



Nichols
Humanitarian
Fund Supporting the humanitarian
activities of Vanderbilt students

2022 Reflection Reports



A faint, light gray world map is visible in the background of the page, centered behind the text.

To the recipients,

Thank you for living beyond yourself and making service to humanity part of your life. Never lose your enthusiasm and your idealism and never stop doing what you can to help others and improve the human condition. You are the best of Vanderbilt. You are our heroes!

With all our gratitude and admiration,

Ed and Janice Nichols

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Introduction

The Nichols Humanitarian Fund is a companion scholarship fund to the Nichols Chancellor's Medal. These programs seek to make Vanderbilt students better members of their communities and society in general by supporting their humanitarian activities and bringing speakers to Vanderbilt who embody the best of humanity. For more about the Fund, visit its website or contact Vanderbilt's Office of Experiential Learning and Immersion Vanderbilt.

Thirty-two students received awards in 2022 to work on humanitarian projects during the summer academic break in six U.S. cities, one U.S. territory, and fourteen foreign countries.

The projects are in Houston TX, Little Rock AR, Nashville TN, New York NY, Phoenix AZ, Washington D.C., Guam, China, Costa Rica, Egypt, El Salvador, Honduras, India, Indonesia, Italy, Ivory Coast, Jordan, Nepal, Panama, South Africa, and South Korea.

The projects include designing strategies to protect endangered sea turtles in Panama, preserving an Islamic shrine in Cairo, Egypt, providing schools in rural India with sanitation supplies, computer equipment, and educational material, cleaning up beaches in Indonesia, mentoring high school students, improving the legal and human rights of refugees in South Korea, researching the prevalence and causes of cardiometabolic disorders and organizing a community event to bring awareness about health issues in Guam, participating in doula services for women of color, a construction and renovation project in Costa Rica, an internship with the United Nations Relief and Works Administration for Palestine Refugees, working with local non-profits to combat food insecurity in Nashville, and much more.

Occasionally, recipients and projects change after the Recipients Booklet is published. The Reflection Reports contain the final recipients and projects for the year after all changes have been made.



Martín Alemán '23

Economics and Political Science,
Data Science, History, and Scientific Computing minors

I was born and raised in Panama. Our geographic location allows us to be the home of the Panama Canal, but also a territory surrounded by marine life. The two oceans that neighbor Panama are a central part of our livelihood. A local legend suggests that Panama means “abundance of fish” in an old native tongue. Fish continue to be very important for the country as Panamanian diet is heavily based on marine food and the fishing industry is the country’s second biggest exporter.

Unfortunately, the marine ecosystem in Panama has significantly suffered over the past few decades. Commercial fishing, illegal poaching, and environment contamination have all contributed to the deterioration of Panama’s marine ecosystem. Given the pressing need to overturn this trend and thanks to the willingness of the Nichols family, I decided to help NGO Fundación Agua y Tierra (FUNDAT) with their turtle conservation efforts in the community of Mata Oscura.

Every year, thousands of turtles travel up to 1,500 miles to lay their eggs at Playa Mata Oscura. Unfortunately, eggs are considered a delicacy by many, and turtles often die when they are caught by fishing nets or consume plastics. These threats are very dangerous for the well-being of marine ecosystems because the green and hawksbill turtles, which lay their eggs at Plata Mata Oscura, are in severe danger of extinction. Fortunately, FUNDAT has been implementing turtle conservation efforts such as taking eggs to a safe hatching place.

For my project, I helped design and build FUNDAT’s educational center that aims to promote turtle conservation in Mata Oscura. Through such a center, locals and visitors can be educated from a young age about the importance of these animals to maintain the marine ecosystem. Also, the center will help protect the community’s future livelihood. Most of the residents of Mata Oscura rely on the ocean to sustain their daily livelihood, as the economic engines of the area are fishing and eco-tourism. The project will foster economic development in the area as it will help Mata Oscura grow as an eco-tourism destination. FUNDAT has already attracted many visitors to the area thanks to its nesting and hatching tours. Before FUNDAT started operating in Mata Oscura there were only 1 to 3 small businesses serving tourists, now there are around 14. Locals see the center as the cornerstone that will further propel tourism by attracting more visitors and functioning as an information center for all the eco-tourism activities and products locals have to offer such as whale watching, farm tours, waterfall hikes, and authentic pastries.

During my time at Mata Oscura, I focused on building the center’s infrastructure and designing the exhibits it will house. The construction of the physical structure involved hard manual labor such as mixing cement, setting up foundations, and pouring concrete slabs. To design the exhibits, I worked in conjunction with FUNDAT’s president and received advice from Biomuseo, Panama’s renowned biodiversity museum.

The final design includes four exhibits that synthesize scientific information in a visual, entertaining, and educational manner. The first exhibit will touch on the evolution of turtles, specifically during the Triassic, Jurassic, and Cretaceous periods. The second exhibit will teach visitors about the hawksbill, green, and canal turtles, including their diet, reproductive behavior, and migration patterns. The third exhibit will be a virtual reality experience where visitors will watch a 360° video of turtles nesting and hatching in Playa Mata Oscura. As turtles only lay their eggs at night and eggs only hatch very early in the morning, tourists who come to FUNDAT outside of nesting and hatching times will still be able to experience it in virtual reality. The fourth and final exhibit will outline the main threats sea turtles face, and the consequences to the marine ecosystem if they were to become extinct. Also, it will feature an exercise for visitors to think about ways in which they can help promote the conservation of sea turtles.

Even though my time at Mata Oscura came to an end, I will continue to support FUNDAT with any aspects of the exhibits design that remains outstanding. Also, on a side project, I will partner with student organization AugNación to help the community evaluate the impact of climate change on its surroundings by helping them set up a climate monitoring system.

I am very grateful for the opportunity Vanderbilt and the Nichols family gave me to participate in this project that will be of great benefit to the community of Mata Oscura and Panama. I aspire to be a public servant one day in Panama, and working on this project taught me that local communities like Mata Oscura are truly aspirational and their ideas have the power to help my country transition to more sustainable fishing, farming, tourism, and living practices. Their vision for a tourism model that remains in harmony with the local community and the environment is one that should be replicated throughout the country.





Westin Bate '23

Biomedical Engineering

My time in Cape Town filled me with a certain sense of joy that I hadn't experienced in many many years. My internship, as amazing as it was with Takoid Biotech, was a rather small part of my experience in South Africa however. South Africa is still a developing country so the abundance of certain technologies that we have here in the United States simply does not exist down there. This void of sorts caused me to think critically and come into my own as an emerging engineer. My internship forced me to become independent in learning. I had to learn an entirely new computer programming language while I was down there. I was responsible for a large portion of the software that Takoid Biotech will utilize in the development of their bioreactors that will greatly help and advance the South African biotech industry. I am incredibly fortunate to have had this opportunity and am so grateful for all the knowledge and experience gained. It will most certainly help me as I advance my career.

The real experience was living in a world without American formalities. As a product of the apartheid era of South Africa, infrastructures such as electricity, water, and public transportation are incredibly inefficient and weak. The South African electrical grid can not sustain constant electricity to all of its residents so load-shedding is needed to prevent damage to the grid. During load shedding, certain areas of Cape Town had no electricity and very few establishments had generators. For me, this meant no wifi, cooking, or laundry. To combat this, I would have to uber to other parts of the city that had electricity to continue my work.

Lack of infrastructure was not just the only thing I endured. I experienced an incredibly drastic socioeconomic and racial divide while down there. Just a 15-minute uber ride outside of Cape Town and I would cross a township consisting of dirt roads and tin houses the size of my apartment bedroom. Racism very much still prevails in Cape Town and it was something I constantly felt when going into restaurants, bars, or any establishment of servitude. I have come back to the United States with a newfound appreciation and am much more aware of what I complain about.

Aside from the shocks and challenges I have experienced in Cape Town, I have made amazing memories with people I can honestly say will be lifetime friends. I will actually be in New York this New Years to meet my South African friends. I saw so much of the city and the country itself. I was on a safari where I saw leopards and lions, and was even in a cage with the great white sharks. I honestly miss it. I miss the way of life and the scenery that the city had to offer. The experience has pushed me to live internationally upon graduation. Most likely in Amsterdam or Paris if I can find employment.



Jared Bauman '24

Vanderbilt Law School

Summer positions for law students tend to be exclusively practical endeavors. Specifically, law students primarily accept summer positions as part of a larger strategy towards employment, wherein they select internships based on a limited criteria of firm reputation and location. Although there is nothing wrong with this approach – job security is quite appealing, after all – I decided to take a different path.

Indeed, while my friends chose jobs in cities they knew they wanted to adopt as their own, I took a position in New York, the one place in the entire world I know for a fact I never want to live; while my friends sought opportunities that would train them to specialize in their particular legal practice areas, I accepted an opportunity in the field of criminal defense, which is not something I necessarily expect to do long-term; and while my friends accepted positions that could ultimately open the door to concrete employment offers, I took a job with full knowledge of the nonprofit field's limited hiring flexibility.

Several people questioned my sanity, and understandably so. Why would anyone volunteer to take weekly four-hour Amtrak rides and sleep in inconceivably cramped Manhattan hotel rooms when they could just as easily secure a formidable paycheck, short commute, and cognizable career path? Still, I never once questioned my choice – not because of any practical considerations, but because of the overwhelming sense of awe I felt for the Exoneration Initiative's exceptional work.

Take, for example, Selwyn Days*. In 2001, Selwyn was arrested for an egregious double murder he did not commit. Although no physical evidence linked him to these crimes, Selwyn was convicted and sentenced to fifty years to life in prison based on a false confession.

I knew I would meet people with stories like Selwyn's over the summer, but I will admit that I had no idea what to expect. I wondered: What does one even say to someone who served decades for a murder they did not commit? What possibly could I do to relate to someone with a life so drastically different than not only my own, but than those of most people everywhere? Would they resent me for my participation in a system that unjustly stole their freedom, even as I endeavored to restore it?

I quickly learned that the answer to these questions was far simpler than I thought. Among the whirlwind of complex legal issues, case files, and court decisions emerged a fundamental truth: "The message here," in the words of an attorney who partnered with EXI for Selwyn's exoneration, "Is to never give up. Never, ever, ever give up."

I learned more about human nature this summer than I have from any professor, textbook, or previous job opportunity. I learned about sacrifice, faith, optimism, loss, joy, and more other topics than I could possibly list. Most importantly, I learned that sometimes experiences that are inconvenient practically end up being invaluable personally.

I will never forget my summer with EXI. I will likewise never forget the extraordinary generosity of the Nichols family, to whom I owe endless gratitude for the incalculable wisdom I gained at this crucial juncture in my professional journey.



George Doster '23

Mathematics and Economics,
Business, Scientific Computing minors

Growing up in Florida, I've always loved being at the beach and in the ocean. Spending time there makes me feel extremely happy and in touch with nature, and I recognize the power that these beautiful environments have on people. Environmental destruction is extremely troubling to me, and I know we are in desperate need of individual and collective change to solve the issues that jeopardize the health of our world. As an avid surfer, I read a lot about the problems that the surfing community faces around the world. I remember reading an article about how much Bali's economy and environment has suffered because of Covid. An Indonesian Island that once hosted many travelers, Bali suddenly encountered severe lock-down and their economy plummeted, alongside the wellbeing of their citizens and health of their ecosystems. Doing more research into these issues inspired me to help make a change in Bali.

I've always had an interest in working for myself, specifically in the sustainable startup space. I saw the economic and environmental devastation in Bali as a great place that I could channel my efforts to provide meaningful solutions, as well as practice creating a startup and building an organization that could outlast my time there. James and I went to Bali for the months of June and July with the intention of launching a startup that could tackle the problems we had observed that summer and enable others to contribute to the employment of Balinese citizens and restoration of their beaches.

After getting to Bali, we found the beaches trashed (with no clear incentive for the returning tourists or locals to clean them up) and realized we had a lot of work ahead of us. We spent the first few weeks organizing and attending meetings with local vendors, government officials, and environmental workers to figure out where our startup could make the biggest impact. It was extremely rewarding meeting with these individuals as they thanked us for coming to their country to help clean their beaches. James and I continued to learn the value of iterating through ideas and listening to feedback and ideas from people who have different perspectives on, and are directly impacted by, the issue. In Bali specifically, many people we spoke with did not see an issue with throwing their trash directly on the ground, so we had to take a different approach to ensure people were still motivated to stop coastal litter at its source. Throughout the following month, we built a website and contacted sponsors to place QR-code incentivized trashcans along the most popular areas of the beach. These special "BeachBins" would direct American and Indonesian corporate funds to our partnered Indonesian non-profits to motivate people to pick up and throw away more trash. When we left at the end of summer, the beaches were significantly cleaner and now had BeachBins that donate to charity.

Through the establishment of BeachBin and the non-profit and governmental partnerships we've created, I've gained a lot of professional experience in having important meetings with people who have different perspectives, remaining organized through a never-ending to-do list, and feeling inspired to make a significant difference in a place I love like a second home. I met so many incredible people and felt that slowing down and really learning about such an amazing place allowed me to understand their ideas and life stories. I am so excited to continue traveling and helping those who are not as fortunate to have the same clean environmental conditions that I've grown up with. Moving forward, I'm incredibly excited for BeachBin to be operational from the US as we continue to partner with Indonesian non-profits who can continue our work. I am hopeful that the structure and mission of our organization can be replicated all over the world, as we strive for litter-free oceans and a much cleaner environment.





Brianna Freeman '23

Human and Organizational Studies, Child Studies

As a strong advocate for social justice and educational equity, my work with LAUNCH Mentorship for the Nash Back-to-School Bash helped me recognize the importance of striking a balance between providing communities with the tangible resources they may lack and celebrating and recognizing the social and cultural capital these communities possess. Antioch, TN—a neighborhood southeast of downtown Nashville—is one of the most diverse neighborhoods in Nashville, with sizeable Black, Latinx, and Kurdish communities. The diversity in food, culture, and community highlights the ways in which historically marginalized communities embody resilience and thrive through connection and collectivist mindsets. The framing surrounding Antioch and its residents have been habitually negative, with media outlets emphasizing population density and misrepresenting crime statistics; these deficit narratives are dangerous and paint communities like Antioch as void of care, community, and value. Thus, community events like the Nash Back-to-School Bash are vital to forming counternarratives and creating spaces where families feel safe and supported.

Additionally, hearing how this event was beneficial for both LAUNCH team members and Antioch families made this work even more worthwhile.

Service-learning initiatives are not easy feats, and I realized how much work was needed to make this event a success.

Intimidating” does not seem to fully conceptualize the stress that comes along with hosting a community event of this size, but the lessons I and the members of the LAUNCH Mentorship organization learned from our inaugural Nash Bash helped guide us we sought to serve members of our Greater Nashville community once again. Before we began planning the Nash Back-to-School Bash, we wanted to orient ourselves in a way that was beneficial to both the Antioch community and the structure and mission of our organization; we also wanted to emphasize Antioch’s intrinsic value and our desire to invest in our community. To prepare for this event, we held weekly team meetings where we shared updates on various aspects of the event (i.e. entertainment, fundraising, advertising, and supply logistics), broadcasting the event on our personal social media account to garner attention and interest, and partnering with Metro Nashville Public Schools and other community organizations to support our dream. I am grateful that so many individuals, families, and organizations were able join us in celebrating all that Antioch is and all that it hopes to become. As a team, LAUNCH felt it important to not only recognize the ways in which we could uplift our Greater Nashville community, but to emphasize the mutuality and support that should be tied within service-learning efforts. We sought to create a space where Antioch residents could not only receive necessary school supplies, but also be in community with one another.

Often, service initiatives may only focus on the tangible resources, and it can be easy to lose sight of the true purpose of these efforts. To combat this, we heavily invested in fun and entertainment to emphasize the joy that is integral to community events. Working alongside the LAUNCH Mentorship team to put on the Nash-Back-to-School Bash experience for Metro Nashville and Antioch residents was incredibly fulfilling; this experience not only exposed me to the ups and downs of service planning and execution but validated my perception of community strength and leadership. I am eternally grateful for this experience and the support the Nichols Foundation and family have provided as we strived to serve our community. I am confident that the skills and lessons I have learned during my time working on this event to other leadership and service-learning opportunities.





Shery Girgis '23

Philosophy, Sociology, & Psychology

During my time volunteering at Roma Capitale Polo Accoglienza Prima Infanzia in Rome, Italy was transformative in more ways than one. Not only did I develop Italian language skills, before developing that foundation, I understood the power of facial expressions and nonverbal communication, especially with kids. Language was not needed for us to communicate, play games, or even read books. The camp had a major focus on sustainability, and it was very innovative ideas. I especially loved how the kids were involved in the sustainability. Though I am not an early education or child studies major, I learned how to resolve issues between kids without even being to speak to them. Being able to learn from the staff and kids about their sustainability initiatives inspired me to recognize the impact that a single person can make, both negatively and positively. There were multiple different compost piles in addition to recycling. The kids were also taught to use glass silverware and plates/bowls for lunch, as to avoid plastic. When plastic was used, it was upcycled into many things on the camp ground, including drums, frisbees, and tossing games. There is a perspective circling around that there is no point in being sustainable if big companies and celebrities will emit tons of harmful chemicals into our environment anyways, but my perspective changed in that I do see the potential difference when individuals are committed. Training the future generations to also think in a way as to preserve our Earth gave me hope, since it was very clear how much the kids thought it was necessary.

After conducting my service, I began to consider environmental law. I knew I wanted to go to law school but being this immersed in a community that focuses on sustainability allowed me to learn about their passion and begin asking questions I had not thought about before. If I could do my project again, one thing that I would keep is the absolute and complete immersion into a truly authentic Roman subdivision. The camp was on Via Del Casaletto 800, which was far removed from any touristy area of the city. Most people there spoke only Italian, with only a few English words in their vocabulary. I believe this really enhanced my service and allowed me to learn about Italian culture while there. One thing that I would change is that I would ask more questions going into it. Specifically, the organization did not specify that I would be around mainly Italian only speaking individuals and said that the program did not require any Italian knowledge. However, I think the experience would have been enhanced if I had been more prepared beforehand to speak only Italian to everyone I interacted with. Another thing I would change is that I would try to bring my own ideas of sustainable toys and activities so that I would have had more to contribute to them. Overall, the experience was lifechanging and I will take the skills I learned with me to both my future career and passions.



Anish Giri '25

Physics and Computer Science

The question I always ask myself is how I can contribute to the community I belong to. As an international student, I have always thought of representing Nepal here on Campus as important as learning things here that would create an impact back in Nepal. Before starting my school here at Vanderbilt, I was working on different projects associated with creating unbiased educational opportunities. I wanted to continue such a project even after coming to Vanderbilt; Nichols Humanitarian fund made it possible to do it over the last summer.

I had always wanted to work in rural schools in Nepal so that I could understand the intricacies of the existing problems and initiate a few steps that could contribute to the solutions. Governmental schools in rural Nepal are ill-infrastuctured and poorly maintained. Because the salary is way too less than what they deserve, teachers are often less energetic about what they do. Students barely get any extracurricular opportunities to groom themselves and the community people are not much aware of putting efforts to better the school situation; in the end, it is the community that benefits from the school. I already knew this because I went to such a school until high school. I believed that unless everyone (teachers, students, and community members) worked collectively on the problems of the school by utilizing the available resources, we can barely bring any significant impact. Keeping that in mind, I launched the project “Afno School Afai Banau Abhiyan” which translates as “Let’s Build Our School Ourselves Movement” at Chandeshwari School in the Nawalparasi district of Nepal.

As I entered the gate of Chandeshwari, I could see a lot of changes that could be made in the school by building a bridge between those three aspects. The first task was to make everyone aware of what I was planning to do in those four weeks of the project. After that, I launched a training program that included equipping students with basic leadership and problem analyzing and solving skills. The next step was to find out problems in the school with the active support of teachers. Drinking water problems, waste management, unuse of existing educational logistics, lack of proper playground, etc. were the major problems we could find at the time. With the help of community members, we were able to sign a contract with a company that would refurbish the water purification system that was ineffective for the last two years. With the help of teachers and students, we were able to clean the playground and manage the waste produced. Within those weeks, we were able to bring some positive changes to the school. Of course, we cannot change the entire system within a few weeks, but I do hope that the project becomes an inspiration for the members of the school.

The entire four weeks were an amazing experience. Interacting with community members gained me a significant insight into the socio-economic status of people in the community. I also learned that in an actual world, it is hard to put your thoughts into action when it is about impacting people on a grass-root level. We had to deal with different unpredicted problems while maintaining the water purification system, we could not get a machine part for the machine and we had to import it all the way from India. Despite all sorts of challenges, I am glad to have the project as an important learning experience in my life.

The project helped me shape my values and aspirations regarding my goals in the bigger picture. I have realized that my social projects are a fine gateway to utilize whatever I have learned in terms of academics and life values for the betterment of others. I have thought of my projects as my responsibility; a responsibility to contribute back to the community I belong to.





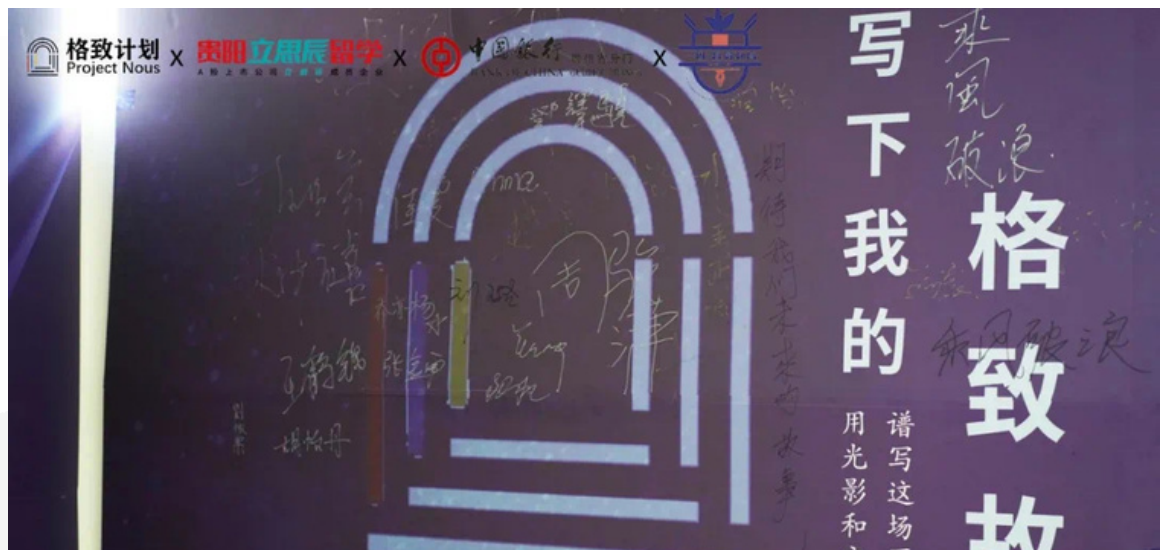
Neeraj Gummadapu '24

Economics
Business minor

Service is something that has been ingrained in me since I was a little kid as my grandfather would speak about his days in service of a non-profit organization in India. He argued that, rather than the pay, the need to serve a community in need is the most fulfilling thing a person can do. I didn't get it at first but eventually I was inspired enough to start my own initiative in high school where I donated food in bulk to those living in poverty in rural villages in India. This experience helped me realize how much I valued helping others. However, in the end, it had to be shut down due to financial issues stemming from Covid-19 restrictions and lockdown measures. Therefore, after transferring to Vanderbilt, I immediately joined Project RISHI as I met an amazing group of students who were just as passionate as I was for helping others. Through the course of this project, I was able to really immerse myself into the lives of those living in absolute poverty and truly understand the day to day challenges they faced. I grew empathetic as many couldn't even get clean drinking water, a decent K-12 education, and how discriminatory the schools were in providing the guys with renovated bathrooms while leaving the girls with inadequate ones.

In the end, I developed a degree of gratitude for the life I was given because, after speaking with my parents, I came to realize how I would have also grown up in a village or a small town in India if I hadn't come to the United States. As a result, my perspective on helping alleviate poverty in rural, agrarian-based economies have not changed in the least. Rather, my perspective and passion have grown tremendously and I hope to one day work directly with intergovernmental organizations such as the UN to help develop policies that directly tackle such issues. I have changed quite a bit as a global citizen through the course of this project as it felt as though I was living in a comfortable bubble my whole life. This project opened my eyes wide open to the problems and challenges many in the world face and I think it is our responsibility to speak up for and to advocate for change.

If I was able to plan out this project again, the things I would keep would be the group of people I went with as they were very supportive, encouraging and as passionate as I was to bring about change in the lives of the many students and teachers we worked with. However, the things I would change would be the amount of time we spent working with the schools because I felt three weeks was too short and it should have been one to two months. Overall, I am so glad to have gained this invaluable experience with the support of Nichols Humanitarian Fund and Project RISHI as the memories and lessons I learned will stay with me forever.



Biyao Guo '23

Political Science

History minor

Over the past summer, I completed my project that brought seminar-styled discussion seminar camps to high students in China who otherwise lacked the opportunity. Unfortunately, due to China's COVID quarantine policy, I wasn't able to be onsite for the project. However, I still was able to organize the seminar camps and engage remotely. Every Sunday, I would meet with other organizers via Tencent Meeting; there, we would update what we have completed over the past week and discuss any upcoming plans. Over the first two weeks of July, the first camp took place in Qingdao. The camp was a success in general. The volunteers we recruited prepared discussion sessions with a wide range of topics such as discussion of World Movie History, Feminism, and Reading Classics By Zhang Ailing. Students who joined our camp in Qingdao generally liked the discussion sessions and enjoyed engaging with the volunteer discussion leaders. Other camps also went well. The camp in Yantai was the most successful according to me. The camp leader was funny, caring, and engaging. On the weekdays, the discussion sessions taking place at the camp all ran successfully, without any accident or errors. On weekends, the camp leader also took volunteer discussion leaders to the oceanside which is a famous touring place in Yantai.

Over the 14 days of camp in Yantai, both students and the discussion leaders had a good time. The only camp that brought us, as organizers, great challenge was the camp in Zunyi. Zunyi is a small city. We also didn't have much connection with local schools. Therefore, we weren't able to reach out to too many students in the first place. The situation worsened as, two weeks before the camp's onset, local schools announced that schools would start earlier than they previously planned. This led to many students quitting our camp. For a while, we only had 2-3 students per seminar class; this was far from ideal.

I think that this experience really helped me to learn and grow a lot. Other organizers and I met via Tencent Meeting to resolve this emergency. We talked for about two hours and eventually came up with a plan B. We decided to move part of the camp online so that more students, from other cities and provinces, could join the camp, enlarging the potential target group. We also tried to publish more information on a variety of social media such as Little Red Book, Bilibili; these are all popular social media among Chinese students. This experience also helped me to learn how to communicate with others and cooperate to go through hardships. I communicated with the six volunteer seminar leaders we assigned to the camp regularly. At first it was difficult. Two of them were very anxious and misunderstood our Plan B. I spent a while to explain to them and listened to their proposal. Eventually, after about two days of communicating back and forth, we agreed upon the plan I offered. The camp was able to run as planned although it wasn't as successful as we expected.





Amaris-Lynn Joubert '23

Psychology

African American and Diaspora Studies, History minors

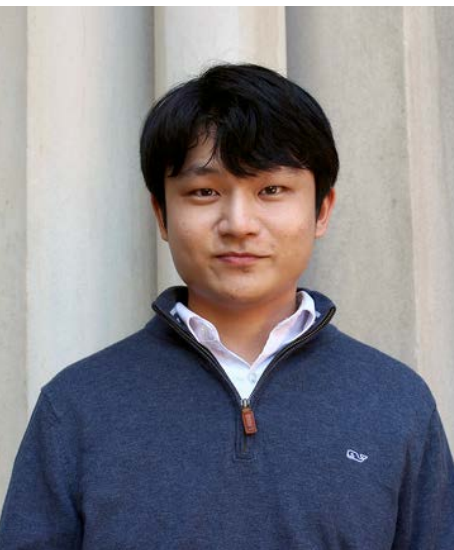
In learning more about students' desires for positive change, self-reflection, and education, I also learned about the tremendous amount of obstacles that graduates must face during the re-entry and parole processes and even the obstacles they face in obtaining their college education. For example, students struggle with basic necessities like adequate dental care both in and outside of prison (which has an effect on self esteem as well as job outlook), and struggle to balance the demands of low-paying jobs (both in and outside of prison) with their schoolwork.

I learned more about how important high quality re-entry resources are to graduating students. Traditional students who are graduating from college already face a mountain of scary changes and uncertainties in attempting to secure a position post-graduation: feeling like their major doesn't lead to a growing, flourishing job field, fear that they are choosing to be locked into a unfulfilling job for the rest of their lives, and fear that they will have to choose between poverty and passion. However, students graduating from higher-education in prison programs (non-traditional students) have these fears in addition to the fears of an individual with a record. For example, non-traditional students are forced to consider how drug-induced tooth decay and lost can impact a career in public service or business. Another strong example is that students must consider whether the housing next to their new job allows tenants with records. Often too, students must consider how the unhealthy, toxic relationships that have contributed to them committing crimes or becoming dependent on drugs may further become a detriment to their housing, career, and mental stability.

I have increased my ability to network as well as make use of my network. I went to the Pedagogies for Higher Education in prison conference with another student leader in Vanderbilt Education on the Inside as well as my mentor for the internship. At the conference, I had a wonderful opportunity to speak to important stakeholders in the mission to have Vanderbilt create a higher education in prison program. I also had the valuable chance to practice being direct about what I think I need and want as well as being humble enough to ask what they think we need or should want.

After all of these extremely enlightening experiences, I have become a stronger, more educated advocate for higher education in prison as well as restorative justice practices. I have also become more receptive to the ways that the core beliefs of restorative justice can impact my own interactions with my community and other communities.

If I could plan my Nichols project again, I would definitely try to go to Riverbend Maximum Security prison as often as I went to Debra K Johnson Rehabilitation Center (DJRC). After multiple weekly visits to DJRC, I was able to bond with the students in the LIFE program and learn a lot from their opinions and experiences. I wish I would have had the same opportunity to connect with students taking Lipscomb classes while incarcerated at Riverbend Maximum Security.



Joseph Kang '24

Economics and History

Business and Political Science minors

Having lived in 3 different continents and traveled to more than 10 countries, I never found the idea of being a ‘global citizen’ peculiar. I was always interested in learning about the problems affecting communities worldwide—whether it be political, socioeconomic, environmental, etc.— and finding ways to tackle them. Forging a global citizen identity at a young age, I grew up with a belief that solely caring about and serving the community that I’m part of is not enough. I wanted to make efforts to make the broader world more equitable and sustainable. The experience that I had this summer, which was made possible by the Nichols Humanitarian Fund, was a meaningful way to act as a global citizen.

As a recipient of the Nichols Humanitarian Fund, I had the incredible opportunity to serve asylum seekers and the refugee community in Korea. An extremely homogeneous country with widespread xenophobia and a refugee recognition rate of around 1%, Korea was the place I wanted to make an impact on. Throughout this summer, I interacted with asylum seekers/refugees through assisting their legal acceptance and resettlement process while spending fun times with them through events. Additionally, I conducted research and translations that were used to advocate for the acceptance of asylum seekers and for improving refugee rights.

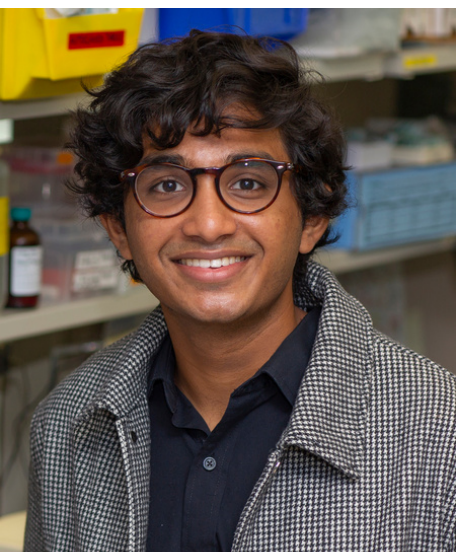
My goal for this project was to assist in strengthening civil society actors’ efforts for improving refugee rights and combatting the Korean tendency to simplify the refugee crisis into foreign security threats. I achieved this goal through working with my partner organizations, Refuge pNan and Advocates for Public Interest Law (APIL). Whether it be translating legal documents, coordinating conferences/webinars regarding advocacy and education on refugee rights in Korea, leading event logistics/activities to celebrate World Refugee Day, or researching on the Afghan refugee community’s situation in Korea to be reviewed by human rights advocates, I have had numerous opportunities that led me to grow on a personal and professional level.

Importantly, I learned how to become a better communicator, a persevering volunteer, and an empathetic leader. By interacting with refugees who came from countries in Southeast Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and South America (truly the most diverse group of people I ever met), I’ve gained diverse perspectives on the problems they faced within their countries of origin, learned about their struggles settling in a new country, and found ways to help them feel safe and welcomed.

I still vividly remember spending time with an Angolan family at a World Refugee Day event, and later finding out that I was helping their legal acceptance process; the Egyptian man who asked for legal assistance while I was volunteering for a refugee awareness campaign, where I later connected him with organizations such as APIL that would provide expert help; the Jumma people from Bangladesh I met and saw their musical performances, the same people I did research on to gather evidence for their appeal to continue staying in Korea. Numerous other people and stories come to mind. Knowing that my service had a tangible impact on the refugees that I interacted with, I ended the project being more motivated and passionate than ever.

I am truly grateful for the Nichols Humanitarian Fund to provide me this opportunity. I am also thankful for the wonderful people at Refuge pNan and APIL for helping me achieve my project goals and teaching me ways to contribute to improving refugee's lives and rights in Korea. This summer experience has truly had a great impact on my future career aspirations. Moving forward, I hope to study forced migration, international law/development, and human rights more critically and continue to be passionate about doing human rights service work that has a multinational impact.





Shaun Karakkattu '25

Economics, History, and Cognitive Studies
Data Science minor

This project entailed working with a nonprofit organization, I previously worked with in high school known as the Students Supporting Brain Tumor Research. Being the largest student-run non-profit in Arizona, Students Supporting Brain Tumor Research (SSBTR) provides unique opportunities for young people to act as principal players in a large-scale philanthropic organization. It gives students an opportunity to learn about brain tumors and gain real-world experience in running a non-profit business while raising funds for brain tumor research. For this project, I involved the SSBTR and its partner organizations like the Translational Genomics Research Institute (TGen), a laboratory in downtown Phoenix which does cancer and immunology research to create programming for underprivileged youth in Arizona. I worked at TGen for over a year as an intern on research into Glioblastoma and thought these organizations could help create an influential program for underprivileged and underrepresented populations to participate in scientific research.

The proposed dates for my project were 5/15-5/21, 6/19-6/24, 7/25-7/31. Over these three weeks of the summer, students would have the opportunity to get involved with different partners of the Students Supporting Brain Tumor Research. The first week would be devoted to school preparedness, science experiments, and nonprofit management. The second would be more research-based with the SSBTR partners like TGen. The last week would involve programs with hospitals like the Phoenix Children's Hospital and Barrow which the SSBTR also work with. This plan changed quickly with the addition of a scholarship program that substituted the first two weeks of programming. Students had the opportunity to win \$250 (2 winners) if they wrote the most compelling essay for their target group. During the last week, scientists and researchers from Barrow Neurological Institute, Phoenix Children's Hospital, Translational Genomics Research Institute, and the University of Arizona all spoke with youth in the state of Arizona.

There is a need for science education in downtown Phoenix. Education in the STEM field is important to the future of Arizona's innovative science and technology industry. For young people, the skills and knowledge that are necessary to participate in STEM research and education are often not taught in Arizona schools. As a result, I think the implementation of this program with both in-person and online programming helped create many opportunities for these underserved students to get involved and engaged in STEM research and careers. Arizona is also facing a STEM teacher shortage, so through this program, I loved teaching about the importance of being a STEM educator and how youth can create change in their own communities by taking on teaching and educating roles in or outside the classroom.

This service project helped give students the opportunity to learn about STEM careers, and nonprofit management and helped create interest in rejuvenating the city of Phoenix through STEM education. The project had two aspects, one in person to provide these students an opportunity to get hands-on with their education through different activities in downtown Phoenix like exploring the research labs and helping with the science museums in the area. Second, the virtual programming will be on the SSBTR website forever as a resource to students which I think will be special and impact students in Arizona and far beyond.

My long-term goal is to be a lifelong learner. At Vanderbilt, I am an Economics and History interdisciplinary major. A large part of my study is understanding how systems have affected history. My hope and goal in proposing this project were to help start systematic change. I would love to help future leaders and innovators in the STEM field by connecting and educating them about the resources that exist in their own communities and teaching them the process of using those resources to create a more educated school environment. My biggest hope for personal growth is to inspire change and service in my community. I want to use the values that the leaders in my life have taught me to create change in my community and personal life. I want to learn to listen actively and develop a growth mindset in order to improve my service and inspire change. I hope that as young people we are prompted to search deeper and find the nuances of each person and every situation since as a commodity, the truth is more valuable today than ever before because it's becoming increasingly rare. This research project helped me accomplish these goals and continue to create change in the city that inspired my interests.

In conclusion, I created a STEM scholarship series for students in Phoenix, Arizona under the supervision of Wendy Kaye (wendy@ssbtr.org). If I could do it all over again, I would try to make the virtual portion available to students all over the country through advertising and spreading the word.



Winners' statements:

My name is Erica Kumar, and I was born and raised in Arizona. This past spring, I graduated with a Bachelor's in Biology with an emphasis in Pre-Medicine and with a minor in Psychology, which I was able to complete in 3 years! I am an Instructional Assistant at Grand Canyon University and will be studying for the MCAT this fall. I am excited for the opportunity ahead!

My name is Jocelyne Espinoza; I am a first-generation Mexican American that is majoring in Biomedical Engineering. My dream is to work on the challenges related to reverse engineering the brain and targeting illnesses such as Alzheimer's and Parkinson's.



Heera Kodiyamplakkal '24

Medicine, Health, and Society
Data Science minor

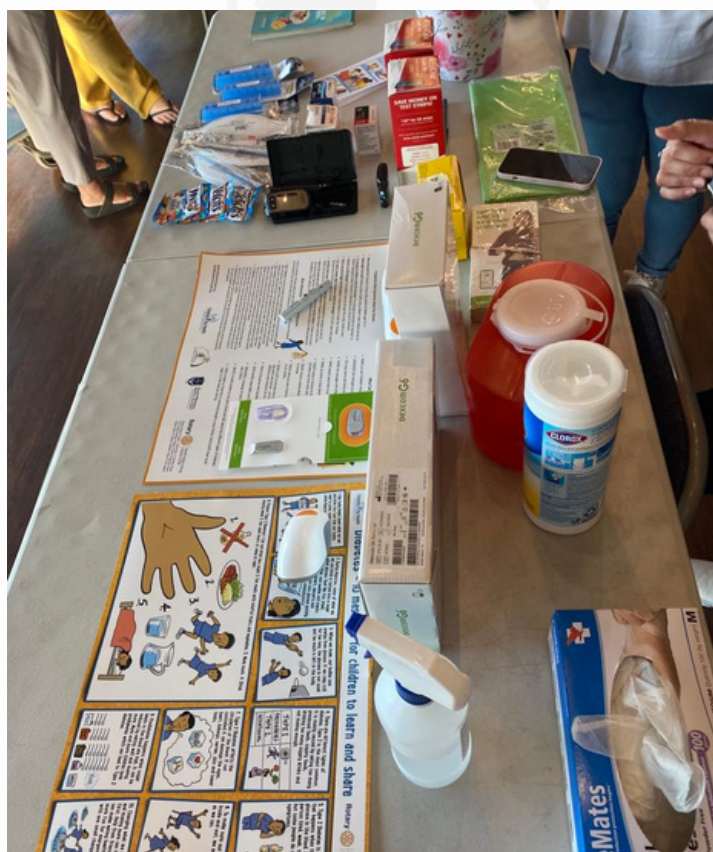
I was born and raised on the island of Guam. Being from an underserved island has shaped me in many ways including inspiring me to go into a healthcare career. Through the Nichols Humanitarian funding, I was able to serve Guam's most underserved and help address some of the health care disparities endemic to the island.

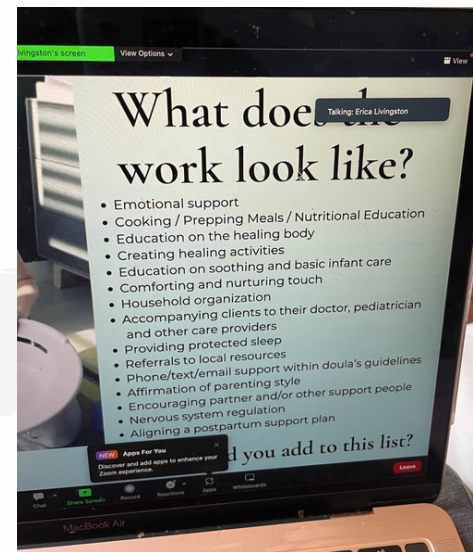
For the first half of my summer, I worked with the Todu Guam Cares Movement. Todu Guam is a non-profit organization that focuses on providing health care services to the underinsured. They consist of doctors, nurses, public health professionals, and volunteers. I volunteered at 4 different health care outreaches over the summer, each of which provided free physical exams to underinsured children. I started volunteering at the hearing exam station and by the last two outreaches, I was able to manage the station and train other volunteers to conduct hearing exams. At every outreach, I was reminded of the importance of early intervention to prevent severe comorbidities like diabetes and cardiometabolic disorders. Many parents and guardians of the children were unaware or ill-equipped with the knowledge to educate their children about the importance of getting medical checkups and maintaining healthy lifestyles. I was humbled by the understanding that my efforts to educate children and provide care could have a lasting impact on these children and their families to come.



After volunteering at Todu for several weeks and learning about the challenges and strengths of a health care outreach, I was inspired to organize a health outreach myself. I decided to focus my outreach on cardiometabolic disorders. I partnered with the Guam Medical Professional for Health Outreach Organization to help organize free diabetes and cardiometabolic disorder clinics in various parts of Guam. I gave a presentation on diabetes and heart disease, and a run-through about home care devices such as blood glucose monitors to record sugar levels and prevent diabetes. We conducted outreaches at a local church and a shopping center.

These outreaches have exposed the significant need for more actions to prevent diabetes. I've also understood the importance of cultural competence in a medical setting. I encountered families who didn't speak English and wasn't familiar with terms such as exercise or balanced lifestyle. A cultural understanding was important to communicate these terms effectively and suggest ways to incorporate healthy living into already existing cultural practices and norms. My efforts this summer have only further inspired me to practice medicine in underserved populations. There is much work to be done, but there is also great potential to make a significant impact on the lives of entire communities in underserved areas such as Guam. I am so grateful to the Nichols family and Vanderbilt University for giving me this incredible opportunity to serve so many people and see medicine through a different lens.





Jeanne d'Arc Koffi '24

Human, Organization, and Development
Computer Science minor

This summer, I had the opportunity to undergo the beginning of Ancient Song's doula training program. So far, I have been able to take childbirth education classes, which include knowledge of stages of labor, breathing advice, comfort measures, birth plans, advocacy, and consent etc... I have also taken some courses regarding postpartum skills, learning about nourishment, physical healing, rest, postpartum intimacy, acknowledgement, and resources, along with participating in an intimate partner violence training. Alongside gaining knowledge around identifying perinatal mood and anxiety disorders and how they can impact birthing people, our conversations also covered trauma and how to conduct trauma-informed care, and communication skills to normalize and introduce conversations about mental health. Additionally, we learned from current doulas how to make these services available to our communities, while also being able to support ourselves, and maintain our health.

After engaging with this community of doula workers, my perspective that it is necessary to learn how to support and uphold both (alternative and inherent) modes of healing and knowledge of care for birthing people in marginalized communities has not changed. Being exposed to so many ways in which birthing people's right to conduct their own informed decision-making are oftentimes not affirmed throughout their experiences, and of all the gaps in care of how society fails to imbue compassion and support throughout the conduction of these processes, has shown me that much more is required from us in how we engage in treating people during and after birthing experiences.

I feel even more reassured of my intention to immerse myself in the learning required to have the tools to create an environment prioritizing inclusion, safety, and equity for birthing people of color. I am also even more convinced that we have to be ready to offer these services to our community members, that we must have the option of beginning and navigating maternity and parenthood with love and intentional support.

Being a part of this community has made me realize the significance of constantly learning how to better care for each other, along with the importance of sharing information and resources amongst our communities. I have also learned to not be afraid to ask questions when feeling uncertain, especially when there's been a habitual deterrent for self-advocacy in whatever space I am inhabiting. I understand now more than ever that our communal need for universal access to culturally appropriate, women-centered healthcare must continue to be advocated for, and this fight begins with each one of us.

Due to Covid, and our instructors' workload this summer, our training was not as intensive, nor as in person as had been scheduled. If I could plan my project again, I would connect with a neighboring organization to supplement for more physical learning and experience in an apprenticeship sense. However, I feel so grateful for all of the knowledge that I have received and the network I have gained to support me as I continue on this journey to achieve my certification.



Amanda Kouaho '23

Medicine, Health, and Society, Molecular & Cellular Biology
Chemistry minor

This summer I conducted a service-based project at the Community-based Urban Health Center of Yopougon, Port-Bouet II (FSUCOM-Port-Bouet II) of the Ministry of Health and Public Hygiene. This community hospital is located in the Yopougon district of Abidjan, Côte D'Ivoire. I worked with physicians to provide primary medical care to the Yopougon Port-Bouet II community. After receiving training, I was charged with performing the physical evaluation aspect of a given medical consultation and reporting my findings to the attending physician. I also assisted physicians in conducting routine medical procedures. While this hospital is not thoroughly representative of the Ivorian hospital system, I was able to interact with individuals from multiple different backgrounds. Through this experience, I was able to observe the barriers in healthcare that the Port-Bouet II community experiences. Moreover, I learned the importance of cultural competency in efficiently addressing healthcare barriers. Treatment methods must be tailored to individuals and situations and can not be generalized across the board.

Unfortunately, on what was supposed to be my last day, the maternal ward of the hospital caught on fire. The fire spread and led to the closing of the hospital for many subsequent days. Patients were forced to relocate to other neighboring hospitals. As such, barriers to healthcare accessibility increased in the Port-Bouet II community. Thankfully, the hospital was able to open again roughly three weeks following the incident.

Through my service project, I also had the opportunity to attend a yearly conference hosted by the Ivorian Association of Pediatric Physicians. The conference was attended by physicians, medical professors and medical students from across the country. This year, the conference was three days and focused on discussing child survival and community health. On the first day, we visited Tounzuebo—a small rural city near Côte D'Ivoire's political capital, Yamoussoukro. While there, we provided free medical care to children and expecting mothers. I worked with pediatricians to gather vital signs and anthropometric measurements. Through this experience, I was able to gain insight into the health inequities of the city. Although a community hospital exists in the city, for the majority of the population, healthcare access is not readily accessible. The conference was also attended by leading pharmaceutical brands around the world. I had the opportunity to interact with these brands and gain a better understanding of treatment methods and gain an insight of their importance in the Ivorian healthcare system.

The experience that I received in Côte D'Ivoire has allowed me to understand how the social determinants of health manifest themselves in healthcare globally. Moreover, the experience allowed me to observe firsthand the factors that influence the health behaviors of entire communities. Tounzuebo is environmentally different from Yopougon, however, the fundamental healthcare behaviors of these two cities are somewhat similar. For example, many individuals only seek medical help when they are ill. Preventative care is seen as somewhat unnecessary. However, this observed similarity is impacted by economic instability in both regions. Nevertheless, this health behavior is observed globally for similar reasons. With this in mind, if I were to do this project again, along with working with physicians to provide primary care, I would also like to add a healthcare advocacy component to my service. I'd hope to work with physicians to develop informational material on the benefits of preventative care to the local communities. The informational material will also encompass resources that the local community could use to understand and guide their healthcare decision-making processes.

The diverse clinical experience that I received this summer has allowed me to connect with those of varying backgrounds and has amplified my interest in addressing health inequities and working within medically disadvantaged communities. I'm thankful for the opportunity to conduct this service project and will be sure to apply the skills that I have learned to my future medical and non-medical endeavors.





Induja Kumar '24

Political Science

Climate Studies minor

This year, I had the opportunity to work alongside Professor Ross to continue compiling data regarding women, food insecurity, water access, health access, and rates of domestic violence that they faced. I used data compiled by Dr. Ross while in El Salvador, that he conducted using face to face interviews with women in rural villages. Reading from these interviews, learning the names of these women, made me individualize data in a manner that I had not had the chance to do in research and lab opportunities I have participated in before. My concern with migration comes from my own background from an immigrant family, and comparing my parents' immigration here (relatively simple, as they had work visas) to the detaining of immigrants at the border that I bore witness to as an Arizonan. Growing up, I saw the results of SB 1070 in the form of racial profiling and police stops affecting our city's Latinx residents, and the ICE detention centers being built throughout the state. The research Dr. Ross does, and directly reading the interviews that are conducted in Spanish and translating them into data helped contextualize the gravity of the situations that many pushed into unjust detainment are fleeing from. From not having access to medicine, to raising 5-7 children in a single parent household, with little education, many women who were interviewed lived in rural areas, where they are the sole providers for their families. As much as the movement to support migrants has grown, little work has been done to study the conditions from which many migrants are escaping, and rarely does this research focus and center the experiences of women.

One reason we decided to focus on water shortages specifically is because in the coming years as the climate crisis escalates, more and more migrants will be escaping natural disasters, many of which will disproportionately affect the residents of the global south. The most recent example of such a disaster is the Pakistan floods, which will likely lead to many climate refugees. While food shortages, floods, and crop failures have been driving migration for a while, little has been done by the international human rights community to address these emerging conditions within a legal framework. ELNOR education, another nonprofit with whom I volunteered this summer, works directly with refugee populations to provide virtual English language learning services to students both young and adult living in refugee camps in Lesbos in Greece. With them, I was able to learn more about what on the ground work in the international context looks like, as well as learn more about the UN's policies for granting asylum status. With them, I was able to write a research article investigating how the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) could possibly incorporate "climate refugee" as a reason for granting asylum status.

On the whole, the research I did this summer helped me understand that the movement to support immigrants in the United States and internationally must center climate change as a primary concern. Addressing its role in driving international migration patterns will be key to implementing preventative measures to provide for those in need (such as building infrastructure to receive new arrivals) and to encourage legal innovations to acknowledge the rule that the climate crisis will play in exacerbating migration.



Vivek Kumar '23

Economics and Medicine, Health, and Society
Business minor

As I walked off the plane onto the tarmac, I felt a rush of warmth and excitement as the 25°C weather and humidity first hit me. After months of planning, I was finally ready to start my service learning experience in Roatán, Honduras. From my previous medical service trips abroad, twice in Haiti and once at the Brazil/Venezuela border, I strongly understood what to expect on this trip. However, unlike my previous trips, I was now an undergraduate student with a more robust medical knowledge and maturity to understand that trip differed from the rest. Through my earlier travels, I realized that they were periodic band-aids offered to the communities that didn't have access to local healthcare. What would happen once our medical group left?

The impermanence of our free clinical aid sat with me. I knew the big picture was taking those steps to create self-sustaining healthcare practices for communities that don't have consistent access to healthcare. Over these previous trips, I took more minor actions, from talking with locals to writing down small ideas and notes. However, on this trip to Honduras, I knew that creating a definitive educational and actionable program was the first step to achieving this broader goal.

Over the three weeks spent in local clinics, I learned how to handle resistance to new ideas. Initially, I began by taking notes of the diet, lifestyle, and local cultural factors impacting patients. More and more patients were presenting with hypertension, diabetes, and obesity, in a demographic at heightened risk of these morbidities. I wrote down ideas for how they take small steps forward, ranging from swimming in the ocean if you have arthritis and can't do other exercises to cutting back on the amount of Salvavidas (cheap local Honduran beer) you drink. The clinical consults between the doctors and patients were quick: take the chief complaint, prescribe medications, and ask the patient to come back in a month, sooner if the symptoms got worse, and that was it. At the end of these consults, I tried to squeeze in a few minutes of conversation with the patients. What types of exercise were they doing? What actions were they taking for their health? I would get a consistent response that my job is tiring enough to be considered exercise.

Resilience. Understanding. Compassion. These reoccurring themes shaped my outlook as I began to have more conversations. I grew to understand that education could only go so far. These conversations were great with the patients, but the doctor and I knew that turning education into action is the most challenging bridge to cross. As a global citizen, with the amazing support of the Nichol's Humanitarian Fund, I knew that this was a bridge that had to be crossed for the foundation to be laid for long-lasting change in the community. This helped give way to 'Pura Vida: sí se puede', a low to no-cost program that combines education with actionable ideas. The program offers an opportunity for doctors to walk through 6 key factors, as described by the American College of Lifestyle Medicine, that can be focused on enacting preventative measures. Having these meaningful and targeted conversations with patients and a signature spot at the bottom of the flyer for patients to sign creates that accountability for the patients to hold themselves true to taking control of their health.



As I reflect on this experience, I should have spent more time immersing myself in Honduran culture during the planning stages. I should have learned about the local food, lifestyle, and culture through blogs, YouTube videos, and travel books. This would have allowed me three weeks to focus on the implementation and ensure the successful continuation of the program. However, I've grown to appreciate the power of conversation and commitment to action. This would have been something that I overlooked before this trip. Still, as I continue to grow as a global citizen, I am excited by the prospect of taking away the positives and negatives from my trip to inform my future decision-making in the communities that I hope to continue to serve, local and abroad.

Pura Vida: si se puede

6 formas para tomar el control sobre tu salud, reducir su riesgo de diabetes, proteger su corazón, y prevenir enfermedades



I. Comida Sana

La comida saludable es mas importante. Elija alimentos integrales en base a plantas que tengan alto contenido de fibra, que sean nutritivos, que promuevan el bienestar y combatan enfermedades. Considere verduras (especialmente brócoli y remolacha), frutas, granos integrales y comidas con menos sal.

Opciones para tratando: Ensalada de ceviche, Tacos con huevos, aguacate, y espinaca.



II. Ejercicio

La actividad física regular y constante es una parte esencial en una salud óptima.

Opciones para tratando: Caminar/Correr con sus amigos y miembros de la familia (Caminar 21 minutos puede reducir su riesgo de las enfermedades de corazón un 30%). Nadar en el océano (especialmente si tiene artritis). En su casa, flexiones y abdominales.



III. Aliviar el Estrés

El estrés puede guiar al mejoramiento de la salud y productividad o también a tener ansiedad, depresión, obesidad, disfunción inmune, y resultados precarios de salud. Antes de demur, medita para relajar su cuerpo y mente.

Opciones para tratando: Meditación (En YouTube, escucha un video al menos 10 minutos cada día). Yoga (No tiene que ir a clase, puede hacerlo en su casa).



IV. Relaciones Interpersonales

Sentirnos conectados socialmente es esencial para nuestra residencias emocional y salud en general. Los estudios demuestran que el aislamiento y la soledad se asocian con una mayor mortalidad y morbilidad.

Opciones para tratando: Hablar con amigos, colegas, y miembros de su familia.



V. Sueño

La falta de, o mala calidad de sueño puede llevar a: una disminución en la capacidad de recuperarse de una enfermedad, un sistema inmunes tensos y a enfermedades crónicas. Necesita entre 7 y 9 horas de sueño cada noche para proteger su cuerpo.

Opciones para tratando: Prueba no usar su teléfono 30 minutos antes de dormir.



VI. Abuso de Sustancias

Los peligros bien documentados de cualquier uso adictivo de sustancias pueden aumentar el riesgo de muchos cánceres y enfermedades del corazón. Los compartimentos positivos que mejoran la salud incluyen dejar de fumar tabacco, y la limitación de alcohol.

Opciones para tratando: Beber agua de coco y agua en lugar de mucho alcohol o frosos.

Un pequeño cambio cada día!
Tome la promesa por su salud: _____





Samuel Lu '25

Elementary Education, Climate Studies, and Human, Organization, and Development

A few weeks ago, I was standing in front of a group of rising fourth graders in a childcare center's cafeteria, handing out certificates of achievement and baskets full of books, flash cards, games, and science experiment kits. After working with them for six weeks, we'd become close, and a few tearful hugs showed me that that time had meant as much to them as it had to me. It was clear that the program had made an impact.

Yet, when I applied for the Nichols Award in December of 2021, my vision for the program that would eventually come to be Camp P.L.A.Y. was nothing like what materialized over the summer. When I applied for this funding, I was in discussion with a school principal from my hometown, developing plans to host a one-week summer program at the elementary school I had attended as a child. We met many times over the course of seven months. We developed a curriculum, identified potential campers, and worked through the endless logistical issues that come with schools during the summer. Therefore, when I opened an email from her in April of 2022, my heart dropped as I read the bad news she had to share: her new supervisor with the school district had not approved our program, and as a result, we would no longer be able to have it at the school. Finding this out in April was—to put it kindly—far from ideal. Not only was it less than two months before the program was supposed to begin, but it was also mere days before I was to move home while dealing with a bout of Covid-19. This meant that I had to completely redesign the program, with a new location, new children, and a completely different schedule. This was a daunting task, and at many points, giving up on having P.L.A.Y. in 2022 seemed like the much easier option. Four months later, however, I was glad I hadn't taken the easy route. Through lots of work and collaboration with and my faculty advisor, the P.L.A.Y. Program became Camp P.L.A.Y., a six-week drop in program at the Child Development Center in downtown Little Rock, Arkansas.

Two volunteer counselors and I hosted a group of wonderful fourth graders, teaching them about nonfiction reading, life cycles and adaptations, and data collection and calculation twice a week. Most importantly, this learning all occurred through a range of games, science labs, and creative projects, ensuring that our campers knew just how fun learning could be.

We played games based around author's purpose, raced to complete calculating area scavenger hunts, and made life cycle comic books, all of which culminated in our campers' Learning Presentations. On the penultimate day of Camp P.L.A.Y., our three teams presented the projects they had been working on throughout camp to their C.D.C. teachers, classmates, and administrators. Our campers got to show off all they had learned through poster presentations, narrative skits, and lessons they'd prepared for younger kids at the center. By the end of camp, not only had our kids developed a joy of learning for themselves, but they were already sharing it with other children.

I am so immensely glad that Camp P.L.A.Y. went ahead this summer. Our brilliant campers learned so much, and everyone involved had a blast. While creating an almost completely new program in a matter of weeks was certainly not easy, it was without a doubt worth it. I have no doubt I will face many challenges like this again in my future—teaching is nothing if not full of challenges—but my experience creating Camp P.L.A.Y. this summer reminded me of why overcoming those challenges is worth it. As important as understanding the life cycle of a frog is, and as crucial as it is to understand the difference between fact and opinion, the thing I am most proud of teaching my campers this summer is not found in any curriculum or state standards. Rather, the thing those kids gained the most from Camp P.L.A.Y. was a feeling, felt by many for the first time in their lives, of finding joy in learning with others.



Erik Mastalerz '23

Architecture and the Built Environment, Political Science
German, European Studies minors

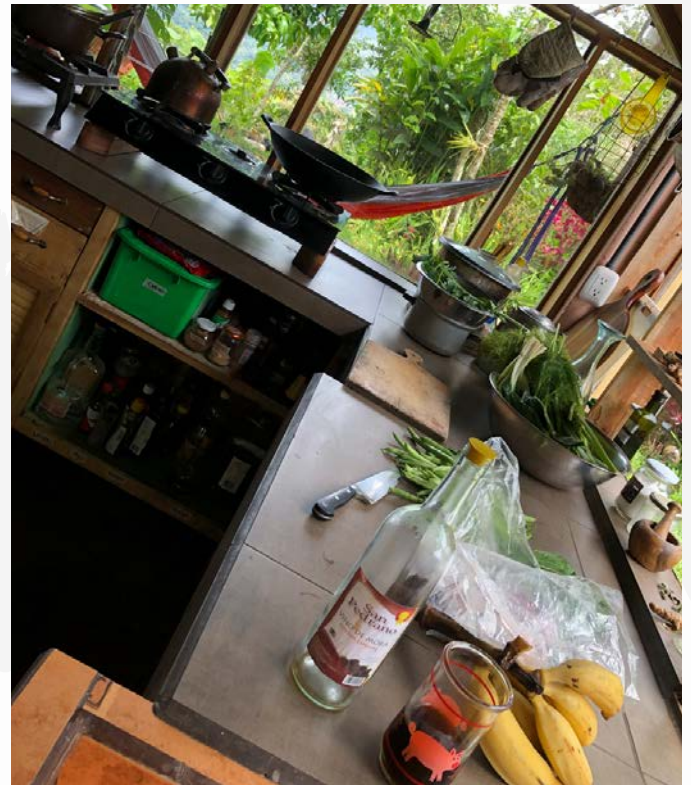
Expansive vistas of green, only interrupted by scattered red-clay roofs and heavy, grey, clouds above. As a volunteer on an organic farming project, the view of the world I experienced for two weeks in La Flor, a small town nestled into Costa Rica's lush heartland. During my short stay, I lived simply in nature and considered my place in communities and theirs in me. Thanks to the generosity of the Nichols Family, I was able to have this adventure, develop unexpected friendships and reframe my perspectives on fundamental components of life.

Every day, all volunteers on the farm would wake up at 6 am for a warm drink and to layout the objectives for the day. Tasks ranged from cooking to forest management (often with machetes) to assisting the resident biologist with organic pest management. Volunteers were paired with local workers or friends of the farm's owner, Jeff, a thirty-year-old engineer from Florida. Jeff had purchased the farm as a passion project several years ago from an elderly neighbor he had met while visiting and working in Costa Rica during college. Over my two weeks, his story, values and vision for the project gradually unfolded and were among the most interesting and stimulating aspects of the experience.

The first daily work period lasted until 10 am when we would break for breakfast. It was often the most intense as the large tasks were best accomplished before the midday heat, although this part of Costa Rica was often overcast. Over his several years on the farm, Jeff had established relationships with several local craftspeople, an elderly naturalist and a biologist who used the farm as an experimental lab for non-invasive pesticides. Most of them had limited English knowledge, so I enjoyed working with the locals to brush up on my Spanish and learn about their lives. Particularly Humberto, picture attached, the elderly naturalist who had made it his life's work to reforest an old farm in the town. Over 35 years, he curated a whimsical jungle filled with thousands of species from across Costa Rica. While working with Humberto, he would share stories from his life including major political moments in Costa Rica and his respect for John F. Kennedy. He showed me the fulfillment one can gain through living simply and devoting yourself toward an aspirational purpose, his was to proliferate symbiotic living with nature.

Following breakfast, often a fruit salad and a kind of porridge, bread, or plantain-based dish, everyone returned to work until lunch at 2 pm which concluded the day's work. One day after eating, we got word of a donation of 500 concrete bags to the town from the regional government. This was important to the residents as structural repairs were not uncommon, and this reserve could be extremely important to infrastructure maintenance in the hilly town. All available able-bodied residents were called to the town center to help unload the 100 pound bags from the truck they arrived on. We spent about an hour working with twenty men of all ages hauling bags on our backs. A wholesome moment, the positive energy and comradery of the townspeople showed the difference a sense of collaborative community makes to living, a phenomena I hope to experience in the future.

These selected anecdotes are some of many from my transformational experience last summer. Costa Rica was lovely, and I hope to return with friends in the coming years to, hopefully, share the beauty, kindness, and hippiness I enjoyed.





James Maxwell '23

Economics and Political Science,
Data Science, History, and Scientific Computing minors

This summer, fellow cohort member, George Doster, and I travelled across the world to Bali, Indonesia and started a coastal conservation nonprofit startup after reading about the adverse effects of COVID-19 on the island's economy that is heavily reliant on tourism and fishing. These sectors revolve heavily around the island's beautiful beaches, which is where our efforts were concentrated in upon arriving and developing ways in which we could impact the island. Our initial plan revolved loosely around cleanup acts, but upon further inspection, we quickly realized that idea would not supplement the waste management system on the island. The government employs local citizens to clean up the beaches every day, but we saw this as ineffective, leaving the beaches subject to litter disposal moments later, the problem was based on the culture and availability of proper waste disposal infrastructure. We based our organization, BeachBin, on providing this infrastructure to beaches around the island and developed an incentive program to begin to change the perspective in which waste management was viewed. Through coordination and communication with local municipalities and surf vendors to take care of the bins, we were able to positively shift the island's perspective of waste management and begin to make a difference at a local level.

My perspective on the social issue of waste management and ocean pollution of course, changed after travelling to a different part of the world for an extended period of time. This came through communicating with international expats and local Indonesians of all occupation about the local viewpoints and system in place. Personally, I only feel stronger about the need to provide support for cleaner oceans and beaches after seeing a lack of care and motive to preserve such valuable aspects of the ecosystem. Environmental consciousness is an issue that I previously cared about, but upon completion of this summer and the project, I find my decisions impacted by a notion to make more environmentally conscious choices. In addition to a stronger sense of the need for conservation action, I developed a sense of compassion and satisfaction towards service and volunteering. Throughout the project, it felt as if we were doing something impossible: navigating a foreign country as an individual and organization to deliver a message, though our uncertainty was always met with a feeling of gratification at every milestone we achieved. Every sponsor, vendor, and municipality applauded our efforts and gave us undoubtful support for our idea and mission. This kept us going. At the end of our service learning it was easy in retrospect to pick and point at mistakes where we had gone wrong, but if you told me 3 months ago that I would have started an organization that would have covered 12km of beach with infrastructure, my jaw would have dropped. I believe that in the timeline that we were given, we did a fantastic job managing the development of an idea and organization in a foreign country where we learned about Indonesian culture, customs, and of course regulations for nonprofit organizations.



Quinn Muscatel '24

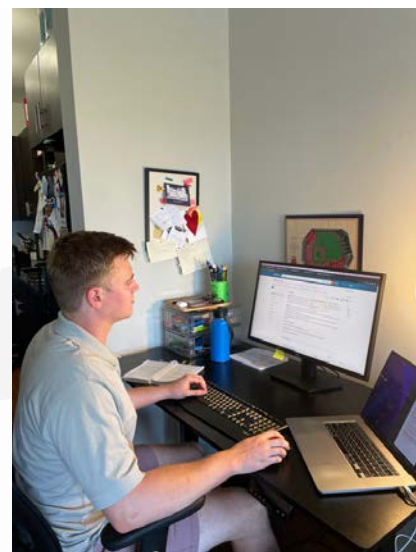
Political Science and French
Religious Studies minor

My original plan was to intern for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency at the headquarters in Amman, Jordan. My hope was to learn more about what UNRWA does for Palestinian refugees and to learn more about what I could do to help refugees in the future. However, due to unexpected circumstances, I had to intern remotely. I adjusted to this change by communicating with the office and discussing times for team meetings and individual meetings. By having meetings at times that worked for all time zones, I benefited from sharing with and learning from the team as well as the work that I was assigned. From this internship, I learned many new skills as well as refined old skills and learned more about the work that goes into helping refugees at an international organization level.

Some of the new skills that I developed during this experience were the ability to use Microsoft teams, OneDrive, and SharePoint. This software was crucial for communication throughout the team and sharing information about projects. I also developed further skills in excel by formulating data into data sheets in an organized manner that will be beneficial to track future information. I also learned how to format and design documents according to a long set of guidelines and standards to ensure that they were suitable for transmission throughout the agency. During meetings, I took notes on relevant information so that it could be accessible for later use to remind individuals of the topics discussed. I also presented information or research methods in a way that was accessible to all members of the team who had a wide variety of skill sets. Thus, I developed skills on how to best approach explaining information to a wide range of audiences. Lastly, I developed more skills on writing important documents for circulation such as briefs and memos. Overall, my ability to do extensive research and summarize its importance has improved significantly.

Due to my work with UNRWA, I now have a broader understanding of what is crucial to the success of Palestinian refugees. UNRWA is devoted to ensuring that Palestinian refugees obtain all of the resources necessary for their success. However, I have learned that education is often not prioritized compared to many other resources for refugees. Education is one human right that should be offered to all individuals and learning this has shifted the way that I look at the importance of education for refugees since education can help encourage those who reside in non-permanent residences such as camps. I now have a better understanding of the work that goes into helping refugees and ensuring that they have access to essential resources and services that they need. However, I intend to research more about the efforts to provide universal access to education as this is an essential resource for refugees.

Overall, if I did this project again I would love to have been able to have gone in person. However, I feel that I have learned so much from this experience and am hoping that when I go abroad I can visit Amman, Jordan to experience the work that I have done in person. Since much of the work I have done involves specific places in Jordan or in other field offices, I would love the opportunity to visit in person. I am excited to continue my work with refugees and continue to learn more about what I can do to help ensure that refugees receive the maximum amount of opportunities and resources possible.



Sam Newmier '24

Vanderbilt Law School

My experience this past summer at the Department of Homeland Security's Human Rights Violator Law Division has been an incredibly formative one. Throughout the clerkship, I learned more about international law, human rights law, and immigration law. I was also exposed to how the government functions, while contributing meaningful work to advance HRVLD's mission—ensuring the United States and her territories are no safe haven for war criminals.

Over the course of the summer, I have developed and refined many of the skills I learned during my first year of law school. I gained more experience conducting legal research using WestLaw, and learned how to do international legal research, which uses a different database. I also gained more experience writing. Over the course of the summer, I completed two major projects, interspersed with research and writing tasks as the attorneys required. My first project was a country-specific primer, which provides extensive, but concise, background information on the country, current human rights challenges, and possible perpetrators. My second project was a litigation guide for a genocide that occurred in a foreign country several decades ago. If a HRVLD attorney finds an individual residing in or applying for admission to the United States who they suspect may have been involved in the genocide, they can use the litigation guide to gain historical insight into the genocide, an applicable legal framework, and best practices for moving forward in the investigative process. I hope to utilize and continue to build on these skills during my 2L year.

I have changed significantly as a global citizen after this summer. First, I was able to learn more about genocide and human rights abuses that have occurred around the world with which I was previously unfamiliar. I was able to gain an insight into the application of international law by speaking with attorneys and hearing about their day to day lives within the government. Many have worked internationally, so it was interesting hearing their experiences in foreign locations. I also learned about how the asylum and refugee system operates in the United States, which is important to understand given current migration issues.

If I were to do my project again, I would keep many of the same components and qualities while slightly changing the formatting. My project was remote, and I would much preferred to have been able to work in person in Washington, D.C. I feel this would have allowed a bit more interaction with some of the attorneys. However, I would keep most of the program the same. I was exposed to a variety of challenging legal situations related to international law, human rights law, and immigration law. I was able to network with colleagues, both in law school and the government, to better understand their interests and careers. Finally, I was given meaningful, substantive work that is important to the American and international communities. It is of utmost importance to investigate and prosecute human rights abuses and genocide, and I am fortunate to have had this experience this past summer.



Salem Omer '23

Neuroscience

I greatly enjoyed my time this past summer working towards tackling the food insecurity issue in East Nashville. I worked on this issue through a two-pronged approach which entailed: conducting interviews of East Nashville residents in which I gain understanding of the issues that they feel contribute to food insecurity and working on a community garden with residents of the East Nashville area.

Early on into the project, I spoke to residents in East Nashville inquiring on the issues that contribute to the persistence of food insecurity in the region. I travelled to various parts of the neighborhood and spoke to diverse groups of people of various ethnicities and ages to gain a holistic perspective of the situation. Prior to interviews, I spent several hours conducting research as to the specific questions I should ask residents. I took into consideration common issues that exist in food deserts such as lack of access to healthy and affordable groceries, as well as lack of efficient public transportation in these regions. I sought detail about the transportation infrastructure in East Nashville, to which I received feedback regarding its inefficiency. I was also provided with very insightful feedback on the critical need to build grocery stores near the neighborhoods of East Nashville, the need for the city administration to increase food stamp assistance, and the need for more youth programs that would not only serve as centers for sports and recreation for youth but would also provide meals. I compiled a brief report summarizing the outlook of the East Nashville community and its demands, went door to door to seek signatures on the report from those who approve of its message, and sent it to several local politicians including Congressman Jim Cooper.

Furthermore, I worked with Brooklyn Heights Community Garden (BHCG), a community garden adjacent to the East Nashville area which is operated by and serves those in the Brooklyn Heights neighborhood. The team at BHCG enthusiastically welcomed the opportunity to hold community gardening events that would bring together the Brooklyn Heights neighborhood as well as the East Nashville community for evenings of building and maintaining garden plots. Both BHCG and I agreed to promote 2 events. I made fliers on the pertinent matters of the events and distributed them throughout East Nashville. On the days of the event, we were collectively able to gather about a couple dozen volunteers for each session and spent both evenings volunteering maintaining the garden.





Leo Park '24

Neuroscience and Child Development

My project provided free golf lessons to children from underprivileged backgrounds. Taught by undergraduate golfers across the nation, I sought to provide an opportunity to build the strength of character that would empower children through life, both on and off the golf course.

Participation in sports and physical exercise is an integral part of childhood. While children at any skill level can enjoy the game of golf, the costs that are typically associated with the sport make it inaccessible for many. I hoped that my project would ensure that children interested in learning the game would have the opportunity to do so, regardless of their socioeconomic status. Early childhood experiences play an imperative role in shaping a child's later development, and I hoped that my service project would leave a positive impact in the lives of these children.

Playing golf throughout my own childhood was instrumental to my personal growth, and I was most excited to share those experiences with these children. My project would not only help these children to become independent golfers but to also gain assurance and self-reliance in many other aspects of their lives.



At the beginning of the project, the children had no idea how to swing or even hold a golf club. Many had never stepped foot on a golf course before, but they were eager to learn. Throughout the week, the children made exceptional progress. With the guidance of our instructors, many began to have confidence in their swings. They were consistently and independently hitting golf balls, but more importantly, they were having a great time. For some, golf became their new hobby, their new “best sport ever!” An amazing memory that I have from the week is when the children would cheer each other on after every made putt, jumping up and down with joy.

Looking back at these moments, I learned in the most powerful way that golf is more than just a game. It builds relationships, teaches self-confidence, strength, resilience: life skills that will empower children throughout their lives, both on and off the golf course.

I am extremely grateful for the Nichols Humanitarian Fund in helping to make this project a reality, as well as the undergraduate golfers who volunteered their time to teach golf to the children. I hope to expand this project in the near future to more children from different areas and backgrounds.



Morgan Peck '24


Vanderbilt Law School

This summer, thanks to the support from the Nichols Humanitarian Fund, I had the incredible opportunity to intern at Southern Migrant Legal Services in Nashville, Tennessee. A project of Texas RioGrande Legal Aid, Southern Migrant Legal Services serves migrant farmworkers across the Southeast with employment-related legal issues related. Frequently, clients are workers from Mexico who came to the United States on an agricultural guestworker visa, known as an H-2A visa, and face issues such as discrimination, wage theft, and substandard employer-provided housing.

Over the course of the summer, I assisted with cases involving various unique obstacles, including dealing with state and federal agencies and responding to court deadlines on short notice. From a practical standpoint, this helped me strengthen my writing and time management skills to react to a case's dynamic needs during litigation. Additionally, working primarily with monolingual Spanish speakers boosted my confidence in my language and cultural competence skills. I also traveled across the state to share basic legal rights information with workers, some of whom live in very remote and isolated places, and gather information about any potential issues at the worksite. Frequently we saw housing that had structural decay, bug problems, and lack of air conditioning or cooling fans, to name just a few issues. I also saw firsthand how the local community responds to these workers, and I was especially moved by the ways it supported them and met their needs so far from home.

Perhaps the most impactful experience of the summer happened in the Mississippi Delta. We represented a group of African-American workers who experienced blatant racism in their workplace by being paid significantly less than white guestworkers who eventually replaced them. To help share their story, our co-counsel hosted a press conference where our clients could speak to a broader audience, including important officials at the Department of Labor, about the discrimination and injustice that they directly faced and that hurt their community at large.



A faint, light gray world map is visible in the background of the page, centered behind the text.

While their circumstances were largely defined by their particular identities as African-Americans in Mississippi, their experience of exploitation is one that virtually all our clients shared. Another common thread joining our clients is their motivation to call out injustice and call for change. As their legal team, we helped them navigate the legal system and deal with some pretty obstinate and frustrating former employers. This chance to engage with the farmworker community, which is not as homogenous of a group as some may believe, allowed me to better learn about the various social issues at play in the U.S. agricultural industry. From our clients in Mississippi, I learned an embarrassingly late lesson about how racism is baked into existing farmworker law and its application today.

Overall, I could not have asked for a better experience. The only thing I would possibly add to my internship is more direct client work, which was understandably limited due to the broad service area and ongoing health concerns with COVID-19. After finishing my internship, I feel like I have grown as a global citizen by having a better idea of how U.S. policies impact foreign nationals on U.S. soil as well – in particular, how those policies have the great potential to harm them while benefitting them financially. I also received a more in-depth look at the reach of the H-2 visa program which has inspired me to seek more opportunities to assist H-2 workers and fight for reform. I am so grateful to the Nichols Humanitarian Fund for making this unforgettable summer a reality.



Jack Proctor '23

Secondary Education & Psychology

This summer has felt like a whirlwind. I have had plans fall through, ideas get remolded, and have felt busier than I've ever been in my life. I've often felt tired, stressed, and frustrated over the past few weeks, but when I think about this project, I am most overwhelmed with gratitude. I feel so thankful for this experience and how it has helped me better understand myself, students, and schools over the past month.

I have felt very challenged in my education at Vanderbilt to specifically turn my eyes toward the education system and how it is both helping and hurting people. It has felt incredibly discouraging to learn about the hundreds of thousands of kids whose basic are going unmet and how that is directly impairing their ability to be students. Kids are coming into schools with a million other more pressing things going on — or they're not coming at all, as is the case for some at Park Avenue. Chronic attendance problems have persisted since the pandemic because students' lives are consumed by the matters of life that are drawing them away from being able to just be kids, and this rate is nearly 20% at Park Avenue.

When I've learned about this in education classes at Peabody, I have often felt powerless to address or take steps toward mending this deep problem. I have walked out of many classes with a heavy heart and no direction for where I can go to start helping people. So, when this opportunity fell in my lap, I knew that this was God telling me, "It is time to start." I felt nervous and unequipped yet excited to get to use this funding toward something deeply meaningful and vitally important for these students. Park Avenue's students are not coming to school because they do not have food and hygiene and cleaning supplies at home. They cannot be fully present as students when their basic needs are unmet.

Getting to provide some of these resources has been so meaningful to me. It has been so encouraging to see an empty room become full of amazing resources and items that I know will bless so many students. Getting to meet students and talk with them about their lives and their needs has reminded me of this importance and has helped me remember how something small like this is actually helping so many people. I feel like I have finally learned how to work toward addressing systemic issues, but I am humbled by the fact that there is so much left to do. I have just scratched the surface of resource needs at Park Avenue, much less in Nashville. It was encouraging to see \$2500 go a long way, but there is so much more to go.

I have learned so much through this experience. I have gotten to grow in professional communication and teamwork with a resource coordinator, community partners, and school administration. I have learned how to shop for these resources and find high quality items for low prices. I have learned how to plan and manage my time and resources. I have learned more about how to listen to kids and ask them good questions. I have learned so much about how hard life is for some of these people and how much privilege I have. And in all of this, I have so much more to grow. I feel so humbled by this experience, knowing that I do not deserve any of my blessings but that I have the opportunity and responsibility to use my privilege to lift some others up.

I feel like I can now see these social inequalities and needs through a much more specific lens. I can put words and names and faces to these things in a way that will help me continue to develop relationships and springboard my teaching philosophy toward empathy. I understand much more about my role as a future teacher and community partner to schools that need resources. Schools need a community that links its arms around its students.

Thank you, Nichols Family, for helping me make a difference this summer.





PROQUEST and WoS: (Autism) AND ((Visual NEAR/3 perception) OR (Visual NEAR/3 process*) OR (Visual NEAR/3 discrimination) OR (Visual NEAR/3 sensiti*) OR (Visual NEAR/3 stimul*) OR Color* OR Colour* OR Pattern* OR Composition OR (Language NEAR/3 compren*) OR (Reading NEAR/3 compren*) OR (Semantic NEAR/3 process*) OR Literacy OR "Special education") AND ((Visual NEAR/3 design) OR (Text NEAR/3 simplif*) OR (Inclusive NEAR/3 design) OR "User experience" OR Accessib* OR Usab*)

PubMed: ("Autism spectrum disorder"[MESH] OR "Autistic Disorder"[MESH] OR Autism) AND ("Visual perception"[MESH] OR "Visual process*" OR "Visual discrimination" OR "Visual sensiti*" OR "Visual stimul*" OR Color* OR Colour* OR Pattern* OR Composition OR "Language compren*" OR "Reading compren*" OR "Semantic process*" OR "Reading"[MESH] OR Literacy OR "Education, special"[MESH] OR "Special education") AND ("Visual design" OR "Text simplif*" OR "Inclusive design" OR "User experience" OR Accessib* OR Usab*)

Helen Qian '24

Neuroscience

For my Immersion project this summer, I worked on conducting a scientific literature review on how visual design elements can be applied to media such as texts, information pamphlets, and user interfaces to increase accessibility for people with neurodevelopmental disorders, specifically Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). As someone who grew up loving both the creative arts and research science, I've always been highly interested in how the two fields could intersect. Moreover, my studies in neuroscience and my experience volunteering as a tutor for students with intellectual disabilities at Vanderbilt motivated me to look into whether existing accessibility standards for communication media take into account the needs of people who are neurodivergent or have cognitive disabilities, as well as how visual design can be integrated and modified to address these accessibility needs.

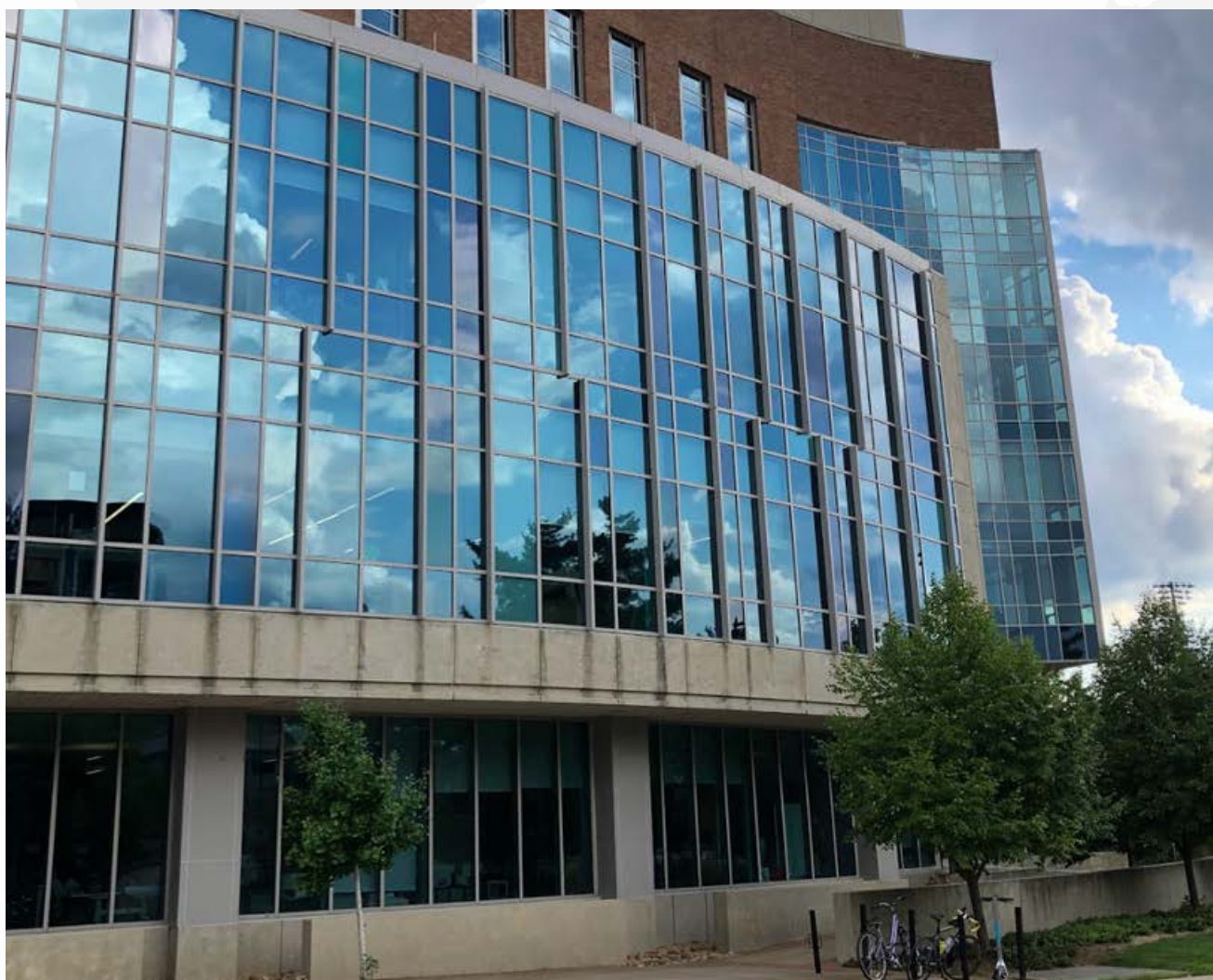
Preliminarily, I found that an estimated 90% of individuals with ASD experience some form of atypical sensory perception toward taste, touch, audition, smell, vision, or multiple sensory modalities. Previously documented symptoms include both hyper- and hyposensitivity to sensory stimuli, altered abilities of chromatic discrimination, and altered preferences for global versus local stimuli. Although global efforts have been made to shape research priorities to create equitable opportunities for people with developmental disabilities, there seemed to be little scientific consensus on how different forms of everyday communication can be made more accessible for people with autism.

Thus, this summer I designed and worked on this project in collaboration with Vanderbilt ArtLab, which aims to make science communication and scientific research more accessible through visual art. The research question I structured my literature review around was: What components of communication, including visual design, language structure, and sentence complexity, are important for improving ease of information comprehension and user interface experience for people with autism?

Prior to this project, I had never conducted a formal scientific literature review before, and this summer experience allowed me to truly explore each step of formulating a research question, systematic search, and specific criteria for selecting articles to be included in my final review. I had the chance to work with Rachel Walden, Reference and Instruction Librarian at the Eskind Biomedical Library, who helped me get started on creating a search criteria with relevant terms for my research interest and who also advised on the type of literature review I should aim to write.

On my end, this process challenged me to consider and define what each word in both my search criteria and my research really meant. For instance, I ended up breaking up search terms like “visual design” into more concrete ones such as “color,” “pattern,” and “composition.” Although I had to rewrite my search a few times to finally achieve the results I was looking for, I was very happy with the learning experience I got out of it. In the end, I compiled 414 articles from four different databases. Within these articles, I completed two separate screening stages, abstract and title review followed by a full text review, to select which articles to include in my final literature review analysis. Overall, the final articles I ended up analyzing include usability studies of games, websites, and other media designed specifically for people with autism, special education research articles on how students with autism respond to different stimuli in the classroom, as well as neuroscience research papers on visual processing, attention, and reading comprehension.

I am currently drafting and editing a paper about my analysis results from the literature review, and I ultimately hope to be able to use my findings to generate a set of guidelines for accessible visual and user interface design for people with ASD. One thing that this project has highlighted for me is how there is always more to learn and discover in both the fields of research and service. Before developing a set of accessibility guidelines as this Immersion project moves onto its next stage, I hope to be able to speak with and interview more experts in the field, as well as conduct surveys and interviews with people with ASD. I’m tremendously grateful to have received the Nichols Humanitarian Fund to complete this first stage of my project this summer, and I can’t wait to see where it goes next.





Alyssa Questell '23

Biomedical Engineering, Environmental Sociology
Chemistry minor

The essayist Jonathan Swift once wrote, “Invention is the talent of youth, as judgment is of age.” Young people hold a special position in society, being among the most creative and most in tune with the problems of their home communities. I believe, strongly, that if we equip youth with the tools and skills to innovate, we will all be better off for it. If invention is the solution, engineering is the means. Unfortunately, engineering represents only a small and often unofficial portion of the K-12 education curriculum, and only but the privileged minority of middle and high schools currently offer students access to engineering makerspaces. Throughout my time at Vanderbilt, time spent in our campus’s makerspaces has been among the most formative and joyful parts of my education. There are few feelings as rewarding as holding a product that was once just a figment of imagination in your hands in the form of a 3D-printed prototype or a spaghetti-wired breadboard. I am grateful to the Nichols Humanitarian Fund for giving me the resources to share the joys of engineering with middle school students in Nashville.

In partnership with Vanderbilt Student Volunteers for Science (VSVS) director Paige Ellenberger, we began the summer by sending out an interest survey to middle schools in the Nashville area. Of the nine schools that expressed interest in receiving an engineering makerspace, all receive Title I funding and seven have student populations in which the majority qualify for free or reduced price meals. After a careful review of school profiles and a discussion with school representatives, we decided to partner with Antioch Middle School. In June, we met virtually with Antioch’s STEAM coordinator and librarian to identify current needs. Using the Nichols Humanitarian Fund grant, I was able to purchase two 3D printers, two Arduino starter kits and prototyping guide, rolls of filament, and various circuitry components, such as breadboards, LEDs, batteries, transistors, and so on.

The first part of July was spent developing lesson plans centered in the makerspace for the upcoming school year. In partnership with VSVS, teams of Vanderbilt students will travel to Antioch Middle School to teach four lessons per semester in the coming academic year. The first lesson will offer students an overview of engineering and the resources available in the makerspace, and will also give students an opportunity to practice operating the 3D printers. The next lesson will introduce students to computer aided design with Onshape through designing their own geometric succulent pot to 3D print. The final two lessons will be geared towards electrical engineering and will allow students to build a touch-activated alarm and a music-responsive LED circuit. As part of lesson planning, I did a trial run with a group of non-engineering Vanderbilt students to gain feedback. While one student was assembling the touch-activated alarm, she expressed how she wish she had exposure to engineering before college. This reminded me of the importance of early access to engineering. Feeling a sense of belonging in engineering is often difficult, especially for traditionally underrepresented groups. Hands-on experiences and exposure to engineering mentors is crucial. I hope through the lessons and interaction with the makerspace, students will see themselves as future engineers and will feel empowered to build solutions to problems they identify in their lives.

The makerspace is now set up at Antioch Middle School on a rolling cart that teachers can utilize to bring lessons into their classrooms. The 3D printers are calibrated and eagerly waiting the return of students to class. Through conversations this past summer, I've learned about numerous challenges in the K-12 education system and the need for outside support to expand engineering access. As I continue onward into my professional career, I will not forget the privileges afforded to me by Vanderbilt's engineering resources and hope to continue sharing the joys I've found here with those who may not otherwise have exposure to engineering. Finally, I would like to thank the Nichols for making this journey possible and Paige Ellenberger, whose expertise and guidance has been invaluable.





Jaret Rushing '23

Religious Studies, Philosophy

South Asian Language and Culture, Islamic Studies, Mediterranean Studies minors

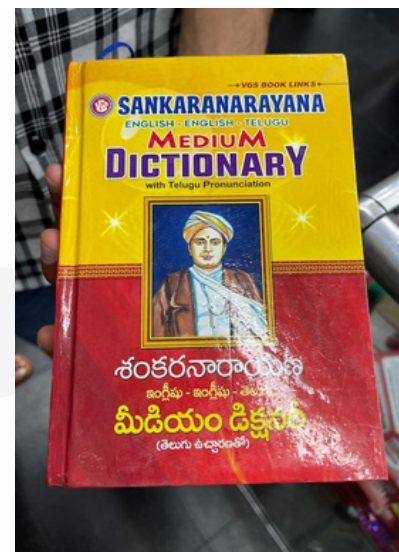
My service project to Cairo has afforded me the opportunity to learn many valuable lessons while being able to contribute something positive to an issue I encountered many times in the course of my studies. Having been made aware of the threatened status of much of the religious heritage we learn about in the classroom, seeing the dilapidated Shurafa Shrine in al-Hattaba was a reminder that theoretical interest (in this case, in Islamic studies) should ideally be combined with concern with real-world change.

In the course of my project, this ethical lesson was complemented by learning about the institutions and processes necessary for effecting that change. I was able to learn about NGOs (especially with regard to how they work in foreign countries), the academic systems abroad that facilitate overseas research and scholarly-humanitarian work, requirements for overseas research, and the general etiquette of working in a foreign, culturally dissimilar environment. While I had assumed that much of the reason for the precarious existence of sites like the Shurafa Shrine was attributable simply to postcolonial poverty and the lack of resources, my trip made me more keenly aware of the negative force that agendas of improvement like economic “modernization” (which are often also social and cultural in motivation) can exert over treasured physical heritage. I have therefore learned that one must be as conscious of overarching governmental programs and systems of power when seeking out the causes of threatened heritage as one is of often vague descriptors like “poverty,” which, while true, remain as only general explanations and can be used to blame victims rather than perpetrators.

Were I able to plan this project again, I would be sure to engage in a bit more preliminary contact with the partnering Egyptian organizations. Coordination in any project is paramount to success, and at times the communication between myself/my advisor and the relevant people at the Megawra Build Foundation could have been smoother with more preparation. Moreover, should I complete a similar project in the future, I will be sure to try and get greater training in the common language of the populace. While Vanderbilt does not teach Egyptian Arabic (and so this could not have really been done), I was nonetheless forced to rely on the linguistic abilities of others to communicate with the residents of Cairo, especially with the often poorer and less educated people of al-Hattaba, the neighborhood to which the Shurafa Shrine is home. This should serve as a reminder that any research endeavor bearing direct, physical relevance to the contemporary world should not be severed from the lives of those it could potentially affect (and from whom the research itself could more greatly benefit, as the residents of al-Hattaba are those who can shed firsthand light on the relationship of the shrine to modern life).

I am immensely thankful to have been able to pursue this opportunity, and I am confident that this experience will aid me in the future in my academic career. Not only have I, so to speak, “learned the ropes” of much of international research, but both the excitement of the endeavor and the aforementioned lessons about issues in humanitarian cultural preservation have motivated me to continue to use my academic passions in fueling real-world change. The opportunity to finally engage my academic passions in a physical, tangible context has made my time at Vanderbilt much richer. Were I to distill my experiences in Cairo down to a single, most valuable lesson, I would say that it is precisely this kind of engagement that makes the humanities truly worthwhile.





Rithvik Sarna '23

Economics and Political Science

For my project, I, along with several other people from the student organization I am a part of, Project RISHI, went to Hyderabad, Telangana, India over the summer to conduct our service project. Our primary goal was to work with rural schools- schools that we've worked with in the past- to get them the necessary supplies and equipment they need to have a better quality of life for both the teachers and students at these schools. Due to the nature of a lot of these schools, it's difficult to get access to things that are rather commonplace in other kinds of schools, especially schools in more urban areas. From more technical computers to TVs used for digital learning to even consistent and reliable internet connection, many of these schools lack these tools that allow for easier and more accessible learning. Additionally, many of these schools also lack proper infrastructure, either lacking proper ways to dispose of waste and have access to cleaner water, or even having basic sanitation that would allow for proper hygiene. As such, it was our goal to help come in and implement long-term solutions for these schools, all the while working with what we had in a rather unfamiliar environment and acquiring problem-solving skills to be a better global citizen.

As a collective group, it was difficult to initially adjust to the environment in which we were working in. From communication to figuring out how we were going to implement what these schools needed, there was a great deal of uncertainty. As such, working with those kinds of conditions allowed us to acquire better problem-solving skills and figure out on how to adjust to an unfamiliar situation. Even in terms of implementation and figuring out what the schools needed, the communication between the students, headmasters, and amongst us in terms of what was needed was different all around.

The students complain about one such thing while the headmasters wished for other things to be implemented in the school all while we had to balance a limited budget and figure out what we could realistically accomplish within the somewhat limited time frame we had in India. However, we were able to consolidate and figure out what we personally think would be best for these schools and that, again, was another skill which we developed was figuring out how to compromise and adjust to what we had to work with. While we wished we could implement classrooms with more equipment, such as rehailing the plumbing system for the girl's restroom in the high school we worked with or installing expensive chemistry lab tables so that the school could conduct a more thorough science class, we could only do so much. We compromised and came to consensus that we could implement a bit of everything, rather than leaving many whole projects behind because of our limitations, all while still having to navigate the ins-and-outs of India and figure out how best we could tackle our problems. Finding appropriate vendors and laborers was perhaps the most difficult task and if there was one thing I would change about our project, should it be done again, is figuring out what kind of work and supplies we would have to purchase for the schools rather than later. Towards the end of our stay in India, we were still attempting to figure out what we needed and spent a bit too much time between figuring out what vendors we would need to visit and what kind of work the school needed (in our case, we fixed and overhauled some of the plumbing in girl's restrooms of the high school).

Overall, the experience of traveling to India and working in an unfamiliar environment and doing the type of work I had never done before was a highly enjoyable and worthwhile experience. After this kind of experience, I would certainly love to do something similar and perhaps under a longer timeframe as well. I now have a greater understanding of restrictions and limitations many schools and communities face, especially as I've never faced them myself having spent all my life in the US. I certainly feel like a better global citizen and hope that the work we did was truly worthwhile not only to myself but to those we hoped to have helped.





Krish Shah '24

Cognitive Studies and Art History
Data Science minor

Project RISHI's mission of promoting sustainability in rural villages in India seemed to be much more idealistic until we embarked on the trip. I have been to India before and many of the schools where my parents grew up were much less developed, but when we first got there, I was shocked at the disparities between the resources that we routinely have access to and the resources that the villages and schools have. We had lodging within Hyderabad city, but we would commute to the village around 4 times a week to survey the school and implement any projects that we thought were necessary. The first day we visited the students and the headmasters, we were greeted with flowers and affection unlike anything we have ever seen or felt before. Many of the students and headmasters gave short speeches talking about how much Project RISHI has done for the school and listening to them felt very inspirational, but nerve-wracking as well because of the responsibility that we had. After visiting the schools and surveying them, I quickly realized that their most basic needs are not being met while we, in America, never have to worry about food or shelter or water. We never have to worry about drinking water that is contaminated with lead or other toxins, and we never have to think about where our next meal will come from. At the high school, the girls bathroom was so dirty that many of them would avoid drinking water so that they didn't have to go to the bathroom. On the other hand, the boys bathroom was recently renovated and had two western toilets alongside 10 urinals. With that in mind, we asked the headmasters how they get their funding, and it was very difficult to discern when the girls bathroom would be renovated so we ended up taking that on as our main project at the high school.

At the primary and pre-primary school, the headmasters were much clearer on what they needed, and we were able to fulfill the majority of their requests which ranged from amplifiers to play nursery rhymes, educational supplies, and English dictionaries. We were unable to meet the children from the primary and pre-primary school, but they seemed to have much more funding from the government due to their academic excellence which was really promising to see.

All in all, this Nichols experience provided me with an opportunity to really take in a service experience and learn what it means to provide for a community that relies on you for funding and resources. I also learned a lot about discussing and assigning priorities for projects based on resource availability, financial support, immediate need, and other factors. Moreover, I am extremely grateful for the support I received from my Project RISHI colleagues when tackling difficult challenges and navigating the language barrier. The Nichols experience was so meaningful and the connections that I made with my group as well as with the students are among those that I will remember and cherish forever.





Rithika Tummala '24

Neuroscience

With my parents being native to India, I would go there on family vacations as a child growing up and notice many cultural and lifestyle differences between India and the US. The Nichols Humanitarian Fund offered me a route to interact with villagers and immerse myself among the locals, in order to implement long-lasting solutions and help them in tangible ways. To me, this was so much more impactful than simply donating money, which is still incredibly valuable, but it allowed me to see the positive consequences of my group's actions as they happened.

I am deeply grateful to have worked alongside Project Rishi members in this service-learning project based in Pamulaparathi, India. We were able to purchase and distribute items to the schools like notebooks, dictionaries, storybooks, a speaker set, and a TV; additionally, we installed two western toilets in the place of previously unusable toilets. I am satisfied that we finished installation and tiling for these toilets in the short time we had, because fixing the bathrooms was emphasized to us by the students.

Throughout this trip, I feel I have grown as a communicator, since I was given the unique opportunity to facilitate necessary conversations between vendors, school staff, and Telugu speaking students, along with my team. This project taught me that with proper planning and utilization of resources, I am capable of creating sustainable solutions in ways that I previously could not have imagined. I developed a vast amount of cultural competency and a stronger sense of understanding for prioritizing certain problems over others, according to our budget. When faced with such tight monetary limits, I was forced to make decisions as to which gaps at the schools we worked with were more important than others, such as sanitary needs versus infrastructure and additional school supplies. For example, the schools had very little technology and innovation, which brought us to a point: we had to decide whether to introduce these new inventions to the schools or focus on improving upon what little books they already had. I also realized firsthand how difficult it is to work with the government and school administration, as timelines are often delayed due to the red tape of internal bureaucracy. Sometimes, even a simple request for funding can take months, or even years, severely halting our progress. In addition, the gender equality gap was something I had always been aware of in America, but in India, I experienced it on an entirely different level. The boys received funding for their sanitary needs before the girls did, leaving the girls with a bathroom that was practically unusable. It only had two working toilets, which was a big issue for a girl student population of 200. This trip genuinely opened my eyes to the realities of life outside of America, from the corruption in government to the severe inequalities facing female students.

If I could do this project again, I would participate in more research prior to leaving for India. In the past, Project RISHI has worked with the same handful of schools in the past, and we are nearing the end of the improvement that we can offer them. We have done our best work, and made a huge difference, and we could benefit from taking our skills to other schools. If I had the opportunity to go back, I would certainly contact other schools and see what other villages are in need of our help. I would also create a stronger action plan in case of liabilities, such as when teachers or plumbers have faulty communication. Something important I want to carry forward into future years is maintaining contact with the vendors that we used this time, because we found very valuable places to buy supplies from, for very reasonable prices.

I would like to end on a note of gratitude to the school faculty, employees, vendors, and students at Pamulaparthi High School, Pamulaparthi Primary School, and Anganwadi Pre-Primary School for facilitating the implementation of our work. To my fellow Project RISHI members on the trip, I appreciate you all being a wonderful group of friends to work and travel with. I would also like to thank Mr. and Mrs. Nichols for the opportunity to conduct social work in a rural community that I would not have otherwise been able to serve.





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