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UWF social work and nursing students to embark on service-learning trip to Guatemala

Pensacola, Fla. – July 21, 2016 – Next month, students from the UWF Departments of Social Work and Nursing will head to Guatemala for a service-learning trip as part of the UWF Emerge program. This program was created by the College of Education and Professional Studies to encourage faculty to integrate high-impact educational practices into course work.

“Two recognized high-impact practices are study abroad and service learning,” said Dr. Chris Cotten, assistant professor of social work and Emerge faculty fellow. “This trip is both a service learning and cultural enrichment experience for UWF students.”

The trip is preceded by a six-session class that provides students with background and context – featuring topics including the history, politics, economy and culture of Guatemala; Guatemala's 36-year civil war; women's issues; Guatemala's healthcare system; migration; child protection and children's issues ranging from malnutrition and international adoption to cleft lip and palate.



“Each student who participates in the trip will take two suitcases to Guatemala – the first is their own belongings; the second is packed with donations,” Cotten said. “We bring clothing, shoes, hygiene products, toothbrushes and toothpaste, toys - whatever we can collect.”

UWF students will travel with Hearts in Motion – an Indiana-based nongovernmental organization that has provided humanitarian services throughout Central and South America for more than 25 years.

The group will fly to Guatemala City on Friday, Aug. 5 and immediately travel to Zacapa in the rural, arid lowlands of eastern Guatemala. Starting Saturday, they will participate in daily service activities until their return on Aug. 14. Activities include:

- an educational forum on the campus of a Guatemalan social work program;
- clothing distribution at a local dump that is also an encampment;
- a visit to a Hearts in Motion-sponsored day care;
- a visit to Zacapa Municipal hospital and the Range of Motion Project, a clinic that creates free prosthetics for people with disabilities;
- visits to two senior citizen programs; and
- a visit to women's empowerment/micro financing cooperative.

Thursday will be spent at Hearts in Motion's compound in Gualán, which includes an orphanage, senior center and an inpatient Nutrition Center for malnourished children, where UWF students will participate in a weekly feeding for local children.

"Research shows that high-impact educational practices aid in retention of students and assist them in forging close relationships with faculty," Cotten said. "Study abroad in a developing country such as Guatemala is a wake-up call to students regarding their status as privileged Americans, the effects of globalization and an opportunity to compare and contrast America's social welfare system with that of a developing country."

For the first time since the program began, nursing students are set to join social work students in 2016.

"The Emerge Guatemala trip is a natural fit for Nursing students because nursing is service driven – providing protection, promotion and optimization of health to individuals, families, groups, and communities," said Dr. Brandy Strahan, assistant professor and director of the UWF BSN Program. "This trip will allow the Department of Nursing to implement our curriculum in an international setting that will immerse the students in an environment and health care system that is vastly different from the United States."

Strahan hopes her students will gain knowledge and experience practicing nursing in a cultural system different from their own, gain increased global perspective and have the opportunity to apply public health services – teaching them the cultural humility and ethical responsibility required of those caring for people in a developing country.

Cotten says students who have participated in the program over the past three years consistently report the experience to be life changing.

"This trip opens the opportunity for students to experience another culture while doing activities that are meaningful and incredibly rewarding," said Sandra Lechuga Corrales, who participated last year and will return in 2016 as Dr. Cotten's assistant and interpreter.

“It demonstrates that, yes, we can all be agents of change. We tend to think that one person can hardly make a difference to decrease poverty and injustice in the world, but in this particular Emerge program, the student can see how one person can truly create change – one person at a time,” Lechuga Corrales said.

For more information on this and other Emerge programs, please visit uwf.edu/emerge.

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