

The Buzz

SUNY Broome News

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SUNY Broome Students' Trip to Haiti Wasn't a Caribbean Vacation

February 27, 2014

Categories: Featured News

Slammed by hurricanes, shaken by killer earthquakes, plagued by contaminated drinking water, and oppressed by dictators, Haiti, with its annual per capita income of \$665, is the poorest country in the western hemisphere. Last January 4, SUNY Broome Community College students and their two faculty advisors spent ten days in the impoverished island nation assisting at health clinics, attending to orphans and bed-ridden hospital patients, packing and distributing food, and providing personal hygiene and water purification instruction. Their efforts inaugurated "Health for Haiti," SUNY Broome's new four-credit global service learning course.

"We don't think of our trip as a service mission, nor is it traditional study abroad," said Jennifer Musa, the Biology professor who, with professor and chair of Dental Hygiene, Maureen Hankin, developed the BIO 104/HST 104: Health for Haiti course and arranged the trip. "Health for Haiti provides health science students with the unique and valuable opportunity to work closely with a Haitian doctor and to use the education and health care skills they obtained at SUNY Broome. The course is also open to any student interested in giving back to society."





Photos taken from [*the Health for Haiti Blog*](#).

“There are many places in need, but Haiti is unique among them,” added Hankin, who had previously visited Haiti as a member of a dental mission. “Because of the challenging political situation and the lack of stable infrastructure, it’s notoriously difficult to help Haiti. For example, many Americans donated money to help Haitians after the earthquake of 2010, but nearly four years later, it’s hard to see the effects of that aid. It’s our belief that at this time, small focused efforts are Haiti’s best hope for improvement.”

It took the two faculty members nearly a year to develop the curriculum for Health for Haiti and to secure its approval. Along the way, Musa and Hankin benefited from the efforts of Gina Curcio, a community partner with extensive experience working in Haiti.

Once the course was ready to go, the only thing left to do was find students willing to get the appropriate immunizations; steep themselves in Haiti’s political history; develop fund-raising initiatives to pay for water filtration systems and food distribution; and collect medical supplies, toys, and clothes.

“I knew when Dr. Musa first mentioned the class to me, I had to go,” said Philip Moore ’15, a health science student majoring in phlebotomy. “But there was a lot of preparation so we’d know what to expect, such as the poverty, the crime, and the tropical weather. Not to mention paying for the trip out of pocket. It wasn’t something to make a snap decision about, but I felt this course would challenge me. It was a chance to help people truly in need.”

Moore’s decision-making process was no surprise to Musa and Hankin.

“Students knew from the beginning that the trip would be difficult, and at many times uncomfortable,” Musa said. “They knew they’d be challenged.”

One of the challenges was smelling garbage as soon as they got off the plane.

“Garbage was everywhere,” Moore said. “In the streets, along the roads, in streams and rivers that were a lot of peoples’ only water source. We saw goats and pigs eating the garbage, and then we’d watch kids taking baths in that same water.”

Another challenge: encountering a country without any kind of organized health care system.

“If you can afford to see a doctor, you’re lucky,” said Moore. “If not, you might have a remote chance of getting into a free clinic.”

Some Haitian patients are fortunate enough to receive care at Mother Teresa Children’s Hospital in the capital city of Port-au-Prince.

“Visiting that hospital was very difficult for me,” said Chelsey Franks, who is completing her Phlebotomy Certificate and planning to enter the Radiographic Technology Program. “Mothers drop off their sick children and are only able to visit once a week. When we first walked in, a baby was crying, so I picked the child up. At first, I wasn’t sure whether I was holding a boy or a girl because there was no name tag. Babies without name tags are the ones who just got left outside the doors.”

“The most difficult part of the trip for me was not to feel pity for the people,” said Emily Burgoon ’15, who is enrolled in the Physical Therapist Assistant Program. “Those in poverty have lived in those conditions for generations, and it’s unlikely to change for many more. But the people I met were very proud because they worked so hard for what little they had. They’re intelligent and have the strongest faith and resilience I’ve ever seen. To pity them would be an insult.”

“Most of us have nicer garden sheds than what a lot of people in Haiti live in,” Franks added. “I wanted so badly to give them all something other than a tarp thrown over

pieces of wood and rusted metal. They had absolutely nothing, but every day they're hard at work and somehow making things work. Seeing people like that in those surroundings was heartbreaking."

"There were a lot of tears in Haiti," Hankin said. "But there was also a lot of laughter."

"We went to a village called Grande Saline, about three hours from Port-au-Prince," Moore said. "We held a clinic there with a great man, a Haitian physician, Germaine Robinson, who'd lost his family in the 2010 earthquake. We bought 75 family water purification units and instructed the families in Grande Saline how to use them. It was the first time ever they'd had clean drinking water. They were elated."

Moore also recalls giving a widow a bag of food that would last her and her family for weeks. His memories of Mother Teresa's Hospital for the Dying are just as vivid. "People were dying of AIDS, typhoid, and malaria. It was very humbling to take a pair of gloves and rub lotion on the bodies of men writhing in pain, and give them a sip of water."

"It was remarkable to feel the love pouring out from everyone, from the children at the orphanages to our guest house owner," added Burgoon. "Everyone I met was so thankful for us being there."

That sense of gratitude turned out to be a two-way street.

"Before going to Haiti, I complained about my job every day," said Franks. "My job still may not be my favorite, but I'm grateful to have it, knowing there are people who don't have the opportunities I do. Right now, I'm very thankful for so-called little things that I always took for granted. Like clean water out of the tap, a warm shower every morning, good health—everything the people in Haiti just don't have. I know someday I'll go back."

Many of the students who took "Health for Haiti" are preparing for allied health and nursing professions, but not all. One is preparing for social work. Another is studying liberal arts, intent on becoming a teacher. But whatever their futures hold, they'll go forward knowing there's a common foundation to human interaction.

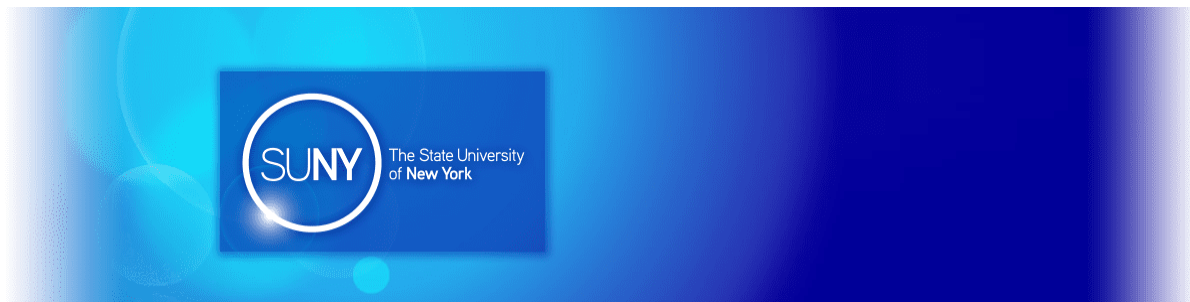
“Not all the things we did in Haiti required special skills, just a willingness to hold someone’s hand and sit with them,” Hankin said. “We provided comfort to some very sick babies, children, and adults. Just as the babies might stop crying for a bit if you held them, so did the adults seem to appreciate some physical touch and human contact.”

“We didn’t speak the same language,” added Musa. “But through eye contact and touch, we were united in our humanity. As educators, we feel that there’s no greater learning opportunity we can give our students.”

Three SUNY Broome Adjunct Professors receive Award for Excellence in Adjunct Teaching

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We are honored and pleased to both announce and congratulate our exceptional colleagues who are recipients of this year's SUNY Chancellor's Award for Excellence in Adjunct Teaching:

Timothy Skinner

Department of Communication & Media Arts

Karyn Moyer Zapach

Department of English

Christine Duffy-Webb

Department of Teacher Education /Early Childhood Education

SUNY Broome is fortunate to have so many faculty and staff who go the extra mile to serve our students and our entire academic community. Please take an opportunity to congratulate these faculty members on receiving their Chancellor's awards in the inaugural cadre. It's quite an honor, especially among the dozens and dozens of exceptional adjunct faculty who grace our classrooms and online networks every semester.

Kevin E. Drumm, PhD

President

SUNY Broome Community College

A Superstar at SUNY Broome becomes a Superstar at Excelsior College and receives a PTK Scholarship

February 10, 2014

Categories: Featured News



Talitha Purdy, a SUNY Broome Physical Therapy program graduate transferred to Excelsior College to earn her Bachelor's in Health Science degree. Talitha, who graduated from SUNY Broome in 2011 with high honors, continues to excel academically at Excelsior and was recently awarded a merit based PTK scholarship. Congratulations to Talitha!

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Submitted by Terri Fadden, SUNY Broome/Excelsior Partnership Office