation about reproductive rights and the status of women in Vanuatu needs to take place at the village and governmental levels in order to secure the mental and physical well-being of women and girls in the nation.

My project next led me to the village of Tanavoli, where many of my former students live. While I was undeniably pleased to see their smiling faces, it saddened me that so many of the girls, some as young as fourteen, were already married and caring for children of their own. It saddened me even more that this did not shock me the way it once might have. In Tanavoli, I met with groups of girls and women for informal discussions over tea and biscuits, during which they asked me numerous questions about women's health, pregnancy, and childbearing. The topic of breastfeeding came up over and over again, and I was able to reinforce the value of exclusive breastfeeding for at least six months, particularly due to the lack of nutritious solid food options available in the aftermath of the cyclone. I also spoke with the women about family planning and delayed childbearing, encouraging them to space their children out by at least two years and to wait until their twenties to have children, when their bodies are physiologically developed and capable of healthy pregnancy and birth.

Jennifer Neczypor

Vanuatu

I concluded my time in Vanuatu at Ebenezer School, where I taught a workshop on malaria prevention to fifth-grade students and their teachers. I modified UNICEF's malaria education curriculum to create a workshop relevant to Vanuatu and accessible to primary school students. Throughout the day, the children participated in trivia activities, coloring projects, and games that taught them about the prevalence of malaria in their country and around the world, the signs and symptoms of malaria infection and the devastating consequences of the disease, ways to prevent malaria, and the functions of anti-malarial treatment. The students were each given the flag of a malaria-endemic country with the number of population-wide malaria infections printed below it, and were asked to line up in order, from the least number of infections to the highest. They were stunned to learn that Vanuatu is situated nearly in the middle of these nations. During question-and-answer time, the students discussed with me the popular belief that there is a tropical leaf capable of curing malaria, and we had a very productive conversation about the benefits of seeking medical treatment as opposed to utilizing custom cures. After the conclusion of the workshop, I encountered one of the participants proudly showing off his handmade "Block Malaria" poster and teaching his parents and younger siblings how to keep themselves safe from mosquitoes. This, to me, represents the essence of what I strove to accomplish in Vanuatu – the sharing of health knowledge with others, who will then go on to disseminate the information in their communities, thereby leading to sustainable change.

My service experience in Vanuatu enabled me to teach healthy behaviors and provide invaluable medical care. This opportunity allowed me to delve deeper into grassroots global health work and learn more about the specific health needs of the people of Vanuatu, and it served to reaffirm my desire to work in the developing world long-term after completing my midwifery and family nurse practitioner training. The evening before I left the island, I shared a final meal with my Ni-Van sisters Rolenas and Cindy and their families. After eating, I drank tea with my two sisters, both of whom currently have small infants. Sitting on a woven mat in the dimness of the bamboo hut, the two mothers nursed their babies and shared their birth stories with me, as well as their hopes for the futures of their newborns – good health, opportunities for education and employment, and lives free of disaster and disease. I too share these dreams, not only for their children, but for all of Vanuatu's precious children, particularly the vulnerable young girls of the islands. Through partnerships, educational workshops, and development projects such as those that I was able to carry out with the support of the Nichols Humanitarian Fund, these dreams are beginning to transform into reality.

Lauren Pak

SOUTH AFRICA

"There are different kinds of justice. Retributive justice is largely Western. The African understanding is far more restorative- not so much to punish as to redress or restore a balance that has been knocked askew." –Archbishop Desmond Tutu

According to the Gini index measuring income inequality, South Africa stands as one of the most unequal societies in the world. On the twenty-minute van ride from Summerstrand to Missionvale and Sapphire Road, the disparity is unmistakable as it is unshakable. The same road carries us past the elegant restaurants and hotels that stand dripping in wealth, unapologetic in their glamour. The nicely and newly paved asphalt becomes a slap in the face as it continues to stretch to township areas that are built with less. The extremity between the haves and haves not is sickening. There is no in-between to cushion the scale with statistics that work to justify socioeconomic differences. The polarity and the level of imbalance are sickening. There are too many suffering. Instead of the houses the post-apartheid leadership promised in reparation, gray-haired mothers still look at the horizon unbelievably hopeful in their shacks. The toilet stall structures and roads become a pitiful Band-Aid attempt, almost mocking, as they stand next to poverty. Who has a need for brick toilet houses when there is no indoor heating and infrastructure for basic shelter? This is where the ghost of apartheid haunts, far enough away that individuals do not have to look human rights atrocities in the eyes.

Communities are unable to climb out of the cycle conditioned by inequality, which has presently perpetuated itself into a culture of gang violence, unemployment, HIV, rape, and drug abuse. Though apartheid laws started the wheel, the simple dismantlement of legislation alone has no power to undo the effects of institutional inequality. There must be new structures built to empower and pave the road to peace. Peacebuilding requires proactive and preventative programing, not just reactive ones because that will not transform the culture. The inability to overcome the dark weight of the past coupled with the social problems of the present threatens to leave South Africa in despair. It is easy to feel discouraged in this country. It is too easy to sink into helplessness and give in to the grip of depression. Reactive initiatives send the message that change and freedom are not achievable so instead here is compensation. This is all we can do, isn't it better than nothing?

The basic human needs for food and healthcare are leveraged to bring in community members. Missionvale Care Center provides free meal packages for the first hundred families based on unemployment record on a daily basis. Those who received meals were not required to then send their children to their local school or aided in the employment search. Sapphire Primary School defines their success in that they offer a safe place and a good meal for learners away from gang-torn neighborhoods. Learning standards are not met in the classroom, and students went home to be influenced by the drugs and abuse of their family. Drakenstein Palliative Hospice and Butterfly House in Paarl serves as a house for those impacted by HIV and AIDS and provide primary care and recreational activities for children. Though their narrative therapy proved abuse at the family level, they had no power other than home visitations to ensure the wellbeing of the child and the offering of security at their center.

I would be satisfied with the clear limitations of these efforts if peace indeed grew out of retributive and reparative justice. But that is not the case. Poverty alleviation should not merely be the movement to satiate immediate needs. Restoration after a forest fire does not end at planting the initial tree, it continues until the ecosystem of the forest is bustling with biodiversity that becomes self-sustaining. Organizations must shift their focus and prioritize their efforts with the goal of transformation. Though it is critical that immediate needs are met so that an individual does not go hungry for the day, the model of support must also expand to ensure that the individual can stand on his own and never go hungry again. Restorative efforts will only be long acting and sustainable if the goal of community centers and social service organizations purposefully and intentionally approach the day-to-day with the goal of not being needed in the future. Transformation must occur at the individual, family, and community level.

The road to peace is long and hard. Each day is conditioned by different situational complexities and challenges, but sight of the larger battle against inequality cannot be dismissed. The principal at Sapphire has to deal with the shooting near school perimeters and Missionvale's executive leadership must respond to the knife fight over a misunderstanding in the food line. There will always be unexpected hurtles. But that does not mean the end priority should not be the vision of compassion, peace, and justice. Sometimes when wrestling at the ground level, we lose sight of the bigger picture. We punish ourselves for our inability to fully address one societal issue, and this has the danger of narrowing our vision to where we pigeon-hole ourselves in one objective.

This is why I believe in partnerships. The most in South Africa was that the culture of peace cannot be built alone. Missionvale Care Center, Sapphire Primary School, Drakenstein Palliative Hospice and Butterfly House found themselves overwhelmed when they willed their structure to be the only practical solution to South Africa's inequality. As we seek the holistic well being of humanity, we must remember that each plays a part. Schools will provide students with the opportunity to gain skills and mechanisms to achieve higher standards of living. Care centers allow individuals to reclaim their sense of worth with psychological care that is then supplemented by the fiscal support of integration programming. Social workers are essential to managing family abuse cases. Religious leaders can mediate inter-community disputes by advocating forgiveness and encourage spiritual strength despite external conditions. Though we will be disappointed if we have unreasonable expectations, we cannot lower our standards because of situation. If we expect our children to overcome inequality, we must respect their potential and ask for quality engagement. We cannot excuse learners for not paying attention or not doing homework because they were not raised in structural foundations of peace. If we have a different set of expectations, we are only confirming mental inferiority.

I will share a humbling experience that taught an important lesson when it comes to the ethics of intervention and how feelings of singular responsibility becomes a dangerous trap. I was volunteering for the day at the Butterfly House located inside of a community dominated by domestic abuse, drugs, and gangs. Through the afterschool program, I engaged seven and eight year olds with storybook reading. I was a placebo. My onomatopoeia loosed laughs that distracted from the pang of hunger and the family depression for a time being.

Lauren Pak

I was conflicted for breaking through the eyes of emptiness and fear that assessed me at my introduction to only be leaving after gaining their love, trust, and respect. Wasn't I only reinforcing the idea of loss, disappointment, and separation as a short-term volunteer? But there was a stubborn girl who refused to engage. She was a hardened one. Though she sought my attention, she diverted whenever I looked her directly in the eyes. I knew this game and didn't push her. My role was to invite and wait until she came to conclusions on her own accord. My place is not to tell her what is right or what is wrong. Instead, my presence became the interactive space through which she could discover her self. She thought she had cleverly stolen my hair-tie. But after a while her curiosity won over and she started playing with my hair. We started building a relationship, and by the end she had laced my hair with gentle tenderness. To complete her labor of love, she tied the ends with what she had initially taken. The next hour was filled with laughter, hugs, her wanting to share her food. Her small hands around my waist and smile before she left was of a girl who knew she wouldn't be seeing me again. She had always known. If we had both listened to the fearful perceptions of "what-if"s in our heads, I would not be in South Africa and she would not have sat with a stranger. We cannot control how others will perceive us, but we can decide from our end how we will engage. The silent embrace said she forgave me for not staying longer. She had known all along that I would leave but decided to love me anyways, there was mutual learning within our relationship.

We all play a contributing part in this ever-turning world. Desmond Tutu also said "my humanity is bound up in yours, for we can only be human together." Though I can tangibly state my deliverable is my project plan for an afterschool library system built around community-centered leadership and an accessible school website, the significance of my role lies in the fact that I was present, that I gave and received love. I acknowledged the experiences that shaped my perspective and earnestly sought to understand that of those around me. Relationships are an opportunity to explore, wrestle with, and discover the great complexity of humanity.

How do I quantify trust? How do I quantify the change of mind in my schoolboys who decided that they would respect my boundaries and make tokens of affection rather than pinching my body in places I did not like? How does one quantify the whispered bravery of a girl asking if she could share a story with me, or the choking tears of a man who realized in an answer to my seeking heart that true freedom is found in believing in goodness despite brokenness? Teach me how to measure forgiveness and peace. I realized during my time in South Africa that in these relationships and moments we share, we become the evidence. We are able to grow and learn more deeply about our own nature through connection. We encounter grace and understand its irrationality only when we find ourselves direct recipients of it. We practice reconciliation when we acknowledge the existence of another despite hurt and heartbreak. It is our collective will, our collective strength that determines value and purpose. Peace is dependent on how we decide to relationally approach self and the greater world. By recognizing interdependency, we understand that actualization is in human interactions and that the solution lies in multilevel strategies and programming. Therefore, we must strive to consciously support and encourage each other in the most loving of ways, in respect, with humility. Together, we must celebrate. Together, we must cry. We must face the marvelous depth and the harrowing limitations of our humanness. In this togetherness, there rests compassion.

Sydney Pedigo

ENGLAND

This summer was packed with a lot of firsts. Even the ordinary was vibrant on this background of international experiences and the lessons from this trip are wrapped into my life to this day. For the OACS Global Immersion Program in London our preparation started in January with meetings and speakers aimed to ensure an easy transition so that we weren't wide-eyed and lost tourists. Although there were moments of wide-eyed, frantic bus map reading, we quickly transitioned to life in England. We had all been assigned in groups of two to a service site. Mine was a creative youth center in East London called Spotlight, a response to the need for a place for the neighborhood youths. The building was fundraised, designed, and overseen by a board of young people with amazing results. State-of-the-art recording studios and design labs as well as dance, boxing, and radio rooms kept the young people entertained for hours each day and helped them find passions and strengthen their skills.

However, this building, even though carefully crafted and maintained, stands on the backdrop of a struggling area. East London is the most diverse area of England, plagued by enormous health issues characterized by low life expectancy and high obesity rates. The host of other non-health issues such as unemployment, lack of affordable housing, high deprivation levels, and recently cut government funding add to the area's struggle to thrive. My work in the youth center wasn't directly involved with these problems, how could one service team of undergraduates fix these intangible issues? Instead, I focused on the people. My job varied day-to-day, ranging from teaching sewing classes to spending hours at the air hockey table, with the one constant to connect with the youth. And that's all I could do there, create connections to span oceans and live on through Facebook and pictures. After the month ended I realized I had acquired skills I didn't know I was missing.

Now I am far more capable navigating a large, foreign city and can adjust to the schedule and culture of a different country's non-profit system while remaining proactive and engaged. One of my favorite lessons from the trip came from the youths themselves—their respect for each other's cultures was remarkable. It was insightful to see the benefits of growing up in a diverse environment and what that means for future generations. These youths had been raised in a global scene without having to leave their borough and it gave them such wide minds that they didn't blink at my Texan accent or when I said "y'all." The trip was focused on health and so there were many thought-provoking meetings with government officials and community organizers regarding the subject. Those meetings imparted a structured view of the U.K.'s health system and impressed on us the rapidly changing state of East London. However, it was only through the non-profit experience of interacting with the residents of the terrifying statistics that I understood the challenges and strengths of the health of the area.

Lee Perkins

ECUADOR

Because of the Nichols Humanitarian Fund, I was able to travel during spring break to Ecuador to work the women of Sibimbe, a sewing cooperative. I traveled with a group of five other professional and graduate students from across the University. Prior to our trip, we spent six weeks learning about the many dimensions of global poverty and the responses to it. This interdisciplinary class and immersion trip were a part of Project Pyramid, a Vanderbilt student organization aimed at ending global poverty. As a person whose primary field of study—religion—is situated in the humanities, I welcomed the opportunity to work with other students from various academic backgrounds. We all came to the problem of poverty with different questions and analytical lens. I enjoyed the rich discussion that emerged from such collaboration. The American academy is so divided according to the many fields of study and specializations. I am thankful for Vanderbilt and its promotion of interdisciplinary collaboration. Project Pyramid is an example of Vanderbilt's commitment to provide opportunities of meaningful engagement across disciplines.

After the class on global poverty was over, my Project Pyramid group had the chance to put into practice what we had learned by collaborating with Sibimbe Sewing Cooperative, a social enterprise that supports women in the rural town of San Eduardo. Sibimbe employs a grandmother, two single mothers, and a female priest, all of whom work at Sibimbe part-time using local textiles to create a variety of purses, duffle bags, tablecloths, and liturgical vestments. Sibimbe also makes a carrying case for healing oils sold by Thistle farms, a social enterprise in Nashville, TN. Shared Trade, an e-commerce site, features some of Sibimbe's products for sale online while Cokesbury, a United Methodist retailer, offers Sibimbe's stoles and altar cloths in their catalogue. Our project mission embarking on this trip was to gather necessary information to develop recommendations for how to increase Sibimbe's sales and future business growth. The ultimate goal for Sibimbe is to be able to employ, support, and empower more local women in the San Eduardo area in the future.

Lee Perkins

ECUADOR

Machismo typical of Latin cultures is an important concept for understanding the gender politics of Ecuador; it is the strong sense of masculine pride most times at the cost of denigrating women. Consequently, women and children are a vulnerable segment of Ecuadorian society. High rates of unemployment, illiteracy, and fertility exist for women. Sibimbe was started to promote financial independence. The women that are a part of the sewing cooperative have been enabled to provide more for their children and overcome some of the obstacles created by the gender inequality in Ecuador.

Over the course of eight days, we traveled through the country conducting market research and meeting with the women of Sibimbe to assess their needs. During our research, we observed that the tourist market is flooded with many of the same products and that Sibimbe's products were no difference causing Sibimbe to lack a competitive edge in the local tourist market.

We identified local fabrics and designs that would be more appealing to Western consumers. We had assumed that the women had poor business and financial management skills, but they kept good records, maintained a balanced budget, and saved money for product development. With that solid foundation, we decided to focus on increasing Sibimbe's competitive edge in two aspects: branding and product development. We had the women to create prototypes for two new products; designed company tag for Sibimbe products; and created a contact list of local vendors in Nashville. It was an enriching experience to work with the women of Sibimbe and to hear their stories. They are all hard working women as are many of Ecuadorians, but lack opportunity to participate in the global market and face many systemic obstacles.

Alva Powell

MOROCCO

My trip to Morocco with the Office of Active Citizenship and Service was one of the defining features of my transition from college to indpendent adulthood. During the time that I spent there, I had the opportunity to expand on my knowledge of self, my country, and of the world around me. It challenged me to question my assumptions about the way the world should work and evaluate the ways in which it can.

In Morocco, organized volunteerism is understood much differently than what most people in the United States are accustomed to. Here, volunteerism is managed in a decidedly organized, business-like manner. There is the ubiquitous presence of large, non-profit organizations that function similarly to corporations. For example, the Red Cross, Habitat for Humanity, and the Susan G. Komen Foundation are quite expansive and very business-like organizations that most American are familiar with. While some dislike the idea of corporate volunteerism, it fits very well into the goal-oriented, results-based, time-centered character of our country and continues to flourish as such.

In Morocco, I found that volunteerism embodies a much more laissez-faire approach. While there is just as strong of a desire to help the community, there is much less pressure to reach set quantitative goals. In some ways, this is a positive thing as it allows organizations to be flexible and cater to the needs of the people as opposed to numerical guidelines. In other ways, this is negative because it makes it difficult to quantify achievement and measure success. As a volunteer, this was something that I struggled with during my time there. I spent the majority of my time as a volunteer at Organisation Panafricaine de Lutte pour la Sante (OPALS). OPALS provides counseling, testing, and support for people who have contracted sexually-transmitted diseases. While they provide services for a wide array of sexually-related diseases, their particular focus is on HIV/AIDs. During our first week at OPALS, we spent most of our time trying to negotiate what we should expect from OPALS and what they should expect from us as volunteers. From an American perspective, I am accustomed to volunteer organizations having a particular duty or set of tasks prepared for me as a volunteer. However, at OPALS, and at some of the other volunteer organizations our group worked for, I found that the expectation was for the volunteers to seek out the work as opposed to having it given to them. Instead of being given tasks each day, we would arrive and ask around to see if anyone at the organization needed help. At first, this was frustrating, but it also gave us the freedom to explore the organization without being buried within any particular task. We had the chance to meet the nurses, the front desk workers, the community liaisons, and even the president. In the beginning, we completed a diffuse set of tasks, but eventually we settled our work came into focus.

Alva Powell

MOROCCO

As volunteers, we helped publicize the organization and its services. The organization already had a well- organized website, so we primarily focused on improving the appearance and accessibility of their Facebook page. The first thing we worked on was just improving the aesthetics of the page. Some of the pictures were a little crowded and at first glance did not draw the viewer in. We then decided to try to come up with a way to generated traffic on the page. We came up with the idea of posting weekly facts or news articles that related to sexual health. By doing so, we were able to markedly increase the number of people who visited and/or liked the Facebook page. We also started making videos of different staff members talking about their jobs at OPALS as a way to make the page seem more personal.

Although the work on the Facebook page was initially time-consuming, we eventually ran out of tasks to do at OPALS. Because of this, we spent the last week in Morocco at a daycare for underprivileged children and taught English. Even here, as volunteers, we were given the freedom to teach what we deemed necessary and appropriate for the children. This consistent pattern of having to seek out the need made me challenge my notion of volunteerism as something to be prepared and consumed. Perhaps, in my own community, instead of seeking out “prepared” opportunities to volunteer, I could challenge myself to seek out the need and adress it.

Justin Riele

NEPAL

As I walk down the dirt roads of Kathmandu in the early morning, I hear the howling of the nocturnal street dogs, the ring- ting- ring of the morning bells at the Hindu temple next door, and the ever too familiar sound of jackhammers taking down what is left of the buildings deemed no longer safe in the wake of the 7.8 April 25 earthquake. I am on the way to meet the parents of my favorite student.

Sunil is a five-year-old boy whom I have grown to love during my time in Nepal. As Sunil walked into class alone for the first time during my second week of volunteering at EDUC, he was the only child not wearing the school uniform- his muddy blue button down is the way I picture him today, even though he and six other children now have new uniforms thanks to the Nichols Fund. On that first day of school, Sunil sat in the corner with his head down for the duration of the day without a sound. By his third day, he refused to sit anywhere in the classroom except on my lap and it stayed that way until I left.

Neither the 16-year age gap nor the lack of language communication played any role in us becoming close friends, and after the difficult realization that I would not be able to fix the damage of the earthquake or save every child of Nepal during my short time there, I was determined to make a difference in this one boy's life.

As I arrive at a stone building alongside the slums of Kathmandu, our translator located the house of Sunil. We enter the dark stonewalled building where I find Sunil and his seven-year-old brother sleeping on the concrete floor of their bare room – no furniture, no bathroom, and no toys. When asked about where their parents were, Sunil's older brother told my translator that his mom left for work every morning before they awoke, and returned each night after they went to sleep. When asked about their father – deadening silence. It was at that moment I rushed over to set aside the kitchen knife that Sunil was fiddling with.

Justin Riele

NEPAL

This is the most vivid image I have of my time in Nepal – a perfect illustration of the heart wrenching poverty in the wake of the earthquake, lack of education, sanitation, and adequate living environment.

It is impossible to encapsulate everything that went on during my time in Nepal. Thanks to the Nichols Fund, I was able to start a music program at the Nepal Orphans Home by teaching a cappella, voice lessons, and creating two full music videos for YouTube. I taught four units of science including a course on earthquakes and natural disasters to young earthquake victims who had lost houses and relatives. I raised over $1000 by crowd funding, rented a Jeep, and delivered supplies for the building of three new homes in a remote mountain village. I helped feed the homeless in the streets of Kathmandu through the Curry without Worry program, and I played basketball and became a friend to the children of Nepal Orphans Home.

I have too many takeaways from this experience to quantify, the biggest thing being that I now think of $10 as 1,000 rupees – that small amount can feed a family of four for a month in Nepal. I am currently in the process of raising $10,000 so that EDUC can purchase new land for the building of a new school, which will be achieved by donations from friends and family as well as a benefit concert, held by the Vanderbilt Melodores this October.

Sunil's father left him and his brother when they were infants. His entire village was destroyed by the earthquake, leading his family no choice but to migrate into the capital into their tiny concrete box of a house. This story is the same for so many children in Nepal this year. Being the only male teacher at EDUC, I knew when I left that I had become a father figure to him, and I knew that when I left Nepal, I wouldn't let my presence be forgotten to this young boy. I have become the primary financial supporter and father figure to my young friend named Sunil, and I will be sponsoring his education for the duration of his schooling.

Paul Snider

Each week of ministry looked a little different on project. The very first weekend we were there, we drove to Oribi Bible Camp and took part in a two-night retreat with a local youth group called "Youth Alive." This youth group is predominately made up of Zulu teenagers and young adults from the nearby townships. After the camp, we also went to their youth group meetings and built relationships with them. By the end of the trip it was cool to see how our high school students and the youth there had become close.

For one we week we worked with a children's Holiday Club (equivalent to american Vacation Bible School or VBS). We did crafts, memory verses, singing and dancing, and put on skits for the kids who ranged in age from kindergarten to grade seven. Another opportunity was teaching "lifeskills" at a special transition school. The school is designed to help Zulu students learn English before transitioning to completely English-speaking schools. We spent three days there teaching about hand-washing, healthy habits, and just getting to know them and helping them practice their English.

Several days throughout the trip we also got to visit the Genesis Care Center. It is a 40 bed hospice that is almost half constituted by HIV/AIDS patients as well as other very sick and terminally ill men and women. The hospice gives patients dignity and helps families who are often devastated and fragmented by the loss of parents to AIDS or other sickness. We learned about patients who were even able to undergo treatment and manage their HIV infection to the point of being able to leave the hospice. Khula Creche is another ministry under the Genesis umbrella that operates about one hour away from Port Shepstone in a very rural, impverished area. It is a day program for 80 children in the under-resourced community. To help, we played with the children, gave their jungle gym a much-needed fresh coat of paint, and helped with the feeding profram they operate.

My personal day-to-day work always included one other important component: my small group. I mentored five teenage guys throughout the project. I hade one-on-one meetings with them and got to know their stories and their character. We ate meals together, and laughed together. We walked through the various trials of the trip together and processed how we felt. We even did a skit together at the end of the trip for a talent show.

One lesson we learned as a team was about race and the needs people have. A lot of our students had an assumption that since they were coming to Africa, the majority of the people they would be working with and doing ministry with would be black. This isn't always the case in South Africa, and about one third of the people we worked with were white, middle class South Africans. When we worked at the Holiday Club doing children's ministry, our students became dissatisfied because they didn't understand the need to be working with "bratty white kids." This lead to us having a discussion as a whole team about our attitudes towards the work and how to approach it better. I moderated the discussion and gave the kids some thoughts about how we can often look for service that looks good or fits an expectation we have.

A lot of people want to go on a trip to Africa and later post pictures of all the black kids they helped. But a local missionary shared with us that her newsletters often have white kids now and that is a place where there is need as well. We make assumptions about poverty and need based on skin color even though all of the kids there – black, white, and everything in between – could use our love and care.

There were many outcomes of the trip since our team was so large (38 in total) and we engaged in so many different ministries. At the big-picture level, we strengthened a partnership with the church we worked with and have laid groundwork for going again to serve there. As a group we helped feed and encourage and give joy to people who would not have experienced that otherwise. On a smaller scale, we impacted the individual lives of many. Even know I see south Africans posting on the walls of our students on Facebook and carrying on the relationships from a distance. I got an email from one Zulu teenager who wanted to tell me about how he appreciated our team. These are connections that could be maintained and have an impact on both sides. In my small group there is even more of that connection. I'll be following up with my five guys as they transition back to regular life and move on. Several of them are going to college this year or next year and are unsure about a lot of things. They are looking to me still for mentorship and friendship even from a distance.

Florence Ann Sobell

RUSSIA

When friends and family ask how my trip to Russia was, I always respond with "eye opening". Our group of Vanderbilt students spent three weeks in Vladimir, Russia learning, living and serving. The weekends and remaining week were used for travel and sightseeing, which I appreciated and enjoyed, but I feel I gained the most from living in Vladimir for those three weeks. While in Vladimir I had a Russian lesson every morning and did service each day. This service took many different forms. We frequently met with Russian students of all ages who were studying English. Because Vladimir is a smaller city, many of these students had never had the opportunity to hear a native English speaker. Over tea we would practice our language skills, the host students working on their English while we toiled over Russian verb tenses and pronunciation. With the older students we were able to exchange ideas and opinions that I once thought would be impossible to exchange across such a broad cultural chasm and language barrier.

We also planted many gardens around Vladimir, one at a preschool, one at a handicapped children's school and one in a monastery. Other service included painting at a preschool and cage cleaning at a small local zoo. We worked closely with the Veteran's Home in Vladimir, where we cleaned apartments, planted with them, gave presentations about our lives in America and had many sing along sessions.

One of the most important things I have gained from this experience was the erasing of stereotypes that American culture has instilled in its citizens. The people I met, worked with and lived with during my time in Russia were warm, hospitable and all around fantastic people and were nothing like the cold, harsh and vodka-swigging people I had previously imagined. I also learned so much and such a wide variety of materiel in such a short amount of time. I learned simple things like how to navigate public transport, in Russian no less, and how to tell my Russian babushka, who spoke no English, about the weather and that I liked milk in my tea.

Florence Ann Sobell

RUSSIA

I also cultivated greater appreciation of history and the impact that it still has. Russia lost over 20 million people during World War II, which equates to approximately the loss of one family member per family. Victory Day is May 7th in Russia and was celebrated the entire month of May and well into June. Students my age spoke with pride about their great-grandparents and grandparents who had died for their country. And in Vladimir, the history went even deeper. Vladimir was the capital of Russia during the ninth century and has more museums, historical sights and markers than tourists know what to do with.

That was my favorite part of the trip, being able to immerse myself in a culture that had such a rich history and such a determination to preserve it. While we were in Saint Petersburg we met with a woman who had lived during the Leningrad Blockade. She was describing how she ate her own shoes for the nutrients in the leather and how her family had scraped the flour based glue off the wallpaper to eat for breakfast. And yet with such a difficult childhood she was one of the most vivacious old women I had ever met. It was people like her that made me fall in love with Russia.

On a more somber note, while in Moscow we were able to see a semblance of a gay pride rally. It was heartbreaking to see the small amount of people gather and when they raised their rainbow flag, watch the police descend upon them like wolves. Living in a very small rural town I had never before seen police officers use any kind of force, especially on a seemingly peaceful demonstration. It was a very sobering experience and made me appreciate the freedom we have in the United States and encouraged me to speak out about the situation in Russia in hopes a change will be made. I could talk for hours about my experiences in Russia and the little quirks and differences I noticed and the funny stories I accumulated. But I hope that this short essay conveyed to you that experiences I had left me a changed person, a person who hopefully will not take her rights, resources and opportunities for granted.

Sam Strader

ENGLAND

When I learned I had been chosen to do a service learning project in London, I was ecstatic. 2 years into my graduate degree in counseling and I was experiencing some burn out. Several members of my cohort also were experiencing the frustrations and exhaustions of the realizing the hardest third of the race was still in front of us: the internship year. We all knew that not only would we have to keep up the same level of dedication to class work, and for most of us, also remain employed at a level to sustain ourselves, but now also begin to take on clients and put in a substantial number of (unpaid) weekly hours at a site. The task seemed too daunting to fully understand and accept. I felt myself questioning all of the choices that had led me to this point. It was at that crisis point that I applied for the OACS program. My passion and drive has been rooted in trauma-informed care for all people, a basic assumption that all people can be resilient, and a compelling urge to stand with survivors and help them reclaim their lives. The London program specifically offered a chance to work with refugees, to empower disenfranchised people and help increase their quality of life. I have worked with interpersonal violence survivors, but refugees were a new kind of survivor entirely. I was eager and excited to see how strengths and resiliency displayed itself in these brave and unique people. I wanted to hear their stories, to validate their experiences, to learn as much as I could from them in a short but amazing period of time. And, I wanted to remember why I had been driven to help in the first place. I wanted to find my fuel again and get back to my roots and drives for choosing grad school in the first place.

London was a whirlwind. It was an exciting adventure from the first. Of course there were the obligatory touristy adventures of visiting cultural landmarks such as the Globe Theatre for a show and shopping at the local markets. We also were incredibly lucky enough to meet a Member of Parliament and a Lord from the House of Lords, as well as a Mayor from an eastern Borough. I was struck by how all of these political leaders shared a passion for advocacy and change for disenfranchised people. Affordable housing was a focus of many conversations. Gentrification is a problem there, much as it is here in America and specifically the city of Nashville. Nashville is growing, very quickly. And as it does so, housing costs are rapidly escalating and pushing out families and communities that have been established here for generations. I watched the same struggle happening in East London and I felt a profound connection to the people fighting to create positive change and provide resources for people who need it most. Politicians in London have gotten creative as more conservative views have begun to take over political discourse. A mayor spoke to us about building housing that would have affordable units subsidized by other units which would be charging a higher rate. In that way, affordability is budgeted into the project as a whole, sustainably. I was struck by this seemingly simple solution and wonder why we aren't doing more creative and wonderful things like that here.

Most importantly, I interacted with a group of wonderful volunteers at the company I was placed with called The Limehouse Project. It was a team of what amounted to case managers who helped advocate for people relying on government benefits and housing, usually who spoke very little English and came from vast cultural differences. Many were also unable to gain refugee or asylum status and were attempting to make ends meet as best as they could. They are facing crisis because many of the benefits have been cut and cost of living continues to rise. The combination forces many out of their homes, and out of the city entirely.

Sam Strader

ENGLAND

Despite the heaviness of the task before them, the staff I interacted with were tireless in their passion and dedication. With a focus on education and empowerment and advocacy, they stood with the most in need people in their own community. And when I was lucky enough to interact with and advocate for the clients, I was humbled by their bravery and resiliency. One man, with tears in his eyes, told me of how he had come to London with nothing and built a business. When he had become sick, he had lost his business and now had to ask for help and assistance with housing and food. I expressed to him that I believe that it is the duty of any community to take care of each other. He held my hand and I felt a true connection and sense of community with this man, and it struck me how many of our perceived differences fall away. There I was, in a country not my own, speaking with a refugee from a third country entirely, and yet our shared human experience united us across all of those boundaries.

If I had to pick a most important part of my London experience, I would say that would be it: that what we share, across any boundaries, is so much greater and more powerful than any of the differences in language or geography that might exist. I believed that to be true before going to London, but I had not felt it in my heart and spirit until I sat with that man. The strength I saw in the people I got to meet and advocate for inspired me. The passion and drive of the team I worked with humbled me. The beauty of the city awed me. All of it revitalized me. I returned to my city, my wonderful complicated growing challenging Nashville, and remembered why I wanted my career, and why I wanted it here. In community is how we change and grow. My definition of community has grown. I am not just a part of an advocacy community or a Nashville community, but much larger communities now as well. I have peers and mentors across the globe now! And we accomplish so much more together. I am proud to stand with oppressed people and advocate for change within any setting, and knowing there are people all around the world fighting for the same justice gives me hope and strength.

Bryan Stromer

My experience in South Africa was transformative because it allowed me to interact with the people of South Africa on a deep and genuine level. Being able to live in the country for an extended period of time and interact with the locals on a regular basis gave me a more comprehensive understanding of what it is like to live in a foreign country and the challenges that people residing in these countries are facing. This journey was amazing because we got to engage with the students who attended the school that we were volunteering at on a very authentic level. This experience was extremely meaningful because I got to partake in it with other Vanderbilt students.

The main lesson that I learned is that South Africa is facing so many of the same challenges that we are coping with in America. For example, one of the biggest issues in South Africa is facing is that there is still a struggle with racial inequality in the country. During my time in South Africa we got to focus on issues surrounding inequality in the education system, which underfunds schools in colored areas. For example, Sapphire Road Primary School (the school where we were volunteering) lacked basic textbooks and school supplies. This lack of funding is occurring despite the fact that the apartheid ended over a decade ago and the South African government has committed to giving all schools equal levels of funding and resources. Most of the materials that the school had were donated from volunteers or local companies that wanted to give back to the community.

One of the most interesting parts of my experience in South Africa was using the information that we had learned in our lectures leading up to the trip and applying them on the trip.

For example, the pre-lectures that we engaged in during the school year allowed us to develop a strong understanding of the history of the apartheid and why inequalities still exist in South Africa. This level of understanding also helped us think about the best ways that we could contribute to this school during our time in South Africa.

Outside of volunteering, we had the opportunity to visit several museums and cultural destinations in South Africa such as the South End Museum in Port Elizabeth, where we received an amazing tour that focused on how the apartheid impacted families who were living in segregated areas in Port Elizabeth. Hearing the stories and experiences of our tour guide, who lived through the apartheid, was an unforgettable experience because it provided deep insight into the pain that this discrimination caused and gave us a deeper understanding of why the ramifications of the apartheid are so long lasting.

However, the most important lesson that I learned during my time in South Africa is that small things can add up to a big change. For example, the main project that we worked on as a group was organizing the school's library. This sounds like a small thing to do but we noticed that after we organized and decorated the library, the amount of students that used the space almost doubled. Additionally, I feel that the biggest way that we were able to make change in South Africa is just by showing the students that we cared about them. It is easy to go to South Africa and expect to make a huge change, but the reality is that we were only there for a short period of time so the biggest impact that we could make is through the relationships that we built.

Isabela Uribe

L'Organisation Marocaine des Droits Humains (OMDH) – or Moroccan Human Rights Organization – is where Noemi and I worked during our time in Rabat, primarily on a project to abolish the death penalty in Morocco. Our work was very interesting, often requiring comparative research on the death penalty, penitentiary systems, judicial systems, and the human rights practices in the Americas, Europe, Asia, the Middle East, and Morocco. Additionally, we were frequently asked to proofread and translate documents between French and English. However, Noemi and I had other assignments beside research and translation. Our supervisor, Mustapha, also assigned us the task of further developing a program to educate Moroccan students about the death penalty. We were supposed to create an educational activity to be implemented in Moroccan high schools about the legal process and ethical implications surrounding the death penalty. Essentially, we created a death penalty board game which was a candy land spinoff. The initial square was the arrest and final square was the execution, with the spaces in between representing different stages of the judicial process – the arraignment, grand jury, jury selection, prosecution, defense, verdict, sentence, and method of execution. Basically, the objective of the game was to avoid execution and was intended to demonstrate how an innocent person could be condemned to death and ultimately executed. It was surprisingly fun and informative making the game – and even more entertaining playing the game with our supervisor and office staff!

Finally, to better understand the issue of the death penalty and the importance of its abolition, during the third week in Rabat, Noemi and I had the opportunity to meet a former death row inmate. Ahmed Haou was political detainee condemned to death for subversive graffiti during Hassan II's oppressive regime.

Only seventeen at the time, he and his high school friends spread antimonarchy graffiti in 1983 to commemorate the execution of an estimated seven hundred Moroccans following the Casablanca bread riots. Subsequently, Ahmed was arrested and sentenced to death for this "anarchic" vandalism, enduring nearly a decade of torture in Moroccan prisons. Later, his sentence was reduced to life in prison, and eventually, under international scrutiny, Ahmed was liberated. Now, he works for the National Human Rights Council in Rabat, providing reparations for the victims affected during the repressive reign of Hassan II. His story is nothing short of incredible, and he is possibly one of the most inspirational individuals who I have ever had the pleasure of meeting. This interview – which later turned into casual conversation – with Ahmed was undoubtedly the highlight of my experience in Morocco. It is not often that you have the chance to meet someone with his history and experiences (not to mention, his humility and sense of humor, only matched by my supervisor, Mustapha).

Aside from my rewarding work in Rabat, going to Morocco was an unparalleled experience. Months of pre-departure seminars had theoretically prepared me for this program. However, despite this preparation and extensive traveling, I experienced a bit of "culture shock" due to the unfamiliar language, religion, and customs. Yet, the friendliness of Moroccans – including my host family, local friends, shop owners, cab drivers, and CCCL staff – allowed me to quickly overcome these discomforts and learn more than I ever imagined about Ramadan, the medina, Casbah, mosques, Arabic, Islam, and Maghrebi culture. Undoubtedly, being in Morocco changed my perspective, and hopefully sharing my experience with others can help eliminate some inaccurate negative

Cynthia Vu

I stepped onto the plane to Russia, not understanding at all what to expect when I landed. Sure, I read the course description online and knew that we would be servicing different organizations in the Vladimir community, whilst going on weekend excursions and adapting to the local culture; however, I did not know exactly what kind of impact our work would have. Although our volunteer efforts were diverse in task, from cleaning zoos to planting flowers, the greatest outcomes from this service trip were the human connections we made- friendships across continents- with the local people we met. We volunteered at many different places, but my favorite trips were the ones to the local schools. For most of these visits, we sat in a classroom and spoke to the Russian students, panel-style. They were encouraged to ask us about anything- in order to practice their conversational English and also learn about life in America from young adults. Other times, Russian students came to us and we asked them questions about their lives in Russia. The Russian students were as excited to learn about us as we were excited to learn about them. Although there was a language barrier, the smiles and positive energy from both sides made this experience so much more meaningful. A topic that came up very often was the impression one people had of the others' country and people. After some discussion, we came to the consensus that although our governments may disagree on some terms, our people could still be amiable and hospitable to each other. Differentiating between one's government's beliefs and one's individual beliefs is very important for a good connection between people of different countries.

Besides having deep discussions with Russian students about government, laws, and culture, another great outcome from this trip were the friendly interactions I had with locals. For example, I led a drawing class for some elderly residents at a Veteran's home. I was nervous teaching to a group of students much older and more experienced than I, but all the residents were energetic, friendly, and very excited to learn. There was one woman in particular I remember who called on me for approval on every single line she sketched. When I replied "хорошо," which is Russian for "good," she beamed and replied back with "very good" in a thick Russian accent. As we were leaving that day, she hugged and kissed everyone in our group and told us in rapid Russian to remember her and come back. I felt like she was treating us like her grandchildren. While at first I thought the drawing class would just be awkward, it was in reality very warm and inviting, thanks to the kind residents we had the opportunity to interact with.

Lastly, I believe the most significant outcome from our entire service trip was how our work inspired some local youth to volunteer for their community with us. After visiting various classrooms and talking to the students there, we exchanged our contact information with them. The students still wanted to learn more about us and hang out with us, so they dedicated their own time outside of school to join us at the service sites. I remember while planting flowers outside a local elementary school, I thought about some high school students we met just the day before and how we probably would not see them again. However, as I was just placing a purple petunia into the dirt, a couple of shy boys from our previous school visit showed up and started to weed the garden nearby me. About fifteen minutes later, some of their friends came and joined us too! I realized that our efforts to volunteer in another country had motivated some of the youth living there to dedicate their time to their community as well.

As I sat on my flight back home to Boston, I contemplated the time I spent in the beautiful country of Russia. Before the trip, one month sounded so long, but as the end approached, I felt like I had just arrived and there was so much left to do. Even though we did volunteer work every day, it did not feel like we were sacrificing our time to do service work. Our work felt more like an exciting excursion. The different connections we made with each person we met, even though we could not communicate very well in words, were the most valuable outcomes I received from this trip. I hope in a few years, when I've improved my Russian fluency, I'll be able to return to the country and reconnect with all the amazing people I've had the pleasure in working with.

Nathan Walsh

RHODE ISLAND COMMISSION FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Thanks to the Nichols Humanitarian Fund, I had the great pleasure of spending two days a week this past summer working at the Rhode Island Commission for Human Rights in historic Providence, RI. The Commission, one of the oldest state anti-discrimination law enforcement agencies in the country, was established by the Rhode Island General Assembly in 1949. In establishing the Commission, the General Assembly recognized that "[t]he practice or policy of discrimination against individuals … is a matter of state concern [because] … discrimination foments domestic strife and unrest, threatens the rights and privileges of the inhabitants of the state, and undermines the foundations of a free democratic state." R.I.G.L. § 28-5-2. Through impartial investigation, formal and informal resolution efforts, predetermination conferences, and administrative hearings, the Commission enforces Rhode Island antidiscrimination laws in the areas of employment, housing, public accommodations, credit, and delivery of services. In addition to enforcing state laws, the Commission has contractual agreements with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development to assist in the enforcement of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967, the Americans with Disabilities Act, and Title VIII of the Civil Rights Act of 1968.

Due to the Commission's limited budget, it relies on law student volunteers to help fulfill its lofty mission. This allowed me to dive right in and accomplish a lot over the summer. I was responsible for gathering the relevant and material evidence and testimony necessary to determine whether discrimination occurred in a given case; then, I wrote detailed letters to the parties explaining the Commission's determination and its bases.

My work was particularly interesting because the Commission uses an inquisitorial model rather than the adversarial one which American law is known for. Rather than two opposing parties using a court as their battleground with the judge or jury sitting as the referee, parties who feel as though they were discriminated against can simply tell their story to the Commission. The Commission will then set out to both investigate the claim and determine whether discrimination occurred. I found that this model was more beneficial to many parties who lack either the financial means and/or determination and grit that is often necessary to set out to hire a lawyer and bring a lawsuit in court. People who were discriminated against deserve a less stressful avenue to turn to, and the Commission provides that to the citizens of Rhode Island.

Besides working on cases, I was also able to put my legal research and writing skills to good use in assisting the Commission's advocacy for the Comprehensive Community-Police Relationship Act of 2015, which was signed by Rhode Island Governor Gina Raimondo on July 10. The Rhode Island State House often turns to the Commission for input on discrimination legislation. The Commission was proud to stand behind the above-mentioned law, which requires the police to take steps to decrease racial disparities in traffic stops. The law also outlaws police from asking the consent of juveniles or pedestrians to search them absent articulable reasonable suspicion or probable cause.

My work at the Rhode Island Commission for Human Rights was similar to my work last summer at Disability Rights Tennessee. Both experiences were extremely rewarding and convinced me that I will be able to successfully use my law degree to help every individual attain the human dignity they deserve.

Samantha Williams

AMERICAN BAR ASSOCIATION CENTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

This summer I had the opportunity to intern at the American Bar Association (ABA) Center for Human Rights with a program called the Justice Defenders. The group focused on providing assistance to individuals around the world whose human rights had been violated. Those in need of help ranged from individual citizens to lawyers to political figures. During my six weeks there, I had the opportunity to work on memos, briefs and petitions to help the Justice Defenders' achieve its mission. The program collaborated with other international organizations to see relief for individuals from Russia to Mozambique as well as informed people around the world of the status of many human rights issues.

While I was a legal intern with the program, I spent most of my time working with the Eurasia/Russia and Africa groups. Here I had an opportunity to learn about different parts of the world as well as their legal systems and was able to develop the skill of comparing different domestic and international legal statutes, which is crucial in legal practice area. Additionally, I learned more about field of human rights law. As an undergrad, I majored in International Relations where I was exposed to international human rights and the policy as well as the political nuances. This summer I was able to supplement this with a robust legal understanding.

Even though I was designated to be with the Justice Defenders program, the ABA Center for Human Rights has many other departments within the center. For example there are Domestic Violence and Rule of Initiatives programs that worked close to the Justice Defenders. Having this diversity of subject matter allowed me to learn about these areas and discuss with attorneys about their work and understand the legal and social issues facing these areas of law. Each week the center would have brown bag lunches where different groups would present a particular area of their work to the whole center and interns had a chance to engage in a less formal manner. All of which was extremely beneficial for the development of my legal knowledge.

All in all, my experience at the Center for Human Rights provided me with real world exposure to field of human rights law and the lives of these attorneys that strive to enforce it. As someone who has been very interested in international human rights law for years, this internship was a great way to gain a better understanding of this area of the legal profession. In addition to having a gambit of exposure at the center, being in DC allowed me to see what other human rights organizations were doing in the area. I was able to attend meetings with other groups and in one, fill-in as the representative for the program. This was great for a couple of reasons. One it provided with a chance to be engaged in the process. Two, I had the opportunity to take initiative and develop my leadership as well as communication skills.

Thank you again for providing me with the funds to participate in this program. I appreciate you recognizing the importance of this work and encouraging students to do this work.

Davontae Willis

JAMAICA

Walking into the hallway of Jamaica AIDS support for life (JASL), I was struck by the sheer amount of HIV/AIDS cases that filled the building on a normal day. It was rather difficult for me to walk and find my way around the small facility without accidently bumping into an individual. I finally met up with other volunteers who were also from other countries (Australia, Netherlands, Philippines, Pakistan, England to name a few), and we were quickly introduced to the lovely faculty who carry out the organizations mission statement on a daily basis. The first week was essentially my orientation week. I would arrive at facility promptly at 9 AM where I would first eat breakfast with low income individuals who are affected by the HIV/AIDS condition. This breakfast consisted of casual conversation about life, as well as conversations that enabled me to become privy to how various people contracted the condition.

These breakfasts continued throughout my entire trip in Montego Bay and was easily one of the easiest ways to get to know some of the adult victims. In addition, the organization is also a host for children and teens impacted by the condition. It was rather difficult, and heartbreaking, while connecting with the victims. Looking through many of the young individual's eyes, I saw an image of myself, but with a life filled with more tragedy, disappointment and struggle. With the younger people impacted by the condition, it was obviously much easier to build connection with them considering we were all young. We bonded over games, lunches, and the celebrity media. My newfound developed relationship with many of the individuals eventually led to getting many invites to their family functions and other Jamaican summer festivals. This allowed me to not only volunteer but also dive into the wonder of the Jamaican culture.

Davontae Willis

JAMAICA

In conjunction with prepping and implementing the activities done at the JASL center daily, I also served as an intern for the NGO organization. The other interns and I first collected data from local hospitals and clinics, which essentially broke down the number of cases of HIV/AIDS reported in that area. The data only showed us the number of new cases in the last month and of course left out the specific individuals who received the diagnosis. From this data, we were able to construct a ranking based on the communities most affected by the condition. We were able to target the communities we most anticipate to work with. After pinpointing those communities, my team members and I made posters and handouts with information regarding contracting HIV/AIDS, practicing safe sex, and dealing with the prognosis of the condition at hand. The latter case was extremely important, especially since volunteers should never assume that every person being lectured is HIV negative. We, nonetheless, took our information and distributed it around various universities in different areas.

From passing out the pantalets to hosting a variety of talks during different organizations chapters, we strategized a way to appear everywhere and remain consistent so that people would take us seriously. The universities we visited ranged from Montego Bay community college to University College of the Caribbean.

The elicited response was mostly positive. We had many students asking well-developed questions after our informational session and even had a few people share some personal stories about people they know who suffer from the tragedies of HIV. With this in mind, our purpose of spreading the word and creating a dialogue about the condition was fulfilled. It is rather difficult for us to tell whether out “word of mouth” method worked in these specific communities since we were only stationed in Montego Bay for four weeks. It would be rather interesting to obtain the number of new HIV/AIDS cases in those specific communities at a later date. Still, my group members and I definitely feel like our job is done and we have left a lasting impact on both HIV/AIDS victims and the college locals alike.

Office of Active Citizenship and Service

Embedded in the rich intellectual setting of Vanderbilt, OACS aims to support the university to achieve an undergraduate experience that exposes students to a wide variety of perspectives and immersion experiences aimed at educating the whole person while cultivating lifelong learning. This is done by creating service immersion experiences that give every undergraduate an opportunity to engage, to question, and to create change locally and globally. OACS creates trans-institutional programming, including programing that embraces the centrality of public health and other thematic experiences central to the strategic mission of the university, through supporting and advising students and student service groups and through leveraging and embedding the use of digital technology to foster interaction and learning between students and the communities in which they serve.

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.

OACS offers opportunities for Vanderbilt students, including a diverse array of global service immersion projects and internship programs. OACS' suite of Global Service Immersion Projects provide students with an opportunity to engage with critical issues of inequity in a globalized world through engaging in community-based service.

To find out more about our local, national, and international service opportunities offered through OACS visit www.vanderbilt.edu/oacs.

Nichols Humanitarian Fund 2014/2015

“"Demand things of the world and if they don't do it then change the world to suit the demands."
-2008 Nichols–Chancellor’s Medal recipient Bob Geldof

Vanderbilt University Office of Active Citizenship & Service
2301 Vanderbilt Place | Nashville, TN 37235
615-343-7878615-343-7878 | 615-343-7878615-343-7878
oacs@vanderbilt.edu
www.vanderbilt.edu/oacs