

## ABSTRACT

Traveling and working in Haiti is nonlinear and sometimes frustrating, however, compelling learning opportunities await those who are able to successfully navigate its unique complexities. In May and June 2016, I led the first ever study abroad from our university to Haiti. Seven undergraduates, a graduate student, an assistant director, and myself travelled and engaged in “adventure-based” learning for one month in Haiti. Students came with a variety of majors and skills to engage in hands-on, experiential, learning about healthcare, environmental degradation, water resources, deforestation, agriculture, and safe-water interventions.

The first week was spent in Haiti “boot camp”, where we spent the week learning, hiking, observing, and acclimatizing to the mountains of Haiti. Students were exposed to the urban setting of Port au Prince and very remote villages high in the mountains above Port au Prince. During the last three weeks, students experienced the diverse geography and culture of Haiti, traveling from the large capital city of Port-au-Prince to remote towns along the Artibonite River and in the Central Plateau of Haiti. Students engaged in service learning projects related to health, water resources, and education. They utilized their unique skills and experience to teach dance at a Haitian school, observe dental and health practices at a local hospital, teach nursing students about mental health, update data for a local hospital, and collect water samples for bacterial and DNA analysis.

The study abroad program allowed students from all disciplines to contribute their energy and ideas to explore real-world problems in Haiti in a collaborative environment. Although Haiti is known for its complex social, environmental, economic, and cultural issues, the Haitian people show great resilience and optimism in the face of these challenges. The study abroad program provided an opportunity for students to work alongside Haitians, in the context of service learning projects, field trips, and group activities to explore Haiti’s complex issues.

## INTRODUCTION

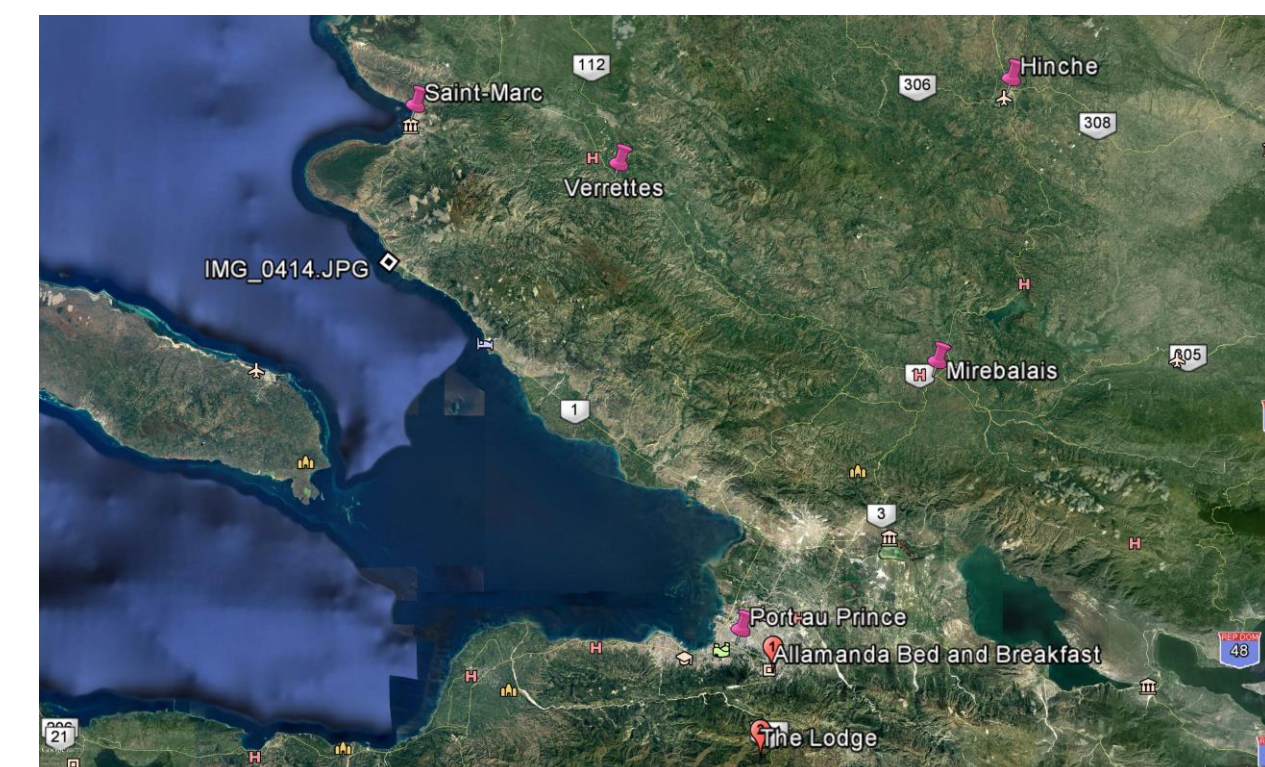
- Many people fear travelling in Haiti. I have been travelling there since 2007 and I have yet to have an experience that is sufficiently negative to prevent me from working and travelling in Haiti.
- Many missionary and humanitarian groups travel to Haiti, but there are few that travel with the purpose of learning while in Haiti. Haiti provides an ideal classroom for learning about environmental degradation, water quality, and poverty.
- In 2016, I led the first ever study abroad group from Grand Valley State University. One of the biggest obstacles to proposing, planning, and implementing the trip was the perception that Haiti is unsafe and filled with tropical diseases. No significant security or illness was encountered by our group during the trip.



First Trip    Spring Research with Student    Earthquake and Cholera    Biosand Filter (BSF) Research    Water Culture Research    ISF Well installation    Signage Study    Student Club Strip    Study Abroad

## STUDY ABROAD PROGRAM APPROVAL PROCESS

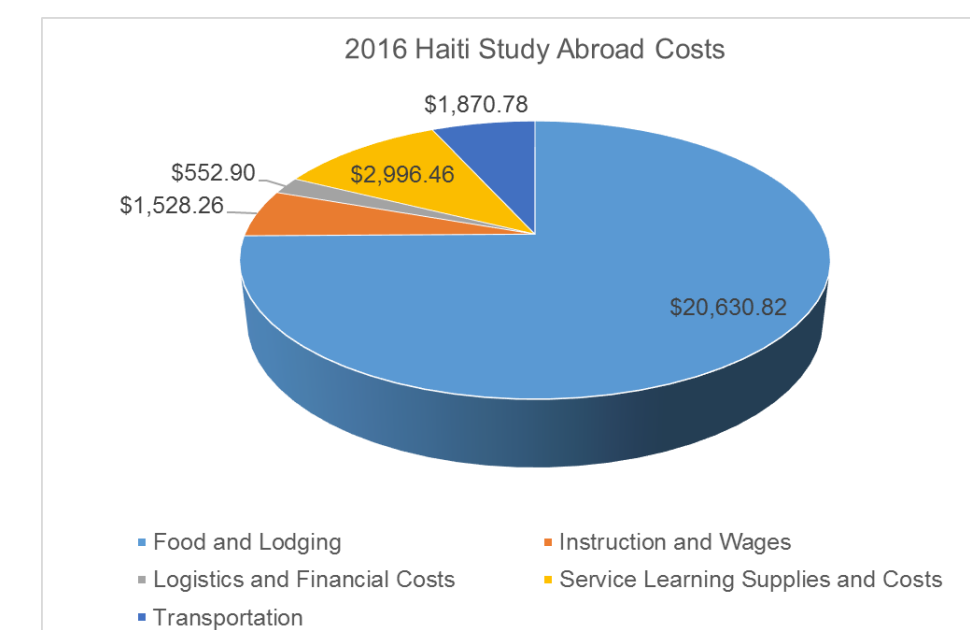
- The initial proposal was submitted in Fall 2014. Major concerns were over student safety and interdisciplinary nature of the study abroad.
- The preliminary proposal was approved to allow funding for a December 2014 trip to visit sites and make contacts for the first trip.
- In May 2015, a trip was taken with 6 GVSU students from a student organization called Students for Haiti. Several of the sites for the study abroad were visited to work out transportation and lodging details.
- The full proposal for the study abroad was approved by the university International Education Committee (IEC) in September 2015.



## TRIP LOGISTICS AND COSTS



- May 14 Leave Gerald R. Ford (GRR) Airport in Grand Rapids
- May 14 to May 18 Allamanda Bed and Breakfast in Petionville, Haiti
- May 19 to May 22 Lodge in Furcy, Haiti
- May 23 to June 11 Kay Ayiti in Deschapelles, Haiti
- June 12 to June 13 Decameron Beach Resort
- June 15 7:30 leave Port au Prince,



Costs for 10 people

Expense	Cost
Food and Lodging	\$20,630.82
Instruction and Wages	\$ 1,528.26
Logistics and Financial Costs	\$ 552.90
Service Learning Supplies and Costs	\$ 2,996.46
Transportation	\$ 1,870.78
Grand Total	\$27,579.22

## LEARNING AND SERVICE PROJECTS

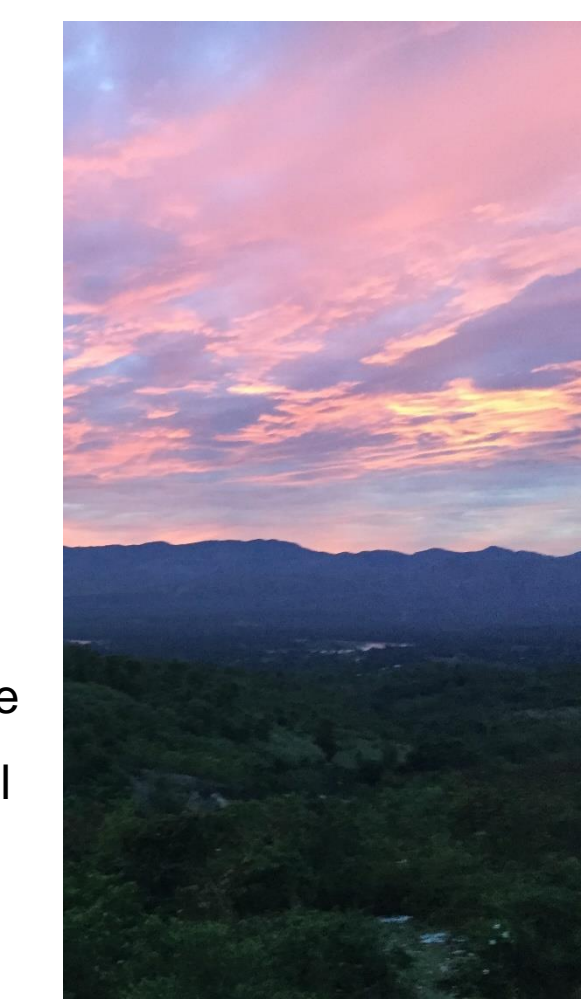
As a group service project we installed three new In-Situ Filtration (ISF) wells in two communities near our service site location. Students assisted in the installation and water quality monitoring of these wells. Students also participated in several service learning projects including:

- Teaching dance to kids at a local school.
- Presenting information about mental health to nursing students.
- Sampling water and analyzing it for bacteria and DNA.
- Entering data and organizing hospital documentation for a local hospital (Hôpital Albert Schweitzer (HAS)).
- Showing a movie (Finding Nemo) to kids at the local library.
- Helping a non-governmental organization that provides after-school programs for kids.
- Observing doctors and dentists while working with patients (primarily pre-medical and dental students)



## LESSONS LEARNED

- We did a lot of walking and hiking! My Fitbit recorded a total of over 500,000 steps and 2,352 flights of stairs, over 240 miles and climbing a vertical elevation of 23,352 feet. This amount of hiking was challenging for some students.
- One can never have too much insect repellent in Haiti.
- The itinerary for the trip worked well to allow the students to adjust gradually to the cultural and environmental challenges.
- Although the state department issued several travel warnings during our time in Haiti we generally felt safe. Contacts in Haiti were invaluable in identifying and avoiding potential threats to our safety.
- Leading a trip like this is a lot of work, but well worth the effort.



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Ellen Bolden, Hans Renord Pierre, LeGrand Mellon, our interpreters, and the entire Hôpital Albert Schweitzer (HAS) team. I would also like to thank my assistants Joe Courtade and Denielle Rile for their help in leading the trip, and all the students who served as “guinea pigs”. Mark Schaub and Elena Selezneva from the Padnos International Center who were instrumental in helping this program be approved and implemented.

## HAITI “BOOT” CAMP

- In Port-au-Prince we visited the national museum, Iron Market, historic hotels, the catholic cathedral destroyed in the January 2010 earthquake, and many other locations en-route.
- We moved to the mountains for intense field learning about ecology, hydrology, and environmental issues.
- In Furcy, we went on several hikes, explored geology along the road to Seguin, hiked up Kenscoff mountain, visited an orphanage and Wynn Farm above located above Kenscoff.

