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International Service-Learning: For A World Of Difference

by Linda A. Chisholm, Ph.D.

"My friends who have graduated tell me that employers want to know what job have held and whether they have been overseas. How can I do those things while in college?" students ask.

They are not alone. This is the question many students ask as they look to the future. Organizations of all kinds--private business, not-for-profits, and governmental agencies--seek employees who understand the workplace and can fit appropriately into the team. Because so much in today's world requires skills of intercultural/international communication and cooperation, employers are especially interested in candidates who have shown that they can perform in such settings.

International service-learning is one option for college and university students, allowing them simultaneously to study and earn college credits and to perform substantive and responsible service in a community agency abroad.

The International Partnership for Service-Learning is the best known of the organizations that offer such opportunities. Programs lasting a semester, a year or summer in eleven different locations around the world attract students from more than 300 U.S. and Canadian colleges and universities. More than 20 percent of students are from minority backgrounds; of this 20 percent, most are African Americans.

Just What the Doctor Ordered

One of the early Partnership students was Tasha Jiles [Ford] from St. Augustine, Raleigh, NC. Now a practicing physician specializing in internal medicine and pediatrics in Memphis, TN, Dr. Jiles [Ford] was a 20-year-old collegian when she enrolled in the service-learning program in England. There she earned college credits in courses related to the culture of Great Britain and its social welfare system.

As part of the semester program, she worked some 20 hours each week in a psychiatric ward and assisted mentally disabled outpatients in the community. "I taught social skills, such as how to shop and cook and helped them to be as self-sustained as possible," she reports, "and this experience awakened my desire to be a doctor and convinced me that I could be a good one." After graduation from St. Augustine's, Tasha attended medical school at the University of North Carolina.

When Tasha left for England, she thought that she would be shut up in a room

somewhere with thousands of books. "Instead," she says, "I sat in on staff meetings and read reports about clients before actually meeting them. I took blood pressure, assisted in deliveries, and went on ward rounds, giving hands-on care and serving the community directly."

Future Teacher Learns Lesson For Life

A more recent African-American student is Damani Aaquil. A 21 year old college student at Manchester Community College in Connecticut, Damani was pursuing his major in social services and his interests in education and in African studies. He selected the Partnership program in Jamaica in the Spring of 1996.

"With such an opportunity," he said, "I enjoyed successful experiences in teaching, program planning, community development and networking. While in Jamaica I learned about Jamaican culture, history, literature, and current events both through my classes and through informal debates with fellow students at the College of Science, and Technology in Kingston."

"I was then challenged to digest and re-teach this information to my students at the Jamaican Movement for the Advancement of Literacy. This re-teaching is a prime example of how teaching and service are reinforced in the program. I discovered my primary role as a translator and mentor," he adds.

"I could take no knowledge for granted, however. Some of the 17- and 18-year olds could not spell their names! Now they write to me in the States, and I respond personally and correct their writing. It has helped me reconfirm my goal to be a teacher."

Finding The Right Program For You

How do students find such programs that combine study and service or other types of internships? How does the study they do overseas get credited toward the degree at the home college? How do they find the financial resources for such learning experiences?

First, there are directories available in college and university libraries and study abroad offices. Peterson's publishes a number of helpful guides: Study Abroad, Academic Year Abroad, Internships 1997. Other books include Volunteer! published by the Council for International Education Exchange; The Peace Corps and More published by Global Exchange; and Making a Difference College Guide: Educating for a Better World, by Sage Press.

In researching the program that is right for you, do not hesitate to call the sponsoring organization's office and ask questions such as these: How long has the program existed? What is the philosophy behind the program? With and for whom will you be working? What kind of advising, support, and supervision will you have? What academic institution is responsible for your classes? What are the living arrangements? What does the program fee include? You may ask for the phone numbers of previous students to get their reports on the program's quality. You also want to ask about the number of African-American student participants in the organization's programs each year and for the names of the colleges they attend.

the U.S.

Make Sure Travel Study Counts

Once you have selected a program, you must discuss it with your academic advisor, dean, or study abroad officer to ensure that the academic work you will do overseas can be credited toward your degree. In some programs, the academic work is proscribed; in other cases, you may select from an extensive list of courses just you would on your own campus. Remember though that as on your own campus every course in the catalog is taught every semester, so you and your home college should be flexible.

The foreign university at which you do your academic work may issue a transcript indicating completion of your studies. This transcript is sent to your home campus which records the courses and credits as part of your requirements for graduation.

How To Pay for Study Abroad

But how do you pay for it? Programs of study abroad, service-learning, and study-internships vary widely in price. When you inquire about costs be sure to find out just what the fee includes. Do you pay separately for housing, food, travel, and other costs include these?

If your college or university permits you to go abroad and credits your studies on your return, you may apply federal financial aid and loans to the cost of the program. Other types of scholarships may not apply. You will need to investigate. Ask your advisor, dean or financial aid office.

Students selecting service-learning programs have raised money from such service organizations as churches, Rotary, or Kiwanis Clubs. These grants are usually small or less, but several of them can add up.

All of the above advice suggests that you should start planning early for study abroad or service-learning programs. It takes time to find the right program, get the academic approval, secure a passport and visa, and put together your finances.

Benefits of Study Abroad

Is it worth it? You bet! Like Jiles and Aaquil, you will find your horizons broadened. Service-learning gives you work experience, academic advancement, and living abroad all at the same time. "I hardly recognize my students when they return," Professor Barbara Tazewell, who directs the international service-learning at St. Augustine's. "Even though they have been gone only one semester, they return poised and confident with the practical knowledge of how to get around the world that they seem to have grown by years instead of months."

Dr. Thomas Law, President of St. Paul's College, an HBCU in Lawrenceville, Georgia, has summarized his students' experience in service-learning abroad through the Partnership: "Our students have been enriched and renewed by these adventure parts unknown and find upon their return that their lives will never be the same

For a catalogue of Partnership programs in the Czech Republic, Ecuador, England, France, India, Israel, Jamaica, Mexico, Philippines, Scotland, and South Dakota (with Native Americans), contact the following:

The International Partnership for Service-Learning

815 Second Avenue

Suite 315

New York, NY 10017

(212) 986-0989

pslntny@aol.com

<http://www.studyabroad.com/travelstudy>

LINDA A. CHISHOLM, Ph.D. is Vice President of The International Partnership for Service-Learning and President, Association of Episcopal Colleges.

Global Study Directory

BOSTON UNIVERSITY INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMS

Description: Language/Liberal Arts and Global Internship Programs in Beijing, China; Dresden, Germany; Grenoble, France; Haifa, Israel; London, England; Madrid, Spain; Moscow, Russia; Niamey, Niger; Orange Walk, Belize; Oxford, England; Padova, Italy; Paris, France; Quito, Ecuador; Sydney, Australia; Washington, DC, U.S.A.

Subject: Vary by site.

Dates: Fall and Spring semester; Summer term, or full academic year.

Eligibility: All majors are accommodated.

Housing: Homestays, apartments, dormitories, kibbutz.

Scholarship: Merit and/or need-based.

Financial Aid: \$200-\$1000 for Fall/Spring; \$100-\$1250 for summer.

Deadline: October 15 for Spring; March 15 for Fall/Summer

Cost: \$8600-\$13,810 for Fall/Spring; \$3950-\$8900 for Summer (depend on the program).

Contact: Brian Whalen; Boston University International Programs, 232 1 State Road, Boston, MA 02215

Phone: 617-353-988

E-mail: abroad@bu.edu URL: <http://web.bu.edu/abroad>

Shyaam Bachmann's

African Ties

Shyaam Bachmann is an outstanding example of a collegian with African ties. A few summers ago, he helped Ghanaians lay the foundation for the new health clinic

research center being built in Asamang-Ashanti. The small center, now complete, is designed to support research of tropical diseases plaguing Ghanaian villagers. The center is dedicated to improving and expanding the knowledge of health-care, especially of tropical and infectious diseases, among Asamang-Ashanti villagers. Health-care services in Asamang-Ashanti are poor. Villagers lack adequately trained staff, other facilities are dilapidated, and the center has few essential supplies or drugs, syringes, gloves, and disinfectants. The new health clinic and research center has relieved some of the distress, but the small clinic still needs staff and more. Each summer Shyaam Bachman returns to Asamang-Ashanti to help his Ghanaian friends. He encourages other collegians to spend their summers there assisting the clinic. When he completes his medical degree he expects to be even more helpful to his Ghanaian friends. If you see the severe health condition under which so many Asamang-Ashanti villagers live, you will perhaps join Shyaam Bachmann next summer when he returns to Asamang-Ashanti.

Shyaam Bachmann is now a collegian majoring in molecular biology at Hampton University, Hampton, VA. He has a four-year scholarship for his pre-med. curriculum at Hampton. The son of Dwight and Portia Bachmann, he comes from Farmington, CT. To help or for more information, contact the following:

David A. Asante, executive Director, Community Rural Health Project, Konya Brenhoma, P.O. Box 7, Asamang-Ashanti, Ghana, West Africa. Or email Dr. Y. Nsiah,

NSIAH@ECSU.CTSTATEU.EDU.

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