

SOMOS returns to the Dominican Republic

Front-line engagement: Reports from the field

Following are edited first-person reports by David Aday written during his work in the Dominican Republic in January. (Complete text at www.wm.edu/civicengagement.)

Jan. 1: Thoughts upon departure

Jason Starr, one of the project co-founders, offered the following observation: "Had I not helped start this program, I wouldn't have been qualified to join it." We have witnessed a project taking on a life of its own. I find myself running full speed to keep up with the students who own and operate this remarkable effort.

Jan. 3: Settling in

We arrived yesterday to sunny, 87 degree weather. With five doctors, one physician's assistant, two registered pharmacists, 13 undergraduates, and me, we constitute a motley crew. We'll spend the day counting and sorting pills, bagging them with labels and instructions. We'll go to the community to make sure that the clinic site is ready and that things are in place for the research effort.

Jan. 5: Clinic and water

We've seen more than 400 patients, mostly young women and their children. We seem to have more than usual of the ever-present "grippe," a general syndrome that involves flu-like conditions, lack of energy, and assorted pains in the stomach



Matt Harrington

A SOMOS roving medical team makes a house call.

and head. It seems mostly like a malaise reflecting a general sense of helplessness and despair.

The research team is focused on describing residents' problems in accessing clean drinking water. Our roving medical providers see in their homes patients who are too sick to walk to the clinic. This is important because we're getting the word to the community that we intend to help everyone, not just those who have the resources to ensure their place in the line of our school-based medical effort.

Jan. 6: Mucking with Nichol

Rain again and the field research and medical teams return to the clinic tired,

wet, sticky, and with a strong sense of accomplishment. President Nichol has mucked along with us through roads and paths that, with rain, offer up a nice soup of mud, litter, and pig excrement. In the barrios, residents dismiss our muddied shoes and trousers and insist that we come inside. [The physicians] find stroke victims, some as young as 30, who need medicine, information, and advice.

Mohammad Torabinejad was part of a research group that worked in the community in the summer. His presence opens doors and hearts throughout the community. Progress sometimes is slow because everyone wants to spend time with "Mo." After a late dinner, students listen as

About the team

The Student Organization for Medical Outreach and Sustainability (SOMOS) returned to the Dominican Republic for its third project visit to the village of Paraiso in January. Assisted by Gene Nichol, president of the College, it conducted research on access to uncontaminated water in addition to hosting a week-long medical clinic, complete with free medicine. The January group featured the largest medical team assembled for the project, ensuring that service was provided to more people in the clinic and to patients who could not make it to the facility. In addition, 13 students were on site from Jan. 2 through Jan. 9.

their president offers encouragement and support, and speaks with insight into the intricacies and promises of this novel project in research, learning, and service. In turn, "Nick" listens to the ideas, concerns, and aspirations of students more determined—and likely—to change the world than any I've known.

Jan. 9: Saying goodbye

Saying our goodbyes in the community is difficult. We see the desperate needs of the residents, and they see, I'm sure, our sense of helplessness in not being able to do more.

There is "coco y aqua" to provide sweet water as a special gift from the school principal. There are pictures, smiles, and hugs all around.

Nichol engaged: W&M president volunteers with SOMOS

Gene Nichol, president of William and Mary, volunteered as a member of SOMOS (see above). Below are excerpts from his first-person assessment of that experience.

An inspiration

I came to Santo Domingo a year ago to express my strong admiration for the SOMOS program. I hoped to shine a small light on such a remarkable and heartening student effort. I came this week for a second time for quite different reasons. The students of Paraiso hardly need my stumbling words to acknowledge their accomplishment. But I have found them to be a powerful source of both inspiration and perspective. These days in January can serve as vibrant and indelible reminders of what matters in the months and years to come.

Extraordinary students

In a week-long clinic, a remarkable number of patients were seen. Most had enjoyed no access to healthcare services since SOMOS was here last January. But after three years of determined effort by the program's leaders... faces are familiar, smiles are ready, discipline is marked, and the challenges and inspirations of engaging poverty and global inequality on a personal level yield success, heartbreak, humility, exhaustion and, on occasion, joy. Dr. Ramon Lopez, my friend and our principal Dominican Republic liaison, indicated that it



Courtesy of SOMOS

Nichol serves in the Paraiso pharmacy as a volunteer.

is extraordinarily rare to see such a sustained, multi-faceted, coordinated, determined, and substantive effort marshaled by university students. He is surprised. Having been president of the College for nearly three years, I'm not.

Poverty and kindness

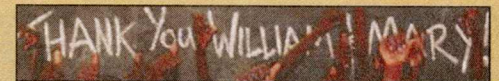
The starkness of the poverty shakes the freshmen witnessing its intensity for the first time. Pushing past pigs on garbage heaps, hordes of dogs and swarms of flies, they enter homes that often make the shotgun shacks of the Old South seem both luxurious and secure by comparison. But inside the dwellings they encounter a cleanliness and organization that defies circumstance. And they experience a hospitality that defies description. The young scholars prepare not only for the more effective delivery of medical services but for the future development of a pilot clean water project. I have little doubt they will bring both to fruition.

Lighting the candle

Intrepid doctors and their student collaborators climb the hills (amidst extremely potent daily rains) to reach the more acutely ill who cannot make it to the clinic. They see daunting challenges: Dominicans with various cancers, diabetes, pneumonia, elevated blood pressures and the stroke victims associated with them, heart-rending birth defects, and dozens of pregnant women yet to receive pre-natal care. But the students have chosen to light a candle rather than curse the darkness. And they have become all the more determined that their life-changing project become a sustainable one.

Beacon of the future

The SOMOS program may well be a beacon for the future. I'm convinced that the liberal arts college of the coming decades will heavily incorporate sophisticated undergraduate research, impressive exercises in civic engagement beyond the walls of the campus, and an enthusiastic embrace of internationalization. It is, at bottom, the effort of gifted and selfless young women and men to give back to those less privileged than themselves. It reflects the belief that service to mankind is the obligation of advanced citizenship. And that the history and the mission of this ancient College call its members to make powerful contributions to our national and international life.



William and Mary students are leading the engagement revolution. To celebrate the culture of service that has propelled them to the forefront, a new civic-engagement Web page has been posted. It contains extended versions of stories in this flier, many with multi-media components. www.wm.edu/civicengagement

Service numbers

323,000

At latest count (2006 survey), William and Mary students contributed more than 323,000 service hours.

90%

90 percent of William and Mary students volunteered in their community after graduation (2006 survey).

5th

The College ranked 5th in the number of graduates who joined the Peace Corps (medium-size universities).

#1

The College had the most international service trips of the schools participating in the non-profit group Breakaway.

Recent initiatives

Phoenix Project

The summer of 2006 marked the start of a long-term partnership between William and Mary and the economically disadvantaged city of Petersburg, Va., as 15 undergraduate and graduate students lived and worked in the community, creating lasting bonds and laying the foundation for the years to come. The students partnered with the Phoenix Project, a nonprofit organization that works to strengthen the nonprofit sector in Virginia communities and train the next generation of nonprofit leaders. William and Mary students contributed more than \$190,000 in tangible labor to organizations within the Petersburg municipality in just the first two months of the program.

www.phoenixproject.org

Back Porch Energy Initiative

The BPEI was born when alums Virginia Walters ('07) and Gina Sobel ('07) decided to fuel their post-graduation road trip with bio-diesel. In short order, they proposed to stop at sites along their route to promote energy consciousness. The duo drafted three other alums for its founding board, added a friend from Connecticut College and arranged for 12 William and Mary undergraduates to provide logistical support as interns.

www.backporchenergy.org

Campus Kitchen

Students launched Campus Kitchen's 12th collegiate branch in October. The William and Mary chapter collects food from Trader Joe's, A Gift from Ben (a local food pantry) and the Williamsburg Farmers Market and turns the donations into prepared meals it delivers to various housing complexes in Williamsburg and to Avalon (a women's shelter). The national organization is sponsored by Robert Egger's D.C. Kitchen. Present at the chapter kick-off, Egger said, "You all are so radically on the ground. It is reassuring to see the brains that we have at this campus, and you can show us what philanthropy in the future will look like."

www.wm.edu/so/campuskitchensproject

SHH: Fujiyama's service revolution

"There exists no other place in the world where a culture of service permeates the community as strongly as it does at William and Mary. With the abundant resources at the College's Office of Student Volunteer Services, the unfailing support from the president and ... the demand from the student body for international service opportunities, William and Mary is not only realizing this phenomena but creating it."

—Cosmo Fujiyama ('07)



Fujiyama

Founded by Cosmo Fujiyama ('07) and her brother Shin, a graduate of the University of Mary Washington, Students

Helping Honduras has raised more than \$350,000 to help an orphanage in the remote village of El Progreso, Honduras, providing various forms of assistance to these orphaned children including infrastructure, supplies and financial

assistance. Started on the campuses of UMW and W&M, the organization has grown to encompass thousands of committed students from various chapters at college campuses across the country, including the University of Virginia, Virginia Tech, Georgetown University, Virginia Commonwealth University and Christopher Newport University.

On Dec. 17, 2007, the organization broke ground on a housing project that will address root causes of poverty in the village of Siete de Abril. www.studentshelpinghonduras.org

Srour in Africa: Building Tomorrow

Founded and operated by alumnus George Srour ('05), Building Tomorrow began as an initiative at William and Mary and now is a nationwide nonprofit organization linking college students at 10 campuses with the educational building projects in Sub-Saharan Africa. The organization already has built one school in the region and two more are scheduled for completion in 2008. Construction is scheduled to begin on three more. In addition to the infrastructure, the organization



Srour

is providing programs in microfinance, AIDS awareness and outreach, and home-based counseling to surrounding

communities. The organization's work has been recognized by Nobel Prize recipient Archbishop Desmond Tutu who now serves as Building Tomorrow's honorary chairman.

www.buildingtomorrow.org

"Whenever I get a tug on the shoulder and realize there's a need somewhere that I might be able to help with, I've just put my heart to it and have tried to do all I can."

"In all I've done, I've been helped by wonderful people, be they students or administrators [at William and Mary]. ... That's made projects like this truly exciting."

—George Srour

Pelco: Power of service-learning

Every day, college students deliver meals to the elderly, pick up trash along the highways, and build houses for complete strangers. Although the students can walk away from their experiences with broadened horizons and good feelings, they may not take away much real learning.

But by having students partner with faculty and community members to incorporate academic learning into service, students can take their service further and become leaders in civic engagement. And Lynn Pelco, William and Mary's Sharpe Professor for Civic Engagement, is helping students do just that.

"The very wonderful thing about the William and Mary students is that they are seeking out what I call thick civic engagement activities," she said. "They are helping to build homes, working in soup kitchens, traveling to developing countries—they see the issues and they come back to the resources we have in our faculty at the College and say, 'Teach me how to think through these problems. Give me the skills, the knowledge and the wherewithal to go out and make a difference so that people won't need a soup kitchen.'"

One of the primary ways that students at William and Mary have become involved in



Pelco sits for a video interview.

service-learning is through the Sharpe Community Scholars program. The program accepts about 75 freshmen annually and involves participating students in coursework that integrates community engagement and academic learning. Sharpe Scholars, their faculty instructors, and community partners

work collaboratively to develop community-based research projects, and throughout the year the Sharpe Scholars work to implement these projects.

Pelco said that by taking students out of the classroom and having them tackle real problems, they learn at a much deeper level.

"In that process, they do a lot and develop a lot of the skills you need to become an engaged civic leader," said Pelco. "Things like building

consensus in a group, deliberating, and getting across your perspective as well as listening and understanding other people's perspectives."

As a professor who has worked mainly with graduate students, Pelco has been amazed at just how much the freshmen have been able to accomplish. "We don't know how far they can go in terms of the depth of their involvement—in research activities, collaborating in the community, establishing programs—until we let them have those opportunities," said Pelco.

"The very wonderful thing about the William and Mary students is that they are seeking out what I call thick civic engagement activities."

—Lynn Pelco

Action vs. protest

Perkey defends her generation

Critics who charge that the current generation of college students has failed to engage the affairs of the nation miss the mark, according to William and Mary senior Angela Perkey.

"Just because we don't protest, we don't take a stand verbally, does not mean we are not engaged," Perkey said. "Instead of just speaking up or going to a protest, our generation acts. We get out there and ... we solve the problems that we see facing our community and our generation."



Perkey

"Instead of just speaking up or going to a protest, our generation acts. ... Actions speak louder than words."

—Angela Perkey

Actions speak louder than words." Perkey, who very much is a product of the service-learning culture at William and Mary, has acted. In 2006, fresh from a service-grant funded research project that tackled the issue of obesity in her hometown of Nashville, Tenn., she founded Students Serve, an organization that provides similar grants to help undergraduates at other universities apply the service-learning model. Just one year later, one student used a Students Serve grant to address youth violence in Austin, Texas, by offering art creation as a non-aggressive outlet; in

Raleigh, N.C., another student created a medical rehabilitation service that acquires equipment—power wheelchairs and walkers—from local hospitals and refurbishes them prior to distribution to low-income residents. The common thread is each is forging academic knowledge with civic engagement to effect change, Perkey said.

Students Serve is fully directed by undergraduates at the College of William and Mary, a fact that brings it incredible vitality but that also has proven a fundraising liability. Even as they prepare to approve additional grants, the directors of Students Serve are doggedly working to solicit funds to extend service-learning opportunities. They are employing both Web-specific and traditional marketing strategies to get their word out, and they are networking with strategic university-centered groups to help others grasp the service-learning vision.

"Protesting can only go so far," Perkey explained. "If you aren't in political power—and college students are not—you can only do so much, but with service-learning, you have the ability to use your convictions and act upon them to create change. That to me, and to our generation, is much more valuable."