

International Social Work: Academic Service Learning in Jamaica

"International Social Work: Academic Service Learning in Jamaica". This course has been approved by the School of social Work as a three credit elective course for Winter term 2012. This course includes both an introduction to Jamaican customs and culture, and an experience of social work in an international setting. Service learning will be an essential focus, within the context of a less developed country.

This elective course is designed to be offered during winter break, and will include an experiential component of traveling to Jamaica for the entire winter break as a group. Two faculty will be working with the student group, and will be coordinating the service learning projects. Students, in small teams of 3-4 people, will be assigned to service learning projects in the local area. These projects will involve either children, youth, or macro projects with the community as a whole.

The Saturday all day orientation two weeks prior to the trip will also include a faculty-led seminar on the issues of cultural competency. This will be an initial introduction to Jamaican culture in general and to the history of the parish where the service learning activities will take place. We will also address issues and challenges for Jamaicans and other immigrants who live in this country, and increase students understanding of US ties to the Caribbean. The follow-up session that is 3 weeks following the trip will allow students to process their experience and to work together on a presentation that can be presented to the School of Social Work and to various classes and events (e.g., MLK Day, Undergraduate Symposium, etc.).

For the entire trip, faculty and students will be in Bluefield's, a fishing village on the southwest coast, which is an hour drive from the major international airport of Montego Bay. It is within the same time zone as Michigan. The community in Bluefield's has been very active in organizing a community center, a community pre-school ("Basic School") and a new high school ("Bluefield's Academy"). There are also efforts currently to develop a local farmer's market., and the local Ann Arbor Rotary Club has funded a grant to assist with the farmer's market. A number of academics and students from multiple schools in Missouri, New York, and Portland, Oregon have been visiting Bluefield's on a regular basis. There is currently work on an archeological "dig", with the idea of developing a local museum, and geological faculty and students have been researching the local rivers. There are few tourists in Bluefield's, although hundreds of tourists are driven through in buses going to the Sandals resort at Whitehouse, about 10 miles away. There has been excellent community leadership in this community, and they are very welcoming towards our students and faculty. Our presence is seen as a positive contribution to the local economy and to community development.

There are three service learning projects that have been negotiated with local community leaders. One will be with the community pre-school, and will involve assisting the teachers in the groups with 3 year olds, 4 year olds, and 5 year olds. This can include reading stories, assisting individual children with assignments, and overseeing recess activities. This group will also conduct an inventory and needs assessment to see what other resources could be the focus of fundraising when they return back to campus. The second

project involves mentoring high school students at the "Belmont Academy", and working together with them in collecting data for the community survey. We will work to assign students early to this group so that they can make contact with their mentee over Skype before we arrive for the week. This mentoring can also involve assisting with homework assignments, exchanging information about computers and social networking sites, etc. Students in this project group will also be assisting Dr. Reaves in conducting parenting skill training classes for parents and teachers, depending on scheduling. Students in this group will have their mornings free and their afternoons structured, in order to adjust to the after-school schedule of the teens. The third group will focus more on community/macro issues, and will be involved with interviewing community leaders to identify major issues as seen by these key informants, and then coding and analyzing the data from the community survey. They will be responsible for reporting out these results on the Friday of the week we are there. Data will be collected on Saturday and Sunday by all students, together with the high school mentees and members of the local Friendly Fishers Society. All students will be accompanied by a local adult in gathering door to door survey data.

For a daily schedule, students will spend the morning at their service learning project, and the afternoons will include time for working on their journals, reading, exploring the community, and taking bus tours of the surrounding community.

Evenings will consist of a series of faculty-led seminars, class discussions about the day's events, and guest speakers from the local community. One seminar in particular will focus on the topic of slavery, a comparison of slavery in Jamaica and the US, and the generational impact of slavery in present day. A part of this discussion will be the issue of white privilege and white guilt, as well as the impact of master-slave relations on the present day. In the afternoon following this seminar will be an afternoon trip to a local plantation that still has the buildings that housed previous slaves and shows their workspaces. Guest speakers throughout the week will include a Peace Corps volunteer, a local Rastafarian artist, and local community leaders who will speak about Jamaica customs and culture. Another faculty-led seminar will focus on international social work, and it will be paired with the guest speaker from the Peace Corps.