



Spring 4-4-2007

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Sherry Wallace
Illinois Wesleyan University

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Recommended Citation

Wallace, Sherry, "Study Abroad More Than Sites, Classes for Student" (2007). *News and Events*. 3228.

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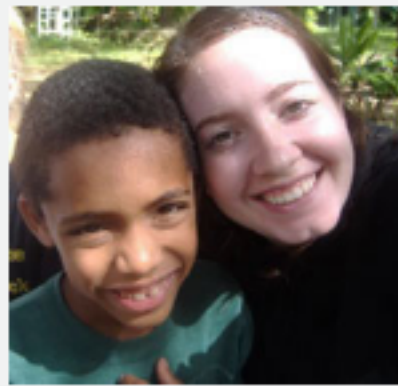
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Study Abroad More Than Sites, Classes for Student April 4, 2007

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – Lauren Booth, an Illinois Wesleyan sophomore, is finding her study abroad program is about more than textbooks and tourist sites – it's also about a hammer and nails. Booth is part of a new kind of study abroad opportunity allowing students to perform volunteer work in the developing nations where they study.

"I wanted to experience life in a developing country, and I knew there were volunteer options integrated into the program," said Booth, a Hispanic studies major, who is currently studying in Santiago of the Dominican Republic.



Lauren Booth (right) poses with a villager in the Dominican Republic.

Students in the program spend time with local residents. Booth, who arrived in the Dominican Republic in January of 2007, has been in the country for four months. During her time there, the Des Plaines, Ill., native has taught English to residents in Santiago, traveled to a rural village to build latrines with the Peace Corps, and helped at a local orphanage. "We painted furniture, cooked meals and played with the children," said Booth of her time at the orphanage. "We also had a 'salon day' for the kids. It was an amazing experience."

The goal of any study abroad program is to immerse students in the life and culture of a different country. In developing nations such as the Dominican Republic, that means seeing day-to-day struggles. "I learned first-hand the effects of extreme poverty," said Booth. "I also learned about myself, and what I am capable of doing to help."

The volunteer experience abroad is a growing trend, says Stacey Shimizu, acting director of Illinois Wesleyan's International Office. "Not many programs have built in the kind of community work Lauren is doing," said Shimizu. "More and more study abroad programs are offering some kinds of for-credit internships or non-credit volunteer opportunities."

Illinois Wesleyan works in conjunction with international organizations to send students abroad. Currently, 69 IWU students are traveling and studying across the globe. The Dominican Republic program comes from an organization called the Council for International Educational Exchange (CIEE).

"Volunteering is part of the added value of studying abroad," said Ann Curtis, campus relations coordinator for CIEE. "It's another way students can be culturally immersed in the region and connect with the community."

Other students in the CIEE program with Booth are volunteering at hospitals and coaching baseball or working with small businesses to become successful. "I have really learned about the Dominican culture," said Booth. "I probably don't even realize yet how much I have learned."

Contact: Sherry Wallace, (309) 556-3792