



# INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

Published by the National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development (NISOD) • College of Education • The University of Texas at Austin

## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF AN OVERSEAS COLLEGE SERVICE PROJECT

In December 2004, ten students and three faculty from Hillsborough Community College in Tampa, participated in a humanitarian undertaking in Ghana, Africa. The service project—to build houses for the needy—came under the auspices of Habitat for Humanity. The student group, the World Humanity Club, a campus affiliate of Habitat for Humanity International, had participated in building homes in the Tampa Bay community and was now ready to go global. The “Ghana Project” service in that country was a life-affecting experience. Along the way—pre-and post-trip—students made public service announcements, raised funds, developed an educational website, created a documentary, and gave presentations in the community.

What was the significance of this project? Why go overseas for service? HCC’s World Humanity Club (WHC) was already serving the local community by volunteering with the local Habitat for Humanity, and the cost of the trip was hardly inexpensive. Could we have “helped” more by just donating the money to the charity? Could students have been taught the cultural perspectives just as well within a classroom setting? What tangible and intangible benefits came from our physical presence in Ghana that would justify the time, expense, and effort of the trip?

In short, the rewards were tremendous. The ten students who traveled to Africa have been affected profoundly by the experience. Several students have chosen working for a non-profit as a career goal, wanting to dedicate their lives to serving communities in need. Most of the students have become more involved in campus activities, student government, and their studies. In addition, they have been recognized for their service and leadership, and represented the school well in the media and in the community. Several students have made plans to return to Ghana and continue their service there. The club photographer has been invited

to present his collection in two local galleries, and several students published articles, poems, and images in the college’s literary magazines. Our videographer screened a feature documentary of our experience at the Ybor Festival of the Moving Image. Not only did students learn about TV/radio production, grant writing, education, and marketing, but they also made vital contributions to our campus and community.

### Acquiring First-Hand Experience of Another Culture

- Students became familiar with the culture through pre-trip research and first-hand experience, including the area’s geography, religion, values, and arts (music, dance, traditions, sculpture).
- Students gained an understanding of the roles of poverty and social action via pre-trip research into poverty, economics, history, and social action in Ghana, as well as first-hand observation.
- Students were immersed in the culture, working alongside the local inhabitants, living in the area, and participating in cultural events. This immersion offered a deeper level of insight into the Ghanaian people and their values, traditions, environment, history, and needs, a level of understanding not usually found on vacation or in reading. Learning was enhanced via daily journal writing and discussions. Students reflected during the creation of a documentary, the chronicling of their experiences in a written text, and their public presentations.
- Because of the close relationship with the local people, especially the children, students increased their awareness of a global culture, integrating ideas and becoming aware of the differences and similarities between the Ghanaian culture and their own.

### Serving Communities

Students served their local community through the Hillsborough County Habitat for Humanity recycle and building programs, logging in hundreds of hours working to build housing for those in need in the Tampa area.

Students served the HCC Ybor Campus community, recruiting students to our campus by volunteering at



recruitment fairs and highlighting their international experience. Students gave formal presentations, sharing their experience with peers through individual classroom visits and lecture presentations for Black History Month. They created an exhibit of African artifacts brought back from Ghana and contributed to the school newspaper and student literary magazines. Students made numerous contributions to the campus website with hundreds of photos, a video of the Ghana trip, personal messages from abroad, and educational material.

Off campus, the Club has made dozens of presentations to children in local public schools, promoting the college, travel to Africa, and decent housing for all people. The Club also provided free educational materials to the schools.

### Enhancing Life Skills

Enhanced life skills benefit students during their academic program and throughout a lifetime of personal, family, community, and employment participation.

- Acquiring practical skills in basic construction theory and techniques, students were able to work in roofing, window fitting, door lock insertion, and block and wood construction methods. By contrasting American techniques with the Ghanaian techniques, students became aware of some of the basic forms for building homes worldwide.
- By creating films, including a public access television commercial and a documentary film about the experience, students gained expertise in the processes of scripting, shooting, performance, and/or editing.
- Students contributed to a book which chronicled their experiences and served as a guide for other schools. Their contributions not only enhanced their reflection on the experiences, but also their writing skills. All students participated by writing about their "assignments" pre-trip, such as the webpage design and fundraising, and personally reflecting on their experience. Students were encouraged to work with the college's writing center to edit and re-write their material to a high standard.
- Students improved their communication skills through the pre- and post-trip interactions with local public schools and the campus. These interactions included oral presentations, creation of web-based lesson units for K-12 students, and oral presentations for HCC faculty, staff, and students.
- Students experienced numerous teamwork activities throughout the entire process, a high priority in today's academic and work environments.
- Students gained knowledge and understanding of successful fundraising for non-profits. Students

brainstormed and then analyzed potential activities, considering such factors as up-front money and time-constraints.

- Information technology skills were increased during the building of a club and an educational website about Ghana.

### Strengthening Student/College Bonds

Student involvement helped enhance a sense of belonging with the college. Because of their involvement with the service team and their close work with faculty and administration, students enhanced their sense of belonging with the institution. Students took ownership of the project, splendidly represented the college, and truly desired to give back to the college community following the trip.

### Faculty Benefits

Being immersed in the Ghanaian culture, the faculty gained knowledge of the African culture and brought back first-hand information about the arts, environment, values, traditions, and politics of the region. The knowledge we gained will be incorporated into our respective curricula. Additionally, the faculty developed an enhanced multicultural perspective of the global humanistic tradition, a vital experience.

### Internationalizing the Curriculum

Students must be prepared to work and compete effectively in a global and multi-cultural environment. This project promoted awareness of and openness to the Ghanaian culture and its perspectives, and assisted in moving students closer toward the goal of global competency.

The Ghana Project not only offered a rich, complex experience for the students and faculty, but benefited the college and local community, as well. The far-reaching effects began to pay for themselves immediately.

**Susan McClung**, *Instructor, Humanities*

For further information, contact the author at Hillsborough Community College, Ybor City Campus, PO Box 5096, Tampa, FL 33675-5096.  
e-mail: smcclung@hccfl.edu

