

Nichols Humanitarian Fund



2017

TABLE OF CONTENTS

About the Nichols Humanitarian Fund
Nichols Humanitarian Fund Statistics
The Students
Nancy Anosike
Zoe Brown
Naomi Chan (Report not submitted)
Sophia Druffner
Agatha Fenech
Raquel Gibson-Starks
Bri Grantham
Mckenzie Green
Laura Gronauer
Lauryn Hardy
Jeremy (Britt) Hatcher
Jordan Henderson
Azeem Hernandez
Malik Hollingsworth
Shelby House
Austin Isaac (Report not submitted)
Annalise Jirik
Julie Jones
Alec Jotte
Priyanka Kadari
Caitlyn Ko
Austin Konkle
Garrett Lappe
Nariko Lee
Yuguang Lei
Henry Lu
Julie Mancini
Lo Meisel
Sarah Nash
Ashley Nmoh
Tunmise Olowojaba
Bonnie Pang
Hydn Park
Araminta Ray
Sarah Robinson
Emma Stewart
Ajike Sumpter
Izabela Tyszka
Denise Wanyana
Brianna Watkins
Carolyn Yee
Clara Yip
Office of Active Citizenship and Service
Nichols Humanitarian Fund 2017

About the Nichols Humanitarian Fund

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

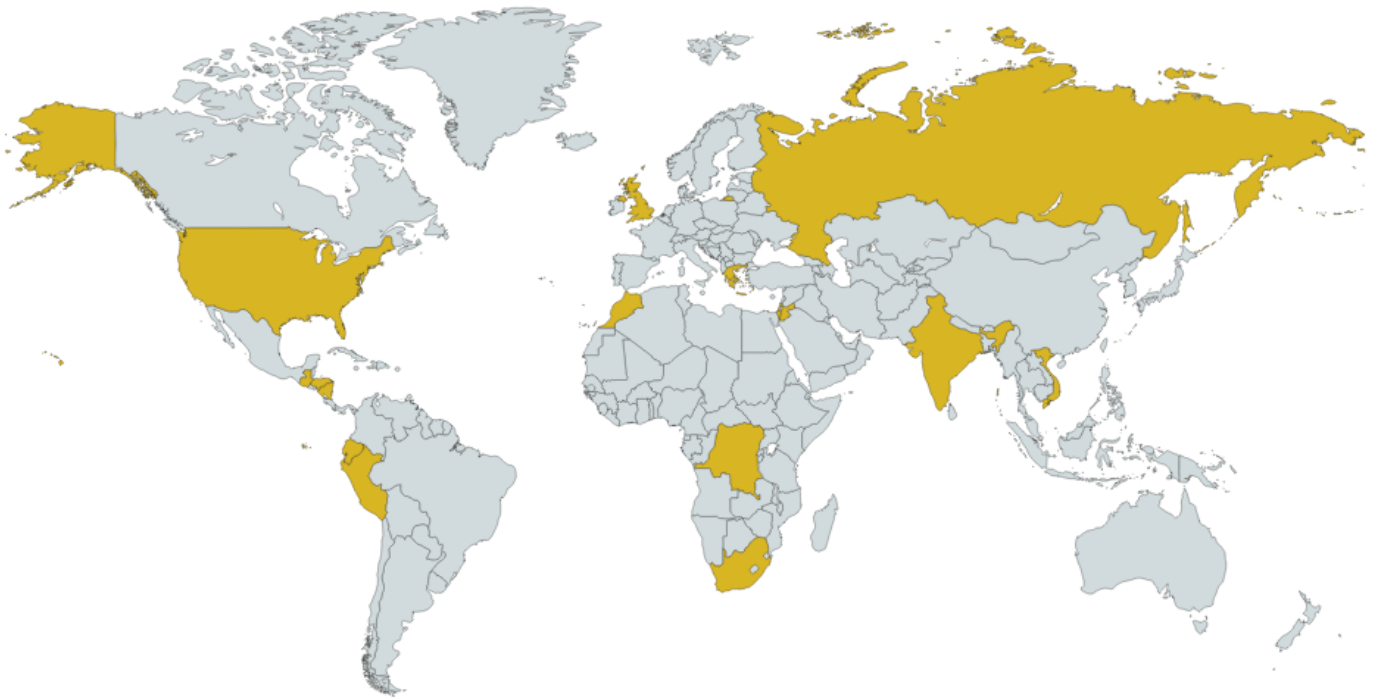
All currently enrolled Vanderbilt students are eligible to receive assistance from the Fund, provided that they are citizens or permanent residents of the United States. Preference will be given to undergraduate students who have not yet completed their baccalaureate degrees.

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

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

Nichols Humanitarian Fund

Nichols Humanitarian Fund Coverage



Nichols Fund Recipient Service Locations for 2017

Nichols Humanitarian Fund

The Students

Forty two students were selected to receive the Nichols Humanitarian Fund Award to pursue humanitarian projects during the summer of 2017. The award enabled students to work with communities on humanitarian efforts including human rights, public health, immigrant rights, early childhood education, mental health, and environmental sustainability. The average GPA of the 2017 student recipients was 3.46 and the countries where they worked included India, England, Morocco, Ecuador, South Africa, Russia, Guatemala, Greece, Peru, Honduras, Israel, Vietnam, Palestine, and the United States.

Nancy Anosike

South Africa

The problem with service trips is that they end. The return to one's regularly scheduled life, complete with comforts and luxuries lacking in the country of service. You cannot help but find yourself at odds with your return. A life changing and mind-blowing experience just occurred, yet once I stepped foot back in my hometown of Irving, Texas, I started wondering if any of it was real. Did it really happen? Did I leave the country and spend 6 weeks in South Africa, traveling and living with amazing people and encountering a whole different culture? All of a sudden, I was no longer so sure because Irving felt so familiar. Within hours, I was back to driving my car to the local mall on well-paved roads, spending money on things I did not really need and enjoying the privilege I have always had.

The problem with service trips is that they end.

However, when I decided to concretely believe that my service trip did occur, I was ready to reflect on the consequences of those 6 weeks. Combined with a deep spiritual journey sparked by God and nourished by the Holy Spirit, I discovered that I could not go back to living the way that I used to live –not completely. I could not change the fact that I am surrounded by amenities that are considered a privilege by certain communities in undeveloped countries, but what I could control was the extent to which I bought into the heavy materialism present in America. I became resolved to always treat people with love and kindness, regardless of whether I knew



them or not. This was the sort of warmth that the South Africans I met offered me, and I did not want to insult their memory by not applying that same attitude in my own life. Additionally, I would reorient my understanding of what were ‘needs’ and ‘wants’ in my life. I may need water to brush my teeth, but I no longer want to keep the faucet running as I do so, because while Irving was not experiencing a drought as Port Elizabeth was, I will not continue living in a wasteful manner. My final resolution was an overall change in mentality regarding the meaning of life. I deeply felt that God revealed to me through my time in South Africa and in my later reflections that service is simply the way I interact with everyone around me. It does not have to occur at a special place, in a particular duration of time, nor does it have to be considered a grandiose act. Service can be embedded in the very essence of my character and etched into the vessels of my heart. In this way, it becomes impossible to feel at odds with yourself at the end of a “service trip.” With this mentality, one humbles themselves in the most Christ-like of ways which ultimately leads to a pleasing and consistent life.

The amazing thing about true service is that it never really has to end.

Zoe Brown

Morocco

My experience with AMDH, which translates to the Moroccan Association for Human Rights, was incredibly eye-opening and fascinating. The organization is responsible for supporting free-speech, liberty, and equality in Morocco on behalf of those it believes to be oppressed. They focus on spreading the word about human rights violations that take place within the country and facilitating gatherings of like-minded individuals who yearn for a more democratic Morocco. I was proud to contribute my language and research skills to such an organization; I translated brochures for them to help them reach a wider audience and I pinpointed their media presence in Latin American and Spanish news outlets. In addition, I compiled a master list of potential partner organizations for them worldwide. My boss, Issam, was especially excited about this as he plans to use the list to make connections that will extend AMDH's network of support.

Truthfully, AMDH showed me much more than I contributed in return. The depth of the human rights problems that plague Morocco was shocking, but it was inspiring to see the people around me working daily to affect positive change. I learned that the indigenous people of Morocco, the Berber people, are angry that they do not receive recognition from the Moroccan government. Their language and their culture has been stifled and overlooked since the influx of Islam; the protests they put on in the Rif region while I was working in Morocco made their frustration very clear. I learned that free

speech is not what it seems within the confines of a monarchy. The TV and radio stations are all publicly owned, and any publications that do not support the King are typically put out of business. I learned that even though the Family Code was adjusted years ago to give women more freedoms, these women are still struggling against traditional viewpoints that prevent further progress.

Even more important than researching these issues at my work site was talking to the people I met about how these politics shaped their lives. Moroccans in my generation are very proud of their culture and country, which was great to witness, but they also have some complaints. For instance, one of our neighbors refuses to learn the French language because he believes that the fact that everyone is expected to know French to do business is one of the ways Morocco is still subtly colonized by the Western nation. In addition, I spoke to many local women about their experience being harassed in the streets. Despite the new Family Code, male dominance of public space has perpetuated an environment of catcalling and aggressive language towards women. I witnessed this firsthand, and it was no different for the women who lived nearby. It was exceptionally powerful to be able to put these big picture issues into a local context in the short period of time I was there, despite the fact that I struggled communicating with many Moroccans.

Much of the learning I accomplish on a daily basis happens inside of a classroom in a very controlled environment. Being

Zoe Brown

Morocco

placed in a new city, in a new country, in a new culture was a form of experiential learning I have never gotten the chance to partake in. I feel like I discovered things about the world and about myself that will be ten times more valuable than anything I could learn from the comfortable seat of my desk. I am so grateful to have had such an experience and feel like my newfound knowledge will inform my future actions, especially in the realm of service and global relations.



Naomi Chan

Israel and Palestine

Naomi Chan is a recent graduate from Vanderbilt University with a Cognitive Studies major. This summer, she worked with Operation Groundswell (OG), a service that provides ethical volunteering opportunities, educational programming, and fully immersive experiences. Through OG, Naomi volunteered with Rabbis for Human Rights, an organization that advocates for the rights of marginalized members in Israel and Palestine. Additionally, Naomi volunteered with Shorashim, an organization that creates programming between Israeli and Palestinian families in order to foster understanding and nonviolence between the two populations.



Sophia Druffner

Pennsylvania

“How do I wrap my arms around as many patients as possible?” The woman, short, African-American, and wearing a bright red dress, throws her arms out; the air seems to retreat from the motion. Her eyes are narrowed, glaring at women and a few men who will be, in two weeks, working nurses. I’m here among them by fate -- stuck in an elevator now a mile away and looking to make small talk, I asked this professor what her lanyard said. She told me that she was part of the administration of the Camden Coalition and a professor at the Nursing school at Rutgers-Camden location. She’s an imposing presence, and though I am not part of the intended audience of nursing students, I am no less challenged by her stare. I look at my own arms questioningly: what patients have I wrapped in them?

Doors open to me in the next few weeks, and behind each of them is a person, a patient. As the days pass, I come to see each person as needing to be cared for, which is what I choose to define a patient to be. In my many interactions, each person becomes a patient, at least for a little while. I find places, modernized shelters and old church buildings turned soup kitchens, to play violin at, one of the ways I choose to care for people. The first place I play is Covenant House, a place for runaway and abused teens. The name brings back memories of me, age 12, reading Sister Mary Rose Grady’s books on my grandmother’s flowered bedspread about the child prostitutes and victims of domestic violence, loved by the staff and volunteers at Covenant House’s original

location in New York City. The nearby Atlantic City House has a door with two locks and three security cameras, but I’m fortunate enough to be walking behind an adult coordinator, whom I introduce myself to before he opens the door. Luckily, with my short hair, beanie, and tattered violin case, I don’t look too threatening, so he lets me in. When I’m with the kids, I win some appreciation from my two-color hair and even more when I open my violin case. As I laugh at their jokes and introduce myself, the “kids,” aged 15-22, look less intimidating. Even the guy with the green mohawk and piercings offers me a shy smile when I offer to play a Beatles song, and the nearly seven-foot-tall boy with long dreadlocks claps the loudest when I play one by Katy Perry. Another tall guy, about 280 lbs with pink nails, tells me softly that he thinks that the violin is his favorite instrument; he’s so glad I came and played today. At the end, I hug a sweet twenty-one-year-old short Hispanic girl goodbye, and her eyes sparkle. She’s so excited that she’s moving out today, and she is just about to take the first suitcase out the door. A nearby volunteer tells me that after having received a degree in the culinary arts, she’s moving into an apartment and beginning work at a upscale restaurant.

After I leave, I walk four more blocks, straight ahead. The ocean is there, waiting for me. There’s not many people on the beach, and I lay down, using my violin as a headrest. In my head I can see the faces of the kids at Covenant House, and I can see how their faces relax in my head as they

Sophia Druffner

Pennsylvania

began to hear the music. I know that they're carrying so many burdens -- addictions with drugs, alcohol, abusive relationships -- but somehow, the music helps. The music helps.

A week later I'm at a somewhat dilapidated stone Methodist-Episcopalian church, watching as people come in and are served a hot plate of spaghetti. This time I'm playing slow songs from the 60s and 70s, and I see one man nodding in the corner, eyes closed, conducting along with the music. Another's feet, encased in frayed leather sandals, twitch in time to the music; in his mind, he is dancing. The pastor, a tall black man with a graying beard, thanks me with a hard handshake. I know in my head that there are many complex factors for the people sitting in front of me, but right now, they are more than statistics or parts of news articles or sources of "concern." They're just people, eating spaghetti, listening to a violin play. If I close my eyes, I can almost imagine that we are all in a dark restaurant, sitting at tiny tables, and I am the background string music. Somehow though, there is more meaning to be found in the music in this yellow, paint-peeling church basement and circle tables with dented legs. A week later I'm playing violin next to the bed of a psychiatric patient. He's 50 years old and in a world renowned hospital in Philadelphia, suffering from alcohol withdrawal and numerous complex socioeconomic issues. I know most of these, of course, because I've listened in on the doctors' conversations as I've shadowed in the past four days, but the man isn't throwing things or acting particularly abnormal as he talks to me. He's just a guy

listening to violin music, occasionally humming along. After a few songs, I sit down and ask him a bit about his life. Sometimes, when talking about his family, his stories deviate, and he picks nervously at his food. I can tell that he's not eating anything on his plate; he has anorexia nervosa, and when he's not fingering the food, he's scratching at the skin on his hands. His hands are beautiful, by the way. His fingers are long and the nails, although ragged, have rounded oval cuticles. I glance at them again when he takes the opportunity to look at the TV and find that the skin on his hands is red and angry, somewhat spoiling the image of the hands which were once pristine. When he looks back at me after a few minutes of watching television, I ask him if he has any requests, and he asks me if I know "The Yellow Rose of Texas." I think of the girl whom he may have joined hands with, his beautiful fingers wrapping around her own, and I play for them. As my bow crosses the strings again and again, his right hand drops from scratching at his left hand, and the skin turns white again. They lie at his side, still trembling slightly, and I wish that I could take his hands in mine and stroke them, as a mother sometimes strokes the hands of her child when the child is anxious, but I can't; my hands are covered in gloves, and I am not his mother. So I play, and I play, and I play, and it seems to bathe his hands in quiet and love. When I leave, an hour later, he asks me if I have to leave, if I will come back again. I tell him I have to go, I don't live here. I wish I could stay, but I can't.

Sophia Druffner

Pennsylvania

And I mean it.

A tall African-American man, a social worker in his mid-sixties, challenges me in the Philadelphia Free Library when he says “Talk to the person who is talking to himself.” I think of all the many people whom I have seen talking to themselves in a way that usually indicates mental derangement, and immediately, even without seeing them physically, the fear and flight responses come to mind. These are they to be avoided. These are they to walk around. These are they to ignore... but yet another sentence from him reminds me “Saying “hey, how are you” to someone brings them back to being in a social environment; it can do wonders.”

Throughout my time in Philadelphia and Camden, I wanted to do more than serve people by playing violin. I wanted to understand what affected them too - the government regulations, the socioeconomic factors that led them to be so disadvantaged. How do I wrap my arms around patients? By understanding. The first part of this understanding this summer was a research project with Professor David Frankford at Rutgers University, the Camden campus. Under his direction, I researched the most recent development in Medicare, a reform program initiated in 2015 called MACRA. Its aim is to transform patients’ lives by fixing the way that doctors are paid. It promises to reach more patients and physicians; the more articles I read, the more I am convinced that MACRA will make medicine better. Professor Frankford seems to think so too, and as the project ended, he encouraged me to interview primary care

doctors and employees in nonprofits to figure out how their lives will change because of this act. So I do.

The second part of this understanding came from collecting many interviews. Some came from high places, such as the director of the Medical ICU at Penn Presbyterian. Some came from lesser known places: a small, single grant-funded desk at the Philadelphia Free Library, established by a small Filipino nurse to take insulin and blood pressure tests on the largely homeless population who frequent the library. Through these interviews, I came to begin to understand the exploitation that many face. Most of all, I was inspired by quotes left me thinking for hours about the future of healthcare in America. The same RN, JD in the beginning throws us another amazing quote when she says “When the policymakers vote up or down, there are faces and names for the folks whom they’re offending.” This summer, I met some those people, learned some of their names, some of their faces. I am so thankful for the opportunity to have been able to take this trip and to continue on my path to becoming an MD/JD.

Thank you so much to the Nichols and everyone who helped make this trip possible. You have given me the opportunity to learn so much more about myself and my faith, about the people around me, and about the world in which I live.

Agatha Fenech

Morocco

Six weeks in Morocco, 14 fellow Vanderbilt students, and countless powerful experiences, moments of personal growth, and perspective-shaping relationships. Before leaving, I knew I would be going to Morocco for six weeks with 14 other Vanderbilt students. I knew I was going to learn and understand the culture and community in Rabat and Morocco, rather than impact or change it. These few pieces of prior knowledge held true throughout the trip, but they developed and expanded in many ways.

In the most surface level terms, I went to Morocco and worked at a human rights organization, basically as an intern, with another Vanderbilt student. I stayed with a host family with two other Vanderbilt students, and together we fasted for Ramadan and celebrated Eid al-Fitr. During the week, all the Vanderbilt students would take Darija (Moroccan Arabic) language classes and attend seminars together on various aspects of Morocco, such as Women and Islam, Women in Moroccan Politics, and Non-Governmental Organizations and Civil Society in Morocco. We would have formal group reflections once a week in addition to informal group and one-on-one conversations about our time, place, and experiences in Morocco. On the weekends, we all went on excursions together. In addition to being a way to see and understand more of the country, because the culture of Morocco, like everywhere else, varies by region, city, and community, these excursions were also wonderful opportunities to get to know

the other students with whom we were not living or working. The cohort aspect of the program enabled me to learn and grow so much more than I would have otherwise. I was to listen and learn from others' lived experiences and backgrounds in addition to my own and bounce and develop my thoughts and ideas off of theirs.

Furthermore, I am a firm believer that shared memories are the best kind, and I got to share all of my incredible, unbelievable, and challenging memories in Morocco with some of the most amazing people I have ever met.

While I obviously learned and experienced a lot in Morocco, two personal epiphanies and/or reflections stand out among the rest. The first was about the purpose of doing work and service outside of one's own familiar community, and the second was about how we understand beauty as a society. In regards to the first, I was realistic going into the program that I was not going to have any significant impact or "change" Morocco. I was not familiar with the culture or customs, I did not live or grow up there, and I was only going for six weeks. I was going to learn, and what I learned was that we work to understand different communities and engage with different cultures so that we can become the best active global citizens we can be and effect change in our own communities. I plan to go into public service, and this program has shaped and influenced my worldview and will help me be a more aware and effective public servant now and in the future. I could say a lot more on this point (I wrote an entire

Agatha Fenech

Morocco

blog post just about this line of thought), but I do want to touch on my second big moment of realization. When I was riding a camel in the Sahara, surrounded by people I love, and some of the most striking scenery I have ever seen, I thought to myself, “This is so beautiful.” Almost immediately, I thought about how it looked like no other “beautiful” thing I have ever seen before. It did not look anything like the beautiful mountains, or beautiful oceans, or beautiful forests I have seen; it was its own unique type of beauty. I marinated on this thought a lot, thinking about how we see physical beauty and desirable character traits in humans. If nature can create so many different forms of beauty, I think we can challenge ourselves as a society to recognize the many different types of physical and soul beauty in humans. Just because you may not look or be like someone who is called beautiful does not mean that you yourself are not beautiful. The Sahara Desert looks nothing like the Alps or the Bahamas but it is beautiful all the same.



Raquel Gibson-Starks

Morocco

A beautiful sunset picture taken at the beach with friends that had become family sits on my phone background as a reminder of one of the most amazing experiences of my life. My six weeks in Morocco sometimes felt like days and if I'm honest sometime felt like months. The incredible sights in the Sahara are etched in my mind alongside the many pleasant and not so pleasant smells that I encountered in the Rabat medina each day. I am grateful to have had the experience I had in Morocco alongside 14 other incredibly passionate Vanderbilt students and our wonderful program coordinator.

My days in Rabat began with a quiet breakfast with my roommates Agatha and Rita whilst our host siblings and host mother slept. After leaving my homestay I met up with Austin and we began our daily trek to work. The first part of journey was the walk through the medina which was just beginning to stir and once we had navigated the winding streets, vendors, and stray cats we had to get a taxi. Getting a taxi in Rabat is itself an arduous journey because one we found one going to our location (Mini Park) we then had to pile in and wait for the taxi with five seats to be filled with five other people. Each day at our service site Austin and I were teaching English to students ranging from 7-28 years of age with a varying backgrounds in English. Each day required patience, kindness, and creativity. I learned a significant amount about teaching and how important it is to be able to adapt to the abilities and learning styles of your students. Some days teaching was

exasperating and after those days reflecting was critical for ensuring that we would come back the next day with new and or improved techniques and enthusiasm to pass along to our students. After a long day at our service site we looked forward to seeing our cohort to debrief and laugh about the day.

Our weekends in Morocco took us to breath-taking areas of the North African country and those excursions were also used to continue learning about the roles of NGOs in Morocco. Each time we visited an NGO we had to remind ourselves of the context that they operate in and that even after six weeks there is so much more information that we would need to know before we could understand the complex needs of Moroccan communities. Each excursion was an opportunity to take note of the different characteristics of each city or region while also noticing the commonalities. One of my favorite excursions was in Essaouira, a beach town in the south of Morocco, where the art in the city reflect the creativity and unpredictability of the waves that the locals surf on. The only excursion that rivaled Essaouira was our excursion to the Sahara desert when we rode camels for three hours to reach a part of the world that has managed to escape the greed and destruction of man.

The seminars we attended helped spark incredible discussions among our cohort about feminism and religion, access to education, the contested Western Sahara region, and how to evaluate what aspects of human rights should be

Raquel Gibson-Starks

Morocco

universal and which can be contextually evaluated. I cannot say that my peers and I came to groundbreaking conclusions, but we did engage familiar and foreign topics in original ways and have all returned to campus with new perspectives that we developed with the help of our peers, leader, and the many kind Moroccans we met during our trip.

I only got a glimpse into Moroccan culture in six weeks, but what I experienced in those six weeks will continue to influence me. I gained a better understanding of what flexibility looks like and was reminded how capable myself and others are of adapting and embracing situations in which what we do not understand outweighs what we do understand. I will also have the relationships with my cohort and host family as well as many photos to remind me that those six incredible weeks were not in fact just a dream.



Bri Grantham

Ecuador

From my seat in the Miami International airport, I could feel the anticipation and excitement swell in my being as my flight to Ecuador crept closer and closer. I found myself listening in to the conversations of the people around me to prime myself for all of the Spanish I would be speaking throughout the following six weeks. That five-hour-long flight seemed to last a lifetime, but once I was riding the bus to our hostel and surrounded by the beautiful landscape that adorns Quito, I barely remembered being on the plane at all. Towards the end of the first 24 hours of my stay in Ecuador, I came into contact with someone who belonged to the Afro-Ecuadorian ethnicity for the first time. Although I have met black/afro-latinx individuals before, I was enthralled to see someone who looked like me so far away from home.

Being that I am a Black woman, I tend to attend to minority relations closely. In fact, my desire to pursue the OACS Ecuador trip was driven by the promise of working intimately with the Indigenous community, whose members account for the 7% of Ecuador's population. This promise was fulfilled, as I spent a few hours each day at Yachay Wasi, a school ran by a sweet Indigenous couple, who combined their traditional teachings with modern teachings to provide a holistic curriculum for upcoming generations. Along with my cohort, I learned how to cultivate the land, harvest different types of crops, clear fields, and even cut down unwanted trees. I was also reminded of how closely African Americans resemble Afro-Ecuadorians

when Fernandito, who ran the school with his wife, told me, along with the only other black person in my cohort, that we looked as if we could be from Chota or Esmeraldas.

Afro-Ecuadorians, similarly to the Indigenous individuals, account for nearly 7% of Ecuador's population, which, comparatively, is little over half the US's population of Black Americans – 12%. Because the majority of Ecuadorian people of African descent live in the province of Esmeraldas or Valle de Chota, Afro-Ecuadorians are not seen as frequently as one might think in Quito. Like Black Americans, they face discrimination and deal with negative stereotypes. Often, you will hear Mestizos, individuals who belong to mixed Indigenous and European backgrounds, stereotype Afro-Ecuadorians as thieves and whores or use “black” as an insult amongst themselves. Unfortunately, the program didn't allow for much interaction with individuals who belong to the Afro-Ecuadorian demographic; however, I think that it could be beneficial for program to implement some type of partnership with an Ecuadorian based organization purposed towards empowering those who belong to this group.

The weekend excursions were definite highlights of the OACS Ecuador trip. Despite successfully maiming myself in unique ways each weekend, I thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to bond with the other Vandy students and to further explore the country. How many people can say that they survived a trek through

Bri Grantham

Ecuador

the Amazon while suffering less than 20 mosquito bites? I can. And that's pretty damn cool, if I do say so myself.

Additionally, the group of students I accompanied throughout the trip proved to make each day 100% interesting and 100% worth-while. Overall, this trip allowed me to draw parallels between my own experiences and the experiences of other

people who have lived lives so different from my own, create lasting bonds with individuals whom I might not have met if not for this trip, and to broaden my perspectives of the world around me beyond what I could imagine. I will forever be grateful for the Nichols and their gracious donations that made this trip possible for myself and countless others.



McKenzie Green

India

While many aspects of my trip to India were different than what I imagined, the value of the cultural education and relationships I gained could not have been overestimated. I traveled on behalf of Vanderbilt's chapter of Project RISHI, along with our organization's president, Priyanka. Project RISHI is a national nonprofit whose mission is to provide sustainable education, health, and financial development in rural Indian communities. We had chosen to focus on working with a primary school in Pamulaparathi, a relatively small village just outside of Hyderabad.

During our time in Hyderabad, my partner Priyanka and I were able to complete renovations to the primary school's restroom including the addition of running water, rendering the facility hygienic and usable. We gave small toys and furniture to one of our most valuable area contacts, the village's Anganwadi worker, who was at the primary school every weekday during our work. She is a government employee in charge of village health care as well as a program similar to American preschool. We purchased new cooking pots and a Prakti biomass stove for the school's kitchen workers, which contains emissions to reduce health and safety issues, and allows the use of plentiful and inexpensive biomass materials for fuel.

The variety of projects that became our focus throughout the trip demonstrated to me the importance of flexibility in serving a community, especially when its culture is much different than your own. Particularly when it came to coordinating our projects with government development efforts it was vital to maintain reliable local contacts and be persistent in our efforts to communicate with them. We also learned the value of having a reliable team for support and feedback. With a team of two, it was sometimes hard to find a fresh perspective. Weekly skype meetings with rest of our executive board gave us increased confidence in our work, as well as new ideas and angles with which to approach our problems.

The language barriers I faced when communicating with members of our village were a challenge, but it was still very clear to me how welcoming Indian citizens are, and how much enthusiasm they hold about sharing their culture with travelers. I was treated with unfailing grace and hospitality. It was sometimes difficult to communicate with locals why we spent our time and funds where we did, especially when it came to choosing sustainable projects over those that may appear more urgent to those who are from the area, such as providing school uniforms and shoes.

McKenzie Green

India

Even when our priorities seemed somewhat perplexing, the vast majority of people we worked with remained grateful and open. Some government officials, particularly the principal of the primary school we worked with, were sometimes critical over minute details of our work, even after refusing to give input while it was being

accomplished. These reactions were frustrating, but we chose to remember that pride usually played a role in these criticisms over truth. We focused on the fact that our work was appreciated and helpful to those we came to serve- the school's students, teachers, and staff, as well as the citizens of Pamulaparathi as a whole.



Laura Gronauer

Washington, D.C.

This summer, I served as a law clerk at the American Bar Association Center for Human Rights in the Justice Defenders Program, located in Washington, D.C. I am so grateful to the Nichols family for facilitating my ability to pursue this incredible opportunity with the Center, which promotes the just rule of law around the world by defending human rights advocates from harassment. I had such a fantastic experience during my time at the ABA that I will be continuing to work on projects remotely throughout the semester.

During my time at the ABA, I worked on a variety of projects, including researching and writing about judicial harassment, pre-trial detention, violations of the right to freedom of association and expression, and the independence and impartiality of the judiciary. While I cannot discuss the specifics of the cases I worked on for confidentiality reasons, I am excited to share the impact that this important work had on me. Throughout my time at the ABA, I was struck by the courage demonstrated by human rights defenders around the world, who often knew that speaking up for what was right would almost certainly result in their harassment. These advocates, who work to defend fundamental rights by holding governments and non-state actors accountable for human rights violations, are often subject to intimidation, persecution, violence, and baseless legal proceedings as a means of impeding their activities and discrediting their important

work. Many of these advocates were repeatedly subjected to such harassment in the past, yet they persisted in their activism. It was a privilege to work in support of these human rights defenders, who put their lives and freedom at risk to uphold the rule of law.

Each week, our team met to discuss the most pressing issues in each region and the projects we were currently working on. Since each project I worked on generally focused on a specific country or region, I particularly enjoyed these team meetings because they allowed me to broaden my understanding of human rights issues in countries and regions that I had not yet had a chance to explore. It was a privilege to learn from such a knowledgeable team of attorneys and other staff members who were committed to assisting human rights defenders around the world.

Much of my work involved researching and writing about fair trial issues. Since my 1L legal research course had focused on domestic issues, this was my first experience performing extensive research outside that narrow scope. I particularly enjoyed researching the case law surrounding the application of international treaties, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). I also researched and wrote about judicial harassment of an advocate in retaliation for his peaceful activism, revised and supplemented a trial observation report,

Laura Gronauer
Washington, D.C.

conducted research regarding state of emergency protocols, and researched defamation, association, and freedom of expression laws in several other countries. This breadth of assignments exposed me to a variety of ongoing human rights concerns and expanded my research skills exponentially.

My summer position with the ABA Center for Human Rights was a phenomenal experience, and I look forward to continuing to assist with their important work throughout this semester. This experience has strengthened my commitment to performing pro bono and public interest work in throughout my legal career. I am grateful for the support of the Nichols Humanitarian Fund, which allowed me to explore my interest in human rights work and to expand my knowledge of ongoing human rights issues.

Lauryn Hardy

Morocco

This summer I had the incredible opportunity to live and work in Rabat, Morocco. These six weeks have had a lasting impact on my life, not only due to the friendships fostered and the life lived there, but largely due to the immense perspective change that occurred. Upon returning to school, I have found it difficult to explain to my friends and family what life was like in Morocco or how I enjoyed my time, because, truthfully, the experience was beautifully challenging.

One challenge was altering my idea of what it meant for me to work for an NGO in Morocco. As a Vanderbilt student, I often value efficiency to the highest degree. As a foreign volunteer, however, efficiency was essentially off the table. My priorities every day at work were forced to be basic, simply to gain understanding (sometimes literally due to the language barrier). Before actually being in Morocco I would not have said that I expected to have a positive, real influence in the work that I was doing at REMESS, in fact prior to leaving we had read a number of research papers about the danger of foreign volunteers holding this assumption. Yet, I quickly realized that I had held onto this expectation more closely than I would have ever liked to admit. And though I pushed against this for the first week or two, justifying my lack of productivity to Ramadan's schedule, I began to understand why I had read all of those articles on voluntourism.

The reality was that I was an American, college student who had barely traveled around the U.S. let alone the world; never spent a second in Morocco, and had read

only a few specific articles and blogs about life in Morocco. I had limited understanding of the challenges that Morocco faces and little perspective on those my own country needs to address. Yet, I wanted to be a part of change in a foreign country.

To want change is not bad, in fact it is a critical part of my "advocate" nature, however to want to change something, let alone a group of issues as critical and complex as those concerning culture, is to severely misunderstand what is needed for true, lasting change.

Although I may have traveled to Morocco expecting to be a part of widespread, cultural change, I have returned with the same objective, though for my own country. By living in a country considerably different than my own, I became acutely aware of the issues of the U.S. while learning about those in Morocco. As I worked with men and women who advocate for change in Morocco, I was able to see advocacy in person, even in the face of an often strict monarchical government. Returning now, I have new experiences, perspectives, and questions that were only made possible by all those I met, learned from, worked with, and experienced in Morocco.

Jeremy (Britt) Hatcher

Ecuador

It's been three weeks since I got back to the United States and I can't believe it's been that long. My time in Guatemala is still so fresh on my mind, and I'll try to put on paper the two months of life-changing experiences that I had this summer.

When I got to Guatemala, we spent the first few days staying in a hotel. It was overwhelming, and it took me a while to get my bearings and even feel comfortable stepping outside of the hotel. The streets were crowded, narrow, and uneven... and they all looked the same. The smells were sweet, sour, rich, and tangy, often varying from block to block. There was noise all the time, perhaps the most shocking example being the 5:00am firecrackers that were shot off every morning by families celebrating a birthday or a major life event. A close second place would be the roosters, which woke us up every morning by 6:00 am if the firecrackers didn't do the trick. Aside from the fact that the city felt different than anything I'd experienced before, many of the small routine things I used to take for granted suddenly got more complicated. Instead of drinking from the tap, we had to buy bottles or fill the large container every few days. No matter how delicious it smelled, we avoided street food because we knew there was a high risk for bacterial infection. Finally, I had to learn to cook for myself and fit time for cooking into my schedule. These seem like tedious, insignificant things, but I realized that part of understanding someone means being able to relate to their daily routines and experiences.

Despite the shock of adjusting to a new

schedule, throwing toilet paper into the trash can instead of the toilet, etc., the largest adjustment by far was using Spanish as a daily (hourly) communication method. It wasn't really an option. If I wanted to order food, find the bus, etc., I had to use Spanish. In the instant I recognized this, I realized what a blessing it was to have already received an education that allowed me to easily to adjust to communicating with people in a different language than I grew up with. In terms of cultural adjustment, I realized that this was much less difficult than I'd imagined. Despite the separate language, people in Guatemala are remarkably similar to someone I'd expect to meet here in the US. They love TV, have dreams and ambitions just like my peers at Vanderbilt, and laugh at the same jokes. They play sports, want to go to college, love coffee, and more. I learned that, no matter how many miles apart, people are linked together by a lot more than separates us.

As far as my schedule in Xela, Guatemala, I split most of my weekdays between working in a clinic called Primeros Pasos and taking advanced Spanish classes at a local Spanish school. At Primeros Pasos, I worked with a team led by local educators to enhance and teach a preventative health curriculum to students in grades K-6 in schools in the Palanujoj Valley. We spent a lot of time focusing on sex education, self-esteem, mental health, puberty, and nutrition. It blew my mind to see how challenging it was to get these kids to focus, and part of that is that the content we were teaching

Jeremy (Britt) Hatcher

Ecuador

was so foreign and unfamiliar. It made me realize how much of my education – and even my moral code, really – can be attributed to the blessing of growing up in the US with teachers who were knowledgeable and had the resources to provide an excellent education.

Not surprisingly, part of this summer was a reality check and a bit of disillusionment. I came in having spent the majority of my life romanticizing the notion of practicing medicine in Central America. Both through my experiences in Primeros Pasos and through firsthand stories of peoples' contact with the national healthcare system, much of what I learned was shocking. Statistics about teen pregnancy, birth complications, recovery time from surgeries, availability of specialists for complex conditions, and more were appalling. I learned about the general feeling of mistrust toward the healthcare system, particularly the physicians at local hospitals. The problem seems to be a complex mixture of under-resourcing, a lack of attention to patient well-being, a failure to create a system that produces personalized medicine decisions, and a general tendency to spend too little time with each patient to treat more than the most critical of conditions. I wondered a lot about where I could fit into a system like that – a system so large and with so many complex failures. How could one person possibly make a difference? How could I – a single doctor – possibly hope to make an impact in such a HARD medical model. It was a discouraging thought, and it wasn't until I thought about impact on the scale of a single patient that optimism

returned. No matter how many patients there are that need care, I realized that every single interaction is an opportunity to shape someone's life trajectory and provide excellent care.

I'm not sure what the rest of my life and professional journey will look like. I know with certainty that I want to practice a service-driven career, and I would love for some of that to be in Central America. However, I think that the biggest need is for physicians in specialized fields to provide excellent quality care and inspire local physicians to strive for continual improvement in their own healthcare system. I'm also pretty certain that my opinion and perspective on this issue will change throughout my lifetime. All of that aside, there's a special place in my heart for Central America and Guatemala. I can't wait to go back, and I know that the experience I had will effect the way I approach the next four years of medical school. Finally, this summer reaffirmed more than ever the reality that this world is in the hands of a mighty, beautiful, and loving God who wants to know us intimately and who transcends all lines of culture or nationality.



Jordan Henderson

London

Jordan planned to go to London and participate in the OACS Global Service Immersion Program. However, because of a last-minute situation beyond his control involving his passport he was unable to travel to London and participate in this program and therefore did not submit a reflection report.



Azeem Hernandez

London

London was an incredible experience that will impact the way I interact with the world and challenge me to be more curious about my environment and the dynamics at play in my cities. I traveled to London with the intention of immersing myself in the culture to gain insight on the various similarities between dynamics in the United Kingdom and the United States. I was intentional about the various social structures and systems of power that I questioned. I acknowledged, however, that no matter how I might try – I will never truly fully understand any such dynamic in London because I am an outsider. Regardless of how I might try to check my bias, I still wear a unique lens that skews what I see in a very American way. This experience confirmed that belief. From the use of certain words that I deem unacceptable in America to the types of discussion that occurred in political spheres, I slowly learned that London was under no obligation to care about the same issues that America did. However, I also noticed the various topics and power structures that did translate.

Through my placement site, I was afforded the chance to work with local organizers and their respective organizations. I noticed similar trends of impoverished areas composed primarily of people of color that struggled with access to quality resources and education. I witnessed firsthand the various ways local organizers took it upon themselves to change that system because of the growing frustration they had with lack of governmental initiative. I also hear accounts from local

victims of the growing housing crisis that pushed hardworking citizens further and further from the cities and into areas that are deprived of crucial resources. I met the residents that were being forced into outer boroughs that no longer had reliable access to public transit, educational resources, and job proximity. It was an interesting experience to compare those issues with similar housing issues that exist in both NYC and Nashville. However, it was more interesting to hear the governing council's response to citizen concerns about such issues.

As I prepared to return to Nashville, I wanted to ensure that I would be as intentionally curious about the dynamics in my city as I was in London. I found that I was very hyper aware and hyper critical of the various systems in London by means of simply paying more attention. That critical lens, however, is incredible beneficial to the betterment of such systems. If I could bring that lens to Nashville, there is a chance that I could impact change both on my campus and across the city.

I question what I can learn by simply being more intentional with my attention in Nashville. Even through the on-campus organizations that I am on, I wonder the ways that we can expand our impact by simply observing our world a bit more. These dynamics have existed for a very long time and many initiatives have already launched to address them – I just may not know what they are. As I was on the plane returning home, I started researching local organizations that

Azeem Hernandez

London

shared similar values to me and began exploring options for involvement.

Regardless of the questionable impact I can make on my surroundings, my time in London has added a layer of understanding to my perspective. I am more analytical about the way things operate and I find myself with an almost amusing layer of curiosity about everything. Perhaps what we do is not always just the way we do things, maybe there are new innovative ways to address societal issues that we simply have overlooked.



Malik Hollingsworth

South Africa

If I took anything from my service in Port Elizabeth, it is that no matter how much we try to help or think we're helping, the change we make is only a fraction of what needs to happen, and once we leave, life goes on.

Before I even got onto my flight to South Africa, I missed the first flight, and had to hastily buy a second, got sick while traveling, and spent most of my first two weeks extremely ill and groggy, but I still engaged and participated. I still did what I had to do while there because I didn't travel so far just to stay in bed all day. As I stepped onto the campus of Bethelsdorp High School, I immediately felt like an outsider. I felt like these kids could tell that I wasn't one of them no matter how much I looked like them. They could tell my time here was only brief, and whether or not my presence was truly impactful for them, their lives would go on once I left them. Over the next four weeks at BD, I realized more and more that no matter how much we work and try to change these kids' lives, we can't save them or their country. We're outsiders. We are untrained to help them, and no amount of time or money or resources will ever be enough for us to change the entire fabric of their country or of their lives. When we left that school each day, their lives went on as they normally do without us in them. We certainly made an impact, but they can't let their lives stop just to get to know us.

Day after day, we saw different kids. We made friends and picked favorites and learned to adore them, but everyday, I couldn't forget that for us, this would all come to an end at some point, and that in



the end, their lives would have to continue, and so would ours. While working in Port Elizabeth, I found out that a friend from home had died in a car crash. I was thousands of miles away, and I couldn't do anything. I didn't have any mutual friends to reminisce or to console me.

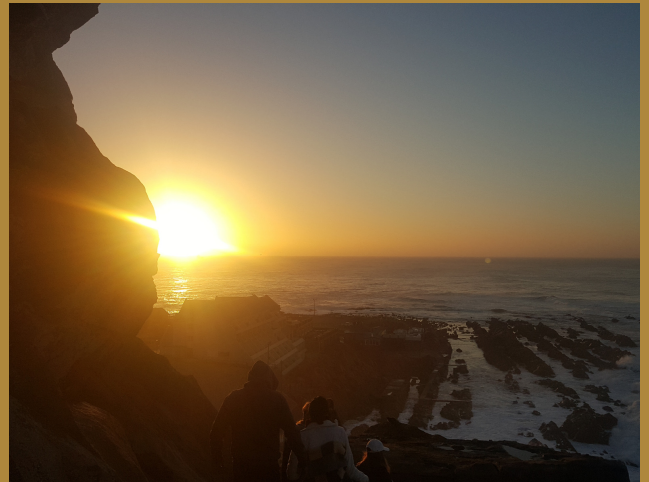
Consequently, it influenced my service and my interactions that entire week and the next. I couldn't disconnect myself from home or from loss, and no matter how hard I delved into my work at BD, life at home went on. By the time I returned, a month had passed and most of the mourning was done, and I had to do all of mine alone. Around the same time, one of the students that was closest to us lost her aunt. This was just before her exams which she couldn't miss. She was angry and upset, and all she wanted was to talk to someone about this, but she also knew she had to study because passing these exams were critical to her success because she was in the 12th grade. Life went on while everything was happening around her.

Overall, I loved my trip, but we had built in time to reflect and process and

Malik Hollingsworth

South Africa

express ourselves. We got time to unwind from the realities that everyone in Port Elizabeth faced. I'm thankful for the immense privilege I received by being able to travel and experience and fall in love with that place. Most importantly, I'm thankful for all of the things it taught me. It taught me to open up to everyone around me because you never know who will become a lifelong friend and even like family. I learned to how to let go the extreme expectations to which I tend to hold myself and others. I learned that even when you have nothing, having people around you who care about you can make even the darkest of times and the seemingly worst conditions be bright and joyous because you're sharing them with people whom you love. Most of all, I learned that life never stops to wait for you to catch up. Everything keeps going even in the moments when we have to stop and think and process all of it. That doesn't mean that we can't take that time to ourselves and collect ourselves. We have to make time for healing, but we can't forget that life continues even when we don't want it to. And, that's a good thing. Life goes on and we still go on because we have to, and that gives us time to find happiness even in the worst places and times of our lives.



Shelby House

India

When I flew into Lucknow, I wasn't sure if I was making a huge mistake – I was trading my last semester at Vanderbilt for a lot of unknowns. And when the semester got going, I often felt like I'd screwed up. Lucknow was a really hard time for me – personally, professionally, academically. Almost every day was a constant struggle, and when I came home to America, things didn't really get any easier. But, now, three months on, I am so grateful for my time in India and even – perhaps especially -- for the challenges that came my way. I am now healthy, happy, and proud of what I pushed myself to do – of how much I learned – and I'm once again reeling that I would not have had the opportunity for growth and adventure and critical engagement without the generosity of the Nichols and the Humanitarian Fund.

I worked at AALI for about four months. I was terrified on my first day – my Hindi was incredibly rusty, I was jet-lagged and intimidated. But that quickly faded, and as I worked, I realized how different my experience and understanding were because I was actually living in Uttar Pradesh and navigating its crazy streets every day. I grappled with the pollution, the stares, the infrastructural issues – and as UP rattled through political unrest, I listened to my host mother talk about her fears and criticisms without reservation. My service experience was colored by this – and I was required to take on humility in a new and more meaningful way.

Lucknow made me question what I want to do in life. For the longest time, I knew I would be jumping immediately into a Ph.D.

program in South Asian Studies after graduation. But once I started living in India, I called all of that into question. Particularly, I had a lot of questions about the ethics of studying India, especially as a white Western woman. It made me stressed and overwhelmed and angry walking on the streets for many reasons, but I was itchy with the reality that no matter where I went, there I carried my privilege. Americans who study in India are immediately among the top 1% financially – we walked past people living in abject poverty each day, ignored their plight, moved forward with our posh and privileged lives. And I began realizing more and more that my place and role is not to change Indian society. As much as I was frustrated by gender dynamics and harassment in my city – it's not my place to fight back against it in any systemic way because, relatively speaking, I suffer very little at its hands. The standards are different for me. Movements like that should be led by native women, and I can support that, but I can't take over their roles.

At the same time, I was watching American politics and aching that I couldn't be home – because I do have a space and understanding for reform in my own country. Every day, I reassessed my privilege, wondered more broadly about where I fit, and reconsidered my original path. I'm still not sure if I have it all worked out, but I'm glad I didn't jump into something that I may ultimately think is unethical.

My time at AALI was my second

Shelby House

India

semester senior year; it was my third Nichols grant, with my first being after my freshman year at Vanderbilt. I was ready for Lucknow because I got to apply all the lessons I learned then to my work now. For instance, I remembered how much I missed my coworkers in Morocco; I remembered how much I missed the food – and I worked harder to be present and grateful throughout my service. I reflected more actively and consistently; I tried to soak in as much as I could.

Above all things, I expanded my ability to be humble, to listen, to support as a real ally. I'm amazed by how much I've changed in the last four years, and I know I would be a very different person without these incredibly experiences where I was allowed to confront all the knotty problems of ethical international service in their most raw, tangible, beautiful forms. I would not be where I am today without the Nichols.



Austin Isaac

Honduras/Guatemala

Austin Isaac graduated from Vanderbilt in December 2016 and is currently attending medical school. In his gap semester, he addressed the lack of neurology care in Northern Honduras by collecting relevant data from patient charts in the region's hospitals and clinics and writing a grant to fund diagnostic equipment for a new neurology department at Hospital de Occidente in Santa Rosa de Copán. In Guatemala, he served as a health education volunteer through Primeros Pasos, a children's clinic that is the sole healthcare provider for the twelve rural communities surrounding the city of Quetzaltenango. Austin was excited to finally combine his degrees in Neuroscience and Spanish to achieve his mission of providing healthcare to medically underserved communities in Latin America.



Annalise Jirik

Russia

Six months before I left for Russia, all I knew of the country were Putin, Anastasia, and Vodka. The appeal of the unknown paired with the opportunity to serve as an ambassador, both for the US and for Russia, drew me to the country. I decided to fly across the Atlantic to a once Communist country to challenge my world view and to expand my perspective. Through service, I wanted to understand what I did not, to confront my own bias, and to cross cultural barriers to form relationships. The result of this exploration, however, left me with an unsatisfied curiosity, more questions than answers, and friends that live a mere 5,345 miles away. As we say in The States, I got a little more than I bargained for.

The bulk of my time in Russia was spent in the cozy town of Vladimir, three hours east of Moscow. Vladimir is an ancient town that was founded in the 1100's as the capital of Kiev. Now days, Vladimir is a pleasant city full of families, university students, and babushkas alike. For me, Vladimir was home to those that showed me Russia's heart. From the babushkas that lived through WWII to the University students striving to create a future for themselves, the people I met added texture and diversity to my experience by inviting me into their lives. Our service work provided an integral entrance point for starting these relationships. It was by digging up weeds and painting playgrounds that my group was able to demonstrate our good will and to foster relationships built on trust. Through these relationships came conversations in which I came to recognize that Russia and its people are far more



similar to my home than I expected. Removing myself from my context in The States allowed me to examine American society through the hardships and triumphs of the Russian people. Simultaneously, it allowed me to begin understanding the Russians' experience without the bias of being a full-time member of their community. Over the course of four weeks, I was able to learn what it meant to be Russian while processing and sharing my own experience of being American.

It was through my host family's kindness however, that I was able to truly experience the love of the Russian people. My patient host mom worked with me to understand Russia's political system and to grapple with injustice. In the morning, sitting at the kitchen table drinking coffee, we would discuss the Russian news media, bias, and propaganda. As I would draw comparisons to my experience in the US, we would think big picture and talk about the concept of truth. In the afternoons, over tea, we would talk politics and she would challenge my perspective on issues such as the Crimean Peninsula and Ukraine. I would push back and through humble inquiry, we both began to understand and reconcile our differences for our mutual gain. At night, we would

Annalise Jirik

Russia

cook dinner with my host sister and laugh while peeling potatoes. My host sister and I would take turns cooking desserts, making my mom's famous banana bread a staple in our little Russian flat. My host family truly welcomed me and made me a part of their family. It is a beautiful and humbling thing to be accepted and loved in someone else's home.

When I said goodbye to my host family, my host mom made me promise that I would keep exploring the world and asking questions. With tears in her eyes she told me to always follow the road of my heart. She smiled and raised her mug of tea by ways of toasting and said, "Zhizn' prekrasna i idivitel'na," life is wonderful and surprising. While I undeniably got more than I bargained for, my host mom knew that I was leaving Russia with exactly what I needed. In this saying is the Russian people's subtle recognition that life never turns out as expected but, that it always turns out for the best and because of that, it is all the more wonderful. I would like to wholeheartedly thank Mr. and Mrs. Nichols for, without their generosity I would not have been able to raise my tea mug in response and say with a new found understanding, "Zhizn' prekrasna i idivitel'na."



Julie Jones

Greece

In the modern American consciousness, the concept of “Greece” is still enmeshed in ideas of ancient mythology and the foundations of democracy. Few have the chance to learn and experience its rich modern history – from its exploitation under the Ottomans, heroics against Nazi Germany, subsequent civil war, and relatively new democratic government. With the added tension of economic collapse, austerity measures, and the impact of the largest refugee migration since World War Two, modern Greece weaves a rich tapestry of social movements and cultural heritage. This summer, I had the opportunity to return to Greece as an intern with the Melissa Network, working to provide women migrants with a safe space to access resources, learn new skills, and adapt to life in Greece. Working in Athens, I learned to value intercultural exchange and individual relationships, even in a work environment that was chaotic and disorganized.

The Melissa Network was the first NGO I have worked with in an organizational capacity. For my overly organized mind, it was difficult to the hectic style of an NGO. Without proper funding and with quick worker turnover, it is incredibly difficult to create structure in a nonprofit organization. At Melissa, there were too few workers to define organized roles for everyone. When they suddenly got an influx of volunteers, they were not prepared to accommodate everybody, yet did not want to turn people away. Many volunteers, therefore, had few assigned tasks, or would see their projects fall apart



as soon as they left due to a lack of consistent programming. Furthermore, working within a Greek context was a huge learning curve: Greeks are notoriously disorganized, often late, and live life in a way that is often viewed as careless and frivolous to a Western audience. These traits, on top of the already chaotic nature of an NGO, led me to truly experience the organizational side of an NGO for the first time. While it was frustrating, it also led to some of my best moments at Melissa Network.

At Melissa Network, I connected with an incredible group of diverse women. The founders of the center included Filipino and Nigerian migrant collectives; administrators came from Spain and Albania, migrant women hailed from Iran, Iraq, Syria, and more; and volunteers visited from England and Canada. This group of women collaborated on art projects, gave opinions on feminist poetry, and shared the similarities – and differences – of their lived experiences. Hearing the voices of women from all over the world was empowering, and it expanded my own understanding of

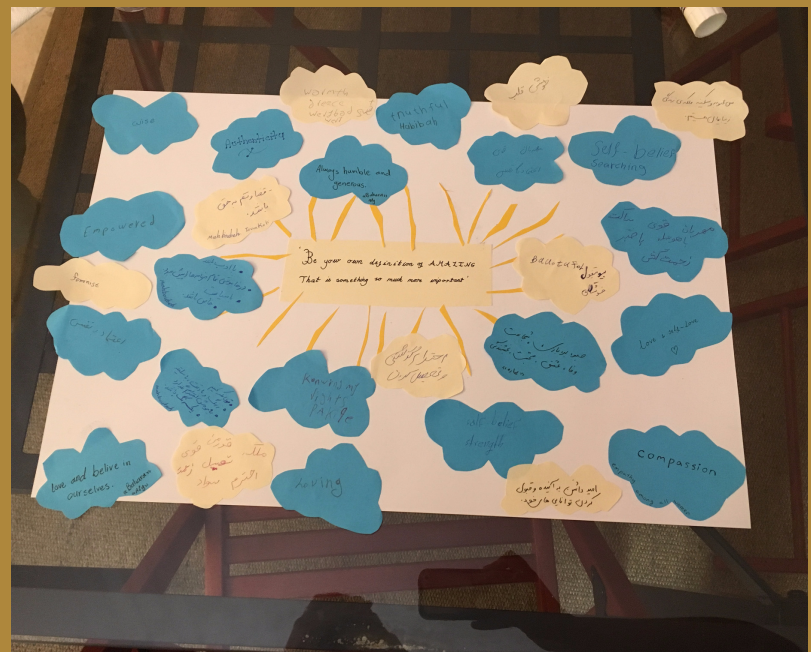
Julie Jones

Greece

perspectives as much as it benefited the women at the center.

Finally, my internship allowed me to form close relationships with many of the teenage students at the center. Teaching English classes, we played games and laughed about our shared habits, adding the all important word “shopaholic” to their vocabularies. These relationships were sobering, too; we discussed the probability of an unwanted arranged marriage and thought up tactics to stop the street harassment women faced daily. These relationships became so important to me, and it was difficult to leave the center at the end of my six weeks, knowing our journeys in life would most likely separate us. In the end, I almost wish I had not had the opportunity to get so close to these women—their lives are already filled with so much tumult and separation. Perhaps my time at the center would have been more well-spent doing spreadsheets and scheduling, giving the women who worked there full-time opportunity to build lasting relationships over a longer term.

My time at Melissa Network allowed me to explore the diverse, dynamic atmosphere of Athens and the inner workings of an NGO. By looking at my experience through a critical lens, I hope to have learned lessons that will help me enact lasting change in the future.



Alec Jotte

Ecuador

My experience in Quito, Ecuador at Fundación Campamiento Cristiano Esperanza was fantastic. To recount, la Fundación is an organization in Quito that serves persons with moderate to severe disabilities. The foundation also owns a home where about 20 of their students live, as the children/adults are not able to live with their parents for financial, legal, or other reasons. I spent 6 weeks working 8am – 4:30pm, Monday – Friday at this foundation. The relationships formed with the individuals who run and attend la Fundación are ones that I hope will continue to influence the way in which I look at the world.

One of the major lessons I learned was in observing pure patience that was rooted in love. Tía Betty – who received many mentions in my blog – not only embodied but radiated a love and energy unlike any I have seen. Her patience with foreign volunteers who lacked speaking ability, patience with the niños of the site, and mostly the way in which she loved the

children – unforgivingly, relentlessly, and wholly – was something otherworldly. I wrote her a note on the final day in which I told her that she was one of my heroes. This holds true. I hope one day to be able to love even partially as authentically as she. I also learned a major lesson about humility and embarrassment. I believe that I felt truly embarrassed more times in the six weeks I spent in Ecuador than I had in the five years prior. There were times in which I had to ask someone to please use different words three or four times in a row because I could not understand their Spanish. I was lost in the new city more times than I care to recount and had to ask for directions. I would be surrounded by people in a conversation, attempting to follow it, and suddenly have the group all laugh and look at me (for what reason remains a mystery). The fact was that three-year-old children were able to communicate more effectively than I the majority of the time. However, in this lack of communicative ability, I was forced to spend much more time listening and thinking than speaking. I learned just how much value there is in sitting back and focusing on listening to understand rather than listening to respond. I hope to take this lesson and apply it to my interactions in English as well.

I also had my first major experience alone in another country with another language. My Spanish improved drastically, learning about ten new words every single day. I made friends with some of the Ecuadorian university students and was able to see their home pueblos outside of



Alec Jotte

Ecuador

Quito. I experienced something entirely new and exciting. As for the outcomes of my service - I very slightly smoothed the running of an organization for 6 weeks. I did not make any sweeping influence. I hopefully made the life of Tía Betty (with whom I worked) less stressful. I was able to teach her a little bit about US culture and ideally was a happy presence to make the days easier. I also created a short testimony for the organization in the hope to attract other volunteers. Finally, in my application to this fund I wrote the following:

“One of the major goals of my time in Ecuador is to learn and experience.”

“Learning how to humbly engage with populations and people on an individual level who have a drastically different background from myself is a major skill I also hope to hone over my service experience and to later apply in my professional aspirations”

“I aspire to learn about agápe – a Greek word that describes an understanding of interconnectedness that embraces a universal, unconditional love that transcends and serves regardless of circumstances, in a context that requires me to completely humble myself. “

I can say with confidence that I successfully achieved all of the above goals with flying colors.

Thank you, Mr. and Mrs. Nichols for providing me the financial means of this incredible experience.



Caitlyn Ko London



When I told my friends and family that I was traveling to do service in London, England this summer, many of them questioned why, because London is one of the financial capitals of the world. However, deprived populations exist in even in the most advanced cities. Sometimes these populations need the most help because those populations are the easiest to overlook. This summer I had the opportunity to do service through the OACS Global Service program, and volunteer in the London Borough of Hackney, one of the most deprived boroughs of London. I worked for six weeks with the Public Health Department of the local government in Hackney. With the borough having large immigrant populations and many different racial and ethnic groups, it makes creating universal public health initiatives difficult to access for specific populations. It was an amazing learning opportunity for me to work with the public health team and see how the British approach public health issues in their community.

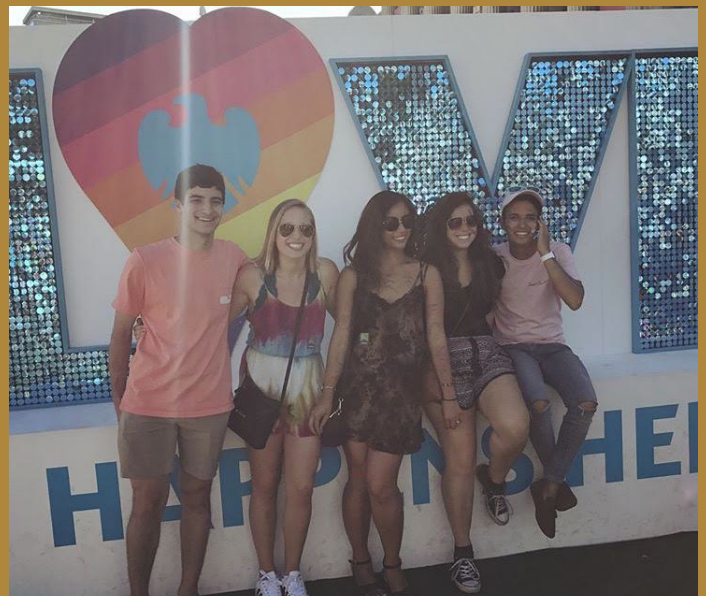
My specific assignments within the public health team were oriented around the Healthier Hackney Fund, their local government's grant scheme used to fund grass-root charities that create services to address issues in the borough that members of the community have seen first hand. I evaluated the final reports for some of these local charities, which gave me a good perspective on what kind of services they offer in the community. These services ranged from sexual health education in young males of Hackney to creating more non-alcoholic drink options at pubs and bars to decrease the amount of alcohol intake in the community. Another project I worked on was as literature review on the effectiveness of peer led support groups in some of the charities. I assessed outside literature, interviewed people from Hackney who had experience with peer led support groups, and looked at evaluation reports of some of the peer led support services in the borough to create a report of suggestions I had for the Public Health Department moving forward. My last project was doing a kick-start to the Sugar Smart Hackney campaign. Sustain and the Jamie Oliver Foundation organized the national Sugar Smart campaign, and Hackney as a borough is going to join in November. The long-term goal of this campaign is to tackle the obesity crisis and city's poor oral health by raising awareness about how much sugar people really consume in their food. The team hopes that this campaign can work towards decreasing health disparities in the borough and improving overall health and

Caitlyn Ko

London

well being. With this project, I went around to different dental offices in the borough to engage their interest in joining the campaign. It gave me a good sense of how difficult it can be to recruit support for government initiatives, and helped me to see and experience different areas of Hackney first-hand.

Needless to say I truly enjoyed my time working with the Public Health Department of Hackney. I also came to love the diversity of London as a city itself. Each borough had something different to offer, and was unique in their own ways. Being in London at this time was also interesting in the types of conversations I got to engage with Brits about, mostly surrounding Brexit, the Trump election, the fire of Grenfell Tower, and the housing crisis going on in London right now. It was enlightening to see from the British perspective how they can really relate to the process of the Trump election, because there were so many parallels for them with the election results of Brexit. Additionally it was really interesting to hear about the housing crisis, and how Grenfell Tower was a demonstration of the problems in British, political infrastructure, because that seemed very relatable to how housing prices are skyrocketing in Nashville right now too. Not only was the trip a great learning opportunity for me from a public health perspective, but I also learned a lot about international views and political climate's influences on local government structures. I can't thank the Nichols enough for this opportunity they have given me to participate in this service trip, and I'll be forever grateful.



Priyanka Kadari

India

Arriving back in the United States after over a month in India was a jarring experience. Each time, I think I am ready to leave, but when the day finally comes, I inevitably find tears in my eyes. The month I spent working on behalf of Project RISHI was almost unbearably grueling, both physically and emotionally. Both the heat of the Indian sun and the responsibility of ensuring our mission's success weighed down on me. Part of the reason it was difficult is we had no external volunteer coordinator, partner organization or translators. We were the volunteers, the coordinators, the translators and the organization all in one. While I was incredibly proud of the work we completed, part of me was completely burnt out after that month.

Still, even as I rested and took a break from Project RISHI, my experiences kept teaching me. For a month, we were intensely focused on providing a bathroom for the children, and we also conducted surveys on the needs of the surrounding primary schools. Most lacked a bathroom or playground. No seven-story library or innovation center existed in this village to motivate the students. The kids' feet became rough, walking barefoot to class each day.

Yet, each day inspiration flourished. The teachers and the kids were both fighting to provide an environment of learning and engagement because knowledge is all they wanted. It reminded me that education isn't just a highly priced private university with innovation centers

and libraries and mission statements and selective admissions and stressed out students. It can be that, and one can receive a wonderful education out of it. But, education at its heart just needs a teacher, a chalkboard, pencils, books and an eager student. Most importantly, these kids were finding opportunity anywhere and everywhere, grabbing for any chance to become smarter and absorb more. They made me fall in love with learning all over again and rekindled my curiosity and passion that I had somehow been losing. Furthermore, in this political climate, I have realized even more the importance of conducting international service. Most people do not want to conduct service in India. Even during this year's organization fair, when I started explaining that our mission focused on India, I saw several people say, "Oh, India. isn't that dangerous?" Fears of service opportunities in diverse areas are indicators of the racial and cultural barriers in our country today. Service is innately about recognizing each other's humanity, and this is exactly what has the potential to heal many of the divisions between the different communities in America.

Austin Konkle

Morocco

Exhilarating. Exhausting. Fascinating. Fatiguing. Incredible. Incapable of being captured in a 100-page dissertation let alone a 2-page reflection paper. I arrived in Rabat, Morocco with no expectations. As much time as I spent during the months of May and early June attempting to prepare for my first time leaving the country, I simply couldn't conjure up expectations of what the 6 weeks that followed could possibly produce. Nor should I have tried.

From the instant I stepped off the plane, mentally jumbled and jetlagged, the culture shock was frighteningly apparent. As we drove further from the airport, billboards, street names, and signposts rapidly transitioned from English to French and Arabic and a blocky, ancient-looking language that I later came to know as Berber. My stomach churned like a boiling cauldron of magma, hot and heavy and poised to erupt at any moment as we approached our residence for the evening, the charmed and rustic Hotel Darna.

The next few days were a whirlwind. Before I knew it, I was waking up every morning with my host family, trekking to the taxi hub (Bab Chellah), spouting English phrases at the front of a shower while waving a dried-out dry erase marker for 4 hours, cramming into a 4-person taxi alongside 7 other locals, and snaking back through the medina as one might in a crowded concert venue on the way to the Center for Cross-Cultural Learning for reflection and rejuvenation. While adjusting to this routine happened startlingly fast, it was more for a lack of alternative options than for any true



capacity to successfully assimilate into the Moroccan culture. Every day brought new adventures. From daily attempts at charades with my host family who spoke exclusively Moroccan Arabic to weekly excursions in our cohort's bus that we affectionately named "Bert" to 4th of July celebrations with impossible-to-light sparklers on the beach, the 6 weeks came and went with some of the highest of highs and lowest of lows both physically and emotionally.

Since I've returned home, I've encountered one question more often than all others: "What did you learn from your experience abroad?" Until recently, I wasn't quite sure where to begin. But now, a month later, I can concretely say that it was a newfound respect for and ability to be adaptable. Flexibility is consistently lumped into a category of "soft skills" that can't truly be measured or taught. And for that reason, its value can feel slighted, a mistake I've often made in evaluating my own ability to be adaptable within different groups and settings and contexts. But since returning to Vanderbilt campus, an environment that is as dynamic as it is

Austin Konkle

Morocco

demanding, I've reflected on my time in Morocco through the lenses of self-evolution and change. As a VUceptor, my Visions group presents me with new challenges at every turn related to the first year experience. As a lifeguard, I'm continually confronted with changing patron needs and weather conditions. Even just as a member of this campus and a citizen of this country and of this world, we are constantly operating under ever-shifting norms and expectations of our society.

While no two days were remotely the same in Morocco, neither are they exactly alike on the home front, and I feel infinitely more equipped to adapt and improve my own condition and those of my peers thanks to my 6 weeks in Morocco.



Garrett Lappe

Russia

This summer, I had what for most people is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to travel across the world. From mid-May to mid-June, I was in Russia with five other Vanderbilt students as a part of our Maymester program, Russia Today. Traveling outside the US had been a goal of mine for a few years, and I had taken some Russian language and literature classes and my interest in the history and culture of Russia combined with the contemporary political environment made the Russian Maymester program the obvious choice for me.

This was made even better by the nature of the program and the planned activities and projects—primarily a nature of cultural immersion and education. We did not spend our time in Russia as tourists camping out in hotels, museums, and theaters, but with diverse Russian families who were brave and compassionate enough to welcome a stranger to live with them for a month. My host family was wonderful and I still contact my host-sister, Polina, months afterward.

In addition to the housing situation settling us into a genuinely Russian mode of life, our excursions to the local schools, universities, and church communities gave us a real look at the state of affairs, and talking to children, university students and the elderly revealed to us a glimpse of their priorities, concerns, and philosophies. The children are rowdy, energetic, and kind—and they are more connected to the rest of the world through the internet than most of us would imagine. The Russian university students are also

outward-looking, yet still committed to awareness of current issues and the improving the lives of their neighbors. The elders we met at Vladimir's local veteran's home may have been the happiest people we encountered in Russia! Having witnessed first-hand Stalinism, the Great Patriotic War (WWII), and the collapse of the Soviet Union, they have a great wealth of experience and knowledge to share on the complex matters such as the interweaving of individual freedom and collective duty. As veterans and witnesses to the great tragedies of war and tyranny, they are especially worried about the global political environment which we now face—with a rise of complicated relations and violence in the Middle East, terrorism, and increasing nationalism as a response to international tensions. More than anything else, however, they talked about the significance of our presence in Russia, and the value of our work at their facility and at their churches and schools. The value of our service projects exceeds the mere physical work. For them, our program is a symbol of a youthful openness, friendliness, and a sign of a peaceful future.

In Russia, we left more than we brought, and we came home with more than left with. I found friendships among my fellow Vanderbilt students, connections with university students in Russia which I hold dear still, and my memories of wandering through streets, metros, grand cathedrals, forests and swamps all alike I will forever cherish. The tea, shoveling, hiking, planting, and

Garrett Lappe

Russia

laughter and all else above have contributed to a once-in-a-lifetime experience that I will never forget, and for which I will forever be grateful for.

Without the aid and scholarships from both the Global Education Office and the Nichols Humanitarian Fund, this would not have been possible. It reminds me of how fortunate I am to be at Vanderbilt and to be in a position to make great change, and I plan to make good use of my growth allowed by this experience. I cannot begin to find the words to thank everyone involved in this program and the organizations that sponsor it. Thank you, thank you, thank you.



Nariko Lee

South Africa

Where America is loud, Africa is silent.
Where America is silent, Africa is laughing.
Where America is laughing, Africa is in fear.
Where America is in fear, Africa finds strength.

It has been exactly two months and two days since my feet have shuffled along the dusty roads of the motherland. I found it so difficult to write this piece because it creates an air of finality. There is no going back - no more group reflections, no more cutting bread, no more clinic, and no more African clouds. I found it so difficult to write this piece because I did not want my experience to end. I acknowledge that I have the pictures and the memories and the lessons learned but it is not the same. I can write poems an encyclopedia long about the enigma that is South Africa. But it wouldn't matter. It's not the same. I can try my hardest to tell you about an experience that is a tip of a metaphorical iceberg. You can nod along and pretend to understand but there is nothing like being there - being in the trenches. There's nothing like watching the sunset over Cape Town. There is nothing like hearing the story of apartheid in a prison by someone who was incarcerated there more years than I've been alive simply for fighting for equality. There is nothing like looking a woman in the eyes and telling her she has HIV. There is nothing like a mother begging you for the equivalent of eight cents so she can have enough electricity to warm a bottle for her baby. I'm sorry but you can't understand. I do not mean to harm your feelings. But unless you have been there and done these things by having these experiences I don't

is what is seen on social media because it is the 'pretty' side of the country but there is just so much more to South Africa than that.

Because of this, my thoughts are all over the place with the thought of this final reflection and it pains me to not write in poem. I want to be able to convey everything that I have experienced and feel but I can't seem to find the words to do so. What I can tell you are the lessons that I have learned. I have learned what it means to have faith in faith. I have learned that money really doesn't buy happiness no matter how hard we try. I have learned to be a global citizen. I have learned the language of Afrikaans and Xhosa. I have learned to sing more and worry less. I have learned the game of rugby. I have learned that life is a lot shorter than it seems. I have learned that sometimes it is okay to stop and smell the roses. And above all I have learned what it means to have enough.

And with all of this still fresh in my heart I would do the experience all over again - the ups and the downs, the good and the bad, expect you to say "I get it." People always ask me how my summer in South Africa was. How I must have had so much fun and how I must have gotten amazing pictures. I smile and nod and don't tell them how angry I was at the system that I lived in. I don't tell them how my polaroid camera became the town's because mothers had never had a picture of their children. I don't tell them that I held a baby in my arms that was dying from HIV. I don't tell them these things because they don't want to hear it. They want to hear about the safaris and the beach and the other Americans I met

Nariko Lee

South Africa

along the way. It's like everyone wants to hear about South Africa without hearing about South Africa. This is not to say there is no good. I have seen some of the most spectacular sights in my time there - from deep caves used as musical halls to seeing a real lion during a safari to school children gripping between the fence loops screaming at the top of their lungs during a net ball game to whales jumping out of the water at sunset. I have had a fair share of these experiences; the heartwarming and the heartbreaking - because there is nowhere in the world like South Africa. And I am blessed to have the nation open its arms to let me have a glimpse at a different way of life. And I am forever thankful to Vanderbilt University, Cliver Mentzel, Mr. and Mrs. Nichols, and Kurios Trend who all helped make it possible. I am also thankful to Sister Ethel, Sister Annie, Auntie Rachel, Andrew and Junayne - who I hold forever in my heart with the rest of the South African people.



Yuguang Lei

New York



I have learned an important thing during my internship period, and that thing is shame.

In an Hospital, amidst a thunderstorm of cursing, mocking, stamping of the feet and yawping on the psychiatric unit, I stood inside the bunker-like nursing station protected by steel, bricks and plexi glass, alone and resigned, staring into the abyss of nothingness. “Giving responses and contacts only incites them. That is what they want. I will do no such thing as to initiate prolonged, fruitless conversation; besides I am tired and hungry. I am exhausted.” I silently said to myself. Then I heard a soft and scratched voice saying to me, “hey, hey, why you even don’t look at us, as if we are nothing?” I remained expressionless, while waiting for the attorney to finish talking to the psychiatrist.

After I returned to my apartment in that evening, I reflected. The voice was right. At that moment, I did view the patients as something irrelevant. From the view point of efficiency, I probably did the right thing—our time was running scarce for the day, and initiating conversation could give false hope. Nothing incites more anger than false hope. Nothing incites more anger than false hope, for a sense of betrayal arises as the

false hope vanishes.

But the voice remains in my mind, and shames me into asking the question that what kind of civilization and system we have built us whose efficiency must come at times at the cost of viewing our fellow human beings as nothing? The soft, scratched and tear-soiled voice once also echoed in the gas chambers of Belson, Dachau, and Auschwitz, I guess. “Hey, hey, why you even don’t look at us, as if we are nothing?”

I took a greyhound bus to go back to Nashville. I felt the sense of shame on the bus, whenever nice cars raced by the bus. Every one of those little cars seemed to be a remainder to the people on the bus that they are the loser of this society of wealth and auto-mobiles. Many turned their heads away, as the cars went by, and looked to check whether others were looking at them. As I do not like driving, that was not my shame, which came later.

The bus went by Charlottesville, VA. The time was still midnight of Thursday, or the very early morning of Friday. At that time, the outskirts of Charlottesville were still a quiet and peaceful place. Today, that is, Monday, I read on the news that the protest in front of the White House is going into its second night.

I could be there by tomorrow morning. Indeed, I have not only been in front of the White House, but was inside the oval office. But going there wouldn’t help much, besides you have got reading to do tomorrow, right? Then arises the shame in my heart. In the moment of cynicism, a

Yuguang Lei *New York*

cynic has the self-confidence of God. Who am I to say that such a trip would not help much? If there is such a thing as Categorical Imperative, and if it commands me to take a last stand, wouldn't I be obliged to do so, even if telling the truth to an evil prince means my certain destruction, even if the telling "wouldn't help much"?

Kant's point about Categorical Imperative is that if someone has told the wicked prince so, then you have no excuse to do otherwise, since it is now proven possible to tell the truth on the pain of death. Someone could have proven it with his life. One day during the internship, after returning from work, I found out that Chinese Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Liu Xiaobo has died in Chinese custody because of terminal liver cancer. But Liu has repeatedly denied that he was a moral model. Liu's meaning was clear: we must free ourselves of the yokes of ideology, which has created so many moral models to enslave us.

So, given Liu's denial, is there proof of such an a priori command, or God, in this world where benevolent efficiency sometimes unwittingly or helplessly reduces individuals into obstacles to ends, rather than ends, or not even means? One must ask with a sense shame, what ends are these, and what benevolence and alienation are these?

It seems logical that not all propositions are absurd. For if all propositions are absurd, then the proposition that claims that all propositions are absurd is absurd itself. But is demanding what cannot be done absurd? Is the proposition that we should

do what we cannot do absurd? Could there be such a demanding Imperative? Could the cries of Caines be true—"my punishment is greater than I can bear"?

I once felt shame to write these words as my final reflection of my internship experience, as a voice at the back of my head told me to keep them to myself. Now I feel shameful that I once felt shameful of my true thoughts and feelings. Isn't the shame felt upon our failures to be our brothers' keepers that makes us so fearless as to bear witness to truth in front of evil princesses, even on pain of death? I often do so wonder, as the internship lasted and passed.

Henry Lu

Nicaragua/Peru

Imagine waking up in a unfamiliar environment, with only the knowledge that you will be learning new cultures, meeting new people, exploring beautiful geography, and heightening your experience in providing long-term service-related education to amazing communities. I just described every morning of my two-week trip in Nicaragua. My journey through this Central American country was priceless, and the new people, cultures, and learning on the side of both us Americans and them Nicaraguans enhanced the experience even more.

Before flying to Nicaragua, I thought a lot about what the trip would be like.

Would our service be more physical and materialistic, or would our service be providing education to the communities we were visiting? This was very important because in my opinion, traveling to a less developed country was more of a short-term process in aiding these communities while actually providing education and learning would allow the communities be self-sufficient. After staying in Miami for a night, before we knew it, our group was standing outside the Managua International Airport. I remember imagining a large bustling city filled with skyscrapers and businessmen, since we were in the capital city; however, I soon learned that no buildings existed above seven stories. We quickly traveled to Jinotega, where we worked with a ministry. Through this venture, our group learned how to make water filters to create clean, drinkable water. In addition, we helped build a church and learned how health clinics

worked in small towns in countries like Nicaragua. We even hiked miles deep into the forest to learn how healthcare was brought to those who weren't necessarily accessible to these privileges. In addition, we also talked a lot with the locals and learned so much history and culture. Next, we traveled to Leon, a city larger than Jinotega. The group we worked with was stationed in the middle of the forest.

The highlight of this section of the trip was realizing how much we took for granted in America. We worked mainly in the forest, building stoves and visiting the public hospitals in the area. It was interesting to see the difference between the private and public hospitals in the area.

This trip taught me so much. I learned about the history and background of the nation that better allowed me to understand why Nicaragua is the way it is today. I learned why stoves must be made certain ways to in order to avoid carcinogen build up indoors, I learned about how to make water filters to purify the water so that locals can drink it, and I learned that rice and beans go with everything. Throughout the trip, I also began to realize that in addition to us providing education, I was learning a lot as well. The education part of the trip was a two-way process; it wouldn't be right to travel to these countries and act as if we were saviors. This would be one of my most important revelations throughout my time in Nicaragua.

Throughout the trip, I believe that many results were achieved. Some were as simple as teaching the children to

Henry Lu

Nicaragua/Peru

brush their teeth, and others were more educational in terms of learning how public and private health works in foreign countries, especially countries that haven't necessarily had the time to become as developed as other countries. In addition, outcomes became apparent on our side as well. After coming back from this trip, it was rare for me not to tell others about my trip and what I learned from it. In my opinion, spreading the word about how education can leave such a lasting impact is the start to revitalizing how service works both on our campus and across the nation.

Most importantly, I could not have had this amazing experience without the help the Nichols Humanitarian Fund. I hope that this fund can help other students deepen their passion in service.

Julia Mancini

London

My time in London helped me reaffirm that international service work is something that I want to continue not only during my time here at Vanderbilt, but afterwards as well. I've been toying with the idea of applying to the Peace Corps for a year now, but was hesitant as to if I was ready and experienced enough to dedicate a little over two years of my life to helping a community in another country. I had some reservations about the benefits of serving as a Peace Corps volunteer, and whether the opportunity was more advantageous for me to grow and develop personally rather than for the community in which I would serve.

However, I do believe in the importance of creating new avenues for cultural exchange between different nations, and after spending six weeks in a city and country that were not my own, I am leaving with the sentiment that we mutually benefitted. We're living in a particularly tumultuous time in history, as the geopolitical status of the world's largest nations is constantly shifting. The current presidential administration in the U.S. is radically different from those that we've had in the past, leading to a shifting field of enemies and friends as new alliances are formed and old ones are tossed. Moreover, as the UK prepares to undergo Brexit, France and Germany are left to become the new face of European politics as neo-populist movements continue to erupt in countries across the continent and the globe. Now more than ever, there remains a significant need for cultural exchange between nations to allow citizens from different countries to interact and

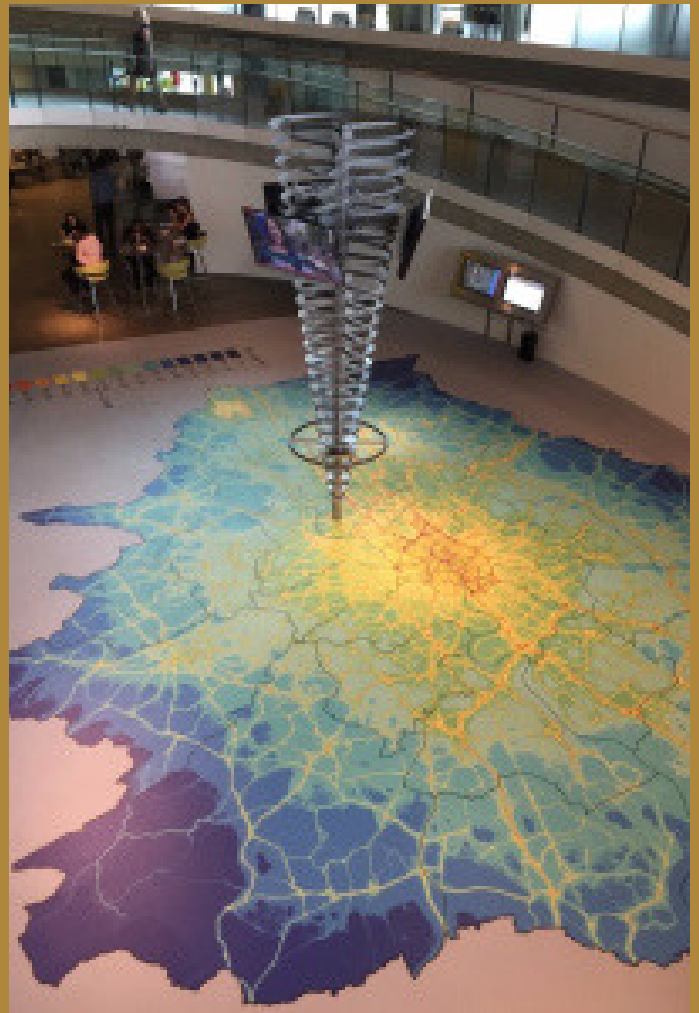
understand one another's needs and struggles.

The London Global OACS service trip gave me insight into how public health, education, local and national governmental affairs, and institutional discrimination all intersect in the context of a single city that holds major international influence. Working in East London, I was placed in an organization called Hackney CVS, which allowed me to meet real residents in the borough of Hackney. The CVS stands for "Council for Voluntary Services" which means that the organization exists to provide structural, functional, and organizational support to any non-profit or voluntary organization within the Hackney community. I met dozens of Hackney residents who decided to form their own grassroots organization or charity to help their friends, neighbors, elderly, children, and more. The most beautiful part about my work was seeing the sheer variety of causes that these people and organizations seek to help. Our first week, we met a Congolese man who started an organization aimed at promoting the mental health of other Congolese families in the community who were facing challenges assimilating to London's culture and lifestyle. Only ten minutes later we were discussing the strength of the projects proposed by a young black male from Hackney who wanted to improve the situations of other black Hackney youth with sports programs and homework tutoring sessions. And these are only two examples – HCVS works with over 100 of these organizations.

Julia Mancini

London

I'm currently hovering at that interesting halfway point of my time at Vanderbilt where I can look back on my first two years and reflect on how drastically I have changed both personally and in my aspirations for my future. Hackney CVS is the first tangible organization I've discovered that I would love to work at in the future. I've never been able to imagine myself in a specific job role before, and my service trip to London has helped me with reshaping and conceptualizing new ideas for my future career path. I want to work with passionate people who wish to provide opportunities and improve the quality of life for their fellow community members. People who recognize that other people are other humans just like them, with whom they share their humanity, and are thus worthy of love and care and support. I may not return to London for some time, but the memories and experience I've taken with me will help guide me through these next few years.



Lo Meisel

Morocco

I'm not entirely sure why I chose to go to Morocco. Soon after arriving in the country, I wrote in my personal journal that "part of me is wondering why i even decided to come here, now that morocco is actually a place and not just a name on a paper. but i came here for a reason, i think, and i might even find a better reason for coming while im here." However, I couldn't quite find my footing. I couldn't figure out how to navigate the Medina - the old city, filled with thin and winding passageways - and I found myself spending most of my time in the few places that were comfortable for me. For two weeks I interacted with my host family, dedicated myself to my service site, and explored Rabat and other cities, all in hopes that I would discover some grand purpose in coming to Morocco. Once week three of the trip came and I still hadn't had any epiphanies, I fell into a mid-trip slump and began asking my peers about their goals in hopes that I might discover my own. It was unsuccessful. I had bonded with my host family, but I hadn't really interacted with any other Moroccans, and I felt like I wasn't experiencing the real culture. I didn't particularly feel like I was making a huge difference in my service work; I was very productive in what my supervisor asked me to do (reading articles and books and writing analytical reports on them) but I didn't feel like my work necessarily had many impacts there. In short, I felt unsatisfied, even though I knew that I was gaining a huge amount of knowledge from my experience.

At that point, I made a conscious



decision to fully step outside of my comfort zone and interact personally with the culture more, so that I could gain something substantial from this trip and also make an impact as well. In the fourth week, I befriended several students from Asilah, some of whom I still keep up with over social media. I explored Rabat with the intention of meeting people and getting to know the city on a deeper level. I talked with my host mother about hard-hitting questions like the role that religion plays in her life and the role that she plays in religion. I challenged my own internalized stereotypes when I realized that several of the women in my host mother's family, including her, had post-graduate degrees and that Moroccan teens gush about *Pretty Little Liars* just as much as Americans do. I went to a symphony at the Mohammad VI

Lo Meisel

Morocco

theatre and spent time in the Rabat art museum trying to better understand the implications of the politically-charged pieces. I asked my new Moroccan friends what they thought about women and LGBT individuals in their society, and I connected their perspectives and ideas with the academic knowledge that I had gained from our sessions and my service.

On our last full day in Morocco, I successfully journeyed by myself to the beach and back to buy a sfenj - a Moroccan donut - and an orange juice, and I felt like I finally knew Rabat. And yet, I knew that there was still so much more that I hadn't experienced in Morocco. We only got a small taste of an incredibly complex culture, and it would be impossible for us to ever fully understand these complexities. At the end of the day, Morocco belongs to Moroccans, and although I can come and appreciate and contribute to it where I can, I can never claim ownership of it. I realized that it was okay that my my volunteer work didn't drastically change the culture of Morocco, because it wasn't my culture to change. Considering my position as an outsider, one of the best things that I could do is to bring all of my knowledge and experiences back to the United States to share with others. Now, my job is to challenge other people's ideas about Islam and Muslim-majority countries and Islamic feminism, just as my ideas were challenged during this trip.

As it turns out, I was correct when I predicted that I would find my reason for coming while in Morocco. I realized that I wasn't there to "save" the country, but



rather to learn from the people there. I learned so much more than I ever expected, both about Morocco and about the importance of learning in and of itself. I learned how to stand back and observe before jumping into action, and that sometimes the best way to be a global citizen is simply to listen to the stories of those who are often overlooked. Most importantly, my six-week service learning experience in Morocco taught me to always be empathetic and open-minded, because you can never know what you can learn from someone whose story differs from your own.

Sarah Nash

Russia

I find myself in an incredibly unique and wonderful position as the summer ends, and I reflect back on my experience during my Maymester service trip in Russia. In addition to joyfully remembering the time I spent there, I also look forward to returning in Russia for the upcoming Fall Semester, as I will be flying back to Russia immediately upon submitting these final thoughts and reflections. While many of my friends who studied abroad looked forward to their semesters with mixtures of nervousness, excitement, anticipation, and fear, I feel almost as though I'm returning to a place that is familiar to me. While I was only able to spend a month in Russia in May, that time was so full of meeting new people and bonding with them through acts of service that I truly feel that I was able to break through that tourist-friendly exterior to see a piece of the "real" Russia. From Vladimir, to Moscow, to St. Petersburg, I met all kinds of wonderful people, and was able to see a culture that I think would be impossible to truly comprehend just from book or movies. It is truly a place that is only done a proper service when one visits it in-person.

Of course, I'll always appreciate getting to tour the Kremlin and seeing the canals of St. Petersburg, but I truly miss the elderly veterans who were so quick to want to talk and hug after what felt like so little work for me. I miss the children whose school we visited who were so kind when I gave my best attempt at Russian, and who reminded me that trying one's best is more important than being perfect, as they practiced their English so that I could answer some

questions. For every tourist destination that fascinated me and made me awestruck as I tried to reconcile this massive achievement of mankind to the miniscule photographs I'd seen on a computer screen before this, there were many more people for me to meet who had so much more to offer, and who could really speak with me on a personal level.

So as I wait in anticipation for my return to Russia, while I am excited to enjoy myself in an amazing country so different from my own, I also have gained the perspective that Russia is a lot more similar to the United States than many people give it credit for. And, more importantly, I look forward to another four months of finding new ways to connect with the Russian people and to serve them whenever possible. While many stereotype Russians as stern, closed-off people, I can now speak from experience to say that even the most reserved Russian person, or the shyest one, was eager to open up and share their stories when they realized that we were simply there to lend a hand, or an ear. While I can't know for certain what the new semester will have in store for me, I do know that for every challenge or idea lost in translation, there is a nation full of people that are happy to help me find my way. If my time in Russia this May has taught me nothing else, it has imbued me with the certainty that people are truly open to sharing. People want to share their culture, their knowledge, and their history with those who seek it. With only a genuine sense of curiosity and openness, along with a healthy dose of a willingness to serve, I

Sarah Nash

Russia

truly think that Russia, and any other nation of people, will open up to those who seek it. Political affiliations and interests may shift unpredictably, but a nation's citizens are not their ruling political party – we are free to bond with other people in spite of politics, not dependent on them.



Ashley Nmoh *South Africa*

This summer, through the generous aid of the Nichols Humanitarian Fund, I was able to travel to South Africa as a part of The Office of Active Citizenship and Service (OACS) summer global service program. I embarked on this journey with 16 other students who eventually became my family. We all served in different ways around the community, but I primarily worked at the local Bethelsdorp high school and at the Missionvale Care Center. At the high school I taught reading lessons to eighth graders and at Missionvale I did a variety of tasks at the community clinic and at the Fr. Christmas unit. Though six weeks is indeed a very short amount of time, I can honestly say that my trip was life changing. Not only did I form strong friendships, but this trip also taught me what it means to truly serve. I came on the trip with preconceived expectations of what my service would look like. Though I knew I couldn't change the world, I came on the trip excited to make a difference in the lives of the people I would meet. Though I did indeed serve the community in Port Elizabeth, South Africa, I truly believe that the people of South Africa served me more than I could have ever possibly served them.

In the Fr. Christmas unit, I worked most mornings with a woman who is referred to in the community as Auntie Rachel. We spent our mornings sorting out donations to wrap and make Christmas presents so all of the kids in the community could have a present on Christmas day. Together we wrapped hundreds of presents for the children and shared in laughter

and even a few tears. She taught me that service isn't always tangible or quantified and she taught me the importance of friendship and conversation. Though we often times got distracted and didn't make as many presents each day as we hoped, I realized that sometimes listening to someone's story can be a form of service. As she shared her story and I shared mine I was able to understand the struggles of the community and the hardships members of the community go through every day. Sharing our stories gave us both a sense of comfort and I realized that service can often times be just as simple as listening to the stories of others and letting them know you care. At the local high school, the students were so appreciative that students came all the way from America to serve and spend time with them. They told me stories of the gang violence, drug abuse and discrimination in their local community, but they also told me of the big dreams and hopes they have for their life. From the members of this community I learned the importance of Ubuntu(togetherness) and how helping someone feel as if they're not alone can make a huge difference on their life. As I helped Sister Annie, the nurse at the clinic at Missionvale, with organizing patient files, urine samples and fetching medicine I also learned that service is sacrifice. Many times, I would arrive at the clinic before the doors even opened and see a long line of patients in need of medical care. Many of these patients suffered from HIV/AIDS and didn't have money to get medicine or care at the local

Ashley Nmoh *South Africa*

hospital and so doctors came to Missionvale twice a week to treat these patients for free. I would arrive around 7 in the morning and help the doctors with whatever they needed and someday I would walk miles around the community in the hot sun with home care providers to bring care to individuals too sick to come to the clinic. Whenever I worked at the clinic, I expected my days to be long and physically draining, but watching Sister Annie joyfully and passionately give her life to the service of others gave me strength to keep pushing on. The women at Missionvale were always so joyful despite their circumstances. These women taught me the importance of joy and gratitude in life. Though these women didn't have much of their own, they gave and gave in endless generosity. They taught me the importance of the little things. Though I didn't build a school or make any dramatic difference in the community, I know that if I affected the life of at least one person I have indeed made a difference. I felt at one with the people of South Africa and each and every day I tried to serve the community in love and joy and they reciprocated that love and joy back to me 100 fold.

I am extremely grateful to the Nichols Humanitarian Fund for allowing me to have such a wonderful opportunity. The people of South Africa and the experiences I had will forever be imprinted into my heart. I know six weeks was a limited amount of time but I hope to continue to serve on Vanderbilt's campus and in all my future endeavors. I hope the lessons I learned will guide me into being a more globally

oriented citizen and help me as I dedicate my life to the service of others.



Tunmise Olowojaba *London*

The London Summer OACS Program has officially ended, and I am eternally grateful to have participated in an experience such as this. I had the opportunity to work at the London Borough of Hackney as an Assistant Public Health Practitioner for the Public Health Team.

As I reflect on my past six weeks in London, it seems incredible that I was able to experience as much as I did and was continually challenged in pursuit of serving the residents of Hackney. The first week I arrived at the London Borough of Hackney Service Centre, I recall the kindness of my supervisor in accommodating me and my two cohort members, and his passion for serving those in the local community. My workplace supervisor, Thomas Dunn, is a strong advocate for positive community based health initiatives and is professionally and personally invested in public health related matters. Similarly, those who worked on the public health team are so passionate about what they do, as I demonstrated in my first week at the Public Health Team. Those on the public health team specialize in a variety of public health issues, including smoking prevention programs, drug and alcohol abuse services, healthy eating campaigns, multiple needs services, and analyses of how health policy impacts the work at the Hackney Service Centre. Additionally, the public health team seemed to care so much about the community, and worked enthusiastically on their projects with the mindset of doing work in excellence. Those on the public health team went beyond and

above the call of duty, potentially because the health status of some members in the Hackney area is not ideal due to unfortunate social circumstances. For instance, gentrification has been an issue that has been impacting low-income residents for quite some time, and as a result a large population of low-income residents have been pushed to the outskirts of London and oftentimes lack access to affordable nutritious foods. What has been one of the most fascinating things for me about London's Healthcare System has been the NHS and how involved local government is in community based health initiatives. The power of socialized medicine is it removes a lot of the structural barriers present in the United States that prevent many from utilizing necessary healthcare services. What I found to be surprising, however, is the erasure of health-based issues rooted in issues of race. Through conversations with public health officials, policy makers, and government representatives, I realized what permeates London's public health approach is a colorblind rhetoric.

To elaborate, people will be usually identify groups of people by their ethnicity or their country of origin, but rarely by a racial category. And while I do recognize that race perhaps manifests and may have different social implications in the United Kingdom when compared to the United States, I do think there is merit in exploring the ways in which race may impact health care delivery in London. To elaborate, it is important to discuss issues of race because when health disparities

Tunmise Olowojaba *London*

are evaluated by racial categories, it is apparent that there is differential use of health services according to various racial groups. It is up to leaders of the community, the central government, and affiliates of delivering culturally sensitive health care to create optimal environments and conditions to ensure that all residents of London have equal access to and receive quality health care services. I am thankful to have learned about public health in a global context, and hope to explore the intersectionality between race and health care services in my pursuit of working in public health and medicine.

Bonnie Pang

Russia

The month I have spent in Russia feels as if has gone by very quickly, and yet, the memories I have of the trip are numerous, our everyday packed with either productive or enlightening activities or classes. A week into our trip we had mostly spent the time getting adjusted to the environment and meeting the people we were going to work with, ending with the start of our service hours doing some gardening work at the local veteran's home. Using the Russian we had learned from classes in Vanderbilt as well as in classes on this trip, we also got to communicate and converse with the veterans there who were glad to tell us their stories. We met with them one more time later too to work together on a small craft, a small protective doll. Although limited, I was surprised by how I could put my basic Russian to use not just in daily life but in conversing with the veterans we met. As we worked alongside them, they were happy to see us trying to speak to them in Russian even if we could not say much and we managed to get across a good amount of what we wanted to say gestures and incomplete sentences.

We volunteered not only at the veteran's home but also with many schools, usually doing some painting work and then afterwards talking to the kids there. In one of our trips, we also worked alongside university students who were also doing service. Again, that experience of being able to communicate not solely with language which, although very valuable regardless, but through our shared work and process towards a common goal as we,

or instance, needed to tape and plaster the walls of a school building in renovation. We did similar tasks the other times we volunteered, such as painting a playground, but we also got to talk and play with the kids there. It is perhaps a bit more of an intangible effect of our trip there but it was very interesting to actually speak to people living in Russia not just to find out where to go or what bus to take but just to converse. The kids told us about what they wanted to do when they grew up, what their favorite subjects were, and so on while the organizers told us about the reasons why they were so passionate about what they did, whether it was running the veteran's home or the arts school. I had realized that I would have these experiences before the trip but experiencing it first-hand, having stories of others, was very enlightening.

The most memorable experience for me though, would be the hike to the abandoned church that we did with the church youth group. Not only did we weed the area, replace flowers, and help maintain the structure with fresh logs, we also participated in a service ministered by some of the church members. We read Old Church Slavonic verses alongside them as they later explained in English the church holiday they were celebrating. It was Trinity Sunday, and they told us that it was a good day for starting a project, like the small maintenance work we were doing. It is the combination of immersion and service in this trip that I am grateful for having been able to experience, as we were able to understand the context of the service we were performing and where. It

Bonnie Pang

Russia

was not just that we helped with some duties in preventing the old church from further falling into decay, but that we learned about its importance as its history was told to us by one of the organizers around a campfire.

In all, the trip was indeed a once-in-a-lifetime experience of service and learning. We built bonds between our group of students and the organizations we volunteered for through the work we did together and the conversations we had. I learned a lot of useful phrases in Russian and improved my conversational fluency in the language through such frequent practice, but I've also made many amazing memories that have changed my views of people and the world. Although many are different from us, we find connection in our shared humanity.

Hydn Park Baltimore

The American legal system is adversarial, so it's easy to imagine it as a sort of fight or competition, in which one side "wins" and triumphs over its opponent. What I witnessed this past summer were not fights or triumphs but rather attempts – sometimes successful, sometimes not – at communication from parties situated at different vantage points.

One of the main functions of the Department of Health is Medicaid eligibility hearings. At the beginning, I was skeptical – if the Department is within the Attorney General's office, whose client is the State, then aren't the people seeking Medicaid the adverse party? However, in effect, the true clients are the recipients of Medicaid as a whole. The State has a limited amount of money, so it has to ensure that the limited amount is spread around as fairly as possible. If there is someone whose life is in danger, the State needs to know that it hasn't used up all of its Medicaid allowance on non-urgencies like physical therapy (which is important, but lack thereof most likely not life-threatening).

Maryland has been, and still is, recovering from the mid-20th century, during which the State started spending exorbitant amounts of money in an effort to rid the state of inhumane mental asylums and psychiatric institutions. Obviously, this was not a sustainable solution; many existing beneficiaries were wondering why things were changing, and new applicants were undoubtedly confused at the lack of consistency.

Many people have a negative view of lawyers. I know many who dislike any and

all lawyers due to occupational reputation or personal experience. I know many who have been taken advantage of by lawyers, the very people who have promised to provide aid through tough times. But, at the Attorney General's office, I saw lawyers doing their best to help those most in need, using the tools they best knew how to use, within the confines of those tools.

As a part of my summer experience at the Department of Health, I had the chance to visit the Chief Medical Examiner's Office in Baltimore. The facility was relatively new, built with growth and expansion in mind. It could not have been pure coincidence that one of the most "dangerous" cities in the United States would also have one of the most state-of-the-art autopsy spaces. In the span of the couple hours I was visiting, at least eight autopsies had taken place. Statistically, most or all would be found to have been drug overdoses. It was a cold-bucket-of-water wake-up call to the national opioid crisis, and it was nothing like hearing on the news that increased prescribing and usage of opioid-based pain medication had been heavily contributing to opioid dependence and eventually overdose.

I can sit in the law school library and read casebooks all day long, but, at the end of the day, my purpose is to effect change in people's lives. This summer's experience has helped me observe the possible impact of the work in close proximity. This memory will serve to ground me in the concrete consequences and prevent me from floating away into the nebula of legal theories and hypotheticals.

Araminta Ray Vietnam

Thanks to the support of the Nichols Humanitarian Fund, I had the opportunity to spend 6 weeks of my summer teaching English in Vietnam. Working and traveling alongside ten other college students, I spent the first month of my trip in Da Nang, a coastal city in central Vietnam. The project was a cultural exchange, so we spent the first half of each day in an intensive Vietnamese class at iCan International Education Center. The evenings were spent hosting an “English Corner” for a growing crowd of local university students. Each week, we focused on a different aspect of American culture and used a variety of teaching methods ranging from guided discussion to catch phrase and other vocabulary games. We spent our weekends at homestays and enjoying our new friendships built in English Corner.

The final two weeks of our trip were spent participating in a cultural exchange internship at Tan Trao University in Northern Vietnam. We lived in dorms alongside the other students in the

internship program and greatly enjoyed the chance to both host an intensive language program and to practice our Vietnamese as we explored the region. We even got to visit a student’s family rice farm and plant a paddy together!

English is the language and currency of opportunity in Vietnam, and I was grateful for the opportunity to help my new friends gain more confidence in a skill that will take them closer to their dreams. For example, my friend Binh wants to become an elementary school teacher and help kids gain a solid foundation in English that will prepare them to eventually attend university. My friend Thúy dreams of working in the resort and tourism business so that she can meet guests from across the world. My friend Hà wants to communicate better with and propose to his girlfriend in Canada. Even though I was only in Vietnam for six weeks, I know that teaching my friends and helping them practice and increase their confidence will serve as a building block in their second language journey that will last far beyond the summer.

As I reflect on what I have learned personally this summer, I smile as I realize what a tremendous encouragement to my spirit it has been to partner with students just like me on the other side of the world. Our native tongues and our campuses are different, but our dreams have a lot in common. We all dream of a world where we can take full advantage of the opportunities that surround us, but we also dream of making those opportunities a reality for others too. We laugh, we like



Araminta Ray *Vietnam*

climbing tall mountains, and we're always ready to get late night treats (ice cream sundaes in the USA, and milk tea in Southeast Asia). However, as joyful as my summer of new friends and new culture was, I am also burdened by the influence of Western culture in Southeast Asia. Just because I am an American and a native speaker of English, I have opportunities that many of my friends there will never see. It makes my heart sad to see the slow loss of linguistic diversity as English becomes an increasingly universal language. While it is helpful to have a common global language, I believe that it is equally important to preserve other cultures for the benefit of the global population.

Looking forward, I will continue to keep in touch with my Vietnamese friends over the internet and I hope to return in the next few years to visit. I will remain increasingly aware of the power and privilege of my nationality as I interface with different cultures in Nashville and abroad. And most of all, I will be forever grateful for the Nichols family as they graciously provided me this opportunity!



Sarah Robinson

Morocco

This past summer, I volunteered as an English teacher at Association Attadamoune, an NGO in Rabat, Morocco. The organization offers free sewing, cooking, barbering, and aesthetician classes, as well as English. I had taught English in different capacities before, but I felt woefully unqualified when I walked into Attadamoune on my first day. I remember being led silently into a room and waiting for an orientation to the organization to begin. After about 15 minutes of sitting there, I realized there was no orientation, and the other people waiting were my students. My students ranged in age from four to twenty-nine and came from a variety of backgrounds and proficiency levels. I definitely made up some things as I went, got frustrated, questioned the impact I was having—and yet some of my students still came everyday excited to learn.

One of the biggest things I gained from my experience at Attadamoun was an understanding of non-Western conceptions of time. I realized that it was not my place to decide what was best or most efficient for the organization; I was there to serve by doing whatever task I was given. That being said, there was such little communication that I'm not sure that I was truly able to partner with the organization and effectively serve the community. There were so many Moroccans more qualified to teach than I was. Many of them were actually my students. Part of it was definitely the language barrier, which was on me for going to Morocco knowing I

could neither speak Darija nor French. Although I think my flexibility and patience increased tenfold over the course of the summer, I don't think I ever felt qualified to teach English in Morocco. Couldn't my time have been better spent serving communities in my own country? Where I speak the language and have a better understanding of the culture? I am still grappling with these questions, but I think the cultural understanding that I did gain in Morocco was perhaps more important than anything else I could have done there.

I learned so much from my host family—particularly the two amazingly strong women of the house, Fatema and Amina. I learned (again) how meaningful it is to speak to someone in their first language as I came home from my Darija classes and tried out my newly acquired vocabulary. I learned that we have more similarities than differences. What I learned about Islam and Moroccan culture will be something I can take back to the United States and use as ammunition against Islamophobia. For example, I proudly showed my family the recording I had made of Rabat women performing dhikr, the repetition of the names of Allah. My grandmother responded with an eye roll and a comment about all the bad things she had read about Muslims. It was the perfect opportunity to share my experience in Morocco and tell her about all the different Muslims and forms of Islam I had encountered there—specifically Sufism, which is promoted by the government to combat terrorism! I don't know if I'll find myself teaching English abroad again, but

Sarah Robinson

Morocco

I'm more motivated than ever to continue doing ethnographic interviews and talking about what I have learned from the community. After coming back from Morocco, I find it easier to identify social injustices in the United States and have critical conversations, as well as be a more active citizen. I am so thankful for this experience; it has had a life-changing impact on the way I approach service and cultural exchange.

Emma Stewart

Morocco



In the month since I left Morocco and returned to my routine and the comforts of home I have answered the question, “How was Morocco?” more times than I can remember. In the first few days, providing an answer proved surprisingly difficult. In the whirlwind of reverse culture shock, my response simply became, “it was an experience.” I have found that I needed this time to critically process my time serving and learning in Morocco – to reflect from the outside and make connections between my experiences in Morocco and my life in the States.

While my trip to Morocco was full of once-in-a-lifetime adventures and incredible relationships, it was also full of discomfort and struggle. In addition to missing the comforts of home – which I fully expected – I found myself struggling to adapt to the concept of “Moroccan time” and acceptable Moroccan societal practices. Abroad, I learned that the American valuation of efficiency, productivity, and speed are not omnipresent. Moroccans

prefer to operate at a slower pace and with a sense of faith in God to will an outcome – described using the term *inshallah*. This approach was present in every segment of Moroccan life, including the professional sector, which forced me to exhibit patience and thoughtful understanding. Additionally, I was forced to come to terms with the acceptability of street-harassment in Moroccan culture. My host brother explained to me that catcalling is not seen negatively like in the American perspective; instead, it is seen as a method for dating or a sort of joke. Both of these societal standards pushed me out of my comfort zone and made day-to-day life in Morocco challenging. Yet, in reflecting on my struggle with the differences in Morocco, I understand that “different” does not mean “weird” and what is culturally “normal” to me is considered “abnormal” to someone else. Facing these challenges while teaching English in Morocco taught me the importance of understanding my own bias and privilege before serving in an international setting.

Though the cultural differences between the United States and Morocco did shock me, what stood out to me more was the vast similarities between the nations at a human level. Amid a period of prevalent Islamophobia and xenophobia in America, I am grateful to have had the opportunity to experience life in an almost-entirely Muslim population and learn about the history and practice of Islam on-site. I went to Morocco hoping to learn about the Middle East and Islam and humanize both concepts. Fortunately, I left with exactly

Emma Stewart

Morocco

that perspective. Before Morocco, I had only been exposed to the concepts of praying five times a day or proclaiming “Allahu akhbar” in a classroom and in ideologically charged conversations or news broadcasts. Yet, in Morocco, these concepts were given a human form and with it, I found more understanding and empathy. I recognize the power of human connection to combat hostile rhetoric and hate.

Perhaps the most thought-provoking experience I had while in Morocco was my service placement at Fondation Orient-Occident, where I taught English to sub-Saharan refugees and migrants. This placement offered a unique view into Morocco’s tumultuous relationship with the African continent and its role in the world migrant and refugee crisis. The interactions and conversations I had with my students about their experience in Morocco and their reason for learning English forced me to question the validity or even morality of teaching English as a method of development and provided an new perspective on racism and nationalism on a global scale. I will remember my students forever and will take their perspectives with me into my future political career. My experience in Morocco challenged me in ways I had never been challenged before and offered an unprecedented perspective on race, religion, immigration, and culture. After the trip, I feel better equipped to serve with the needs of the population in mind and my own biases in check. My summer in Rabat not only offered the

adventure of a lifetime but also a refinement of perspective, both of which I am eternally grateful for.



Ajike Sumpter *South Africa*

Due to the generosity of the Nichols Humanitarian Fund, I was provided the opportunity to travel to South Africa for an invaluable service experience. I participated in the Global OACS program in partnership with Kurios Volunteer Projects, and spent the first part of my summer lending my time to Bethelsdorp Comprehensive School. Bethelsdorp (abbrev. BeeDee) is a high school serving the Northern Areas of Port Elizabeth, a community established due to forced removals as enforced during Apartheid's latter years. BeeDee's campus was built to last for 15 years, but 45 years later it still stands—a school doing what it can to educate youth who live in the shadow of Apartheid's 400-year legacy.

Before embarking on the service component of the OACS Cohort in South Africa, I spent time wondering what would be asked of me, whether I'd have enough to meet the community's needs. Often people begin service experiences trying to craft what they want to get out of it, building expectations before being introduced to the community itself. In my experience, I tried to resist the temptation to diagnose to ensure I could be more receptive to the school, from its teachers to its students to its staff.

BeeDee experiences a range of issues, including minimal government funding for educational materials, crumbling school structures, classroom overcrowding, and highly varied education levels among the students from within and across grade levels. These educational issues are accompanied by community ills

perpetuated by historic social inequity (gun violence, unsustainable employment, drug addiction, etc.) The issues presented at Bethelsdorp are not unique, as many schools in the Northern Areas encounter similar problems. Unfortunately, BeeDee seems to be a case study in a nationwide struggle for equitable resource distribution among South Africa's Coloured and Black citizens, made highly visible through education.

I am not an educator, nor am I an education major. When BeeDee faculty tasked three of us OACS volunteers with serving their school in educators' roles, I was apprehensive. It is impossible to combat layered educational gaps (specifically with reading and English) to six eighth grade classes of 30 to 35 students per day. But that is what Alison Kreher, Carolyn Yee and I did for nearly a month, unabashedly and fully. In the first week, we experimented with educational methods that we thought would keep the students engaged. By week three, we developed lesson plans that targeted the eighth graders' interests, from music artists to sports teams. We asked them to write stories and perform skits to become more comfortable with the dynamics of English and Language Arts. We couldn't address a sliver of everyone's education needs, but the lessons we gave were hopefully challenging and entertaining to the grade eight students. Also, Alison and Carolyn's constant positivity encouraged us to power through our roughest times at service.

Beyond that, the three of us became

Ajike Sumpter *South Africa*

friendly faces for students who needed people to listen and support them. There is some criticism about becoming attached to people in a service environment, but developing relationships with the students was natural and instantaneous. If one cannot make connections with the community in which they're serving, to what effect is service meaningful? Many students from all grade levels became comfortable spending time with us in the school library, asking us questions and giving us a glimpse into their world. It was truly a privilege developing relationships with a few of Bethelsdorp's youth; as much as we attempted to teach them, they taught us about aspects of South African culture, their personalities and lives, and what they want from the future.

Though the OACS volunteers descended on BeeDee during a critical nationwide testing period, school administration made it a point to accommodate our needs. For example, English department head Mrs. LaGerdein provided suggestions on how to make class time more effective while highlighting what problems could arise when meeting student comprehension. Administration allowed us autonomy with how we structured our service time, a privilege full-time staff and faculty are not always granted. Nevertheless, most of BeeDee's staff was welcoming to our service, ensuring that we did not want for anything.

Beyond our involvement at the school, I felt truly attached to the Northern Areas-at-large. Since we were working in the community, the community welcomed and

nurtured us in return. We were invited to fellowship in different religious spaces, sharing their faith practices as a part of their daily lives. A few people made wonderful meals for our cohort, while others invited us to look at the history of their respective neighborhoods through walking tours. We met a slew of individuals working to better the communities they were given. The knowledge and experiences acquired through this brief service opportunity are permanently engrained in my personhood. My gratitude toward Mr. and Mrs. Nichols cannot be quantified. The Nichols Humanitarian Fund afforded me the opportunity to engage with an international community, and in return I acquired life altering lessons and skills that will come to fruition in future service endeavors.

Izabela Tyzska *South Africa*

This was neither my first time in South Africa, nor my first time participating in this specific service-learning program. Expectations were as clear and high as they could have been, and yet I never could have anticipated how the six weeks would unravel.

Much of our service as a cohort was helping other individuals serve their respective communities in Port Elizabeth. Specifically, I spent most of my time in the garden and crafter's unit at Missionvale Care Center. In the mornings, I worked alongside Auntie Rosa weeding or harvesting vegetables, and in the afternoons, I knit while learning isiXhosa. There were days here and there where I packed Christmas presents, went on home visits, and prepared hundreds of lunches for the school children. I made myself as useful as I could, understanding the value of giving an extra set of hands so that the individuals who serve their communities ceaselessly may get some rest, socialize, and feel appreciated.

I had already studied the sociopolitical context of South Africa, engaged in seminars and reflection on power and privilege, and served collaboratively in Port Elizabeth. I had already come to realize how engrained systematic injustice and oppressive poverty were in the community, as well as come to recognize that our presence could only provide ameliorative assistance rather than spark transformative change. Through an independent internship, I already had the opportunity to contribute to research used to inform social policies in South Africa – a



constructive effort in influencing structures. Even though I already had these experiences and understood what the scope of my service would be, I chose to go back again rather than direct my energy elsewhere. What allowed this return to be intentional and necessary was the opportunity to serve by supporting the cohort in their development.

Although my defined role originally included managing some on the ground logistics and facilitating reflections, it came to encompass accommodating the various visions for the service-learning experience within the cohort, as well as making myself a particularly approachable leader that was just as integrated within the group as a peer or member of the collective. Often times it was difficult to embrace the service-lifestyle mentality and to unconditionally practice what I was preaching. As I was helping the cohort navigate their understanding of our impact, I had to confront and reflect upon how my actions contributed to the growth of the cohort and each individual. Throughout the six weeks, I was encouraged in remaining steadfast and

Izabela Tyzska *South Africa*

committed to the bigger picture of service. I practiced patience and vulnerability. I made meaningful relationships with the cohort, learning from each individual member. Our community partners became my mentors, brothers, friends. Leaving Port Elizabeth, and then South Africa, came with many tears. My experience and relationships reminded me of the hope in justice from individuals working towards it ceaselessly. I ultimately took away more than I have left.

Since returning home, I have continued sharing with our community partner in Port Elizabeth as he seeks to make his programs more sustainable by attracting more students to serve with him. Although it may just be databases and marketing from thousands of miles away, I am invested in his growth for the growth of the community that welcomed us wholeheartedly.

I have grown, and I hope to return.



Denise Wanyana *London*

London was one of the most unique experiences I have had so far. The diversity in the city blew me away. Immigrants from different parts of the world enrich the communities in London with their food, culture, religion, and race, and it was interesting to see how all these aspects coexist in the same place.

For my placement service, I worked with Limehouse Project, which is a non-profit organization in the London borough of Tower Hamlets that responds to the needs of the minority communities in Tower Hamlets. They help empower marginalized communities by establishing pathways that assist the community members to overcome social, economic and personal barriers to employment as well as physical and mental wellbeing. Limehouse project believes that through empowering one person at a time, they can eventually empower a whole community. My time at Limehouse was spent working on an evaluation project that would help the organization determine whether the services that they are offering are helpful and beneficial to their clients. My objective was to assess how accessible the services offered by Limehouse are to the members of the community, whether the services have made a positive (or negative) impact, whether the community members practice what they have learned at Limehouse in their everyday lives, and whether they would recommend Limehouse services to their friends, families, and/or other people in their communities.

In addition to creating the evaluation questionnaire with my colleague, I was

able to interact with community members, from East London, that participate in Limehouse's clubs and empowerment courses. Most of the people that Limehouse Project serves are immigrants from Bangladesh, Somalia, etc. Some of these people (mostly women for the projects I was evaluating) had never felt the need to learn English because they stay in their homes most of the time and interact with family members or a few close friends who speak their native language(s). As a result, the majority of the people that I saw come through Limehouse had lived in London for years and managed to get by "fairly well" without learning English. As you can imagine, the inability to communicate in English in London comes with its own struggles. These women cannot help their children with their schoolwork when required. It is hard for them to get employed because of the language barrier and when they do, they usually get lower class jobs that do not pay enough money for them to live a comfortable life with their families. It is hard for these women (and men) to move up in society. This is where Limehouse Project saw the need and stepped in to help these minority communities in Tower Hamlets by teaching them English, capacity building skills, and offering various advice sessions on welfare rights, immigration, debt advice, how to apply for jobs, etc.

The biggest challenge with my work at Limehouse was the language barrier, especially because I had to engage with the community members of Tower Hamlets in

Denise Wanyana *London*

order to carry out surveys that will potentially be used in making the Limehouse Project services provided to the community more accessible and beneficial to the people that need them. It was difficult, most times impossible, to effectively communicate with majority of the Limehouse clients that were participating in my evaluation project of the organization's services. The language barrier challenge highlighted the importance of community participation because the knowledge and ability of a community member to identify/relate with the people in their own community is invaluable. Lastly, I was able to witness Limehouse's mission and belief that "through the empowering of one, we can empower an entire community." This was a very significant lesson that I learned from Limehouse that has further shaped my perspective on community service and public health.

Brianna Watkins *London*

My experience in the London OACS Service Program was a phenomenal journey that helped me grow as an individual in all aspects of life. This was an experience that I will never forget and has become ingrained into my daily life post leaving London.

My original idea of London was drastically different than the actual London I encountered. This may be due to the perception that the media gives London or just my inability to accurately learn about another country's culture without stepping foot on its soil. Before even arriving in Heathrow International Airport I was aware that London would be a culture shock for me. I am a girl from rural Alabama so just going to New York City is a major change for me, but I was ready and excited to begin the service program.

When I was accepted into the London Service Program I was vividly aware that I needed to learn more about the culture I would serve. I began to do research about London's history and culture. My prior research did little to prepare me for what I actually experienced in London and everyday I was amazed by the amount of information that I learned. For instance, I began to realize that most of the information that I knew about London was primarily about Central London or also referred to as the tourist part of London. The accommodations for our cohort were located in zone three which is relatively close to Central London, though during my first week it felt like we were far away. This was because I was unaware of how large London was and had limited the size of the



city of London to the size of Central London. As I began to go to more places in London I became aware that there was not one London but several small boroughs with distinct characteristics that compose London. On paper that sounds very obvious, but in person it is very visual how immense these differences are and how each borough has its own distinct characteristics.

As we walked through the Westfield mall on our way to the train station everyday, I realized how gentrification had drastically changed the borough of Newham where we were staying. Traditionally a poor area with one of the highest minority populations in London, it was interesting to see the influx of a white middle class population. I witnessed people of varying races and identities shopping, dining, and working together and it made me really analyze how I perceived the area. The area appears to be a hidden jewel because these days the UK and the US seem to be in a state of crisis over the topic of immigration. This mall

Brianna Watkins *London*



and the other adaptations such as Olympic Park seemed to result in a positive outcome because it contained the most diversity I believe I have ever seen. People appeared to be happy and integrated into their own society. Scenes such as this make me question and develop my thoughts on cultures interacting.

The gentrification of several London boroughs such as Newham and Hackney were a major topic of thought that reoccurred in my mind and my cohort members' minds while we were in London. At my placement site, the Council of Hackney's Public Health Team taught me about several of the inequalities regarding health and housing in London. When I walked through a gentrified area my first day in London, I had no idea that housing was the biggest crisis in London.

This gave me a different perspective of Brexit and showed me how much gentrification affects London. Middle class people that work for the government with a passion I aspire to have one day told me that they literally could not afford to live in

London and had to commute over an hour and half to get to work everyday. If this was the living situation for middle class people, I began to wonder what the living environment for low-income people was like in London. Fortunately, through my placement I was able to learn more about how the government was working to change the current situation and I even had the opportunity to work with the housing policy team in Hackney.

The Council of Hackney taught me informative information and also kept me socially aware of problems in the U.K. During my time at the Council of Hackney, a black man died after he was detained by a police officer in a grocery store. I was baffled by this incident because it resembled a typical story in the United States that I would receive on my newsfeed on my way to class. I recognized how normalized I had become with police brutality, when my co-worker told me about the incident that occurred in Hackney. It did not even register with me that this was an unusual event. In my mind I thought how terrible, but these horrible incidents happen and we have to advocate for change. Then I realized I was not in the United States, but in London, England. I had previously thought that police brutality and color biases were American issues, but this week has made me question these topics in a more global perspective. These topics were really salient to me because at my placement I was able to analyze research and data about young black men in Hackney. The issues that the Hackney residents experience and the issues that

Brianna Watkins

London

young black men in the US face appear to be parallel. It was informative to learn the race discrimination and challenges in London and the actions that the policy team were taking in order to combat the problems. Sadly my journey has come to a close but I definitely learned from the experience and believe that it taught me more than any textbook would have been able to do. The service work that I participated in was interesting as well as mentally engaging.

Each day I was able to learn more about London culture and some of the similar challenges they encounter. When I reflect on my experience in the program, the main thought I have is how grateful I am to have been able to participate in this program. It was not all sunshine and roses. Our hike on the rainy Cliffs of Dover for our enrichment activity showed us that, but just like when we reached the top of the cliff, the view of this journey is pretty great.

Carolyn Yee *South Africa*

My time in South Africa has given me a deeper respect and appreciation for history, culture, and policy-making. The more time I spent in South Africa, the more it occurred to me that although the United States of America may be the leader of the free world, the United States in some ways may not be that different from South Africa, a country that gained notoriety for its institutionalized racism and discrimination. I needed to go abroad to see my home country in a more accurate and honest light. The lack of will to racially integrate amongst colored, black, and white communities in South Africa startled me. However, in the past month, I have begun to realize and accept that this sentiment is alive in the United States and on Vanderbilt's campus. I expected that our country would be further along than South Africa in the path towards equality because the Union defeated the Confederacy 147 years ago while Apartheid ended only 23 years ago. However, the flames of our history continue to burn our nation, especially when many in our country prefer to rewrite history instead of come to terms with it.

I was reminded over and over again during this trip through life maps and conversations that friendship and storytelling can be a powerful tool for integration and social harmony. Friendship and storytelling can deconstruct preconceived barriers and enable us to come together over shared human experiences and values, such as family, humiliation, and pain. Integration is integral to the end of racism. One reason the Apartheid government was so effective at

oppressing the majority of its citizens was because it traumatized millions of people through massive forced removals. District Six was torn apart because it was an example of a racially integrated community living in harmony. As the United States becomes more segregated with gentrification on the rise, we need to fight for policies that encourage integration in schools, workplaces, and neighborhoods.

I was deeply moved at Bethelsdor High School by the faculty and staff's camaraderie and commitment to their students. The teachers' selflessness and team spirit made me realize that I want a lifelong career working to improve under-resourced schools. The challenges teachers face are never-ending, and thus require them to regularly recommit to their calling and take ownership of their community. During the four weeks I was at Bethelsdorp, my job constantly asked me to choose others over myself. My hope is that if I continue to work in such an environment, I will one day view the community's needs as my own and reflexively serve others before myself. I am anxious to spend my days around students' youthful, excited energy and dream of their future with them. I hope my compassion and love for others grow so that one day I am able to love my students as extravagantly as Ms. Lahading, Ms. Forbes, and Ms. Booysen loved their students after thirty years on the job. By dedicating myself to a larger community, I ultimately hope to become my best self. Since returning to campus, I have begun to

Caroline Yee *South Africa*

identify as a person of color and question what being an Asian American in a white space means. My experience in South Africa has made me begin to re-examine my country and my past. Growing up in Hawai'i, I was blessed to live in a community where ethnicity was a sign of culture instead of a barrier. Being in South Africa, where people openly talk about race and write ugly truths on highway billboards, has encouraged me to ask myself questions about privilege and identity. Thank you to my cohort for pushing me to identify systemic issues in the context of culture and history in South Africa. Thank you to Ms. Lahading, Andrew, Junayne, Isabella, and Clive for mentoring and loving us. Thank you to the Nichols for providing support and financial assistance for this experience, which has served as a catalyst for a life of service and advocacy.

Clara Yip Ecuador

When I first heard about the Global OACS trip to Ecuador, I was interested primarily because I wanted the opportunity to go to South America and do something meaningful with my summer. Since I was finishing up my undergrad degree and wouldn't begin my first job until after August, I wanted to spend it doing something adventurous but relatively low-risk. From the service standpoint, I didn't really care what I would be doing as long as it was helpful to someone. As our pre-trip seminars continued, we were tasked with reflecting on our role as global citizens and the pros and cons of international service. I began to realize that I had signed myself up for something bigger than just a six-week trip to Ecuador.

During my time in Quito, I worked at a site called Camp Hope. Camp Hope is a school of sorts for people with a range of cognitive and physical disabilities. It functions as a school for students capable of learning occupational skills and a daycare for those who are too young or otherwise incapable of doing so. I spent almost all of my time, eight hours a day, five days a week, working in the classroom for the most dependent students. What that looked like was changing a lot of diapers, spoon-feeding or supervising meals and snacks, and doing other miscellaneous health care tasks.

In addition to working in Quito, I also lived in a homestay with the Zirrit family. The purpose of the homestay was to improve Spanish skills and provide another avenue to learning about Ecuadorian culture and values. I didn't really expect much from my homestay aside from a place to live, but my

host-mother's daughter had actually spent some time working with disabled students as well. I learned that while Lenin Moreno, the recently elected President of Ecuador, has done a lot to advocate for the handicapped, the daily lives of the disabled still has not changed much. The stigma is still such that although some public busses are wheelchair-accessible, bus drivers will not stop to pick you up if they see you need special accommodations.

In a lot of ways, the public view of the disabled is still very much similar to the perspective in the States. Systemically, there is not a lot of space for the handicapped to advocate for themselves. Since I was working with disabled students, I was thinking about what I could do to help, but I don't really think that it is possible to create lasting change in these deep-rooted prejudices with a short-term service project. Similarly, it got me thinking that while Moreno has garnered a lot of attention for being one of the few world leaders to have a handicap, there are still so many other people who live with disabilities that are not able to have a public voice. The blind and deaf are able to be integrated into our society and advocate for themselves and their issues, but there are so many people, particularly the non-verbal, non-communicating students in my classroom, that would hardly benefit from such opportunities. I realized that when we talk about the disabled, we almost always are speaking of those who are physically disabled but still have the ability to form thoughts and opinions.

Something I noticed during this

Clara Yip *Ecuador*

volunteer experience is that in addition to the usual flattery that comes with telling people you are donating your hours to a certain cause, there seemed to be more talk of how hard my particular issue was. People are quick to understand when you say you want to help alleviate poverty or homelessness or hunger, but there was another layer to working with the disabled. I think that the stigma around the disabled plays a huge role in the idea that their lives are sad and that working with them is emotionally difficult. People focus on their limitations, all the things that they can't do and are missing out on, but everyday working at Camp Hope had its fair share of smiles and laughter. Sure, some days weren't entirely enjoyable, but at the end of the day, I was playing with and helping kids who like to be hugged and hate brushing their teeth.

One of the elements of international service is the language barrier. Going into this journey, I knew that my Spanish skills would be tested and that there would be times when I wouldn't be able to understand when I was being spoken to. However, all those moments of confusion made me realize how difficult it really is to try to bring something, anything to a different country. Whether you're contributing your time or skills, none of that matters if you aren't able to communicate efficiently with those you are trying to serve. So much time is wasted and frustrations occur when one or both parties feel like they aren't being understood that it can almost negate whatever positive good was intended. I'll admit, my Spanish wasn't

necessarily good enough to be a significant positive influence on my volunteer site. However, I saw many groups of students pass through Camp Hope on their respective short-term service trips and most of them spoke little to no Spanish at all. In those times, I was able to be more useful in explaining tasks to them in English, but only because I had struggled myself through those first few weeks of incomprehension. There are so many cultural and unintentional pitfalls one must be aware of when attempting international service, but the language piece is probably one of the most important ones that I didn't give enough weight to before embarking on this trip.

We were often asked to describe what our lasting impact would be on our respective service sites. The prompt for this reflection paper asks for the "outcomes achieved" through my service experience. What I found encouraging about my time at Camp Hope is that it was run and will continue to run in exactly the same way with or without my contribution. Camp Hope, and its backing foundation, are accustomed to running their own facilities and hosting an ever-changing stream of temporary volunteers. Without extra hands, they can manage to get everything done, but the added hours of labor mean that the building gets to look a little better and the staff get a little more breathing room. I would like to hope that my time at Camp Hope was encouraging to the teachers who only ever see volunteers stay for a few days maximum, but even if it was not, I am still satisfied with what I accomplished. I was able to witness a self-sufficient service organization that doesn't rely on the white-savior to guide them. If anything, I gained more out of the experience than they did.

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 programming 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 through leveraging and embedding the use of digital technology to foster interaction and learning between students and the communities in which they serve.

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 to 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.

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"Demand things of the world and if they don't do it then change the world to suit the demands."

- 2009 Nichols-Chancellor's Medal recipient Bob Geldof

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