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Learning Through Teaching in Haiti

Kelsey Sajdera, College of Agriculture

At the start of my trip to Haiti, I could only think, “What have I gotten myself into?” I was so nervous about going to a developing country—a country that was so different from my own. I could not imagine what it would be like getting off the plane. However, landing in Haiti, I knew I had made a life-changing decision. Our group of twenty students and two faculty members traveled to Haiti with the purpose of teaching about animals and food security. The class was divided into six teams: poultry, crops, goats and meat, chemistry, bio-digester, and food and water safety. I was placed on the crops team. Our team decided to teach about seed and row spacing, seed depth, storage, and irrigation. The presentation portion was designed to explain U.S. practices for better crop production. The overall goal was to give them resources and ways to make their crop production more efficient by using our examples from home. The demonstration showed them how to measure rows and dig the proper depth for the seed. In addition, we showed our partners how to check soil moisture by using a probe and by using their hands. We made sure that we taught our hosts ways that would be practical for them. Thus, it would allow their students and others to apply the knowledge that we taught to their own fields and gardens at the university.

A Haitian quote that stuck with me after my trip goes, “The purpose of life is not to make money, but to use your talents to serve the world.” This quote could not have been more relevant to our service-learning project. We traveled to Haiti not because we were getting paid, not because we had to, and not because we were getting

a grade. We went to serve the people, by using our talents and skills learned through our classes at Purdue. I thought my purpose was to teach the people of Haiti, but to my surprise, they taught me more than I taught them. They taught me life lessons—to be thankful for every opportunity, to cherish each moment that we live, and to give back even when we feel like we cannot. They taught me what my purpose in life is. I do not need to be rich, but I need to be happy doing whatever it is I decide to do. I want to use my talents to better serve the world in which we live.

I was learning while giving my lessons, as well as during the seminar that their students put on for us. There were so many unique experiences that I would never have experienced at home or on campus. I learned how to think on my feet. For instance, we had a translator, but at times words did not translate. The teaching part of the trip is what had the largest impact on me. The people there were so willing to learn and were open-minded about the ideas that we brought to them. Reflecting on it now, I realize that I was fairly narrow-minded before going to Haiti. I thought there was only one way to do things. For example, I thought that communication had to be verbal, when in fact it does not; it just takes a smile. I have learned to go into every day with a positive attitude and open mind. Overall, this experience was one I will never forget. I made new connections with people I never would have had the opportunity to meet if it were not for this trip. I have learned to be thankful for everything I have.

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