For Immediate Release: Jan. 28, 2010  
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www.ship.edu/honors

Ship Students Travel to Dominican Republic to Work with Child Centers

A group of Shippensburg University Honors Program students and faculty have returned home from a week in the Dominican Republic, where they visited child development centers to implement a language arts curriculum that they created last fall.

Eleven SU students and three faculty traveled to Santo Domingo, the country’s capital, from Jan. 10 to 16, introducing the curriculum at five child development centers. The privately-run centers provide supplemental instruction for elementary students since the regular school day in the Dominican Republic is less than three hours long.

“Eighty percent of children in the D.R. don’t even get past the fifth grade,” said Katie Marshall, a marketing/finance major from Chambersburg. “Our goal was to do all we could to enhance the children’s education.”

The Ship students designed the curriculum as their capstone project for the Honors Program and the focus of a fall semester Honors colloquium on social entrepreneurship. Social entrepreneurs identify a social problem (for example, inadequate education among a poor population) and pioneer an innovative solution (an age-appropriate curriculum that can be replicated at multiple centers in multiple Dominican communities).

The curriculum incorporates hands-on activities to help the children improve their English reading, speaking, and writing skills. Topics range from colors and numbers to family, sports, and technology. The materials are bi-lingual, self-explanatory, and self-correcting.

As part of the project—titled Reach Out: Enhancing Education in the Dominican Republic—the Honors Colloquium students partnered with students from Grace B. Luhrs University Elementary School to hold a school supply drive prior to the trip. Luhrs classes collected dozens of boxes of construction paper, scissors, pencils, erasers, and crayons for the colloquium students to take with them.

Accompanying the students to Santo Domingo were Dr. Kim Klein, SU Honors Program director, Dr. José Ricardo, SU modern languages professor, and Mrs. Mary Burnett, SU international programs director.

“Throughout the fall semester, the students worked in interdisciplinary teams responsible for strategy, operations, finance, and public relations,” said Dr. Klein. “It took each student playing a role for this project to be executed successfully.”
In order to cover project expenses, the Honors students wrote grants, held fundraisers on and off campus, and partnered with local businesses and community members. A complete list of contributors can be found at www.ship.edu/honors/reachout.

“We don’t want this project to be a once-and-done thing,” said Abby Montler, a sophomore elementary education major from State College. “We’re looking at ways to make it sustainable and to keep the collaboration going between the Honors Program, Shippensburg University, and the Dominican centers.”

For complete details about Reach Out: Enhancing Education in the Dominican Republic and photos from the students’ trip, visit www.ship.edu/honors/reachout.

The Honors Program at Shippensburg University provides an outstanding undergraduate experience that emphasizes scholarship, leadership, and service. The program is made up of 150 students who are chosen based on academic achievement, intellectual curiosity, and evidence of leadership and civic engagement. Students benefit from small classes, outstanding instruction, exciting research, study abroad, and internship opportunities, and special social and cultural activities. For more information, visit www.ship.edu/honors.