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Alternative Spring Breakers Lend A Helping Hand

April 15, 2014

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.— Last month, 36 Illinois Wesleyan students took the opportunity to spend their spring break doing service projects at Rosebud Reservation, a Lakota Sioux tribe settlement in South Dakota, and in Albany, Ga., a site for Habitat for Humanity's Collegiate Challenge.

At a talkback session that was held on Tuesday, April 8, the students who took the trip to Rosebud and their advisors University Chaplain Elyse Nelson Winger and Associate Professor of Anthropology Rebecca Gearhart shared their experiences through stories and photos.

The 14 participants – including students, faculty, staff and community partners – worked on the reservation from 8:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m. each day, serving in a variety of areas. Some days, they participated in construction projects such as installing counter tops and replacing gutters for residents who had requested help with repairs on their homes. The students also worked in a Methodist-affiliated organization called Tree of Life's thrift shops on the reservation, where residents can buy very inexpensive clothing and supplies such as diapers and other toiletries. Tree of Life also provides a "Warm Welcome" program each morning, where the residents can pay \$1 for simple health services, a meal and supplies.



Students visit Sinte Gleska University on Rosebud Reservation



IWU Students assist a resident at Tree of Life

"The residents pay their dollar so that they feel like they have sense of agency in the matter – that they are giving as well as receiving," said senior psychology major Kaitlin Dunn.

Junior environmental studies major Amanda King said, "My favorite part was cooking meals for the residents, because it really gave me the opportunity to see the diversity of people who needed that service."

On their free day, the students toured Sinte Gleska University, a tribal college located on the reservation, where residents study and learn how to better contribute to their community. Chief Hollow Hornbear and his wife later cooked for the students and made plans to visit Illinois Wesleyan next month.

"This was an amazing opportunity to immerse myself in another culture," said Dunn.

It was so eye opening to see how the oppression of Native Americans directly affects them. The residents were so willing to share their time with us, and I learned so much from them."

Similarly, at the Collegiate Challenge in Albany, Ga., the 30 students and IWU staff volunteers worked every day from 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. building and raising walls and a roof on two different houses. They also spent some time working in thrift stores that help support Habitat for Humanity. One day, they worked with students from a Magnet School in Georgia and helped them construct birdhouses.

"I feel like I made the right choice to take part in the Collegiate Challenge," said first year math major Cindy Basillio. "I love seeing the difference we can all make with just one week."



Collegiate Challenge students work with the builders

All of the participants seemed to exhibit a clear understanding of how their trip benefited their experiences students at Illinois Wesleyan. King compared the Rosebud trip to studying abroad in Australia and becoming familiar with the Aboriginal culture.

“In Australia, I didn’t feel like I knew how to help the native people with their struggles, but here in the United States I can spread awareness of how we can help our native people,” said King.



The students pose with the plans for the house they helped to build

Sophomore physics major Julia Savich said, “I went on an Alternative Spring Break trip with Habitat for Humanity last year, and it was a wonderful experience that allowed me to apply what I learned in the classroom and meet new people. I wanted to continue that this year and I will most likely go again my next two years at IWU.”

To find out how to become involved with Alternative Spring or Fall Break in the 2014-15 school year, contact Chaplain Elyse Nelson-Winger at (309) 556-3005 or chaplain@iwu.edu.

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