

NICHOLS HUMANITARIAN FUND

Supporting the humanitarian
activities of Vanderbilt students



2019

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In total, twenty-seven students were selected to pursue humanitarian projects in sixteen countries during the summer of 2019. Due to an emergency, the student who traveled to South Korea was unable to complete their project. Their reflection is not included in this booklet.

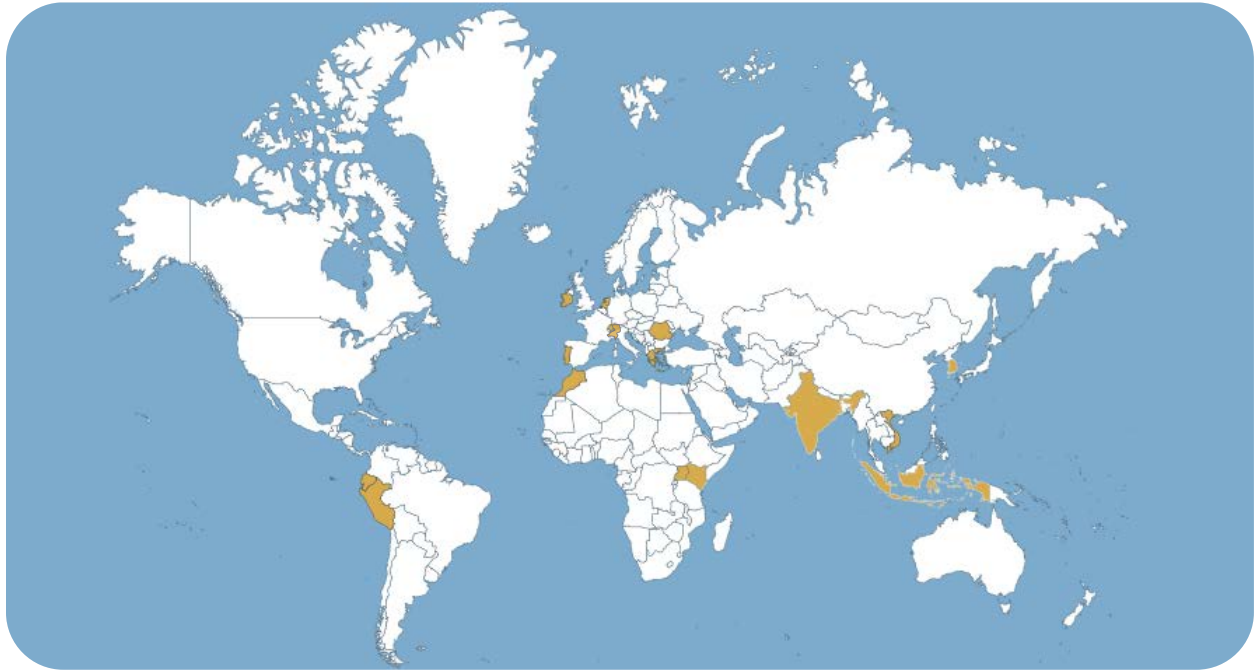
About the Fund

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 is a companion scholarship fund to the Nichols-Chancellor's Medal, and 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. The Fund distributes awards based on merit and need to Vanderbilt students to pay the expenses of their humanitarian activities.

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, Rwanda, India, Russia, and more.

2019 Service Locations



Ecuador

Greece

India

Indonesia

Ireland

Kenya

Maldives

Morocco

Netherlands

Peru

Portugal

Romania

South Korea

Switzerland

Uganda

Vietnam

Student Reflections

Gerrica Alexander

Morocco

It's amazing the amount you could learn in such a short time. I only spent six weeks in Morocco, which is hardly any time, but I learned so much about the people I was surrounded by, cultural customs, the importance of belief, and ultimately myself. It's slightly ironic. How I was partnered with the Attadamoun Institute, where Bethanie and I were tasked with teaching English to a wide array of backgrounds and ages. It was awesome to be part of creating an environment where anyone could come in, no matter their skill level, and try their best to learn whatever little or large concepts they could. I have so much admiration for all of our students. They were so passionate. When they read aloud, they would sometimes struggle - especially with words that did not sound how they would phonetically be pronounced. As they stuttered, there were large smiles on their faces. They were excited to share the knowledge they gained. They loved participating in the team vocabulary competitions. These are just some of the many examples of why I have so much respect for every single person that walked into that room - whether that was once or they were regulars.

As someone not working in an NGO that required a lot of capacity building, the relationships I formed when coming to class everyday were my way of learning more about the Attadamoun Institute and the education system in Morocco. Sometimes, I felt like I was missing out on some of the more statistical and factual elements about education and employment. I realized that if I wanted to learn more about the education and employment and what Attadamoun Institute's goals were, I had to

talk to the students. Attadamoun was not only a place where anyone could come and learn English - they offered so many other skills: cooking classes, barber classes, cosmetology classes, sewing classes, etc. Unfortunately, it was also greatly underfunded. There were not many resources there, which made teaching English a little more difficult. But Attadamoun did give opportunity for many locals. I am especially thankful that I was able to be part of an organization that aims to teach people skills that could eventually be profitable for the individual. Unemployment is pretty high in Morocco. Many university educated individuals do not have jobs and the percentage is even greater for people who do not have a university degree. Despite the lack of resources, everyone working at Attadamoun was there to share their skills and spread their knowledge of those various skills. It was a collaborative and very welcoming environment.



I am so thankful for all of the relationships that I had developed while in Morocco. In the beginning, it was uncomfortable, I have to admit. I was put in a completely different environment from what I was used to. I had to navigate the homestay life alone for the first week, which was incredibly difficult for me. But as I opened up more, so did everyone I interacted with. They only returned the energy I gave, so I learned to engage

in conversation, to ask questions, to not only listen but also speak up. Morocco taught me a lot about issues I was previously unaware of. The experience taught me about people and how cultural differences shape point of view. It taught me how to have very difficult and sometimes heated conversations, but to approach them wanting to learn more about the other side. Ultimately, Morocco taught me about myself. I am incredibly grateful for this experience. And I cannot thank the Nichols family enough for their generosity. It was truly an incredible experience!

Maria Loaiza Bonilla

Ecuador

In the beginning of my trip, I was very much in my comfort zone. How could I not be? I speak Spanish, so when I got to Ecuador, I could easily blend right in when I wanted to. Ecuador neighbors Colombia (where I'm from) and it was surprisingly hard to point out any big differences between the two cultures. The Spanish class I took during the first week of the trip helped with that, but it wasn't until I began service that I really started to learn about so many things: the indigenous cultures that make up a significant part of Ecuador's population, an area of service I wasn't expecting, and so many things about myself.

To begin, I will preface this by saying that part of the OACS Global Program I participated in involved attending regular pre-service meetings throughout the semester leading up to the trip. I am very involved in Vanderbilt's Alternative Spring Break program, whose philosophy stresses the importance of education, service, and reflection. In my experience, I've come to realize that education is truly one of the most crucial parts of any act of service, especially when that service takes place abroad like it did in this program. A big risk to performing short-term service is doing more harm to a community than good. Intentions aside, it is very possible to have a harmful effect – but this is where education comes in. It is so important to really understand not only the ins and outs of the issue being addressed, but also what it means to be a part of the community you do service in, the challenges that community is facing, and what your place is as an outsider coming in to do service.

I believe that someone's role as a volunteer is not to take over. It is not to point out flaws in the community. It is not to begin enormous projects that are unsustainable because what happens when you leave? I would say that someone's role as a volunteer is not to carve out a space where you believe efforts should be placed, but to fill an existing one. In other words, a volunteer's job is to help support the community, to acknowledge that they are capable on their own, to empower members in the community in their endeavors, and give help when and where it is needed. The pre-trip meetings that I attended affirmed these thoughts and placed them into the special context of global service. Education does not stop when service begins; it is a continual process that helps you grow, especially as an individual immersed in a culture that is not your own. This was absolutely the case with my trip.

Seeing the school I would be volunteering at for the first time was amazing. When you step through the door of Yachay Wasi, it feels as if you've stepped into an oasis in the middle of a bustling city like Quito. Once you see the school's garden, it feels that way even more. However, the garden is so much more than it seems. During the pre-trip meetings, we discussed the significance of this garden (called a chakra) to the indigenous community. To them, it is a way to connect to the Earth Mother (the Pachamama, they call it). It was so cool to be able to see/be let into such an important part of their indigenous culture.

What I really did not expect, however, was what service would actually consist of. The directors of the school spoke with us volunteers on the first day and explained where the school needed help and why. It turns out that because of the push for the Westernization of the school

system in Ecuador, standardized tests were pushed on them, with government funding that the school desperately needed relying on their adherence to these new standards. The problem is that this type of education cuts into the time used to teach the students things about their indigenous background and culture. As a result, the teachers and students have to spend more time in the classroom and less time in the chakra where before they had the opportunity to learn about the importance of protecting the Pachamama and learning valuable lessons via this huge chakra full of crops like corn, beans, vegetables, and other foods. We arrived as they were preparing for the harvest. Since the kids and teachers could no longer work in the garden, that is where we came in. It is entirely possible that the school could have gone without our help and gathered the harvest on their own, but our help went a long way in making their jobs easier and freeing up time for the teachers to plan lessons and overall just focus more on the kids' educations. This is what I was saying is an essential aspect of short-term service. We were not there to create a problem to find our own solution to. Instead, we recognized the need that the community presented us, acknowledged that the community is absolutely capable of working on it themselves, but provided support and empowerment as was asked of us.

The service was hard. Prior to going on the trip, I was not expecting to be waking up at 6 AM every morning, taking the bus for an hour to the service site, and I definitely was not expecting to be doing manual labor. My job was to gather the harvest. What this entailed was making my way through a sizeable field of corn, picking the corn (which is a lot easier said than done!), and collecting the beans that grew all the way up the

cornstalks. Then, we would take the corn to the school's kitchen and get to work shucking, sorting, and hanging the corn to dry for replanting the next season. The work was intense and exhausting. I would then take the bus back to my homestay for another hour, getting home in the late afternoon.

What's important to note is that I did not expect to be doing this kind of work when I first began the OACS Global Service program. As a pre-med student, I've always been very interested in healthcare and especially public health. When I began service at Yachay Wasi, I was honestly upset and a little angry. I simply did not understand why someone with my language skills, my interests, and my background would be performing service that was so unrelated to all of that. I would wake up every morning dreading the manual labor I knew awaited me. As time went on, however, I learned a lot of valuable lessons, both about what it means to do service and about myself.

On one hand, I learned way more about Ecuador's indigenous culture firsthand than I could have without being there. When one of the school's directors had time, she would teach us about their beliefs. For example, she would tell us that the beans in the chakra, often hidden among the giant stalks of corn, would show themselves to us if we treated them with kindness and respect. The corn and beans grow together, alongside each other, she'd say, to show us that we all need to support and care for each other. I learned that the importance of the big harvest festival I was able to participate in, called *Inti Raymi*, was to really thank the Pachamama properly for the bountiful harvest and show gratitude to her so that she would provide for them during the following growing season.

Another important lesson I learned about service came over time. Like I said, I was a little upset when I started. However, I came to the realization that a community's needs will not always align with your interests. I learned that the true selflessness of service comes when you put your interests aside and provide the help that is needed from you, not just the help that will benefit you personally or professionally, as people are so eager to look for when they decide to get involved. The work was not necessarily what I'd hoped for, but I was there to help the community, not myself. Once I realized this, service became a lot more enjoyable and rewarding. (In the end, we managed to collect the entire harvest just in time for the harvest festival!) I feel like this was an important lesson to learn as I continue doing service here in Nashville and wherever I go after college.

After my trip, I would now consider myself a corn-shucking expert. (Ha!) Jokes aside, though, I think I've taken a lot of steps towards becoming the active citizen everyone should strive to be. I'm so happy that I got the opportunity to get to know such a beautiful country like Ecuador and the equally special culture of Ecuador's indigenous communities. It was such a privilege to be welcomed by this community and I'm excited to apply the lessons I've learned to the service I will continue to do in my own community.

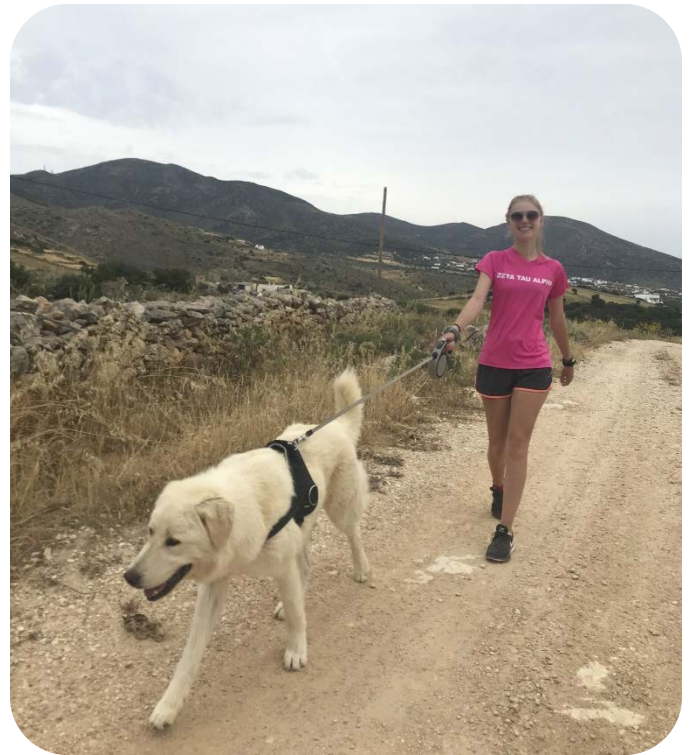


Jenna Collazzo

Greece

As I'm finishing my final travels back home here in Greece (I'm currently on the ferry back to Athens to catch my flight tomorrow), I can't help but look back on my adventures in Paros and already miss my time there so dearly. I spent over two weeks volunteering at the PAWS animal shelter in Tripiti working alongside the amazing manager, Carolina, 20 other dogs, and other volunteers who stopped by occasionally from around the world to take a pit stop from their trips and vacations.

I worked early half days from the mornings as the heat from the sun is too much for the animals in the afternoons. Every morning as I drove down the mountainside to the shelter on the old farmland, I was greeted by Caro's smiling face wishing me a "Kalimara" and 20 different (and extremely loud and excitable) dog barks. Upon arrival, I was always excited for a new adventure: the dogs, just like people, have good days, bad days, sick days, grumpy days, happy days, etc. Walking the same dog two days in a row was never the same. The shelter during my time there consisted of Susie and her four 6 week old puppies (Choco, Vinila, Hazelnut, and Caramel), the ten 3 month old puppies rescued from a garbage can in town, Caro's two 3-week-old puppies (Pepe and Foo-hoot), the 9 front dogs (Boobie, Clint, Boris, Annie, brothers Faro and Fado, Tina, Mira, and Lilecca), Bumbai, the 2 Pitbull's (brothers Tinker and Taylor), the two middle cage dogs (Lion and Pasta Flora), the two back cage dogs (Mona and Rio), the three solo cage dogs (Alexandro, Fino, and the large husky, Toby), and finally the 5 cats (San Danco, Thelios, Big Face, and two others).



Most of the dogs that end up at the shelter are either rescued by locals on the streets or have been "disposed of" in garbage cans or by shop owners or farmers who cannot look after their dog anymore. Dogs that are given up are most commonly dogs that have been neglected, physically and verbally abused, and "short leashed" for a majority of their lives; whereas the dogs rescued from the streets are starving, scared, and sometimes aggressive. A large part of volunteering at the shelter was not just the daily feeding and cleaning of the cages but also working with the dogs to make them more "adoptable" for possible locals within the island (about 10% of adoptions) or abroad adoptions specifically to Germany (around 90% of the adoptions). This job included introducing dogs to "kind words and touches" and trying to get them accustomed to human handling from a more loving perspective.

As I mentioned in my previous blog post, a majority of the overpopulation and consequent starvation and death of the dogs and cats on the

island is due to the local belief that neutering an animal changes its behavior in an undesirable way. Consequently, this overpopulation leads to stray animals that starve, wander the streets, and get abandoned in trash sites. Additionally, what also saddened me most was the rules regarding adoption of a specific breed of dog: Pit bulls. Almost all adoptions through the PAWS shelter are done through an organization in Germany. However, Germany, along with many other European countries, have strict adoption laws that do not allow their people to adopt pit bulls. A large amount of dogs at the shelter are pit bulls (like Rio, Tinker, and Taylor), and unfortunately, shelter life is all they will know for the rest of their lives as they cannot be adopted from abroad clients. Additionally, most of the pit bulls on the island are grown to be aggressive guard and attack dogs which is not a suitable environment for them if they were to be adopted by the locals.

When I first arrived at the shelter, there were two dogs that immediately broke my heart because of their poor conditions that I was determined to help as much as possible during my stay: Clint and Toby. Clint had been dropped off at the shelter during my third day of volunteering; he was constantly shaking in fear when around humans and other dogs, wouldn't eat, and wouldn't go on walks. Caro informed me that he had been dropped off by a local who couldn't care for him anymore and had been kept in a small cage for his whole life. Little by little I worked with Clint to accustom him to human touch; worked with him to get used to being around other dogs and people; made sure he ate whenever possible; and worked day by day to accustom him to a collar and eventually leaving the cage at the shelter to go on walks. During my first day with him, he was crying and shaking

when I tried to pet him; by the end of the first week, he was eating his food, put on his collar, and sat outside the shelter with me to let me pet him; by my last day with Clint, he was playing with Boobie, eating all his food, and loved to go on runs down the mountainside with me. I was so ecstatic with the progress he has made and I told Caro to let me immediately know when he gets adopted! The other dog I spent a lot of time with was Toby, the giant Husky dog. The first thing I noticed about Toby was that he was running in circles and had created a circular ditch in his cage area from doing this constantly every day. As I remembered from classes at school and from what Caro informed me, this behavior is common for enclosed dogs under severe amounts of stress and anxiety. Additionally, he had been short leashed his entire life so is not yet accustomed to the freedom of roaming and playing on his own. The isolation in his enclosure is most likely another contributing cause to his stress. Due to his breed, he does not get along with many other dogs, but Caro told me she's looking to rescue him a "girlfriend" to keep him company very soon! For this reason, I made sure to walk Toby for extra-long hikes and more frequent walks than the rest of the dogs. Some days I would stay longer than necessary to make sure he got his extra walks in in hopes that it would help reduce his stress. Although it is still obvious that he is under a lot of anxiety, by the end of my time volunteering, he was circling a lot less frequently and was playing with Mona and Rio from the other side of the cage almost every day! In addition to Clint and Toby, I also made sure to have a lot of "play and cuddle time" with the pit bull brothers, Tinker and Taylor, since I know they will spend the rest of their lives in the enclosure.

I really do hope one day to travel back to Paros, Greece to visit the shelter and the animals at the new location where dogs like Toby will have a larger, cleaner enclosure to live. I remain in contact with the shelter's current manager, Carp and PAWS VP, Ray who will keep me up to date on the new construction and adoptions since I have left.

Ivana Dulanto

Ecuador

Although my time in Ecuador was only 6 weeks long, the experiences I had working in CENIT I will carry with me through life. CENIT was a small local non-profit organization located in one of the poorest neighborhoods in Quito serving some of the most vulnerable children of the area. The goal CENIT had set for themselves, was by no means one easy to tackle. How to dismantle a systematic structure which funnels children into labor and adulthood in place of school and play. The obstacles are many, but I was impressed to see how CENIT was bravely entering the fight at all levels: through relationship building, opening the door to opportunities, and advocacy. I believe two of the biggest root problems for child labor are the lack of access to quality education and skepticism of the value of education in a society where jobs are often granted not on merit, but on connections. If a family does not believe the education system is designed for their child to succeed, why bother sending them to school when they can help provide for the family?



I was inspired and impressed to see how CENIT stepped up to fight the issue of child labor by tackling these underlying causes. For example, before children came to the school, CENIT offered a mobile kindergarten in the markets where they could both slowly ease children away from working into schooling along with gaining the trust from family members. Once at the site, CENIT provided a small classroom experience to give the children the attention they deserved surrounded by adults who believed in them. My work in the classroom with the children was difficult, and there were times I wanted to stop trying and just let them win and do what they want. However, I never succumbed to stop teaching, because I wanted the students to know, they were worthy of having structure, discipline and high expectations.

My service in CENIT may have ended in Quito, but that does not mean that my involvement in childhood and education advocacy ends there. In fact, right in my backyard of Vanderbilt, the inequity in the Nashville public school system fails to give students the right to quality education they deserve. I see this first hand as I have been a tutor in Napier Elementary School since my freshman year at Vanderbilt. At Napier Elementary, 97% of students are minority students, 98% of students come from low income families and the proficiency level for math and reading is less than 5%. Clearly, the education system here is broken and action needs to be taken to give children the right to quality education they deserve, no matter what country, city, or neighborhood they live in. I will continue my work as a tutor when I return to Vanderbilt and encourage my classmates to get involved as well. However, I also believe advocating for political action is necessary as well. For example,

I think a possible solution for fighting education inequality would be redrawing district borders in Nashville or distributing tax money equally amongst the city, as to not accumulate all the wealth exclusively to white and privileged neighborhoods. I plan on reaching out to Nashville government members to express my concerns and ideas as well as recruiting students from the Vanderbilt community to join in my fight against education inequity.

Dora Duru

Switzerland

I am grateful that I had the opportunity to intern at Civitas Maxima this summer. Civitas Maxima is an organization that does pre-trial investigations to assist victims of war crimes and crimes against humanity. A small NGO in Geneva Switzerland, the organization exists to ensure that victims receive a shot at obtaining justice for the wrongs committed against them. Interning at Civitas Maxima helped me to realize that that I want to dedicate my life not only to meaningful work but to work that uses the fullness of my skills and passions. It is important not only to help others but to also enjoy the day to day of the work that I am doing. While I gained a glimpse into international criminal law in a practical setting, I think I will walk away from this experience having learned the most about myself and my aspirations.

I gained both substantive and interpersonal knowledge in the eight weeks I spent in Geneva, Switzerland. I engaged in substantive legal work and truly felt like my contributions were useful to the organization I interned with – Civitas Maxima.

The internship at Civitas Maxima provided me with the opportunity to work on a variety of projects, and the type of work I got to assist with reflects the main reason I went to law school – to help those impacted by mass atrocities. During my first week of the internship, I attended a Board Meeting, where I learned more information about the breadth of cases the organization plans to work on in the next few years.

I started the internship by reading the Civitas Maxima Annual Report, and then

formulating summaries of witness, insider, or victim testimonies, and organizing that information in a more easily accessible format. Then, I conducted research on the responsibility of states to investigate, prosecute, and provide reparations when there are violations of human rights. Through that research, I was able to gain more knowledge of international case law. I started my research first by finding cases from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Court of Justice. I also searched for case law from the African Commission, the Human Rights Committee case law on the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and case law on the Convention Against Torture.

As I was conducting research, it became even clearer to me how important it is to speak other languages because some of the case law was only in French. After conducting this research, I wrote about my findings, and submitted that to the attorney who assigned me the project. There is significant human rights law indicating that states have a responsibility to ensure that perpetrators of human rights violations are brought to justice. In spite of this reality, it is not uncommon for states to merely ignore human rights violations occurring on their own territories.

I have learned through the course of my research that finding international cases is not always easy. Additionally, doing research on human rights violations is not for the faint-hearted. The atrocities that people have endured are truly horrendous, and it is important not to become paralyzed by the countless stories of grave suffering in order to move forward with the work that needs to be done.

Besides research, I also worked on summarizing and organizing information from emails.

My final project was to look at the ECOWAS case law and identify in cases where reparations were given, what were the motivations for giving a particular amount and for what offense. I created an excel document with the goal of organizing information in such a way where it would be easy to identify any patterns in how reparations are given by the ECOWAS Court. Trying to determine if the ECOWAS Court gives out reparations in any consistent manner is not an easy task, but I at least collected some research which hopefully will be helpful to the attorneys.

Throughout my time at Civitas Maxima, I gained firsthand exposure to how an international non-profit works. I learned about the importance of team work, and staying focused on the task at hand. I saw how collaboration was encouraged and people were willing to learn from past mistakes.

Moreover, I received guidance throughout my internship. When I had questions, I was able to ask a number of questions in order to clarify my projects.

I was honored to be given actual legal substantive work, and to be able to use my legal skills to make a difference in the lives of victims. I may never meet these victims, but at least I can say that I contributed to the process of justice.

In terms of Geneva the city, I was nervous about communicating in French in Geneva, but I was pleasantly surprised that there are a number of individuals who will gladly speak to you in French if you make an effort to speak their language. Many of the locals have been very helpful in helping me find my way around the city,

and that has made my transition here a lot smoother than it otherwise would have been. I noticed significant improvement in my French-speaking ability and I actually feel a lot more comfortable speaking French than when I first arrived in Geneva. The last time I had been in a French-speaking country was back in 2011, so I was thrilled to be able to be immersed in the French language again.

I would again like to extend my gratitude to the donors of the Nichols Humanitarian Fund for making it possible for me to travel to Geneva in order to intern with Civitas Maxima. I truly know this was not a wasted summer. I contributed research and writing which I hope will save the attorneys some time as they continue to work on their various projects. Overall, I gained experience interning with an international criminal law non-profit organization and I also improved my French linguistic skills in addition to meeting new colleagues and friends. Thank you so much for your investment in me and in justice for victims.

Ayden Eilmus

Ecuador

For the six weeks I was in Ecuador I worked at Yachay Wasi, a small indigenous school in the south of Quito. The school taught Spanish, Kichwa, and English, and combined a traditional standardized curriculum with indigenous ways of knowing in order to cultivate practices of cultural preservation. Here I was primarily working in the chakra, a large garden behind the classroom buildings where corn, beans, squash, and many other foods were grown and utilized to teach the kids about traditional ways of farming and harvesting, as well as important lessons about the indigenous cosmovision. Yachay Wasi was founded by Laura and Fernando, two activists and leaders in their respective communities. Everyone who visited or worked at the school while I was there could only describe it one way: special.

The chakra played a crucial role in the school's curriculum, however, its upkeep was understandably intensive. This was no backyard garden, and instead it more closely resembled a small farm. In preparation for Inti Raymi, an important indigenous holiday to honor the sun after the harvest, myself and two other cohort members were tasked with picking every bean pod and corn cob in the chakra— an overwhelming but rewarding undertaking. Due to insufficient funding, a small staff, and increasing pressure to perform well on standardized tests, those who work at Yachay Wasi have to spend more and more time in the classroom and less and less time outside. The immediate pressure to change the way that time is divided in the school day can likely be traced back to a larger societal pressure to westernize, that can arguably be

further connected to the colonialism that so saliently informs Ecuador's history.

And so, for six weeks, I and two other members of our Global OACS cohort did farm work. It was not exactly what we were expecting to spend our time in Ecuador on, to say the least. I won't ever forget my homestay partner coming back from the first day at our service site (I had had to stay home sick) and explaining to me that she had spent the day doing manual labor while I was home resting in bed. In all honesty, I didn't entirely believe her. After beginning the next day, however, I quickly learned that she wasn't exaggerating the intensity and scale of our work. The times that followed at Yachay Wasi were some of the most mentally and physically challenging that I've experience yet. It was also one of the most important and engaging experiences I've had the honor of participating in to date.

Towards the end of my time in Quito I began to research ways to translate my work back into my own community back in the U.S. My mother's side of the family is Ojibwe, and although it's important to recognize the distinctness and uniqueness of indigenous cultures within Mesoamerica, similarities nonetheless exist. My time in Ecuador often brought back memories of time spent with my Native American tribe in Wisconsin, and I felt determined to reconnect with them upon my return to the states. This desire is what led me to Bug-O-Nay-Ge-Shig, an indigenous school on Leech Lake Reservation— where my family is from— that is incredibly similar in structure and intention to Yachay Wasi. The school combines standard curriculum with immersive Ojibwe language classes and other activities oriented towards cultural preservation efforts. I've always

wanted to speak Ojibwe, and I've always wanted to visit the Rez my family hails from, so after my work in Quito concluded it seemed like the obvious way to continue it moving forward.



My time in Ecuador was transformative to say the least. It was also often really, really hard. Yet I come away from it with more understanding and focus for what I want to do moving forward, not only as an engaged citizen of the world, but as a student. My academic background in anthropology and philosophy was salient throughout the entirety of my time abroad, and having since returned to the United States, I find myself more comfortable with the pathways I hope to pursue in the future. I've always wanted to go to graduate school, but I'm now confident in my desire to get a PhD in anthropology and continue researching and studying what it means to be indigenous in a modern and westernizing world— possibly even in the context of my own people at Leech Lake. I hope to continue the kind of work I started in Quito back home, and find more ways to make the kind of service I participate in sustainable and ethical.

It was such a gift to spend six weeks with the people at Yachay Wasi and be welcomed with open arms into a world and culture I was not from

nor particularly familiar with. On our last day at the school, after we had finally finished harvesting the Chakra, Laura told us she had something to give us before we left. We waited outside her and Fernando's home, admiring all of the beautiful multi-colored corn we had shucked and hung from their windows to dry, and reflected upon the fact that our time there was *really* ending. When Laura returned, she had three hand stitched bracelets to give us, each with "Yachay Wasi" embroidered into it. I tied mine around my wrist before we left the school for the last time, and I haven't taken it off since.

Joseph Ghianni

Romania



First, I would like to thank the Nichol's Family for their financing of my policy and service trip to Romania. I prepared for this trip since June of 2018, and was very grateful to receive the funding to make it a reality. I also want to thank Dr. Charles A. Nelson. In 2013, I interviewed Professor Charles A. Nelson, who was very helpful when he found out I was an international adoptee from Romania. Dr. Nelson is Professor of Pediatrics and Neuroscience at Harvard Medical School. He also serves as the Richard David Scott Chair in Pediatric Developmental Medicine Research at the Children's Hospital in Boston. I interviewed Dr. Nelson on his study he did with two other colleagues titled the *Bucharest Early Intervention Project*. Dr. Nelson provided me with more research as of late to use for my trip to Romania. Finally, I would like to thank Senator Bob Corker's Office for their guidance on policy related to intercontinental adoption. Specifically, his staff at the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee in which he served as Chairman in 2018. Senator Corker's state director offered to help me get connected to persons knowledgeable on the subject after informing them of my accepted request to meet with the Embassy. The purpose for this trip was to learn through both

grassroots and policy level the intricacies of orphan care and intercountry adoption. While my ultimate goal is to see emendations made to The Hague Adoption Convention that better reflects current research and modern advancements, I thought this would be a good step in the process of learning the different issues. My trip was split into two parts. One part was through my time with an organization called The Evergreen Foundation, and the other was a meeting scheduled with the United States Embassy of Romania. The goal of The Evergreen Foundation is to provide a safe and supportive home for orphans with an emphasis in education. Each child in the home is eligible for a scholarship to attend a university, should that be his/her goal. The foundation has a few homes across Romania, but this one is in Giurgiu, a village town on the Romanian side of the Danube River. A Romanian adoptee myself from Giurgiu, I clearly had very personal ties to this trip, and I actually went to this home for the first time in 2013. It was discussed during that earlier trip that it was very likely that I would be in that home, the Bethel Home, had I not been adopted in the late 1990's. Dr. Nelson and two of his colleagues published a paper that found that children in a home environment have much better development than children who remained in an institutional orphanage. I have reached out again to Dr. Nelson to use his research he shared with me during the policy meeting. With this very clear personal connection and that earlier trip, I became increasingly motivated to learn more about adoption and orphan care.

Not going into too much detail for privacy reasons, the Bethel Home houses under twenty children, but I spent most of my time, as noted in my blog, with one of the older ones who was

closest to my age. One of the main skills the foundation wanted the children to learn was to become literate in English. I was able to speak quite a bit to "Francis" (pseudonym), the older youth, during my time at the home, who gave me a tour. After which, one of the board members of the foundation, who was my guide for the day, Francis, and some of the staff and I broke bread with one another (speaking a mix of Romanian and English). Francis then showed me around the town of Giurgiu later in the day. Francis was clearly thankful for the help of the foundation, and took me by his church, the Bethel Church, which was another place the children went often and was the namesake for the home. The board member, Lori, took Francis and me across the Danube River, where we had desserts and coffee at a café in Ruse, Bulgaria. Again, this was excellent time I spent speaking with Francis so he could build his English (and my Romanian). The day ended with me meeting the rest of the children at the Home. I was able to speak with all of them, discussing different things such as sports and their interests.

The reason I wanted to meet with the United States Embassy in Romania was to understand the policy behind adoption and international issues related to it therein. In its immediate scope, I believe getting the conversation going in the international community on emendating The Hague Adoption Convention to align with United Nations (UN's) Sustainable Development Goals by the completion of this trip would be a great first step. If I can get an understanding on issues that governmental entities encounter in the matter, then I will have a greater context to help move the issue forward. The SDGs are part of the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. We

discussed several items. Problems such as orphanage conditions and adoptee health were addressed, aligning with United Nations SDG No. 3, which is "Good Health and Well-Being." Problems involving the diminished welfare of children and adolescents due to sexual predator and trafficker involvement were addressed, aligning with United Nations SDG No. 16, which is, "Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions." Problems relating to the lack of proper nourishment for adoptees while held at state-run institutions and its delayed effect on the respective adoptees development were also addressed, aligning with United Nations SDG No. 2, which is, "Zero Hunger." Finally, problems concerning education, what I consider compromised educational foundations discussed, aligning with United Nations SDG No. 4, which is, "Quality Education." We also discussed what they did as an Embassy dealing with adoptions, which provided me great insight into the international policy of adoption.

This trip gave me rich insight into the intricacies of intercontinental adoption policy, and was a great first step in seeing needed changes in it thereof.

Leoncia Gillespie

Morocco

This summer, I spent six weeks doing service at a non-governmental organization (NGO) called L'organisation Panafricaine de Lutte contre le Sida (OPALS) in Rabat, Morocco. One of the main motivations for me participating in the OACS program was to gain a better understanding of global service. I am from a community that places a high value on giving back to the local community. Thus, most of my motivations to do service are connected to a desire to serve those who have invested in me. When I was younger I was supported by mentors through programs like girl scouts, church dance groups, and school. As a result, I found myself doing service through tutoring programs, my sorority, and women's groups on campus. This is because my strongest passions are related to giving back to my high school, young women, and people of color. I believe this is a direct result of what I have been exposed to through my immediate community. Therefore, one of the goals I set for myself was to explore what it would look like to expand my view of community and generally learn more about my role in serving on a global scale.

I did not know much about Morocco before applying; however, research taught me that many of the people in the country were Muslim and this contributed to aspects of both everyday life and legislature in the community. Much of what I found honed in on the ways these factors affected women. As a result, I envisioned myself working at one of the sites that works directly with research on women and religion, even though I knew there was the potential for me to be assigned to another site. In the end, I was not assigned to the NGO focused on conducting

research on women and religion in Morocco. I was assigned to OPALS located just down the street from the Youssefia Marche taxi stop, in Rabat. OPALS translates to Pan African organization fighting against AIDS. Specifically, OPALS functions as a hub for general treatment, psychological treatment, screenings for various STDs and STIs, education about sexual and reproductive health, legal services, and implementing a host of projects meant to raise awareness locally and globally about the effects of HIV and AIDS in Morocco. The OPALS team also dedicates a great deal of effort to understanding and providing resources for vulnerable populations in Rabat. These populations include sex workers, men in the LGBTQ community, inmates, youth, and women.



I worked at OPALS with Bitania and three other volunteers. Some of our tasks included stamping and scanning official documents, writing a questionnaire for a focus group with sex workers, designing leaflets and fliers, coding and transferring patient files to a digital forum, and working with the OPALS youth group to design a mobile app. The majority of our time was spent working on the patient files and the app. The first of these two tasks, along with other tasks like scanning documents, was pretty simple. Transferring the files was a little more involved than what I had imagined I would be doing after

reading about capacity building work. However, it was still work that did not require much thought and involved little human interaction, aside from working with the other volunteers.

On the other hand, one of the most involved and unexpected experiences I had working with OPALS was working with the youth group, HealthAdo, to design a mobile application. In order to accomplish this goal we had to have multiple meetings with the members of the youth group, directors of OPALS, and a web design consultant. Through our conversations, which occurred through a mix of Darija, English, and French, I was able to learn about young people in Morocco's views on relationships, sex, reproductive health and religion. During the meetings, I was able to make several interesting observations. I noticed that some of the men were more outspoken about their experiences than the women, even though the women still nodded in agreement to several of the statements about relationships and sex that others offered. Additionally, while members of the group knew a lot about sexual and reproductive health, they did not know many methods of practicing safe sex, beyond using condoms. Another aspect of engaging in the mobile app design sessions that I appreciated was the follow-up. Discussions about the app led to more one on one conversations with members of the youth group that felt more like interacting with friends than colleagues. We were able to learn about each other's interests and lives beyond OPALS. One of my first days in Rabat, I wrote in my journal, "By the end of the six weeks, I hope to have people to speak to in the Medina too." In the end, being able to have casual conversations with the members of the youth group was enough for me.

In addition to working at OPALS, a significant aspect of my experience in Rabat was living with my homestay family. As I mentioned before, personal connection plays a strong role in motivating me to serve. While I realize that the needs of a community different from one's own can be recognized without having direct involvement in the community, I also know how much directly interacting with individuals helps contribute to a basis of empathy. While in Morocco, I stayed with a family of five. Excluding my roommate and me, my homestay family was comprised of my homestay mom, dad, sister, brother and grandfather. These were the people who made the experience so memorable for me. Despite language barriers, they made jokes with us, watched television with us, ate with us and genuinely made us feel as if we were a part of their family. I remember the first day our host mom walked us to the Center for Cross Cultural Learning, playing soccer with our 10 year old host brother and his best friend, undressing and bathing at the hamam with our host mom and host sister, and being pulled through the medina by my host mom as we looked for ingredients for my birthday cake. These and so many other experiences with my family are what made me feel grounded in my experience in Morocco. Often, I pondered how the issues we discussed at the CCCL and with our cohort could potentially be affecting the members of my host family. I thought about why my host sister seemed to rarely leave the house. I asked myself how my host brother would come to regard women as he got older. I wondered what my host parents would think if they knew I went to work at a center educating people about sexual and reproductive health everyday (due to the language barrier, they only seemed to grasp that my roommate and I were going to school or the

CCCL everyday). All of these questions circulated through my mind and carried weight because they were connected to people I grew to care about.

Overall, my experience living in Morocco with my homestay family and working with OPALS was both challenging and fulfilling. While working at OPALS I often thought about whether Bitania and I were truly needed. OPALS appeared to be a well-oiled machine, whose language of operation was French. The directors, medical providers, and youth members were efficient and busy. I didn't think my French skills were proficient enough to contribute to the work OPALS was doing without slowing down the system. However, on one of our last days at the site one of the youth members asked how we learned about OPALS and whether it was possible for him to do work with an NGO abroad. This interaction, my work at OPALS, and the relationship I built with my homestay family, demonstrated the importance of global service. Through these avenues I was able to see the ways community, empathy, and mutual learning bear significance across borders. Despite difference in language, cultures, and core values, people share similar interests and needs. Through exposure and genuine interaction, we can begin to facilitate the global exchange of care and human rights.

Abhay Gupta

Portugal

When people described travel as life changing, I would question what they meant as my definition of traveling encompassed going around and seeing as many landmarks as I physically could within a certain amount of time. However, when I traveled to Lisbon, Portugal, I truly understood the concept of mindful, immersive travel.

My primary goal in traveling to Lisbon was to support local youth and help them gain better opportunities by teaching them the language of English. I did that, and much more. I helped teach local students not only English but also mathematics and served as a mentor to them. I played rugby and table tennis with them, immersing them in American culture and working on their English subconsciously as we conversed in English. One big challenge was that the students spoke little to no English, and thus conversing with them was difficult. With the use of Google Translate and the help of a teacher who could translate, I was able to convey my thoughts accurately and improve the kids' English fluency so that they could hold basic conversations in English. In interacting with local Portuguese students and observing their lifestyle, I realized that there are not enough educational resources to support these kids who are financially disadvantaged, and observing their struggles increased my gratefulness for the opportunities I have access to in America. However, I also realized that kindness is a universal language, as it transcended the barrier of the kids not speaking English. In fact, the first week proved very difficult in having the kids open up to me, but I made sure to say hello to each one every day and

helped each one of them with their respective problems. After that, all the kids became used to my presence and started to act more like themselves around me.

By working with the kids, I observed that teaching is a means of learning. In class, I would tailor each lesson to each specific student based on his or her experience, background, ability, and interests. In doing so, I strived to make my learning more specific and effective than a lecture-based model where students would not learn or retain information. But by teaching each specific student relative to his or her circumstances, I learned from their various cultures, backgrounds, varying abilities, and unique perspectives. I taught them, and I learned about them. Furthermore, I learned more about the process of learning. I observed firsthand the significant role of curiosity in the learning process. In circumstances and environments that you are not used to, it is important, and even essential, to exhibit curiosity and openness. By doing so, there is clear and open communication, and thus frustrations and conflicts are minimized, and learning is maximized.

Finally, I realized that learning is a lifelong journey. The kids I worked with were starting this journey as they slowly gained a grasp over the English language. However, they would continue on to learn in school, in professional aspects, and in life. Even with me, I learned so much just by interacting with the kids and noting their perspectives and comparing them to mine. But for a student to be successful, there must be an intrinsic desire to learn. In my experience teaching the kids English, it was apparent in which kids were successful and which kids were getting by. The kids who asked questions persistently until they understood the answer

and the kids who always sought to do more were the ones who rapidly learned. Hence, learning is dependent on the learner.

In addition to learning about teaching, I also learned about Portuguese and European culture. I observed stark cultural differences between American and Portuguese cultures. For instance, I realized that the Portuguese know how to enjoy their lives as they lead successful work-life balances in contrast to Americans. It is common to see people dancing and singing in local squares and celebrating with the famous drink of ginjinha. Everyone is welcome, and celebrations last as late as 5 or 6 am. In fact, the Portuguese have the entire month of June dedicated to partying to celebrate the three saints: St. Anthony, St. John, and St. Peter. In general, their pace of life is slower and less stressful, and they enjoy the finer things in life without incessantly worrying about others and what more they could buy: they are content with what they have.

In addition, people are in touch with nature and have close-knit communities in Portugal in comparison to America. They can step onto their balcony and tell you what the weather will be like for the day, whether it will rain, whether it will be windy. They like to walk in parks and just observe nature. In addition, people value quality time with friends and extended family. Gatherings are casual and people feel comfortable enough with each other to drop in unannounced. Everyone feels like they have someone who's got their back.

The Portuguese also know how to cook, and they cook well. Their quality of food and produce is significantly higher, both at restaurants and in supermarkets. They are aware that what you plant and eat from your garden is

better, and put high value on sustaining (for economic and health reasons) their families with food from gardens and by raising animals. They also know the detrimental health effects of pesticides and herbicides because they are so intrinsically tied to farming as part of them being close to nature.

My experience made me fall in love with Portugal and exposed me to a new way of life, and also offered me a more “whole” perspective as I engaged with locals who are not as fortunate as I am. I got to do all this while meeting like-minded individuals from all over the world who are just as dedicated to service as I am. The memory of Portugal will stay with me forever, and it was all possible because of Ed and Janice Nichols. Without the generosity of the Nichols Humanitarian Fund, this dream never would have been made a reality. Thank you.



Sonia Jeon

Uganda

My journey this past summer in the rural village of Uganda pushed me out of my comfort zone in various ways. I had to overcome cultural barriers and learn how to effectively resolve conflicts within my culturally diverse team.

The lack of resources, including running water, electricity, mattresses, and phone service, was frankly frustrating in the beginning. In fact, there were several times where I wanted to give up, pack my bags, and go back to the comforts of my home. However, I eventually was able to let go and reflect on what I have in the present. Although the living situation was quite dilapidated in my standards, my team's home was furnished and had a functional latrine. We were actually in a privileged setting in comparison to the rest of the village. Slowly, I began to notice the beauty and warmth of my village. Every day I heard distant laughter of village children, ate delicious mangos, and saw stubborn chickens and playful goats around the house. This was when I realized that my life had consisted of becoming isolated from nature – no insects, no dirt, processed food, and social media. Living in the village served as a reminder that humans are also included in nature's vast biodiversity.

I established an incredible relationship with my three native and two international teammates. We all lived in the same small house for two months and experienced several cross-cultural barriers. Particularly, different understandings of time caused conflicts in our team. In Uganda, when you plan to hold a session at three in the afternoon, you can expect people to start showing up around one to four hours later.

This also applied to team meetings, and it was difficult because my international teammates and I were used to being on time. Additionally, there was a language barrier that was hard to navigate. During our educational sessions, the messages that we wanted to convey got lost in translation. This incited frustration, yet we understood that our native teammates also had difficulties with the local language. Open communication with the team was one of my main takeaways from this experience. When I was feeling discomfort, I immediately consulted them and honestly spoke about my feelings. This led others to open up and eventually start a discussion about cultural barriers. Ultimately, I learned how to value vulnerability and open-mindedness.

The positive reception from the village while we held health-related educational sessions was a key motivator for me. As an outsider, it was crucial for me to gain the community's acceptance and trust. This was quite easy because everyone was kind and hospitable, but we still made sure to visit important figures in the village and follow their customs. Additionally, field work was immensely challenging because it required a lot of patience. On the flip side, it was rewarding because I knew my work was making small, yet impactful differences in the community. In the beginning, I had unrealistic expectations of wanting every village member to be educated about healthy hygiene practices and disease preventions, but I gradually began to tweak my expectations to more realistic ones. I understood that our efforts weren't going to transform the whole village to become more health-conscious. However, our work was impacting individual lives, and they will be the ones who share their knowledge to others.

My time in Uganda has inspired me to continue this type of work in the sub-Saharan African context. I am incredibly grateful to Nichols Humanitarian Fund for providing the resources to grow as a global health advocate and reflect on how to humbly serve impoverished and marginalized communities.

Bohan Kim

India

This summer – truly made possible by the Nichols Humanitarian Fund – has been yet the best and most meaningful experience in my life thus far. It helped me confirm my dream and my passion to bridge global communities to make a better world.

I spent the first half of my summer in Kyrgyzstan working in a non-profit clinic that serves village communities with limited healthcare access. There, I was able to see a lot of systemic injustices as well as suffering as a result of those issues. For example, due to rampant political corruption, most of the wealth in the country ends up in greedy politicians' hands. Thus, all the other professions, including doctors, receive severe underpayment. However, corruption breeds corruption, and so many doctors in Kyrgyzstan would refuse to treat patients unless they receive bribes. As a result, only people who possess enough wealth are able to receive adequate healthcare.

On the other hand, I was so fortunate to see and work with medical professionals who did not give into such broken system and rather dedicated so much effort to create a counterculture that advocated for patients. It was enlightening to see that Dr. Rory, the family physician from America, made effort to employ and train local Kyrgyz doctors and nurses to create a medical community of partnership between American and local Kyrgyz medicine. Although Dr. Rory may have come from a "better-established" medical background, she was always open and humble enough to trust and learn from the Kyrgyz's nurses' intuitions and knowledge

about how to care for the villagers. As an aspiring physician wanting to one day see a healthier world, I am grateful to have seen a glimpse of how this dream can be realized: *people*.

I spent the second half of my summer in New Delhi, India as a biology teacher in Bridges Academy, a school that provides education for Afghan refugee students living in India. Again, as I directly heard life stories from my Afghan friends and their families, I was reminded of how broken and full of injustices the world still is – and of how much hurt some people carry each day; all of them had fled their own beloved country because of unpredictable religious and political turmoil, and for many of them, death of a family member or a friend was a common source of pain. Yet, as I have gotten to know and spend time with my students (I taught 7th through 12th grade), I was reminded they are just as *human* as me. Like myself, they all loved to goof around in class, enjoy meaningful friendships, eat good food, learn about the world around, and follow big dreams. Teachers indeed played a big role in providing a space and a community in which students get to do those things and be reminded that they *can* do those things. I learned so much from the teachers at Bridges Academy, who dearly loved their students and genuinely wanted the best for them. I witnessed that good education can be instrumental in empowering individuals to overcome their circumstances and pursue their aspirations.

Because of how this summer stretched my perspective, my experiences were certainly not without challenge. Mentally, it was at times tough and uncomfortable to realize how much privilege I hold and come from. The fact that I have a healthy family, that my family has successfully settled in America (and that we even live in

America), that I can easily pursue a healthy lifestyle and diet, that I can always rely on my parents' support, that I am receiving my education at Vanderbilt, that I am not experiencing many barriers in pursuing my goal to become a doctor, that I have received this scholarship to go half way across the world, all indicates the privilege I take for granted. So many of the patients and the students I came across did not have those things.

However, I realize there is no point in wallowing in a sense of guilt. I cannot change the fact that I was *born* with privilege. However, what I can do is nurture and share what I have. I have seen that through Dr. Rory who tirelessly cared for the village. I saw that through the Indian teachers who, despite their minimal pay for working in a non-profit school, arrived every day with a smile to share their knowledge and love to their Afghan students. I saw that through Edward and Janice Nichols, who generously share this scholarship so that students like me can experience and learn from this life-changing cross-cultural summer.

Ashwin Kumar

India

While growing up, my grandparents would often visit and stay in our household and tell me stories about their upbringing in rural India. My grandmother and grandfather grew up in a small town and village respectively both would recount their non-ideal conditions: snakes in the lake where they were bathing, walking several miles to reach educational locations, mosquitos and flies buzzing in their food and milk supply, etc. As a child when told about these experiences, I was unable to relate as being brought up in the US made me accustomed to clean water, shelter, and food. Now having immersed myself in rural India and attempting to understand the differences between Indian and American culture, I have developed a greater appreciation and gratitude for the luxuries in the US and understand the magnitude of developmental disparity between the Indian villages, Indian cities, and the US. I hope that my efforts this summer by improving the sustainability and quality of life in the five Indian rural schools of Pamulaparthi High and Middle School, Gowraram High and Middle School, and Anganwadi Pre-Primary School greatly improved this developmental disparity and the overall well-being of both students and teachers.

As mentioned in my first blog post, our trip began with a survey of the schools regarding our past project and obtaining a baseline for current and future projects. This information allowed us to identify probable projects and played a greater role as a useful introductory insight into Indian school structure and student life. We also distributed surveys for the students to obtain a greater understanding of their school life and

how the school specifically supports the students' needs. We further expanded the scope of our trip mission by surveying villagers in the Pamulaparthi, Gowraram, and the surrounding villages to understand the villagers' economic standing and what they identified as necessities for economic and personal development. Following these introductory meetings and surveying tasks, we approximated a detailed budgeting for the school requested projects based on each school's development and our fundraised budget. This process combined with fixing and completing such minor projects as computer repair and water testing took approximately a week to complete. In our final week and two days, we initiated such structural projects as bathroom repair and electrical wiring and finalized our project list. As alluded to in my second blog post, our projects were delayed by a couple days due to the schools closing for Mahankali Bonalu. Nevertheless, by the end of our three weeks, all our projects either were completed or close to completion, requiring a couple of days work the following week. Prior to our departure, we ensured that our communication with school authorities and the contractors were reliable and accessible from the US.

During our three-week stay in India, the implemented projects are as follows. For Pamulaparthi Primary School, a new drainage system was implemented in both the girls and boys bathroom to prevent urine stagnation; the water purifier installed last year was repaired; stationary materials were donated; a carpet was provided for school functions; such books as autobiographies and moral stories in both English and Telugu were given for library creation; and a smart classroom was established with a projector, projector screen, and surround sound

for multimedia instruction. For Pamulaparthi High School, green boards were given to replace the glare-inducing chalkboards; IIT books in Chemistry, Mathematics, and Physics for all grades were provided to improve academic curriculum; dictionaries and speakers were provided to improve English instruction and retention; and an n-computer lab using quantum n-computing devices was established modeled off a network bus topology. Because Gowraram High and Primary School share the same facilities, the projects for the schools will benefit all applicable students. For Gowraram High School, a computer lab was established by increasing the electrical connections and providing eight computers; bathroom drainage connection to septic tank was repaired; a grill door for the computer lab was provided to increase security; bathroom doors were repaired to increase privacy; and fans, lights, and electrical outlets were provided to the primary school and to two classrooms in the high school. For Anganwadi Pre-Primary School, such children stationary materials as crayons and markers were donated and play materials and toys were provided as well.



My three-week experience in India has been nothing short of enlightening. Implementing the aforementioned projects required patience, communication skills, and a willingness to immerse myself into Indian culture. As mentioned in my second blog post, communicating with individuals who spoke the native tongues of

Telegu and Hindi was a challenge and required patience to understand their semantic meaning. Such experiences inspired confidence in my communication skills, which in turn allowed me to better and more frequently communicate with the locals. With an increase in communication, I identified perhaps what I thought was the most significant cultural difference between India and the US. My high school courses included subjects relating to human geography and world culture and a common topic that arose was the vibrancy of the social community present in eastern hemisphere. Due to India's dense population situated within geographically similar locations, this effect was clearly visible. For instance, shopkeepers and taxi drivers had a natural interest to converse with us and many locals in the culture would traditionally converse back. The sense of privacy and reserved speech mostly present in the US and western atmosphere is nonexistent in India. Although to a westerner this may be unfamiliar or non-ideal, in reality, the increased communication spurs thought exchange, allowed us to navigate the Indian markets, and reduced any feelings of isolation one may feel in the geographically large US.

In summary, my immersion into the Indian culture and humanitarian work to improve rural schools has provided me with an excellent opportunity for social service and opened my eyes to the education and social disparity between India and the US. Apart from wide variety of structural and academic-driven projects to benefit schools, I myself have grown from this experience, most notably in my character traits of patience and communication skills. I would like to end this reflection on a note of gratitude to the school authorities, employees, contractors, and common people who assisted us

to complete the projects at Pamulaparthi High School, Pamulaparthi Primary School, Gowraram High School, Gowraram Primary School, and Anganwadi Pre-Primary School. I would also like to thank Mr. and Mrs. Nichols for providing the avenue to immerse myself into the Indian culture and conduct humanitarian work.

Marguerite Manning

Morocco

Well here it is. My final blog post. It's still hard to believe that I've been living in Morocco for 6 weeks. The days felt gloriously long but the weeks have gone by too fast. 6 weeks of couscous Fridays, crowded taxi rides to REMESS with random strangers, trips to the hammam, mint tea at the riverside café in the Kasbah, and so much more. I'm a really big fan of closure and reflection, so I'm going to spend this last blog post reflecting on what I'm most grateful for from this experience.



First and foremost, I'm grateful for the opportunity to have experienced Morocco through a variety of perspectives. Through living with my host family, I was able to glimpse an intimate view of family life and a more nuanced view of Moroccan culture. Making couscous with our host mom, celebrating our host brother's birthday, and taking trips to the souk taught me about Moroccan culture on an interpersonal level.

Through lectures from professors at the CCCL I was able to gain a more academic understanding of social issues and politics here by listening to experts on the issues. Then through serving at REMESS, I was able to gain a more practical understanding of those social issues and take an active part in an NGO that's working to mitigate those issues and develop the social and solidarity economy here in Morocco. Because I was able to build such meaningful relationships with my coworkers, they were willing to share personal stories about their experiences engaging with social issues here, and I think I learned more from those conversations than any lecture could have taught me. Through our excursions to cities like Fes and Marrakech and Chefchaouen (see picture), I was able to learn about the multicultural nature of Morocco and the uniqueness of each region. Sure, those excursions were like mini-vacations, but our many guides provided us with historical perspectives that provide insight on why Moroccan culture is the way it is today. Lastly, through our group reflections, my cohort members shared their unique perspectives about their experiences on the trip that fostered interesting discussions and challenged us all to consider new viewpoints. Regardless of this variety of perspectives, though, I'm still an outsider. However, viewing Morocco through so many different lenses has challenged me to think critically about my own role here and helped me do more meaningful service.

These six weeks have also pushed me way out of my comfort zone, and for that I'm extremely grateful. Navigating the significant language barrier, figuring out how to travel around a new city, and bartering with vendors to get a satisfactory price helped me adopt a new air of confidence and independence that will serve me

well in challenging situations in the future. Learning how to adapt to the slower and more relaxed culture was also an adjustment. I'm a very "go-go-go" type of person, and I like to always be doing something, but that's not the way my host family or my colleagues operated. Instead of being frustrated with sitting "idle," I learned to embrace the down time and relish in time spent reading a good book or sipping tea at a café or journaling about my experiences here. My time here has been very ~chill~ and it has helped me appreciate a slower lifestyle filled with reflection and relaxation. I really hope I can take this renewed sense of calm back with me to the hectic environment of Vanderbilt. Lastly, this service experience has caused me to reflect a lot on my power and privilege here in Morocco, thoughts that can be uncomfortable but that are critical in doing effective service. I have power and privilege here as a white woman, as an American, as a foreigner. I have the privilege to experience all the best parts about Morocco and then go home to my comfortable life in the US. Personally, the most challenging part of this trip has been understanding my role as someone here to engage in service learning. It's hard to not feel like I did this trip for purely selfish reasons sometimes. A way to boost my resume and explore a new country. Sometimes I question whether I was more of a burden than a help at my NGO because of my inability to speak French and Arabic and thus I question whether I actually *served* them. Regardless, I can only hope that my time at REMESS impacted their organization in a positive way, whether that be through the resumes that I edited for the staff or the long conversations I had with my coworkers. I think that the best way to ensure that this service was meaningful and worthwhile is to take what I've learned here about the SSE and systems of

oppression that persist in Morocco and take active steps to dismantle similar systems back in my own community. That's a pretty daunting task, but a necessary one. Overall, my six weeks in Morocco were some of the most meaningful, fun, and transformative weeks of my life, and it is an experience I'll always carry with me.



Anna Maynard

Peru

There are people in remote parts of Peru who have never learned to speak Spanish, the language of the *Conquistadores*. They continue, as they have since time immemorial, to speak Quechua, the official language of the Inca Empire, which Empire once spanned the Andes and *Altiplano*, in parts of what are now Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, Colombia and Argentina. I have always heard that Peru is a beautiful and mysterious place, full of music, and *chicha*, and terraced mountains, and women in bowler hats. I was looking forward to going to Cusco to learn firsthand about its ancient culture, and grateful for the Nichols family for making that possible. But somehow I was anxious and afraid. I had traveled before, so novelty was not the issue. The problem was that I had never traveled by myself before. I was afraid that I would feel lonely and lost, even when surrounded by the beauty and grandeur of the Andes.

Now, looking back on my experience, I realize that it was silly of me to be so afraid.

I never felt alone or lonely or lost in Peru. Within a day or two of arriving in Cusco, I felt as though I were . . . at home. This took me by surprise. How could I feel so at home in a place that was so different from my home and so far away? The answer: I became completely immersed in the welcoming culture of Cusco.

Each day was unique, but started out the same. First, there was, as I awoke, the unique aroma of *mate de coca*, prepared by my host mom, Mahara. Then a breakfast of fresh fruit. Mahara looked after me and always asked how I was doing. She was a font of local tips and safety

recommendations. After breakfast, I took the C4M bus, which costs 80 *soles*, or about 24 cents, to the San Judas home. San Judas is the place I worked. It offers refuge to girls from violent and abusive families. Some of the girls at San Judas had been abandoned, others orphaned, still others had been abused. San Judas houses around 42 girls between the ages of 5 and 15. In the morning, there were classes all day. Some of the biggest course focuses were on how to be a good friend, how to take care of yourself and respect yourself, and how to resolve conflicts. I also taught English lessons and tried to keep these lessons as hands-on and interactive as possible. Lunch was around noon, then we had a rest hour. In the afternoon, after lunch, I would help with homework as well as lead discussions/courses.

Before dinner, I always had fun activities such as arts and crafts, yoga, or dancing. My favorite part of this experience was the level of community that San Judas had created. Each girl made an effort to take care of herself and others. This type of community was extremely empowering and allowed the girls to grow emotionally and personally while they lived at San Judas.

Some days, after my day at San Judas was done, I would head to *Qosqo Maki*, a local school, to teach. Unfortunately, English lessons can be extremely expensive, especially in Cusco. *Qosqo Maki* offers free English lessons at night to the local community. Lessons varied daily as many of the students did not come on a consistent basis. I had to adapt to the group of students that showed up that night and try to gauge their English level and create a lesson plan essentially on the spot. At the end of every lesson, I would try and create a future-oriented lesson plan with each of my students. My hope was to make them feel

encouraged to continue coming to the classes on a consistent basis and prioritize these English lessons amongst all of the other things in their lives. Together, we would discuss their desires and hopes for these lessons and then tailor them to different concepts/lessons/goals. One thing that really stuck out to me was the level of gratitude that every student had in the classroom.

In the US, we often take for granted the time that people dedicate to our growth and education. Every day, students would personally come up to me and thank me for my time and express how much these lessons meant to them in English. Reflecting on this new perspective, I am doing my best to express gratitude in my own life. I am making a conscious effort to realize that many of the things I take for granted should be seen as a privilege to be treasured and earned.

In order to completely immerse myself in the culture of Cusco, I teamed up with a group of Peruvians to make the four-day trek to Machu Picchu. The trek was full of the most beautiful landscapes including Humantay Lake, Salkantay, Santa Teresa, Cocalmayo (thermal baths), Machu Picchu town (Aguas Calientes), Machu Picchu, and Huayna Picchu Mountain. I deliberately chose my trekking companions based on a commitment to public service and fluency in both Spanish and Quechua, the original and still-existing language of the Incas. This trek experience was a great way to discuss, learn, and reflect on the languages, culture, and people of Cusco and the Altiplano. I was able to get better insight into my time at San Judas and Qosqo Maki. We had in-depth discussions on the English language and the power of learning English in Cusco. We discussed the cycle of abuse and neglect that affected the girls of San Judas. While these discussions were difficult, they were extremely eye-opening.

On the trek, I also met people from all over the world. Apart from the *cusquenians*, there were people from Argentina, Brazil, Sweden, Italy, Germany, and New Zealand. I learned how to how to speak Quechua, and learned about the Andean people. The Andean people believe in the Pachamama, or Mother Earth who grants fertility and to whom many offerings are made. They also believe in Apu, or mountain spirits.

Each day we hiked between 5-9 hours. At times, the altitude was very intense (the highest point on Salkantay Mountain is around 17,000 ft.). We drank coca tea and chewed coca leaves with a little bit of sugar to alleviate some of the symptoms of altitude sickness. Machu Picchu was so incredible and it made every single day of the trek worth it. Watching the sunrise at 5 a.m. over this famous archeological Incan site lived up to every expectation. I was, and still am, mesmerized by its beauty and its mystery.

I have spent a lot of time reflecting on my experience in Cusco. I have thought a lot about how I would summarize my experience in just a sentence or a key learning. Empathy knits strong bonds of friendship and solidarity among people of all abilities, races, religions, and cultures.

I met Karla, a local *cusquenian*, on my second day of volunteering. We spent hours speaking in both English in Spanish about our lives. Karla and I found that we were very similar, and in very similar times of our lives. Karla is taking courses at a local University in Cusco to pursue a career in law. At night, she takes English classes. Karla and I are the exact same age. Karla and I really clicked and she became my go-to for everything. She helped me avoid all of the tourist traps and recommended the best, local places for everything. She introduced me to her friends and invited me to socialize with them whenever I had

time off from volunteering. Karla and her friends went with me to buy all of my gear for my trek because they wanted to help me avoid being overcharged. She helped me analyze and understand my experiences at San Judas. We talked through my days, and she gave me more insight into common issues within the community that were affecting the youth. As someone who grew up in Cusco, her opinions on socioeconomic issues, young women's empowerment, abuse and neglect in the home, and much more impacted and educated me. Her perspective allowed me to curate a lesson plan that was relatable to the girls at San Judas. I will never forget when Karla came to the airport to surprise me and say goodbye to me. She gave me the most beautiful handwritten note signed by all of my *cusqenian* friends.

As I said, this trip was about service and gratitude. I am grateful for the opportunity to serve. Whatever I gave to others I received back tenfold. And I am especially grateful to the Nichols family for their generosity in making this wonderful experience possible. Without their kindness Peru would be no more than a vague abstraction to me, a place that had never made me feel at home.

Ameenah McKnight

Kenya

Jambo! The past six weeks have been the most exciting and rewarding opportunity I've been afforded thanks to the Nichols Humanitarian Fund.

I was motivated to pursue an abroad experience because I've always been interested in the field of global mental health, and the intersection of culture and psychology. I wanted to gain exposure to alternative approaches to treating various disorders, recognize the differences between the U.S. and a non-Western health care system and ultimately become informed on whether mental health was the field for me.

After my rotation at the Gender Based Violence Centre (GBVC), I decided to spend the other half of my days interning at a local mental hospital in Port Reitz to gain more clinical experience by shadowing psychiatrists and psychologists, giving me direct and behind-the-scenes look at the state of mental health care beyond a Western sphere.

As a psychology student and human who just endured the debilitating reality of suffering from depression, I've been exposed to the structure of the U.S. mental health system, which prepared me to make astute observations and comparisons between the two regions and their practices.

I was surprised to find grave similarities specifically within the psychiatry realm. Although I've been made aware of concepts like westernization, globalization, and over-medicalization in my psychology courses, I didn't

expect the gravity of influence Western techniques would have on patients on a small, foreign land. Similar to what I've witnessed with the U.S. psychiatric system, appointments rarely lasted longer than 15 minutes and always ended with a hastily decided diagnosis and hastily written prescription.

I found this process to be a bit problematic because the psychiatrists were utilizing Western diagnostic scales and referring to the DSM for questions. This approach neglects the visible realities of disorders suffered in these two regions, in that a lot of them aren't comparable enough for Western techniques to be applied. While America is brimming with depression and anxiety diagnosis and over-medicalization epidemic for both of these, these disorders are almost unheard of in Kenya.

While I'm obviously not a professional, I feel like because these disorders are dismissed in these communities as not severe enough for medication or hospitalization, but families still want their relatives to receive some sort of help, practitioners end up attributing symptoms to disorders that do demand immediate care like bipolar and schizoaffective disorder and schizophrenia. I witnessed typically depressive symptoms be regarded as psychotic symptoms, which allowed families to admit their relatives involuntarily.

This isn't meant to be a critique of Kenya's mental health system, because it's more than apparent to me that no mental health system is perfect, but some of the things I witnessed, specifically in the psychiatric department were extremely upsetting and discouraging, however, again, not independent to this region. That rotation provoked a desire to address the field of psychiatry as a whole because it simply doesn't

seem conducive to mentoring the well-being of patients in the way that mental health professionals should be dedicated to doing.

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Despite these initial sentiments, I developed a better understanding of why this cycle persists not only in Kenya, but conceivably in the U.S. after speaking with one of the psychiatrists that volunteered a day a week at the hospital. In short, the fact that they had to pull in a volunteer psychiatrist to see as many patients on this one day proceeds from the lack of trained mental health professionals, a reality of the U.S. mental health care system as well. Due to the high demand of their services for thousands of seeking patients, it begins to make sense why the sessions are so short and how they make swift diagnosis. This scarcity has further reinforced the dire need our world has for mental health practitioners.

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A couple more weeks in, I switched over to observing some psychology students completing their attachments, the U.S. equivalent to an internship, and learned how to facilitate individual and group therapy over various topics like personal hygiene, addiction management, and coping skills. My experience in this domain was the most illuminating in that it gave me the opportunity to utilize practical techniques in a way that felt impactful and confirmed that conducting therapy is something I'm capable of conducting and interested in pursuing as a career. In the U.S., this type of hands on involvement at my education level is unheard of and discouraged, but the mental health professionals I worked with at Port Reitz were eager for and encouraging of me to truly immerse myself in the practice.

In addition to exploring mental health, the program I worked with, International Medical Aid, enabled me to explore other aspects of healthcare by facilitating a hygiene clinic at rural elementary schools and working at a public clinic once a week. These clinics allowed me to connect and build a relationship with the local community exactly how I imagined. The doctors that volunteered with us were extremely patient with the hoard of us American interns, translating the expressed symptoms of the patients from Swahili to English, explaining their diagnosis and teaching us real skills that could be useful in any emergency setting. Among the many skills I picked up, I mastered giving preliminary screenings, in which I did things like taking blood pressure and checking glucose levels. I even learned how to suture up stitches in the case of emergency situations.



While I'm confident that all of these encounters will remain with me indefinitely, the most memorable of them was an overnight I spent in the maternity ward at Coast General Hospital, the largest government hospital in Mombasa. I witnessed five natural births, one delivery being a set of twins! This was definitely not something I fathomed doing but I'm incredibly grateful to the Nichols Humanitarian Fund and International

Medical Aid for providing me with opportunities like this one. Going to Kenya was one of the most impactful lapses of time in my life and I hope one day I can return to Mombasa and leave a meaningful mark on the community the same way they left one on me.

Mahek Mehta

Ecuador

Last night, I was at dinner with the two volunteers who teach English with me and one of them struck up a conversation with a man wearing a University of Illinois sweatshirt as she is a student there. He is a native of Quito but attended the university for graduate school. We mentioned that we were in town for a few weeks teaching English at a local school. He introduced us to his very young daughter—maybe 3 or 4 years old—who greeted us and introduced herself in English. He explained how he tries his best to teach her English but he worries his vocabulary is limited and that she will not learn the language due to a lack of native English speakers around her. He left the restaurant with his family but a few minutes later came running back to our table to ask for the name of the school we teach at. He asked if there would be more American teachers after we left.

Unfortunately, volunteers are staffed as they become available and the school often goes several weeks without English teachers. He left the restaurant again, this time visibly disappointed. This man was certainly too affluent for his daughter to attend the public school we teach at, but the fact that he came running back into the restaurant is a testament to how valuable the English language is for people in this country who want to open doors for their children. The encounter reaffirmed my belief that the English language is an extremely high-demand commodity for many aspiring immigrants who aim to be educated in the United States and possibly build a life there.

On our last day at the school, the teachers gathered all of the students in the large multipurpose room for a very sweet goodbye and the students presented the three of us with parting gift bags. During recess, several children told us not to be sad and even wiped away one of the volunteer's tears. They gave us all a few of the wristbands off of their own hands that are inscribed with sweet phrases in Spanish like "eres lo máximo" (you're the best). We went to a shop nearby during the lunch break and bought little chocolates for the kids. We said our final goodbyes to the teachers and kids and rode the local bus back partway with some of our students. A few of them got off the bus, waved, and briefly ran after the bus as we pulled away. Back at the NGO office, we received thank you cards from Volunteer Connection Ecuador and thanked Clara, our coordinator, for all her help.



In addition to our days at the school, I am very blessed to have explored quite a bit of Quito and Ecuador. My fellow volunteers and I rode up the Teleferico, a lift that takes passengers to a lookout point at the top of the Pichincha Volcano, walked through the streets of the Historic District and climbed the steps to the top of the Basílica del Voto Nacional, learned about the process of making Ecuadorian chocolate from chocolatiers

at a chocolate museum, took a salsa lesson, embarked on a series of adrenaline-filled activities in Baños, saw Quilatoa Lake and the Virgin of el Panecillo statue that overlooks Quito, traveled to the Equator, and had a conversation with Quito's mayor on a national holiday. I had never been to South America before and after visiting Ecuador, I certainly hope to come back.

Looking back on this adventure, I must admit that I came into this trip quite cynical and skeptical about people's motivations for international service. For years, service trips have been pitched to me as lines that "look good" on resumes and a must-have for graduate schools, fellowships, and internships. At Vanderbilt, countless students spend thousands of dollars on Spring Break and Winter Break trips to South American countries every year only to come back and tell stories unrelated to service. Prior to going to Quito, I wondered if this would be like the "voluntourism" trips I had read about extensively before choosing the NGO I decided to work with.

My few weeks in Quito debunked those fears and reassured me of the good intentions with which so many people donate their time to serve others. My fellow volunteers are from all different walks of life. I worked with people as young as eighteen up to age 25, hailing from Chicago to Canada to Italy. Whether they were spending a few weeks of their summers supporting Volunteer Connection Ecuador like myself or were halfway through three-month stints in Quito during gap years, all the residents of the volunteer house were committed to making as much of an impact as possible on their volunteer sites. Weekend trips and exploring Quito always came second to diligently working full-time, whether it was at a school, on the street children project, or supporting the NGO's

administration. We all became invested in Volunteer Connection Ecuador's staff and projects, treated the house's staff with the utmost respect, and tried our hardest to leave Quito marginally better off than we found it. Despite only spending a few weeks with one another, our final day together was quite sentimental. All of the volunteers got pizza from our favorite local restaurant and walked to a small park near the house where we sat on the grass near an amphitheater for our last meal while looking out at the mountains.



Although it is difficult to say in good conscience that the few weeks I spent teaching in Quito will sustainably affect my students, I am hopeful that the lesson plans we compiled and the notebook full of all the vocabulary we taught each grade level will assist the next set of volunteers in fostering the kids' interest in learning English. I am very lucky to have spent the past few weeks laughing with my students as I stumbled over my Spanish, being chased on the playground, and having my hair braided by multiple sets of little hands. Hasta luego, Quito!

Evelyn Mulyono

Indonesia

Waving goodbye at Peniel and Abi for the last time was heartbreaking to say the least. I never expected this service trip to turn out this way. I purposefully chose to volunteer with adults because I thought that I was definitely not one that could bear with the naughtiness of children. Little did I know, caring for children was the best part of my service trip. Seeing Peniel successfully do a complex math problem, especially for a child her age, was definitely rewarding, although it did involve some ice cream and snacks to motivate her to study. Surprisingly, I also let her experiment with my hair, a body part that I probably value the most, as she tried to learn the newest hair trend. Some of them were pretty weird, but some surely were great. That being said, I also had to endure Abi's failed attempts to imitate his sister. He mostly just pulled my hair or completely messed it up. There were definitely times when I was irked at their behaviors: when they tried to climb the balcony, when they took my phone, when they called me aunty. I mean they are still children, after all. But really, the bad times were nothing compared to the immense joy I felt when I was looking after these children.

It really is amazing to see how optimistic they are despite the hardships that they have to go through. Most of the refugees are always full of joy, smiling from ear to ear even though they are not even sure if they will have enough to get by the next day. They often have to write letters to UNHCR in hope that they can set some arrangement for them. Even one of the more grown-up children named Omid had to write one as well. Arriving before the influx of refugees to Indonesia, he was more fortunate to be able to

attain his education at one of Indonesia's best international schools. The fact that he had to beg for their sympathy in order to continue his education reflects how dire and uncertain the lives of the children are. What I admire most about the refugees is not only how optimistic and grateful they are, but how they react to all the misfortunes they must endure. They are always willing to share, and are always willing to help one another despite their limitations. Despite her struggle, Kak Ros always bought Peniel and Abi snacks to make the kids happy. Rahel took care of Omid as if he were one of her own, showering him with love and care. With his background in education, Khalil initially taught Omid the format of letters and how to formulate words to further propel his intent. Given the limited resources available to refugees in Indonesia, doing so may risk his chance of providing for his own kids, but still he is always willing to help.

Before I joined this trip, I thought that the prevalent narrative that refugees are a burden for the state was mostly echoed only in the western world. I was naive enough to believe that, at least in my home country where there is no religious difference that could act as a barrier, they would treat the refugees as brothers and sisters. They just did not know the injustice that the refugees have suffered when they are stripped from any economic opportunity and human rights. The problem, however, is much deeper than what I first expected. They would get verbally abused by their native neighbor. One of them was yelled at when he was walking on the street. "Get lost!" they said. Unfortunately, everyone else seems to have encountered similar experiences as they were just shaking their heads when hearing the story. They would even get physically abused, having trash thrown at them and being mocked.

During one of my last days there, a lot of them were interviewed, but I am honestly not sure for better or for worse. I did not hear what most of them talked about. However, when one person was interviewed through a call, he was forced to keep reiterating why he had escaped his home country and how or why he chose to be in Indonesia. It is bad enough that the refugees have to live with the lifelong trauma of leaving the people and the home they love behind. Now, they are being treated negatively by the people they have no choice but to rely on. It is as if what they are going through on a daily basis is not bad enough.

Having arrived back to the US, I looked back and realized how much my time spent with this community has shaped me as a person. I used to associate someone's unfortunate condition and economic standing to the amount of effort I thought they put in. Despite being aware of this before the trip started, and attempting to stop to acting on that impulse, I still subconsciously did so as I had no close associate who was in such a condition. From them, I learned that more often than not, people really have no control over their conditions. They face structural disenfranchisement, which sadly is not going away any time soon, this prevents them from achieving what they would have if only they had better standing. They also showed me that I should never judge someone based on the preconceived bias I harbor due to the color of their skin or the belief they hold. Instead, what matters most is their conscience: how they still hold the principle of humanity despite having encountered problems that act as a barrier. Furthermore, quoting Taylor Swift, they really showed me how to make the best out of a bad deal. Some people would say it is a mindless strive

when they learn how to sew and code even though they are not sure if they will ever be able to put it to use. They do not know how long it will take until they are able to go back to their home. It is also unlikely that the government will lift their ban to work. Despite all that, to me, it is an epitome of courage and perseverance that never fades.

Words cannot describe how grateful I am to Mr. and Mrs. Nichols. I would not be able to pick up these priceless lessons if it were not for them.

Linh Nguyen

Vietnam

As summer comes to an end, I can't thank Mrs. and Mr. Nichols enough for the wonderful opportunity, and warm-hearted experience.

To recap, I used the award to continue SANSE's mission in improving the living quality of disadvantaged ethnic households, based in Ban Lien, Vietnam. When my friends and I were in 11th grade, we founded SANSE. For the past two years, we have invested intensively in the scholarship programs and school infrastructure. With the award that I was honored to receive, I worked hand-in-hand with other SANSE members to build our next step: health care investment.

We began with research and communication with the local doctors to understand their needs. Based on this research, SANSE was able to finalize which necessities we can provide to the Ban Lien health care center in such a way that can fulfill their fundamental needs.

Thanks to the Nichols Humanitarian Fund, SANSE is able to sponsor operational equipment, light bulbs for the center, blankets, and fundamental items for patients during their treatment at Ban Lien health care center. The brightening smile from the head of Ban Lien health care center still vividly appears in my mind. My heart was singing when I felt the happiness in his eyes as we began to open the gifts. I still remember his words as I and other members in SANSE came to visit: *"You guys are the first team that came to sponsor us. We have sent enormous requests to other organizations, and officials. Yet, it's still the long, exhausting wait. Thank you!"* I and other members in SANSE hold

on hope that from now on, the local doctors will no longer do surgery under the dim light. The center will have its electric system repaired from the equipment we provided. Patients, such as young-age mothers, will have warm blankets during the winter time.

As we began to tackle the health-care issue in Ban Lien, I realize this isolated area possesses a significantly high rate of early marriage and pregnancy. Women, who come to the local health center to give birth, are those at the age of 15 and 16 years old. They are too young, yet, already endure huge responsibilities in life. There is indeed work on raising awareness as SANSE plans ahead.

Within the trip, I and SANSE also managed to visit the rising middle school seniors. We hosted a talk show and exchange-activities with the hope that the students will be further inspired to pursue their education. As they finish their school year, SANSE will also be working on its high-school scholarship program.

There is hope for the future plans ahead. We, as a young student-led organization, still need to work on funds and management to further solidify our system and expand our capabilities to help communities. One day, I hope to fulfill my dream of transforming SANSE into an official social enterprise. It's still a long journey, and I have so much to learn. But truly without the Nichols Humanitarian Fund, SANSE could not have made such a significant investment in Ban Lien this summer. Thank you!

Salsabila Nurnidajat

Morocco

This summer, thanks to support from the Nichols Humanitarian Fund and as part of the Office of Active Citizenship and Service's Global Service trip, I spent 6 weeks in Morocco working alongside a local non-governmental organization and immersing myself in Moroccan culture and daily life. For a majority of the trip's duration, I stayed with a cohort of nine other Vanderbilt students in Morocco's capital, Rabat, where we went to work at our assigned NGOs and lived with homestay families in Medina, which is considered the old city of Rabat. Aside from Rabat, we visited several other cities and NGOs throughout Morocco on weekly excursions, which aided us in better understanding the multicultural nature of the country.



Back when I first found out that I had been accepted into the OACS program, I wasn't sure what to expect. I had a certain idea of what living abroad in a Muslim country would be like, but I was also aware that my perception was heavily informed not only by my experiences from visiting family in Indonesia but also by the West's depictions of the MENA region. I had very limited knowledge of Arabic, and even less knowledge of

the diversity of culture and history in Morocco. The pre-departure seminars and lectures hosted by OACS were instrumental in helping me prepare, and gave me a confidence and awareness that came in handy throughout the entirety of the trip.

However, no seminar could have really prepared me for how I felt when I first landed in Rabat. It was almost as if I was stuck in a fever dream, and my head was buzzing with a weird mixture of anxiety and excitement and awe. Throughout that first day, as we checked into our hotel and had dinner together as a cohort, it slowly sunk in that I was halfway around the world, in a foreign country away from my friends, family, and familiar settings. Transitioning for the first few days was a difficult process, and I found myself wondering if and how I would handle the coming weeks. It felt like everything was unfamiliar – even time felt like it was moving at a different rate. Despite all of this, when I sat down to write my first blog post for OACS, I realized that there was actually an undercurrent of familiarity to living in Morocco that was subtly helping me adjust. In many ways ranging from little details to overarching daily customs, my identities as a Muslim and as a first generation American allowed me to feel at home in Morocco. I found comfort in hearing the call to prayer five times a day, and in conversing in broken Arabic with my host mom. I began reflecting more upon the significance of my identities and previous experiences, and their effects on my worldviews and ability to interpret different situations.

This experience didn't just teach me a lot about myself; I became exponentially more aware of Morocco's political atmosphere and social issues. I learned so much from lectures with our in-country partner, the Center for Cross Cultural

Learning (CCCL), late night conversations with my host family, and meetings with my co-workers at my NGO. While the guest lectures at the CCCL on topics ranging from women in Islam to Moroccan law were extremely informative on their own, they became increasingly more salient to me in the context of my internship with my assigned NGO. The lectures and seminars that we had the opportunity to attend, combined with my internship provided me with a solid theoretical and practical framework for understanding the core themes of our trip. I was assigned to work with the Moroccan Association of Human Rights, known in French as Association Marocaine des Droits Humains (AMDH). Founded in 1979, AMDH is one of Morocco's largest non-governmental organizations specializing in human rights activism. The organization abides by six main principles: (1) the universality of human rights, (2) the globality of human rights, (3) mass action, (4) independence, (5) democracy, and (6) progressive character. To meet these principles, the organization focuses on researching and publicizing human rights violations in Morocco and educating the general public through books, panels, press conferences, protests, and more. The organization has an extraordinary history and there are countless incredible political activists among the ranks of its volunteers.

Needless to say, I was kind of intimidated by the scope of AMDH's work, and worried about what my role would be in the organization. When I first began my internship and was assigned to work on communications & media, I had a laundry list of worries and what-if questions. How would I properly communicate with my supervisor and my co-workers if we have a huge language barrier? What if I mess up the graphics

for an assignment? What if I get lost on the way back to my homestay? Most of my fears were definitely valid – a majority of the other volunteers at AMDH only spoke Arabic and French, and had very limited knowledge of English. I struggled to properly grasp the objective of my first few assignments. I made a few wrong turns on the way back to my homestay. However, these fears didn't last for very long – I eventually came to see AMDH as another "home" in Rabat thanks to the welcoming atmosphere cultivated by my co-workers. My co-workers and the discussions I had with them became the highlights of my internship experience. They were always eager to discuss a variety of topics with me and they were endlessly patient despite the language barriers and my inexperience with working in an NGO. I am eternally grateful to them for allowing me to learn and work with them. Furthermore, I am grateful to my cohort and site leaders for being a crucial support system throughout the trip, and to the CCCL and my host family for welcoming us and guiding us through Moroccan life. The relationships I formed and the conversations I had on this trip are invaluable, and are probably the greatest things that I will continue to carry with me as I strive to fight for human rights and social justice.



Overall, this experience allowed me to grow as both a student and global citizen by pushing me out of my comfort zone, and challenging me to think more broadly and critically. I hope to use the knowledge I gained to improve my studies both at Vanderbilt and beyond.

Emem Okpokowuruk

Ecuador



This summer, I stepped on a plane to Ecuador with expectations that completely shifted when I stepped off onto the soil. My program through the OACS Global Service Program taught me so much about the way of life in Quito, the indigenous communities in Ecuador, and myself during the process. But most importantly, I discovered what Ecuador cares about most: making a change to support their communities, shown from the variety of organizations, frequent protests, and the government responses. My short time in the middle of the world showed me how the power of community is able to break down even the strongest of barriers, helping me develop critical-service learning tools that I can utilize back in the United States and throughout my lifetime.

My community partner, *El Centro Integral de la Niñez y Adolescencia* (CENIT), works to improve the quality of life of underprivileged and marginalized communities by starting with the next generation. Located in the south of Quito, the organization focuses on serving vulnerable children by “eradicating child labor, promoting

their rights, and improving their living conditions” (CENIT). They provide not only primary and secondary schooling, but also have programs geared towards parents, single mothers, and working children. For 5 weeks, my cohort and I worked with CENIT to provide for the immediate needs of the community by working in the areas of education, healthcare, and social life. Some of the activities included afterschool tutoring, tending to injuries in the clinic, and simply playing with the children. We also joined in their fight for systematic change by participating in their organized march against child labor, which petitioned the government for more regulations. Being able to participate in fighting for change and engaging in the development of the students was nothing short of amazing and is something I hope to continue doing.

However, there was only so much my cohort and I could do in our 5 weeks at our service sites. Like any other country, Ecuador faces many deep-rooted problems that spread and affect almost every part of the communities, especially those with lower socioeconomic status. At the service site, my cohort and I could see and experience how CENIT struggled with a lack of resources and disorganization. With our own limited resources and knowledge of Spanish, we only seemed to make things worse at times. But after utilizing reflection tools and thinking critically about the social structures in Ecuador, we realized these surface-level issues have root causes to them – causes like poverty, lack of education, institutional structures, or the way the Ecuadorian government handles child labor laws. For example, CENIT depends on private resources in addition to public ones, which can be volatile at times and result in a period of not being able to

purchase classroom materials for teachers or having less money for student scholarships. Getting to the bottom of the problems does not invalidate the challenges CENIT faced on a daily basis, but it did help us to visualize the bigger picture and goals is making sustainable change.

One thing the OACS Global Service Program taught was how CENIT and every community partner we work with are so much more than the systemic problems that they face. We not only went to help wherever they needed us, but also to learn about the people, the culture, and the strengths of the communities we encountered. CENIT in particular, carries a strong sense of community and empowerment that is displayed in the way the administration and staff interact with the students. Whether through the daily tutoring or monthly talent show, they keep the children accountable and show that they have faith in them and their abilities. Coming from a country that really emphasizes individuality, I am so grateful to have had the privilege to experience such a welcoming, supportive environment.

Like the saying “all good things must come to end,” my short six weeks in Ecuador concluded and I headed back to the United States. Even so, I knew that I wanted to continue doing similar work as I had done at CENIT and other organizations in the past. But what steps could I take? How could I engage in service that would help me participate in sustainable learning work in my local communities? My reflections and tools gained during my program helped me to answer these questions and develop three goals to accomplish this year.

First, I hope to continue teaching health education through Volunteers for Health. As a future health professional, I have learned that one contribution to health disparities is a lack of

health education. By signing up and joining Volunteers for Health during the Fall 2019 semester, I hope to teach accessible nutrition with fun and educational activities at various low-income elementary schools in the Nashville area and possibly fight to make a systematic change for required health classes in the Nashville Metro Public School District. Second, while Vanderbilt is my temporary living arrangement during school, my home in Johnson City, Tennessee is also where I want to be involved in critical service-learning. I recently discovered One Acre Café, which is a non-profit community restaurant that is dedicated to serving and empowering communities that suffer from hunger and malnutrition by providing free meals with job skills training. Food waste, hunger and poverty are major issues in Tennessee, and this community café is a great opportunity to learn more about how it specifically affects my city and ways to challenge the source of these problems. I am not at home for most of the year, but I plan to get involved with the organization during the holiday breaks and the summer. Finally, my last goal is to document one significant conscious change using the Cycle of Liberation model by Bobbie Harro. This tool powerfully impacted me during my program and helped me understand the process of transforming the socialization I have been taught growing up in America. I understand that there is no specific sequence of events in the cycle or a beginning or end point, but I believe writing things down will not only help me recognize the transformation, but also encourage me to continue down the path towards liberation and make it a lifelong practice.

Undoubtedly, the work at CENIT is not finished by any means. The root causes of the challenges we faced in Ecuador require

systematic change, but I'm confident that the organization will continue to accomplish work as they did during my time there. They continue to receive volunteers all over the world and build more community networks to aid them in capacity building work. CENIT, by making strides against child labor and providing education for the next generation, remains a prime example of work that breaks down systems of oppression and creates equal opportunity for all.

Riya Patel

India

Throughout my childhood, I have heard stories of the daily lives of rural Indian villagers. Both of my parents grew up in rural villages in India, and continuously reminded me of how different their lives were from mine. My mom grew up without any Internet, limited water, and no public transportation. She walked over fifteen kilometers to school daily. My dad woke up at four in the morning daily to work in the fields and do household chores before going to school at 7:45. All of this seemed unusual to me, of course; however, it also felt like a distant life that only existed in my imagination, rather than reality. My imagination turned into reality for me this past summer. I was personally able to see the lives that my parents led before they emigrated from India. As we drove through the villages, I saw young girls doing household chores such as sweeping or washing dishes during their breaks in between classes or before and after school. The boys would be working in fields or helping out at their father's jobs during their free time. Each child was so willing to help out. For example, some students stayed past their school time to help us implement projects, whether it was physically doing work or just letting us ask them questions. The most surprising part was that no one complained about not being able to play or spend time with their friends. Every student did his or her part in making sure that everyone's lives ran smoothly. This was their life.

In the United States, I personally have experienced multiple times where people complain or are ungrateful for many amenities in their life. I have been the person that complains about not having enough or having too much

expected from me when in reality, I lead a much less demanding life than so many children in India. These children are expected to help with household chores, their parents' jobs, and go to school at the same time. This is the norm. There is no room for selfishness in these students' lives. They must live to do things for others because that is the only way their life can move forward. They recognize how much time and effort their parents put into raising them, taking care of them, and providing for them, and as a result, they do the same in return. They feel as if they must reciprocate the actions of their parents. I find this incredibly honorable. Growing up in the United States, I always assumed it was my parents' job to work and provide for me. I never felt the need to do something in return for them. This trip reminded me of how much my parents sacrificed for me to be where I am today, and I will integrate this into my actions towards them now.

As I stated before, there is no room for selfishness in India. My most memorable moment happened during one of the days we were asking the villagers questions. We asked one of the women working in the fields what she would change about the village. She replied with, "I want alcohol to be banned." Her reason for this was the prevalence of binge drinking and alcoholism amongst the men of the village. She described how her husband would overdrink alcohol every night, abuse her, fall asleep, and then refuse to go to work in the morning. I wondered why she would continue being married to such an abusive man. Her first response was that it was tradition. In India, marriage is meant to be "till death do us part." Marriage in India is considered to last for seven reincarnations—meaning marriage is considered to be eternal. She stated, "No matter what state he is in, he is my husband." This was

striking to me, and I still believe I could never be in her place. Her second reason was that her husband made her a mother. She had to stay with him to protect the wholeness of her family. She believed it would be incredibly selfish to leave her husband, because it would leave her children without a father. This level of selflessness is astonishing, and I could never reach that place.

Project RISHI's main mission is to create a village that is more sustainable in the future. We implement projects that do not require cyclical funding and can last at the schools. This year, we implemented many of these projects. We focused our work on education, health, and sanitation. Our projects included: a water purifier, bathrooms, two computer labs, doors, textbooks, chalkboards, a projector, and electrical wiring. The schools we were working with had no drinkable water or bathrooms – two necessities that I completely take for granted. I have never been in a place where I did not have access to water. It is something I just assume is there because it is an actual physiological need. But students had adapted to this lifestyle. They acted as if it was perfectly normal, playing and going to school as normal children do. These projects did not feel as necessary to them as they did to us. They simply were okay with not having a basic physiological need. This is why these projects are so important to me. I want these children to know what they deserve – that they should not have to adapt to such conditions. They deserve to be in a place where they have the basic necessities needed to achieve a proper education. They should be focusing on learning in school, not worrying about where to get water from or where they can use the bathroom. These students do not even realize that they deserve these things that

most Americans take for granted. They are okay living their simple lives.

The most important lesson I gained from this trip was recognizing how miniscule and unnecessary my daily anxieties and stressors are. I worry about the smallest things, not even recognizing that most of these things are trivial and insignificant. I have learned to appreciate all the things I have and let go of all the things I cannot control.

Alexander Preve

Western Europe*

My summer at CIJA was one of personal and professional growth. The most important lesson I learned is that progress is incremental. CIJA is one component of a broader network of both non-governmental organizations and governmental entities dedicated to ending impunity for the perpetrators of atrocity crimes who remain at-large. With so many atrocity crimes occurring throughout the world today—from the detention centers run by Bashar al-Assad’s regime to the persecution of the Rohingya and their flight to Bangladesh—it is difficult to remain patient in the face of geopolitical inaction. But when such inaction seems to block any progress, organizations like CIJA keep the evidentiary momentum going to ensure that the groundwork is set for future trials of those most responsible for the actions of their subordinates.

As I described previously, the category of “those most responsible” can vary, and the evidence of their criminality is referred to by CIJA—and others—as “linkage evidence.” The collection of such evidence is important because the courts and tribunals that have previously been established to try atrocity crimes had mandates which, to varying degrees, confined their jurisdiction to trying “those most responsible” for the atrocity crimes at issue. Thus, CIJA’s evidentiary gatherings are tailor-made for use at an *ad hoc* or hybrid tribunal.

To that end, I learned that collecting linkage evidence is DIFFICULT. *Ad hoc* tribunal caselaw shows that high-level perpetrators will often try to claim ignorance of the atrocity crimes committed by their subordinates. Caselaw has

also shown that tying high-level perpetrators to such crimes requires meticulous documentation of chains of command and responsibilities. CIJA and other organizations such as the IIM must confront such challenges as they attempt to document the criminality of high-level military and intelligence officials. Thus, I can now understand how difficult the task of the ICC Prosecutor is, especially given the financial and resource constraints which the Court faces.

The lesson to be learned from that challenge is: any prospective practitioner wishing to enter this field must understand that building these cases is a lengthy and difficult process. The mantra “high-risk, high-reward” has never been more appropriate. One has to be a detail-oriented lawyer with a relentless work ethic and passion for international criminal justice to succeed. It is also important to temper one’s expectations, and to re-calibrate them if necessary (as the Office of the Prosecutor at the ICC has recently done in its revised prosecution strategy).

On a more personal level, I learned that it is important to get to know your colleagues and hear about their backgrounds and stories. I met people from around the world at CIJA, many of whom had fascinating stories. It was nice to work in a multicultural office dedicated to the singular mission of ending impunity and ensuring accountability. This is important on a practical level, too: the more familiar you become with your colleagues, the more effectively you can communicate with them. Communication becomes more reciprocal: you have a greater understanding of what they need to do their job well; and they, in turn, have a better understanding of your perspective, and can better help facilitate your success.

I also learned of the importance of constantly assessing my mental build-up of institutional knowledge. Every reputable organization in this field—whether governmental or not—has standard operating procedures and a well-defined organizational structure. It takes some time to figure out how your department—and, more specifically, how your day-to-day tasks—fit within the broader picture. It is therefore important to take a holistic view of your daily assignments and constantly analyze how they fit in with the organization's overall mission. This is especially true for organizations like CIJA which are intentionally innovative. Over the course of the summer, I was able to gain a better understanding of how and why CIJA does certain things, and how my tasks fit in with that mission. Consequently, I was able to gain a greater appreciation for the work that CIJA does. Understanding the broader picture is crucial and a skill that I have developed more acutely during this stage of my professional life.

Relatedly, I gained a greater appreciation of the importance of networking, especially in what many consider to be a “niche” field—though I believe that characterization is part of the problem. There is no linear path in any field, but that is especially true for international criminal justice. This gives me the confidence of knowing that I have flexibility with respect to my career. This field needs skilled and able lawyers, and there is no one path to developing these attributes. I am not sure if I will immediately jump back into this field after I graduate, as I am still exploring my options. It is possible that I will go work at a law firm after I graduate, or maybe I will strive to become an AUSA or work at a DA's office gaining courtroom experience. That would allow me the flexibility of honing my skills on a

domestic level and re-entering this field after I have established myself.

Regardless, I know that I will return to public service—and, more particularly, to the field of atrocity law—at some time in the future. Of that I am sure. The experience that I had this summer allowed me to (1) gain the knowledge, (2) make the contacts, and (3) gain the skills I need to make that happen.

I am tremendously grateful for the generosity of the Nichols Humanitarian Fund in making my experience at CIJA possible. It was a fantastic summer, and I am glad that I was able to work at such a unique and innovative organization. This was a formative experience in my professional career, and I have no doubt that I will look back on it with pride as I progress through my legal career. As I begin my third year of law school, I feel better prepared to enter the legal profession and establish myself as a hard-working and dedicated professional. I hope other law students continue seeking out public interest opportunities and following their passions.

*Per the request of CIJA, due to safety concerns, the exact country has been omitted from this reflection.

Anna Sonju

Maldives



My time in Dhigurah, Maldives working with MWSRP was not only one of the most memorable and rewarding experiences of my year, but also my life. As I look back on all of the work I did, I think of all of the amazing research MWSRP does, their passion for educating volunteers and locals about the issues they work with, and their excitement about their job. Every single day offered a new and exciting experience, without fail. Some days we would see a whale shark, or even multiple, and other days there were none—but we would see turtles, dolphins, manta rays, and so much more. Spotting and swimming with marine animals daily educated me so much on the different species, their behaviors, anatomy, and more. It was at times hard to see the animals exhibiting evasive behavior, knowing that I was likely somewhat contributing even when I stayed an appropriate

distance away. Moreover, I was explicitly instructed to not do things that I had done in the past with animals as a tourist (get near them, touch them, etc.). This allowed me to sympathize with the fact that many tourists simply didn't know what they were doing wrong and how it was affecting the fragile marine ecosystem, but also motivated me to educate people on the can and can't do's in the ocean. Since returning back, I have been asked by friends whether I was allowed to touch the whale sharks, which has given me the opportunity to share some reasons why it is frowned upon.

Another noticeable change within my life since my time in the Maldives is that my knowledge and care regarding marine animals have increased exponentially. Firstly, several people have asked me about my experience with MWSRP, and a few have even mentioned that they have been looking for a program like it to volunteer with. The fact that sharing my experience with friends has enabled me to influence them—either by getting them interested in MWSRP or in marine conservation in general—has been extremely rewarding. I feel like I have been able to share and represent MWSRP and their mission, piquing other people's interests because they are intrigued by the idea of working with such beautiful animals. Moreover, I've used the knowledge and firsthand experiences from my time in Dhigurah to explain some of the injuries and evasive behaviors that whale sharks and other marine animals exhibit in the presence of a large quantity of boats and tourists. Although sad to discuss, human-induced injuries were not uncommon to see with any marine life during my time there, and it's one of the things I most vividly remember about it. I'm fortunate that I'm able to better understand the

gravity of the situation and share the importance of protecting whale sharks to those who ask.



Since my time in Dhigurah, not only have I become more knowledgeable about the pressing issues regarding whale sharks and marine animals overall, but I've also become much more passionate about staying up to date on issues and sharing this information with people. Social media has been a great medium for this; I have started following several social media pages for conservation non-profits, pages promoting general awareness of conservation, and specific biologists and photographers that aim to increase awareness of environmental issues. This has allowed me to learn and share issues that I find important and has allowed me to get my friends and other followers involved and passionate about the topics. Although seeing turtles stuck in plastic nets and sharks with fins cut off from boating incidents is not pleasant, it's important and often times not largely talked about. Through my more active involvement online, I have signed (and gotten others to sign) petitions about limiting boat traffic in certain areas, shared specific articles and posts about specific ways people can minimize their environmental impact, and highlighted some of the most grave environmental threats to both people and animals. I feel that becoming more educated about marine conservation with MWSRP has

given me the opportunity to feel more confident in where I stand on different issues, as well as more passionate about personally getting my peers to get involved in marine conservation.

Lastly, but certainly not least, when I reflect on my time in Dhigurah, I remember the incredible people that I volunteered with, who cared so much about conservation and truly made the experience unforgettable. Aside from learning so much about these people and what got them involved in marine conservation, conversations that I've never had with other people became the norm with this group. We would regularly discuss our favorite type of shark/whale/dolphin/etc., and why, talk about some of the most rewarding and exciting encounters the MWSRP crew has had with whale sharks, and more. I learned so much about everyone volunteering and felt very comforted knowing that the people I was spending all day with for 2 weeks were so passionate about environmentalism and marine animals. I still keep in touch with a few of the people from the trip, including some MWSRP employees, and hope to continue to for a very long time. With the MWSRP employees looking into doing further research within marine biology, other volunteers wanting to be marine biologists and nature guides, and myself, I'm intrigued and excited to see where our lives take us in the next several years and the impact our time in Dhigurah has had on our future trajectories. This experience easily became the highlight of my 2019, and I am so thankful for everything I have learned as a result of it. I will continue to apply my knowledge about marine conservation to all realms of my personal and professional life and will continue to advocate for marine conservation and keep raising awareness, as I pursue a career dedicated to environmental conservation. With

such a late switch out of the pre-medical track, I was nervous to jump into environmental conservation with little background or experience. I am very thankful to the Nichols Fund for giving me this opportunity, as it has improved my skillset, my background knowledge, and has given me the firsthand experience that motivates me to continue to fight for conservation. It furthermore makes me completely certain that this is the cause I want to fight for.

Bethanie Stauffer

Morocco

This summer I travelled to Rabat, Morocco for six weeks with the OACS Global Service Program. While in Morocco, my service partner placement was the Attadamoune Institute, which provided informal instruction in a variety of areas such as cooking, sewing/embroidery, cosmetics, English, Arabic, and French. The schedule of courses varied daily in order to accommodate the various subjects in the small building. Personally, I taught an English course with another OACS cohort member. In my time at the Institute, my learning was generally limited to what I could observe, as the regular staff spoke no English and extremely minimal French.

The institute was extremely limited in what it could do due to a lack of funding. Our small classroom was shared with cooking class and a barber shop while we were not teaching. The first day we were there, the principal showed us a whiteboard and gave us three dry erase markers and an eraser. These were all the materials we had access to. We were soon relying on students bringing in spare markers and eventually had to buy our own set. The lack of sufficient materials was exacerbated by the variety of expertise levels in our classes. Since these classes were informal, the age and ability ranges of our students were quite wide. On one day in particular, there was a 50/50 split between students that were nearly fluent and students that did not yet know the alphabet. With just one whiteboard, teaching this class became quite tricky.

The need for such a facility is rather concerning when considering the state of the community. The need for volunteer-taught

English courses during the summer months reflects quite poorly upon the Moroccan public school system. This impression was supported by one mother's comments that we were teaching the students the English they actually needed to know, rather than the "useless" things they were learning in school. Keeping in mind how severely unqualified I am as an English teacher; this was shocking. As time passed, it seemed that even the more advanced students had not learned their English through the school system, but rather by consuming American and English media. Therefore, these students also lacked a lot of fundamental grammar skills. The presence of French and Arabic classes at the Institute suggests that the situation may not be much better in the public schools' other language classes.

The attitude toward attending school in general is very different from the U.S. Where you can pretty safely assume every child you meet in the US is enrolled in some kind of formal school, that is not yet the case in Morocco, especially when talking about girls or children in rural areas. There is an extremely negative and pessimistic atmosphere around the tests that Moroccan students must take in order to complete high school and enter a university. Additionally, while Moroccan public universities are free, I received almost exclusively negative feedback about them when talking to students. I think it suffices to say that the perception of formal schooling, whether it be primary, secondary, or post-secondary, is not very good. Until the general attitude toward formal education in Morocco fully changes, one cannot expect to have a sufficient number of effective language teachers or for the children's foreign language proficiency to dramatically increase.

I think my experience there already proves that this is happening. The proof is in the mere existence of the Institute, the high level attendance of our class, and the students' constant eagerness to learn. As long as someone continues to encourage these students on their path, the struggles in education may not be around for much longer. The students we had this summer may very well be the English teachers of the next generation!

Michelle Thiry

Ireland



Thanks to the Nichols Humanitarian Fund, I spent the summer interning at the Irish Centre for Human Rights through the National University of Ireland in Galway. While I was 3,788 miles from my home in Nashville, the atmosphere of Galway felt much like Nashville. The local people were friendly and excited to meet people and tourists from out of town. It was this welcoming spirit that gave me the opportunity to immerse myself in the community. My first week in Galway, I attended the Ukulele Festival and felt empowered to join community members in spontaneous music sessions, although I was truly terrible.

It was this “home away from home” feeling that I had in Galway that allowed me to relax about being in a new country and dive in headfirst into my research at the Irish Centre for Human Rights. While there I researched gender and migration, with a focus on family separation at the

United States southern border and immigration relief for victims of human trafficking. In my research I took a United States-centered approach. I feel very fortunate to have been able to spend an entire month researching such important issues, issues that have been all over the headlines, not just in the United States but also internationally. There was also a constant stream of new research to be done. Whenever I thought I had finally reached the limit on research for family separation, for instance, a new Executive Order would be enacted, spurring a whole new line of research for me to dive into. I am grateful to have been able to research fields of law that were changing before my eyes.

However, before I received my assigned research topic, on my first day I attended the Disability International Law Summer School hosted by the Centre. The theme of the summer school was the right to family. I had the opportunity to hear directly from disabled individuals and their friends and families about how their lives have been affected by the limited rights to family that persons with disabilities have. Attending this summer school was a great introduction into the kind of work that the Centre does and what research or advocacy efforts the Centre engages in. It also allowed me to meet with members of the international legal community that the Centre has a relationship with and works with in advocacy efforts.

In my second week the Centre hosted another summer school: The International Criminal Court summer school. This summer school featured talks, panels, and discussions led by the leading academics and practitioners in the field of international criminal law, and practitioners in the International Criminal Court. To close the first day of the summer school I was

able to attend a talk led by the Prosecutor for the International Criminal Court. I got the chance to hear about her experiences in her role and about the difficulties she has in exercising those duties. She explained some of her more controversial decisions and the politics and diplomacy that motivated some of these decisions. Throughout the rest of the summer school there was a clear theme: balancing the needs for enacting justice or the right to due process for the client, with the best interests of victims of heinous international crimes. I feel very fortunate to have been able to attend this program and learn about how members of the international community balanced these priorities, whether they be prosecutors, defense attorneys, investigators, etc.

Another great aspect of my time working at the Centre this summer was working with students from different countries. It was interesting to hear the perspectives of those from entirely different backgrounds and education. Certainly everyone I met had an opinion on one of my topics of research, family separation. But the reasoning behind why people did or did not support President Trump's policies varied greatly due to everyone's different backgrounds. It was the way that people's backgrounds led to vastly different perspectives that allowed me to approach my research in ways I never would have thought of on my own.

In my time at the Centre, I made many friends and I was able to travel to Northern Ireland with a few of them. While there, we learned a lot about the conflict in Northern Ireland. We took a tour run by members of the Provisional Irish Republican Army and the Ulster Loyalists. The purpose was to give us both sides of the conflict and to learn about priorities in moving forward towards peace from both sides. I

had some basic knowledge on the conflict but this tour highlighted just how much my knowledge was lacking. What was particularly shocking to me was that the city is still divided by a giant wall called the "peace wall," separating those loyal to the British government from those who want independence. Every night at seven p.m., alarms go off signaling the closing of the gate, completely shutting off access between the two sections of the city. While looking up at this wall I felt like I was in a dystopian movie. I was shocked to learn that this kind of division exists and that the wounds of "the Troubles" were still so fresh.

This summer was an amazing experience. It has absolutely shaped my future legal career and gave me valuable skills that will help me every day. I learned how to conduct thorough and effective legal research on highly sensitive topics and how to discuss these topics with my colleagues in an educated and unemotional fashion. I also learned how to work with students and professionals from different countries and educational backgrounds, and how to draw on our rich, diverse experiences to aid each other in our work. Through the Centre I made incredibly valuable connections that will make it easier for me to pursue my human rights related interests in the future. I am so thankful to the Nichols Humanitarian Fund for providing me with the opportunity to learn these valuable lessons and to allow me to conduct such important legal research.

Zhannan Yin

Morocco

I can't believe my six weeks' journey in Morocco is coming to an end today! In retrospect of my experience here, I am inextricably grateful to my host families, our site leaders, all of my cohort members, especially my two roommates Bitania and Salasha, and my coworkers, Salsabila, Oumaima, Nada. I wouldn't be the same person without any of you.



Honestly, there are so many aspects of this trip that deserve to be highlighted in my last blog post, but I finally decided to focus on my interview of the former president of our NGO, AMDH (Association Marocaine des Droits Humains), Ahmed El Haij. Interestingly enough, he is also the father of Ouns, one of the best friends I have made here. Ahmed and I have so much in common: speaking of philosophy, both of us have a particular interest in 20th century continental philosophy, especially the thoughts of Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida; speaking of political beliefs, both of us self-identify as Marxists and are firm endorsers of laborers' rights. In *Jeune Afrique*, Ahmed is characterized as "la philo et la marteau" (the philosopher and the

hammer). As a philosophy student and social activist, I am deeply intrigued and inspired by his life story.

During the interview, he told me about Ila al-Amam movement in which he was one of the major participants. Having descended from the Party of Liberation and Socialism, this movement is considered as the cornerstone of Moroccan Marxism. Different from other anti-colonial movements led by Moroccan monarchic government, Ila al-Amam movement aims at expelling French colonizers and overthrowing domestic monarchy simultaneously. Ahmed told me that although it seemed that Morocco had already reached its independence as early as November 18th of 1955, on the day of which the incumbent emperor Sultan Mohammad V announced the end of Spanish and French colonial rule, Morocco was still clandestinely manipulated by these two Western powers even till now. In Ahmed's view, the so-called independence cannot count as a true liberation since it was nothing but a nasty consensus reached between the Moroccan king and former colonizers. What Moroccan citizens are facing is dual oppression: not only European colonizers, but equally importantly, their own emperor. In other words, as long as they haven't been truly liberated from the oppressive monarchic system, it can't be remarked that the Moroccan citizens are completely free. This distinct way to approach the modern Moroccan history actually reminds me of my home country, China. In the past few weeks, Hong Kong has initiated a series of protests against the Extradition Law Amendment Bill. While all the mainstream media in mainland China harshly criticized those protestors for trying to split and threatening the sovereignty of the country, few of them put themselves in the

shoes of the protestors. What the Hong Kong protestors are fighting against is not necessarily China's legitimate ownership of territory, but rather its totalitarian political structure.

In 1985, something unfortunate happened to Ahmed. He was arrested for his participation in Il al-Amam and did not get out of the prison until six years later. Despite all the hardship he has gone through, however, Ahmed is still actively engaged in the local human rights advocacy and democratization movement even till today. It was a great honor for me to have a face-to-face interview with Ahmed. His experience deserves to be remembered. And I genuinely hope that one day, all his efforts could pay off.



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