



Michigan | Campus Compact MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Aquinas College Expanding the Global Perspective

Aquinas College students stand by their commitments, and even though it has been several years since the college first became committed to an initiative in Haiti, it is not surprising that students continue to be involved there. Aquinas initially became involved in Haiti through the building and support of a sister school there. Each year since, Aquinas has offered an academic course where students can learn about the history, culture and political situation.

The class, under the leadership of Dr. Susan Gasster and Dr. Roger Durham, concludes their studies with a trip to Haiti to visit the sister school and meet Haitian students and their community. Travel is a key component to the partnership with Haiti, as it exposes students to the realities first presented in the classroom. Aquinas Senior Jessica Coffelt explains, "As a participant in the Caribbean Service-Learning program, I cannot express how eye-opening my time in Haiti was. To see the reality behind my academic readings was earth shattering."

Students also spend two days in the Dominican Republic assisting Dr. Angel Valdez in medical clinics to assess the malnutrition status of young children. The Aquinas group conducts community assessments by walking remote, mountainous villages and meeting with families there. Conversations reveal insights into the daily lives of local people. For example, "clean drinking water" was a common response when students posed the question, "What do you most need?"

Upon return home, students shared their experience with the campus community. Colorful displays were created and shared across the Aquinas campus. Each display consisted of photos from the trip along with paintings, sculptures and wood carvings purchased from Haitian artisans. Displays coincided with new student orientation and were themed, featuring various aspects of Haitian life: food, art, music, culture and more. Displays incorporated Aquinas' inaugural Common Reading Experience book, *Mountains Beyond Mountains*, by Tracy Kidder. The book chronicles the work of Dr. Paul Farmer, who has devoted his life to serving the poor in Haiti and around the world. The story of Dr. Farmer is a compelling message of hope in the midst of overwhelming suffering. Community involvement, activism, education and Catholic social teaching are all prevalent in the story. The Common Reading Experience and the service-learning trip reveal what young people can accomplish when they discover a cause worthy enough to commit their lives.

Through involvement in initiatives like the one in Haiti, Aquinas students are challenged to pursue truth and the common good, while retaining a global perspective and immersing themselves in the complex realities and issues that exist in today's world. For more information about this project, visit www.aquinas.edu.