

Serving the Global Community

Future administrators travel to Honduras for a taste of international higher education and service learning

By Nicole Bonomini

This summer, amid the pine-wooded mountains and vivid, bustling markets of Honduras, nine College of Education graduate students explored the country's educational system and the pedagogy of service learning.

Peter Mather, assistant professor of Higher Education, launched this two-week program—which includes the College's first international service-learning course—this year. They toured San Pedro Sula, Catacamas and the capital city, Tegucigalpa, visiting universities for a glimpse of higher education in Honduras.

"In Honduras, we investigated reform movements in higher education and got an up-close look

at how the country's poverty inhibits opportunities," said Mather, a long-time volunteer in Honduras, one of the Western

Service learning, according to Mather, is education in action—with heart. To demonstrate its focus on civic engagement, participants led activities at elementary schools and team-building exercises at the drug and alcohol rehabilitation center CEREPA.

"We were able to set our language, ethnic and economic boundaries aside to have genuine, engaging human interactions," said master's student Megan Karbley.

Back home, participant Liz Hagen reflected on her experiences in the program. "I realized that while Honduras has many institutions of higher education, there is no focus on student affairs. They need to focus their energies on keeping children in primary education, rather than providing extracurricular activities to the privileged college students," she said. "Children (in Honduras) are only required to go to school until they are 14. After that, there is nothing keeping them there."

Overall, Mather aimed to expose students to such challenges in international higher education, while stressing the importance of service learning in all settings. "This program is not just about doing work, but critical reflection as well," Mather said. "Local places like Athens used to be our community, but with the shrinking of the globe, other parts of the world have become part of our lives."

Jana Fryman, another participant, agreed. "In a group discussion one night a classmate showed a map of the world from space...there are no borders on the map, no divide between countries or states. That really struck me," she said. "No matter what language we speak, which country we're from, which socioeconomic standing—we're all humans."

And even if these students never travel again, the values and goals of service learning apply anywhere, Mather says. "Because our students will be administrators, it's important to introduce them to the pedagogy of combining education with social service, which can be done anywhere—in any community, on any college campus."

For the 2008 Honduras trip (June 14–28), Mather and his students will work with an orphanage for children with HIV/AIDS, in addition to their lectures and visits to universities and schools. This trip is open to any Ohio University graduate student in good standing. To learn more about Service Learning in Honduras, visit: <http://www.ohio.edu/educationabroad/programs/LatinAmerica/honduras.cfm>.



2007 Honduras Trip

above: college student personnel graduate students Erin Genide, Megan Karbley and Tywan Banks talk with students in an elementary school in Tegucigalpa, Honduras.

opposite, top: Makiko Yamamoto, graduate student in cultural studies, teaches Ori-gami to students in rural Honduras.

opposite, bottom: Assistant Professor Pete Mather (top center) with students at an elementary school in Tegucigalpa.

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