

Honduras 2006: Reaching Deeper Understanding across Borders

Intercultural awareness and understanding are increasingly important tools in a world that seems to be continually shrinking due to the advent of technology and other forces of globalization. Understanding these forces of globalization and their impact on cultures and societies around the world better prepare us to be leaders in our societies who recognize the importance of our actions as consumers, as participants in economics and as global citizens. My recent trip to Honduras helped me to better understand these forces and the factors involved in grassroots development as I traveled with Saint Mary's to various communities and learned about their cooperatives and other programs to help improve their lives.

The study of intercultural interactions has always fascinated me. I love being immersed in a culture other than my own, experiencing new things and meeting people with different world views. I have been fortunate enough to have previous opportunities to study abroad, specifically in Dijon and Grenoble, France for the 2003/2004 academic year. Through this experience, I realized that through the study of other cultures, I can better understand my own culture. Also, regular intercultural interaction with people from around the world prepared me to better understand intercultural difference within the United States and be able to discuss intercultural issues in a more meaningful way. My experience in Honduras helped me to combine these previous experiences with new perspectives and ideas, adding more depth to my understanding of culture and globalization. In particular, the lessons I learned in Honduras helped me to combine global perspectives and development concepts embodied by institutions such as the

World Bank, the Central American Free Trade Agreement, and the International Monetary Fund with their impacts on the daily lives of Hondurans. I was further able to compare and contrast these global initiatives with the grassroots cooperatives initiated by the local communities. These new perspectives have allowed me to see that, no matter how much I think I know, there is always so much more to understand when dealing with culture, development, and globalization. This experience in Honduras also better prepared me for the graduate work I am now doing, focusing on International and Intercultural Communication and corporate, conglomerate, and media effects on globalization. For example, by able to see for myself the effects of Hurricane Mitch in Honduras, I can better analyze media coverage of the event and perceive the subsequent “coup and earthquake” bias of U.S. media.

By combining experiential education and an academic background for those experiences, I was able to get a better, deeper understanding of cultural and global forces in Honduras. By learning the benefits of this approach, I can better understand other cultures and locals as I understand the importance of context in observation. While a short term trip never allows for full understanding, I feel that my brief time in Honduras was very beneficial, and the positive lessons learned there will benefit me throughout my academic and professional career.