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Courtney Dell'Agnese

Roger Williams University

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Petersfield, Jamaica Leaves Lasting Impact on Students

Faculty-led study abroad trip brings 12 students to Petersfield, Jamaica. Two students, Philip Tringale '21 and Kayla LaRosa '20, reflect on their experience in this new community



The group of 12 students inside a school in Petersfield, Jamaica Photo by: Becky Spritz

March 7, 2019 | By Courtney Dell'Agnese '19

PETERSFIELD, Jamaica –This past January, 12 students traveled to Petersfield, Jamaica through a faculty-led study abroad trip with professor of psychology, Becky Spritz. Throughout the week-long trip, the students immersed themselves in the schools, culture and community.

Petersfield is a small town in Westmoreland Parish, located in the heart of the sugarcane industry. One of the central pillars of the Petersfield community is the Association of Clubs (AOC), founded in 1988 by John Matthias Brown. The AOC sponsors youth summer camps, provides a space for fostering educational opportunities and community meetings and offers a place for individuals to come together for any and all social events. In addition, as part of the AOC's village tourism program, the community hosts students from the United States, from schools such as RWU, and engages them in service projects and local cultural activities.



The class discusses and prepares for observing Jamaican schools. Photo by: Kayla LaRosa

Taught by professor Becky Spritz, the special topics in psychology course "Community Mental Health in Jamaica" is a week-long global service-learning experience that engages students in service activities that promote mental health and wellness among youth in local communities. Through the partnership with Mr. Brown and the AOC, RWU

students are brought into Petersfield schools to aid teachers in keeping the young students engaged and involved in the classroom. Through these experiences, they learn how cultural, social and economic factors shape community approaches to youth development and education. These students are also provided a unique experience to examine themselves in relation to their race, gender, power and privilege, all to consider the kind of global citizens they aspire to be.

"We talked a lot about privilege and I told myself to start thinking more about how I'm at an advantage instead of looking at how people are at a disadvantage," Philip Tringale said. "This trip made me understand my privilege and how I have this advantage over others and because of this I want to use it to help and benefit others."

Below are photos from the trip and more reflections from two students, marketing major Philip Tringale '21 and legal studies and psychology double major Kayla LaRosa '20, about their experience and the impact it had on them.



After observing the classrooms, learning from teachers about the core goals for their classroom and talking with Petersfield students, the RWU students presented their findings and recommendations for how students might overcome classroom challenges. Photo by: Becky Spritz

"My experience there was incredible, but to say it was good or I learned a lot is very broad and doesn't even cover everything we did there. To understand and appreciate a culture that's so vastly different than my own was really interesting to see. They made me understand that knowledge and education is so much more powerful than we sometimes realize."

Kayla LaRosa '20



In support of classroom goals and through one-on-one conversations, RWU students assisted the Petersfield High School students in identifying their character strengths and setting goals for their futures, both inside and outside of the classroom. Photo by: Becky Spritz

"The second day in the schools we did interviews with students they selected for us. We met with them and laid out questions that weren't too personal but allowed us to still get to know them to set goals. I suggested to one student to make flashcards and showed him how to do it. He came back the next day and he came all the way back to find me and he said, 'Look what I'm doing.' And it was the best thing ever."

Philip Tringale '21



Mr. Brown (pictured above) shares jokes, stories and lifetime experiences with every student that comes into the AOC, making each one feel like a part of the Petersfield family. Photo by: Becky Spritz

"Being in the AOC and seeing what Mr. Brown does for the community is inspiring to say the least. And seeing Mr. Vaz at Petersfield High, seeing what he does for his school...These community leaders dedicate their lives to solving problems. They do it without thought. They don't do it to look good. They do it because they care."

Kayla LaRosa '20



Jamaican families open their homes, and their hearts, making Petersfield a true home away from home for the week. Photo by: Becky Spritz

"It was so much more beneficial to have the homestays than if we were just in a hotel somewhere. Every part of being in the Munroe family taught me what the culture of Jamaica was like."

Kayla LaRosa '20



RWU students learned dominoes from community members at the AOC. The domino game is a popular pastime in Petersfield at home, in community centers and at almost any social event. Photo by: Becky Spritz

"It was really cool to see that almost everyone in the town would go to the AOC. The people were all so welcoming, even people we didn't know. I remember we walked into this one little place and they welcomed us in and said, 'when you're here, we treat you.' Because of interactions like that, I left Jamaica feeling like they were family."

Philip Tringale '21



As a parting gift, the homestay mothers gave the students recipes for authentic Jamaican cuisine that they could take back with them to the United States. Photo by: Becky Spritz

"Being a global citizen means traveling to another country and going with the intention to learn as much as you can while immersing yourself in their culture. Don't travel somewhere to help. Travel to experience and understand one another."

Philip Tringale '21



As part of the village tourism, the group visited historic landmarks such as the one pictured above. Abeokuta, which sits on the grounds of a former plantation and contains aqueducts built by Spanish colonists, is a private nature park with two waterfalls and breathtaking landscape views. Photo by: Kayla LaRosa

"[This experience] changed the way I think about traveling. I don't want to travel as a tourist. If I was going to go somewhere with a white beach and palm trees and sand, I could go anywhere in the world. So, if I'm going to go to Jamaica I should experience actual Jamaica and see what's it really like to live there."

Philip Tringale '21

"Jamaica is not all resort. To see that part showed me a lot more than Sandals or Montego Bay. To be a part of that is what impacted me the most. Growing up in the United States you have this vision of where everyone else is in the world and what Jamaica looks like, but seeing it firsthand struck down all those stereotypes I may have formed."

Kayla LaRosa '20

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