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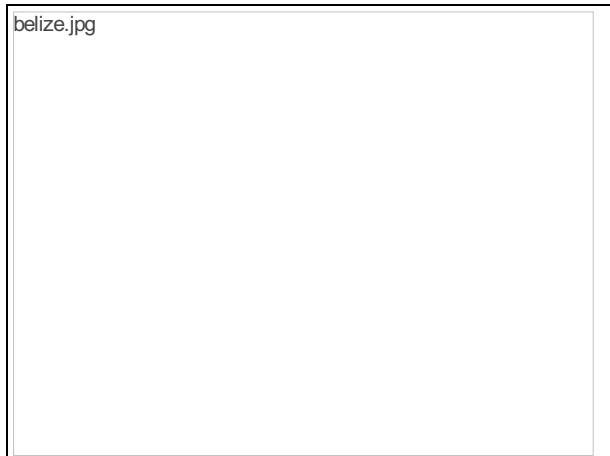
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Study Abroad Students Continue to Give in Belize

NOVEMBER 13, 2009 BY ADMIN



OXFORD, Miss. – When Valerie Blair, a University of Mississippi junior from Corinth, and 11 fellow Ole Miss students landed in Ambergris Caye, Belize, they didn't know what to expect. But every one of them knew why they were there: to serve school children in an impoverished area of San Mateo.



UM students Rebecca Werner (left) of Diamondhead and Valerie Blair of Corinth hang out with children at Holy Cross Anglican School in San Mateo, Belize. Since returning from their service trip to Belize, the students have worked to raise money to provide eyeglasses for needy students in the community.

As part of the UM Study Abroad program, the students traveled with Kim Shackelford, associate professor of social work, to the town of San Pedro, a popular tourist destination. There, they taught Spanish-speaking children living on the outskirts of the island to speak and read English.

The spring break trip made such an impact on the Ole Miss group that several months later, they are still reaching out to raise money for San Mateo schoolchildren with poor eyesight. The students were eager to

make a difference in the community as soon as they arrived, Shackelford said.

"I went to Belize with 12 students I didn't know and within a week, I knew they were very service-oriented," she said. "They worked hard in a difficult situation."

Blair, a nursing major, and Diamondhead native Rebecca Werner, a senior engineering major, are among the students raising money to help buy eyeglasses for needy children at Holy Cross Anglican School. Both members of Delta Gamma sorority, they are selling calendars created by Delta Gamma sister Christy Sims, a senior business administration major from Madison.

Blair and Werner said one of their main jobs during the week was to assist with screenings of students at the local eye clinic. "We asked if we could go help because Delta Gamma's philanthropy is Service for Sight, so helping at the eye clinic drew our interest," Werner said. "We didn't really have any introduction to people at all. We just told them we were there to help, asked them what we could do and told them where we were from."

The children's screenings concluded that 35 of them needed glasses, Shackelford said.

"Our students went with the children being sent to the clinic for eye exams," Shackelford said. "The students learned that even though the exam proved the children needed glasses, the parents could not afford to buy the glasses. One pair costs \$40 if they use donated frames and

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Students Learn 'Real Politics' in Washington, D.C., Winter Session

OXFORD, Miss. – Eleven University of Mississippi students spent their winter break learning about the people who work behind the scenes of the American government in Washington, D.C. Lead by Jonathan Klingler, assistant professor of political science, the students of Pol 391: Applied Politics met not with candidates, but with the people who make candidates'

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Young Alumna Gives Back to School of Accountancy

OXFORD, Miss. – Stephanie Jennings Teague, of Chicago, sees her commitment of \$100,000 to the Patterson School of Accountancy's new building at the University of Mississippi as a means of saying "thank you." "It is a way to show a small token of my appreciation to Ole Miss, the faculty and staff, and the accounting

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Ole Miss In the News

Reuters: Keep an Eye on the Money Supply

U.S. inflation roller coaster prompts fresh look at long-ignored money supply By Michael S. Derby NEW YORK – The amount of money sloshing around the U.S. economy shrank last year for the first time on record, a development that some economists believe bolsters the case for U.S. inflation pressures continuing to abate. The Federal Reserve's

over \$120 if frames are bought new.”

Blair said her experiences at the clinic prompted her to find more ways to help the children.

“Before we went on the trip, we had talked about the idea of using Service for Sight to help these kids. I thought it was neat that the opportunity arose and we jumped on it,” Blair said. “It was neat how it worked out because before we left the clinic, we spoke with the director, who told us more about the funding that comes into the clinic for screenings and exams. That sparked our interest in continuing our efforts after we got back home.”

Blair and Werner said some of their fondest memories of Belize are from working with the children, including Alexis, who was upset when he found out he needed glasses.

Blair persuaded Alexis that needing glasses wasn’t such a bad thing.

“He wasn’t thrilled about that at all,” she said. “I didn’t realize there was such a stigma there against glasses. When he found that out, he was sort of in denial until I put on my glasses and convinced him that there was nothing wrong with them.”

Werner said volunteers are in high demand in the San Mateo community.

“One child I worked with didn’t have an easy time focusing; he always got distracted,” she said. “We had to make it fun for him to learn. It’s a lot like what our children face here. Hiring teachers is a different process there. There is a huge need for extra help.”

Blair added that the children need more individual attention.

“One-on-one time with them seemed to make a difference because they’re in such big classrooms all the time, and they don’t get as much individualized attention as they need,” she said. “They’re doing well to be enrolled in school where such a low percentage of people continue their education past the eighth grade. There’s great need there, even if it’s just letting someone know you care.

Shackelford said she was pleased with the effort all the students gave.

“It made them think about what service they can do and showed them that they really can make a big difference in a week’s time,” she said.

Blair said the appreciation of the students and parents stood out most to her.

“A girl we had spent a lot of time with that week named Irene made us a homemade card and made sure we got it before we left,” she said. “It was just her thanking us over and over for being her friend and being there for her. Even though we were only able to be there for four days with her, she was incredibly thankful. For me it was seeing how grateful they are for everything.”

Seeing how the residents did so much with so little gave Werner a new perspective.

“It’s an eye-opener to see how people who have so little have so much because they’re so incredibly grateful and thankful all the time for everything,” Werner said. “Just the simplest act of kindness we gave them – hanging out with them or going to play soccer with them during their break – meant the world to them. I think relationship-building is something I learned. You can go anywhere, and whether there’s a language barrier or not, you can still connect with people.”

The UM Study Abroad program and Shackelford have planned two more trips to Ambergris Caye: a three-week Wintersession trip that is offered as an elective social work course for all UM undergraduate and graduate students, and a service-oriented trip during spring break 2010 open to all majors. To learn about these and other programs, go to <http://www.outreach.olemiss.edu/study?abroad>, or contact Brett Byrnes at brett@olemiss.edu.

To learn more about contributing to Delta Gamma’s Service for Sight project, contact Rebecca Werner at rawerner@olemiss.edu or visit <http://www.olemissdg.com>.

For more information on the Department of Social Work, go to <http://www.olemiss.edu/depts/socialwork/> or contact Kim Shackelford at kshackel@olemiss.edu.

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