

Merrimack College  
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# HAITI SERVICE LEARNING INITIATIVE

## Project Summary Report



*Figure 1: The Merrimack team with our Haitian partners*

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## I. Mission & Vision

The mission of the Haiti Service Learning Initiative is to develop a mutually-beneficial relationship between the Merrimack College community, Project Medishare and communities within the Central Plateau of Haiti.

**i. Give students an opportunity to use their academic training and skills in a unique setting.**

The Haiti Service Learning Initiative provides students with an experiential learning opportunity where they can utilize their knowledge and skills in a developing country. This expands learning beyond the classroom and traditional clinical settings. When students return to the classroom, they have new experiences that can help them better understand, and make use of their academic training.

**ii. Share our knowledge and skills with people in Haiti.**

Giving students an opportunity to put their gifts to use in ways that better the lives of people in Haiti, the Haiti Service Learning Initiative helps students discover how their talents and skills can be used to help others. This exposes students to the possibility that their academic and professional skills can be more than just a job, but a vocation where their gifts can meet the world's needs.

**iii. Help students grow spiritually, ethically and emotionally.**

Half of the trip preparation is spent preparing and forming our students spiritually and emotionally. During the trip, participants end each day with periods of reflection that provide students with the opportunity to sift through the events of their day and share their joys and struggles. Reflection periods enable students to share their wisdom and pain with each other, and an opportunity to dig into the very deep feelings and emotions that result from working amidst the poorest of the poor.



*Figure 2: Athletic training students at a mobile health clinic.*



*Figure 3: Engineering student working with Haitian partners*

## II. Introduction

The Haiti Service Learning Initiative started in the wake of the January 2010 earthquake in Haiti. After the Merrimack College community fundraised and made a sizeable donation to help the people of Haiti, some members of the Merrimack community wanted to offer the skills and talents of Merrimack students, faculty and staff to assist the Haitian people in rebuilding their country.

In the winter of 2011, Fr. Ray Dlugos O.S.A., Vice President of Mission and Ministry at Merrimack College, brought together a group of faculty and staff – Marc Veletzos (Civil Engineering), Kevin Melanson (Health Sciences) and Brian Suehs-Vassel (Campus Ministry) – to brainstorm a possible partnership with Project Medishare for Haiti. Co-founded in 1994 by Merrimack College Alumnus Dr. Art Fournier, Project Medishare is a medical and development non-profit organization dedicated to sharing its human and technical resources with its Haitian partners in the quest to achieve quality healthcare and development services for all.



*Figure 4: Project Medishare logo; Merrimack College logo; Haitian Flag.*

Since the initial meeting, the Haiti Service Learning Initiative has traveled to Haiti four times to work alongside the people of Haiti with groups consisting of faculty, students, staff and alumni. Building off Project Medishare's well-established programs and relationships, students from the majors of Civil Engineering and Athletic Training have worked with their instructors to increase access to clean water and bring health care for musculoskeletal disorders to Haitians who otherwise would have no access to such medical care. Our students have shared with us that these trips have helped them grow in their faith, in their care for the poor and in developing their professional desires for the future.

With support from Project Medishare and the people of rural Haiti, the Merrimack Haiti Service Learning Initiative has established a mutually beneficial relationship between Merrimack College, Project Medishare, and communities in rural Haiti that betters and saves Haitian lives, while enabling Merrimack participants to grow personally and professionally.

### III. Component Specific Summary:

#### III.a. Civil Engineering

##### Needs in Haiti

*Marmont* - The town of Marmont has a population of approximately 9000. An existing municipal water system provides water to much of this population. The system consists of a capped spring that is approximately 1000 feet above the town, several system pressure breaks with faucets, a 20,000 gal storage cistern, and a network of 3/4" PVC distribution lines. The system has fallen into disrepair, likely due to the January 2010 earthquake, and is not providing adequate amounts of water for the town. There are numerous leaks in the main lines as well as broken or missing faucets. Thus the population must acquire water from local springs or rivers.

*Casse* – The town of Casse has a population of approximately 3500. There is no municipal water system in this region, thus people acquire water from hand pump wells, local springs or rivers. The wells are often inoperable. The local springs are often downstream of the town and contain large amount of coliform bacteria. And the rivers are used for bathing, washing and contain coliform bacteria, albeit at a smaller amount than some of the springs.

##### Achievements

*Marmont* – The Merrimack College civil engineering team has inspected the existing system, performed water quality tests and identified the source of several leaks in the system. We have necessary donated tools and materials , and in collaboration with the local population, we have repaired numerous leaks and replaced the broken main valve. These repairs have tripled the amount of water available to the people of Marmont. In addition we met with the community and agreed to assist them in securing funding to expand their existing water system.

*Casse* – In previous trip, the MCCE team performed various water quality tests at numerous natural springs in the region and inspected an existing rain water harvesting system that is attached to the Lahoye health clinic.

##### Future Plans

*Marmont* – Work with Project Medishare and the community to improve the performance and reliability of the existing water system by: inspecting the system for leaks; repairing leaks and broken faucets; educating the population about the importance of maintaining the system and keeping all their faucets off when not in use; and investigate the possibility of adding additional water storage capacity.

*Casse* – Write a report that clearly identifies the situation in the town and possible options to provide the population with clean water. Work with Project Medishare and the community to choose and implement the best option.

### **III.b. Athletic Training**

#### Needs in Haiti

Being isolated from electricity, running water and most modern technology, many people living in the rural communities of Marmont and Casse survive by traveling on foot, transporting items by hand and farming with primitive tools. This physically demanding lifestyle and dependence on self-mobility increases one's risk of being injured and magnifies the impact of being ill. For those who suffer from musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) such as broken bones, low back pain, and tendinitis, health care is nearly non-existent. Health insurance and worker's compensation do not exist, and if available, treatment is limited to make-shift splints and inconsistent, short-term supplies of inadequate medication. Many of these MSDs limit their ability to work, and in some cases, have kept them from working entirely. Consequently, the inability to work makes them unable to provide for their family.

#### Achievements

Collaborating with the physicians, nurses and community health agents working for Project Medishare, the Athletic Training Team has worked to increase the health care capacity for musculoskeletal injuries in the rural towns of Casse, Marmont and Thomonde. We have provided educational workshops for 36 community health agents on how to treat low back pain; assisted with physical exams at mobile health clinics; observed activities of daily living by taking part in home health visits with community health agents; and, have provided care for people presenting with musculoskeletal ailments at Project Medishare's health clinics. By working with Haitian health care workers at these clinics, we provided a combined or isolated treatment of therapeutic exercise, orthopedic bracing and therapeutic massage for over 165 physical ailments we evaluated.

#### Future Plans

We will continue to collaborate with Project Medishare's Haitian health care workers to improve the health care capacity for musculoskeletal injuries in the community of Marmont by: assessing the effectiveness of our previous health care and educational efforts; providing care for MSDs; and, offering educational workshops that empower Haitian health care workers to independently prevent, evaluate, treat and rehabilitate MSDs. Additionally, we hope to expand our newly established relationship with rehabilitation specialists working for the organization, Partners in Health. Based on our experiences providing health care and workshops in these communities, the health care workers and people living in Marmont are very capable, eager and willing to learn the techniques to care for their MSDs, indicating great potential for the future.

### III.c. Campus Ministry

#### Achievements

Campus Ministry takes a large role in trip preparation meetings: helping students understand the history and culture of Haiti; educating them about Catholic Social Teaching; and, leading them in reflection exercises that are similar to what they will experience on the trip. Once on the trip, the Campus Ministry staff member leads nightly reflections that help students connect their experiences to their faith and beliefs. These periods give students the opportunity to share the joys and sorrows that they experience in a given day.

#### Future Plans

We hope to be able to increase the amount of education we can offer students about the history, culture and current situation in Haiti. Presently our students, faculty and staff invest a large amount of time planning and running multiple fundraisers in order to support our trips. Our hope is to continue to attract partners so that in the future our students, faculty and staff can spend less time on fundraising and more time learning about the problems currently facing the people of Haiti.

### IV. Future Considerations

The Haiti Service Learning Initiative utilizes the knowledge, skills and resources of the Merrimack College community to help meet the needs of Project Medishare and people in the Central Plateau of Haiti, while simultaneously providing members of the Merrimack community with an opportunity for personal and professional growth.

As our work in Haiti continues, increased involvement from the Merrimack College community is needed to secure the future of the Haiti Service Learning Initiative. We welcome anyone who is interested in helping develop or support this project to join our efforts.



*Figure 3: Engineering student and professor working amongst new friends.*

## V. Acknowledgements

Many thanks go out to all those who support the Merrimack College Haiti Service Learning Initiative. Our work would not be possible without the help from the following:

Merrimack College Office of Mission and Student Affairs

Merrimack College Office of Campus Ministry

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Merrimack College Health Sciences Department

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Merrimack College Athletics Department

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Surgi-Care

Friends and Family of the participants