

## ABSTRACT

In April 2023, a group of 1 administrator, 5 faculty, and 20 students from the University of Louisiana Monroe (ULM) traveled to the Dominican Republic to participate in an interdisciplinary service-learning project lasting six days. Disciplines involved included pharmacy (2 faculty members and 9 students), physical therapy/kinesiology (1 faculty member and 5 students), social work (1 faculty member and 4 students), and political science (1 faculty member and 2 students). The home base for the group while in the Dominican Republic was Abba's House Children's Center, a nonprofit Christian organization tasked with feeding, educating, and providing limited medical care to approximately 125 children living in the barrio of Cienfuegos. During the service-learning experience, ULM students engaged in various service and learning activities tied to their programs of study. Students and faculty completed the *Community Service Attitude Scale (CSAS)* before and after the service-learning experience (Schwartz & Howard, 1977). A total of 14 students (70%) submitted both a pre- and post-trip CSAS survey. There was a significant improvement in scores for 21 out of 25 items on the CSAS. This international interdisciplinary service-learning program positively impacted students' attitudes toward community service including awareness of global needs.

## The Impact of an International Service-Learning Experience on University Students' Community Service Attitudes

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Over the past decade, there have been increasing calls for greater interaction between higher education and the "real world" (Markaki et al., 2021), for higher education institutions to educate students about democratic citizenship (Rockenbach, 2020), and to attend to students' moral development (Hudson & Brandenberger, 2023). In response, a greater emphasis has been placed on service learning in academia. Service-learning is defined by Bamber & Hankin (2011) as a teaching strategy that employs social service in higher education students' learning to improve or eliminate problems in communities while collaborating with community partners who have direct connections to the problems. Students and faculty engaged in such service-learning projects experience improved civic and social dimensions of learning (Marta & Gonzalez, 2012), become more socially responsible, gain a greater focus on social justice (Lucas et al., 2013), increasingly engage in reflective practices of such experiences (Markaki et al., 2021), and become more empathetic (Herrmann, 2020; Chang et al., 2019). In addition, international service-learning (ISL)

experiences have been instrumental in preparing students for a global workplace and developing their intercultural competence (Hammersley, 2013). While scholars have not been able to agree on a primary definition of intercultural competence, stating that its meaning varies according to the context of usage, most scholars agree on three primary elements of intercultural competence: attitudes, knowledge, and skills (Deardorff, 2011; Moule, 2011; Portera, 2014; Sue & Sue, 2015). Attitudes include those attributes that facilitate interpersonal relations such as curiosity, respect, acceptance, openness, empathy, and flexibility. Intercultural knowledge is knowledge and awareness of not only one's cultural self, but also the cultures of others. Finally, skills in this context would encompass one's ability to utilize and apply their knowledge in solving a problem, completing a task, or managing a conflict (Tang & Schwantes, 2021).

Bringle and Hatcher defined ISL as:

A structured academic experience in another country in which students (a) participate in an organized service activity that addresses identified community needs; (b) learn from direct interaction and cross-cultural dialogue with others; and (c) reflect on the experience in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a deeper understanding of global and intercultural issues, a broader appreciation of the host country and the discipline, and an enhanced sense of their own responsibilities as citizens, locally and globally. (2011, p. 19)

Markaki et al. (2021) identified the following general service-learning goals: "provision of opportunities to enrich student learning experiences, increase confidence in problem-solving, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities" (p. 3). Not only do students and faculty benefit from such experiences, but community needs are often met. For example, students bring specialized skills, fresh ideas, and high levels of enthusiasm and have the capacity to meet real community needs.

Partnerships involving service-learning are often referred to as Academic Service Partnerships (ASPs) and are defined as "strategic relationships between educational and clinical practice settings that advance practice, education, innovation and research, leveraging the talents of both partners and thus, advancing mutual interests and priorities" (Markaki et al., 2021, p. 1). Van de Ven (2007) identified key attributes of ASPs to include collaboration, leadership across all involved entities, engagement in scholarship related to community needs, and regular communication.

Studies of service-learning in the United States and North America are fairly prevalent, but studies of service-learning in Latin America and the Caribbean are limited (Markaki et al., 2021). In fact, in a review of the global literature, DeGeest et al. (2013) found that 85% of all such ASPs were in the United States, 7% were located in Canada, 5% in Australia, and the remaining 3% in other countries, suggesting that either information about ASPs is not being reported in other locations or is simply more prolific in the U. S.

### **Trip Preparation**

The first conversations surrounding the possibility of such a trip occurred between two faculty members, one in education and one in pharmacy beginning in 2021. The education faculty member, Dr. Watson, already had a working partnership

with Abba's House Children's Center (AHCC) and its director, Mr. Rodriguez, and had visited the location previously. The pharmacy faculty member, Dr. Rotundo, had begun working on a different service-learning project in the Dominican Republic previously, which had to be canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The two decided to gauge interest in such a project among ULM faculty and students by initially presenting the idea at a meeting of the ULM Interprofessional Education Committee in 2021. Interest was high, and Drs. Watson and Rotundo continued to spread the word about such a trip among students and faculty at other meetings and events. By 2022, it was apparent that there was enough interest to begin officially planning such a trip. Trip plans continued and ramped up in 2022, with the trip slated to occur in April 2023 during ULM's spring break.

Nine faculty leaders interested in participating in the trip began to regularly meet and plan. Ideas discussed included fund-raising initiatives, such as writing an internal ULM Student Activity Enhancement Fee (SAEF) grant application and an internal ULM Opportunity Fund (OF) grant application. The primary purpose of these grant applications was to cover the costs of the trip for students (plane fare, hotel, and meals).

In the fall of 2022, 25 students submitted their applications, which were evaluated by faculty according to a rubric template. Twenty-two students were notified of their acceptance to participate in the trip. By January 2023, the SAEF application was funded in its entirety and students were notified that their trip expenses would be covered by this funding. During the winter of 2023, leading up to departure, students obtained passports, travel vaccinations, and attended three Zoom planning sessions designed to prepare them for international travel, trip experiences, and the culture of the Dominican Republic. Pharmacy students also collected donations of over-the-counter medicines and medical supplies for the Children's Center. By the time airline tickets were reserved in February, four participants had withdrawn from the trip due to various reasons including health. On April 8<sup>th</sup>, the team departed for Santiago, Dominican Republic. The final team consisted of five faculty, one senior administrator, and 20 students.

Mr. Rodriguez, the director of AHCC, met the team at the Santo Domingo airport and two buses transported all team members to a hotel in Santiago, approximately 30 minutes from AHCC in Cienfuegos. The next day students were transported to AHCC where they painted the interior of the Center as part of their service activities. An orientation dinner took place at the hotel that evening where team members met the translators and discipline-specific hosts they would be working with throughout the week and learned the history of AHCC and some of the details of the coming days.

## **Cienfuegos**

Cienfuegos is a barrio located on the northwest edge of Santiago in the Dominican Republic. In close proximity to Cienfuegos is an expansive landfill (Rafey Landfill) that is constantly smoldering and contributes significant pollution to the environment in the area. The Rafey Landfill receives up to 1800 tons of waste per day. It is in the dump where many of the first children receiving services from the Center were originally located, scavenging through the refuse looking for items to sell to help support their families. These children often "trash-picked" in temperatures above 100 degrees and for 12 hours or more per day, looking for plastic, tin, paper, glass, and copper to sell in local junk stores and for food for their own consumption.

The houses of Cienfuegos residents are often clapboard shanties with tin roofs pieced together with scavenged cast-off materials from the dump and streets. There are no latrines, limited furniture, rudimentary cooking equipment, and family members often sleep on the floor on mattresses. See figures one and two. Many of the parents/guardians, if they are fortunate enough to have a job, work in sweat shops for approximately \$1.50 per hour, which keeps them locked in poverty.

**Figure 1**



**Figure 2**



### **Abba's House Children's Center**

The Children's Center was established in 2009 and arose out of the conviction of Mr. Rodriguez, who first became committed to providing for impoverished children when he encountered them at the Rafey Landfill and on the streets while he was walking to and from college. As a college student, he forged a bond with several of the children and would bring food to them each day on his way to school. Years later, as a pastor and certified teacher of English, Mr. Rodriguez established the Children's Center in a small, rented building where he served as Director. Mr. Rodriguez later partnered with a U.S. donor to obtain funds for the construction of AHCC in 2016. The same donor regularly provides funds in the amount of \$1,500 per month, which provides enough money to feed most of the now 125 children three meals per day, five days per week.

The primary mission of AHCC is to provide educational, nutritional, social, emotional, medical, and spiritual care for orphaned, abandoned, or otherwise needy children living in extreme poverty in the Cienfuegos area. Currently, several individual donors also help to provide finances so these services can continue to be offered.

Evidence indicates that Abba's House Children's Center is a solution and impetus for breaking the cycle of impoverishment among the families of the children it serves. Over 750 children have been served at AHCC over the past nine years, at least 70 of whom were at significant risk of sexual trafficking/exploitation. Greater than 300 of those children arrived at the Center with anemia and parasites, all of whom were treated medically and are now healthy. Over 300 of those children learned to read and write at the Center. Over 200 Center graduates now serve as leaders at many area churches. Over 100 graduates went on to become secretaries, nurses, receptionists, teacher assistants, and cosmetologists. Additionally, one female attendee recently graduated from medical school.

### **Service-Learning Project**

Drs. Watson and Rotundo, along with Mr. Rodriguez and faculty leaders planned an intricate schedule of activities for each discipline participating in the project. Activities began on Sunday with all disciplines working together to paint the interior of the Center. Later on the same day, the entire team of faculty and students were transported to Juan XXIII Municipal Hospital where they attended a presentation on health care in the Dominican Republic led by Drs. Watson and Rotundo. That evening, the team met and interacted with Mr. Rodriguez, and a team of 7 translators and 5 community leaders at an orientation dinner at the hotel where they were introduced to the week's planned activities. Beginning the second day of the trip (Monday), the student teams were divided by discipline to participate in these activities. What follows are descriptions of each discipline's activities for the week.

### **Kinesiology/Physical Therapy**

On Tuesday, the physical therapy students and their faculty member toured Pontificia Universidad Catolica Madre y Maestra's (local university) physical therapy and medical school departments where they had an opportunity to engage with Dominican Republic physical therapy students and share contact information to help build a support and network around physical therapy education for future collaborative opportunities. Dr. Jones, the faculty physical therapy lead, shared her contact information with the previously mentioned university's physical therapy faculty and medical staff for future collaborations to assist in meeting community medical and educational needs. Students also engaged in clinical observations of physical therapy practices with intervention in multiple settings throughout Dominican Republic hospitals, clinics, and the general community. These observations included orthopedics, neurology, pediatrics, outpatient/community-based clinics, and prosthetics and orthotics. Finally, students organized sports/play activities to enhance physical fitness while maintaining safety and supporting team-building skills with the children of Abba's House Children's Center.

## **Pharmacy**

Because of the larger size of the Doctor of Pharmacy group (9 learners and 2 faculty members, Dr. Rotunda and Dr. Andonie), the group split up for many of the activities to allow for small-group discussion and ensure that all students had the chance to fully participate. On Monday, one group of students visited the outpatient pharmacy at the municipal Hospital Periferico de Cienfuegos with a local pharmacist and then interviewed community members at the Abba's House Children's Center medical clinic about their medications and health needs. Another group accompanied physical therapy students to a local university and rehabilitation center to learn about the medical system in the Dominican Republic, guided by a local physician. On Tuesday, all students and faculty toured the municipal Hospital Periferico de Cienfuegos with a local pharmacist, including visits to the inpatient pharmacy, hospital wards, and tuberculosis dispensing area. In the afternoon, one group visited a pharmacy specializing in dermatological products, and another group visited a private community pharmacy. On Wednesday, students conducted health screenings of community members at the AHCC medical clinic, including blood pressure and blood glucose screenings, medication counseling, and a health needs assessment. In the afternoon, students visited the homes of residents in the community with a local physician to complete a health needs assessment to guide future activities in the community.

## **Political Science**

Two students and one faculty member from Political Science engaged in a variety of activities while in the Dominican Republic, alongside their local guides: a cultural coordinator, translator, and a contracted driver who remained with them throughout the trip to transport them to the city. On Monday, the first day of group activities, Political Science students and faculty visited the provincial government building in Santiago, where they learned about the history of Santiago and viewed citizens lining up to receive governmental services and assistance. Across the street from the provincial government building is a famous park, revered by locals as it has been the site of important, historical political speeches. There, students witnessed a peaceful political protest in action. The park is also home to a number of statues commemorating the founding fathers of the country as well as a historic gazebo. Next, students walked through the city center of Santiago, the architecture of which is strongly influenced by Spanish and French colonial eras, to the Fortaleza San Luis, where they were given information about the history of the Fort during the fight for Dominican independence and the transformation of the Fort over time from military site to government building complex and museum. Afterward, students took a walk through a large, winding tourist market, where their cultural coordinator demonstrated that the presence of a significant number of Haitian vendors in the market signified that despite stereotypically negative media coverage of the relationship between Haiti and the Dominican Republic, Haitians were welcome in the country. After lunch, students and faculty were taken to the Santiago Justice Palace, where a local attorney took them on a tour of the facility and explained the intricacies of the Dominican justice and legal systems - students were excited to be able to receive such a personal welcome to the Justice Palace and to have the opportunity to see courtrooms and ask questions about the legal system directly of a practicing attorney in the country. Afterward, students

sampled traditional Dominican street food from a vendor in Santiago and drove through a major agricultural market in the city, where vendors typically sell produce and other goods to commercial buyers.

The following day, Tuesday, students and faculty began the morning with a trip to the Santiago City Hall. There, they met with a number of local government officials, including appointed and elected leaders, such as alderman, party leaders, and public administration officers. Students were privileged to view a video chronicling the recent cleanup effort in Santiago spearheaded by the current mayor and have detailed discussions on the role that public art has played in the revitalization of the city. They discussed with city leaders the burgeoning role of women in local government and political leadership as well as regional and national electoral structures. Students were also able to tour the actual meeting room in which aldermen cast votes. Next, they visited the Leon Cultural Center, where they viewed fantastic Dominican art and historical exhibitions and learned about the Center's role in preserving local cultural traditions. After lunch, Political Science students visited the Santiago Archives, where a diligent staff discussed how they preserve historical records and documents and how they are attempting to share genealogical records with the public. Students were treated to a first-hand view of how the genealogical records are carefully scanned and uploaded online to a free, globally accessible search engine. Afterward, students and faculty toured the local public library in Santiago, where they learned of the various Santiago citizens awarded by the library due to their active participation in maintaining the library facilities and materials. Next, students and faculty visited a local historic bar in Santiago, Casa Bader, founded in 1939. There, they heard from a local official about how the bar forbade women to enter until just ten years ago, due to the desire to differentiate the bar from the proliferation of brothels in the city at the time of the bar's founding. The bar is also distinctive for its Lebanese roots, which continue to inform the street food the bar offers patrons. Students ended the day by "haggling" with the vendors (with the assistance of their cab driver) at the Santiago tourist market, which their translator assured them is a core part of Dominican culture.

Wednesday, Political Science students once again gathered with students from other disciplines at Abba's House Children's Center and Clinic, where students interacted with the children, toured the village, patronized local stores, and viewed the homes of some village residents. Thursday, after spending the day at the beach, Political Science students, along with all other disciplines, returned to the city center in Santiago to receive a cultural demonstration. At a historic home converted into a cultural center and restaurant on the edge of the historic city park, students and faculty were treated to dinner and a lesson in traditional Dominican dancing and culture, including an appearance by Carnival characters and their signature whips.

In summary, Political Science students received an excellent introduction to Dominican politics, governance, culture, and history. All of their local guides were extremely helpful and informative at each point of the trip and very happy to talk with them about the Dominican way of life, as were various officials and employees at each location they visited. Spontaneous welcomes were the norm; for instance, local party leaders chose to welcome students and faculty into their offices and speak with them about party politics while at City Hall, though they had not been specifically asked to do so before students arrived. Everyone the Political Science students met went above and

beyond to answer their questions and attempt to provide the most enjoyable and informative experience possible while in the Dominican Republic. One Political Science student, when asked about the most liked or beneficial aspects of the trip, noted, "[I liked] [t]raveling through Santiago and visiting the government buildings and museum. I enjoyed meeting all of the government officials and thought our cultural expert was incredible. Almost everyone I met on this trip had been welcoming and kind." At multiple points throughout the trip, Political Science students noted that they felt this trip had reinforced their choice of academic major. Such experiences will not only generate great memories but allow students a new understanding of how service-learning can enhance academic careers.

### **Social Work**

Four students were identified as social work majors. On Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, these students, the faculty member, and a local social worker known by most Cienfuegos residents walked among the homes in the village of Cienfuegos, stopping at many of the houses to meet the residents and interview them. The purpose of the interviews was to provide demographic data for a report needed by the Dominican Republic government. Information collected included the total occupants of each home, genders, and ages of occupants, health conditions of occupants, literacy levels, and income sources. At the end of the week, these data were tabulated and submitted to the government representative. On Wednesday, social work students attended a Cienfuegos community meeting in which they met local social leaders and observed how community problems are identified and ultimately presented to governmental leaders. In the afternoons, social work students worked with children at AHCC with crafts and education.

### **Debriefing/Reflection**

Each evening, a formal debriefing session took place during the evening meal and involved both faculty and students. Students and faculty were asked to reflect on moments during the day that had specific meaning to them. These reflections included expressions of empathy towards the impoverished, admiration of discipline-specific faculty skills, respect for cultural differences, the collaborative troubleshooting of problems, how practice with discipline-specific skills in new contexts built confidence in students, admiration for translators and professionals of the host country, the difficulties of communicating to patients via interpreters, learning to be professional in dire situations, showing love and compassion to an oppressed people, and so much more. The debriefing sessions also proved to be an effective means of troubleshooting practical problems such as transportation and scheduling, reviewing the day's activities, discussing the following day's plans, and providing closure for each day's activities.

### **Challenges in Implementation**

This first cross-college global service-learning project was not without challenges. Funding notice was received too late for many students who initially showed interest in following through. Some students waited for passports to arrive up until the final week. Once on the ground in the Dominican Republic, students expected the schedule to be rigidly adhered to, without consideration of third-world complications.



When the schedule had to be changed several times, students voiced frustration. In addition, students forged friendships with interpreters, and then expected them to be included in extracurricular activities, not considering the added cost this would produce that neither the university nor the interpreters could afford.

## Methodology

Table 1 summarizes characteristics of the students completing the experience. Fifteen of the participating students were female (75%) and five were male (25%). One student (5%) was classified as a sophomore, 7 (35%) as juniors, 3 (15%) as seniors, and 9 (45%) as graduate students.

**Table 1**  
**Demographics of Student Trip Participants (n=20)**

Characteristic	N (%)
Gender	
Female	5 (25)
Male	15 (75)
Classification	
Sophomore	1 (5)
Junior	7 (35)
Senior	3 (15)
Graduate Student	9 (45)

Convenience sampling was utilized for this study. All 20 students were offered the opportunity to complete the pre- and post- tests, but 14 (70%) opted to do so. The pre-experience survey was completed at a U.S. airport prior to departure while the post-experience survey was administered upon arrival back to the U.S. at the Miami airport six days later.

## Community Service Attitudes Scale

The Community Service Attitudes Scale (CSAS) was utilized in this study to measure students' attitudes toward community service pre- and post- the service-learning experience (Shiarella et al., 2000). The CSAS is based on Schwartz's altruistic helping behavior model (Schwartz, 1977; Schwartz & Howard, 1982, 1984). Schwartz defined altruistic helping behavior as one's awareness of the needs of others and one's level of desire to help others. The model involves a series of progressive cognitive and affective steps, starting with the realization of a need and ending with an obvious helping response.

From Schwartz's model, community service attitude questions were developed by Shiarella et al. (2000) so that separate scales corresponded to each step of the model. For the purposes of this study, the Shiarella et al. survey was modified to twenty-five items, 24 of which focused on community service attitudes, while the 25<sup>th</sup> was related to the intent to participate in service-learning. Shiarella and colleagues purposely crafted intention items as outcome measures as intentions are often predictive of future behavior (Ajzen, 1988). A 5-point Likert-type scale was provided for

response choices for all 25 items, where 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly Agree. Table 2 shows the pre-post-test items matched to the following phases in Schwartz's model (1977): awareness, actions, ability, connectedness, moral obligation, empathy, and helping.

**Table 2**

***Community Service Attitude Scale Items Matched to Schwartz's phases.***

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***Awareness***

1. Some global communities need our help.
2. There are people in global communities who need help.
3. There are needs in global communities.
4. There are people in global communities who have needs that are not being met.

***Actions***

5. Volunteer work at global community agencies helps solve social problems.
6. College student volunteers can help improve global communities.
7. Volunteering in global community projects can greatly enhance the community's resources.
8. The more people who help, the better things will get.

***Ability***

9. Contributing my skills will make the community a better place.
10. My contributions to the global community will make a real difference.
11. I can make a difference in a global community.

***Connectedness***

12. I am responsible for doing something to improve the global community.
13. It is my responsibility to take some real measures to help others in need.

***Moral Obligation***

14. It is important to me to have a sense of contribution and helpfulness through participating in service-learning.
15. It is important to me to gain an increased sense of responsibility from participating in service-learning.
16. Other people deserve my help.
17. It is important to help people in general.
18. The global community needs good volunteers.
19. It is important to provide useful service to global communities via service-learning.

***Empathy***

20. When I meet people who are having a difficult time, I wonder how I would feel if I were in their shoes.
21. I feel bad that some people are suffering from a lack of resources.
22. I feel bad about the disparity across countries.
23. Without service-learning projects and community service, today's disadvantaged individuals have no hope.
24. It is critical that citizens become involved in helping disadvantaged communities in other countries.

***Helping***

25. I want to do this (service-learning) activity.
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Student responses to the CSAS were entered into SPSS Statistics Version 28 (IBM Corporation) for analysis. A paired t test was performed for each of the 25 items in the questionnaire and for each student's mean score for all questions. A two-sided P-value < 0.05 was considered statistically significant.

## Results

Table 3 provides the results from the paired t test across all 25 items.

**Table 3**  
***Paired T-test Results (N=14)***

Item	Pre-Mean	Post-Mean	Two-Tailed P Value
1	4.50	5.00	<b>0.013</b>
2	4.79	5.00	0.082
3	4.71	5.00	<b>0.040</b>
4	4.57	5.00	<b>0.008</b>
5	3.36	4.21	<b>&lt;0.001</b>
6	3.79	4.57	<b>&lt;0.001</b>
7	3.79	4.43	<b>0.002</b>
8	3.64	4.29	<b>&lt;0.001</b>
9	3.79	4.43	<b>&lt;0.001</b>
10	3.57	4.36	<b>&lt;0.001</b>
11	3.36	4.21	<b>&lt;0.001</b>
12	3.43	4.29	<b>&lt;0.001</b>
13	3.64	4.50	<b>&lt;0.001</b>
14	4.43	4.64	0.189
15	4.57	4.86	<b>0.040</b>
16	4.21	4.50	<b>0.040</b>
17	4.57	4.71	0.336
18	4.36	4.86	<b>0.003</b>
19	4.29	4.93	<b>&lt;0.001</b>
20	4.50	4.86	<b>0.019</b>
21	4.43	4.79	<b>0.019</b>
22	4.07	4.71	<b>0.007</b>
23	2.86	3.64	<b>0.003</b>
24	3.64	4.57	<b>&lt;0.001</b>
25	4.79	4.93	0.165
Mean, all items	4.07	4.61	<b>&lt;0.001</b>

Items with statistically significant differences are bolded.

## Discussion

This study supports the value of this international, interprofessional service-learning project to improve college students' attitudes toward community service. A significant improvement was seen for the majority of items (21 out of 25) on the CSAS questionnaire following the trip. This improvement was seen even with high baseline scores which indicated overall positive attitudes toward community service prior to the trip. Changes in attitudes were particularly apparent for the Actions, Ability, and Connectedness domains of the CSAS questionnaire. This trip was the first time for

many of our students to interact with members of an underserved community outside of the U.S., and these changes may relate to students' reflections on their own role in meeting international needs.

A growing body of literature supports the transformative power of international service learning on students in higher education. Niehaus & Crain (2013) provided an overview of literature examining student outcomes from international service learning, including students changing field of study or career goals, empathy for the host culture, increased efficacy to help others, desire to participate in future international experiences, intent to advocate on behalf of the poor, and intent to live a more socially conscious lifestyle. However, there is a lack of published literature using quantitative methods to examine the impact of international service learning on student attitudes toward community service. Our study helps to address this gap and contribute to the existing knowledge about international service-learning outcomes for college students.

This service-learning experience was unique in several ways, and differences in setting and structure may limit the applicability of our results to other experiences. The interdisciplinary nature of our team allowed students to learn from other disciplines' experiences. Students were in varying stages of their college education spanning undergraduate and professional training. Discipline-specific hosts facilitated activities for each group, including interactions with the local community in ways meaningful to each discipline. There was at least one faculty member present for each discipline to facilitate learning and reflection. Most students had little to no experience with international travel, which likely influenced the impact of the service-learning trip.

This study has some limitations to consider. It was a pilot project with a small sample size, and we were not able to attain post-trip surveys from all students due to the difficulty of following up after the return to the U.S. This was the first offering of this service-learning experience, and results should be confirmed over time as the experience evolves. Future work should examine other aspects of this and similar service-learning experiences, such as perceptions of the host community and effects on students' career choices and interprofessional teamwork competencies.

### **Conclusion/Next Steps**

The University of Louisiana at Monroe identified student success and community engagement as two defining pillars in its 2022-2027 Strategic Plan. This international service-learning project aligned with the Strategic Plan's goal of preparing students to compete, succeed, and make contributions to a global society that is ever-changing. When conversations began around the Divisions for Academic and Student Affairs partnering together to create an experience for students that was academic and co-curricular in nature, the two divisions never imagined how this combination of community-service, instruction and reflection in one international, cross-disciplinary experience would impact students as they prepared for job placement. This international service-learning experience impacted students, both personally and professionally. One student stated, "I learned so much. I also realized how important it is to communicate with patients and how much it impacts their care when you are not able to communicate with them adequately." Another student shared "I was so moved by the level of gratitude of the people of the Dominican Republic for receiving a service that we often take for granted at home in the US. It made me want to

do more service-learning trips like this.” Moreover, the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA), has identified as one of its strategic goals, Advocacy for Student Success, which includes critical thinking, fostering community, and collaborations with global partners to foster student learning and success. This NASPA goal is another signal that the ULM’s global relationship building will ensure students are able to navigate an everchanging global society.

Fullerton et al. (2015) described such experiences as “epiphanic,” which is echoed in one ULM student’s feedback after this service-learning experience: “This experience has helped to confirm that I am in the right profession..” When students participate in high impact experiences such as this international service-learning project, the potential for long-lasting positive outcomes is significant, for both the students and their university. These outcomes could include increased student success, social responsibility, career development, job preparation, enhanced university relations, and more. ULM has made the decision to repeat this experience at least annually, and conversations are presently occurring about locating a permanent funding source. In addition, Academic Affairs and Student Affairs at ULM will continue to forge relationships with local, national, and foreign entities for additional service-learning experiences, thus creating more transformative projects, services, and experiences.

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