

Pete Freeman

Graduation Year: Senior

College: Arts & Letters

Major(s): Sociology; Gender Studies; Int'l Peace Studies

Minors(s): n/a

Scholar Group Membership: Sorin Scholars

Did you received other funding for this project?: No

Could you have completed this project without CUSE funding? No

More details on CUSE funding assistance? Without CUSE's generous support, I would not have been able to travel to Central Region, Ghana to engage in a service learning experience with Young Achievers Caucus (YAC) and Adolescent Sexual Health Initiative (ASHI).

Project Title: Young Achievers Caucus: Evaluating Teen Pregnancy Prevention Efforts

Project Location: Elmina, Central Region, Ghana

ND Faculty Mentor: Richard Williams

Project Type: Service-Learning

Why did you undertake this project/experience? Deepen your knowledge of a topic or issue, Career discernment and/or preparation, Internationalize your Notre Dame experience

Did your funded experience help you:

[Deepen your understanding of your coursework or field of study]: Very Much

[Discern your interests and post-bac goals]: Very Much

[Become confident in your ability to set and achieve your goals]: Yes

[Gain a more nuanced view of local, national, or global communities]: Very Much

[Improve your written and verbal communications skills]: Yes

Tell us about your experience.

YAC's summer interventions took place in the KEEA District in Central Region, Ghana. The Director of Ghana Health Services (GHS) recently informed me through email that the KEEA District saw 749 new teenage pregnancies in 2016. The director requested that YAC work in cooperation with the Ghanaian government to drastically reduce the instance of teen pregnancy in the District in hopes of a smaller number of pregnant teens in 2017. In order to accomplish this request and fulfill our partnership with the Ghanaian government, YAC enrolled 250 rural children into the NHIS and delivered its "Young Achievers" class to over 400 children during each of its summer events. To accomplish these interventions, prior on-the-ground preparation in the days immediately leading up to the events was critical. Engaging with KEEA local elders, community members, local government officials, and particularly mothers of children who will participate in YAC's interventions proved vital to ensuring that our programming reached a wide, receptive target audience. Not only prior preparation and planning, but also post-testing and data collection in the hours immediately following YAC's "Young Achievers" class were essential to YAC's evidence-based approach. After all, without data to prove that YAC is "doing good" and

not simply “feeling good,” our partnership with the Ghanaian government would cease, as the government requires proof of impact.

I was also involved with incorporating Adolescent Sexual Health Initiative (ASHI) with the Ghana Registrar General. As ASHI's co-founder and MEL Manager, I constructed its curriculum and mobilized team members to deliver ASHI's outreach program in two areas of the KEEA Municipality. I was also involved with coordinating four US and UK ASHI volunteers ensuring their safety and productivity.

Reflecting upon this summer experience, I realize the extent to which international development is a practice of ethical trade-offs. YAC and ASHI risked creating a dependence on their interventions multiple times throughout the summer. For example, by enrolling adolescents into Ghana's National Health Insurance Scheme, YAC risked creating an entitlement or expectation among the parents of those enrolled who may assume that NGO's or government groups would be available to subsidize the cost of insurance. As a result, some parents began to think that they should not enroll their child in health insurance unless it was highly subsidized. I also took away the extent to which experts in the field of international development were still, thirty to forty years after they began, making mistakes in their empowerment projects, policy lobbying, and measurement and evaluation. For example, one of YAC's partner organizations cannot prove that their education intervention improves teacher effectiveness, despite their having delivered this intervention for nearly twenty years.

Describe the impact this project had, both on you as a student-scholar and on the people you worked with.

This summer, YAC and ASHI combined reached over 1,000 Ghanaian adolescents to deliver their teenage pregnancy and sugar daddy awareness curriculums. Another couple hundred Ghanaian adolescents were enrolled into the National Health Insurance Scheme at free or reduced cost. One of YAC's co-founders and I incorporated a new organization - ASHI - with the Registrar General's office in Ghana, an experience which gave my co-founder and I greater insight into Ghanaian bureaucracy, formal NGO incorporation, and the legal 'red tape' required to form and maintain an NGO in Ghana.

This service learning experience further shaped my outlook on international development and my post-graduate career plans. Working directly with impoverished Ghanaian adolescents, their parents and community members, and Ghanaian government officials, I gained critical insight into the various perspectives that development recipients hold about international efforts to "develop" their communities, technologies, and policies. I realized that Ghanaians at different levels of society hold different opinions on the use and role of development initiatives, and that these perspectives form narratives that are often incongruent from group to group.

Describe how this experience is connected to your plans as a student or future professional.

This summer's service learning experience primarily impacted my career discernment. Before leaving for Ghana, I was fairly certain that I may live in Ghana after graduation and continue working with ASHI and YAC in the development sector. However, after returning from this service learning experience, I am unsure whether I will "live full-time" in Ghana after graduation. Certainly, I plan to work with YAC and ASHI after graduating for the years to come. However, I do not need to live in Ghana for my contributions to have a tangible impact. Moreover, my 'white skin' can send the wrong message to YAC and ASHI partners interested in collaborating with or funding our interventions. My on-the-ground involvement with YAC and ASHI gives the impression that we have more "white money" and other resources than we have, detracting from our ability to create an impact with the few team resources in our possession.

What advice would you give other students who are planning to pursue similar projects?

I would advise students with similar interests to reach out to economics and international development professors to discuss their interests and proposed projects. After speaking with professors, students should reach out to fellow students who have engaged in international development projects and engage in conversation. Next, speak with CUSE about your proposed project and draft a proposal. Finally -- apply, apply, apply!

I acknowledge that this form has been filled out truthfully and to the best of my ability. I understand that this information will be shared with many different CUSE constituencies. As such, I have provided as much useful information as I was able. I understand that CUSE will not complete my award disbursement until this form is successfully completed. If I have any questions or concerns, I will contact CUSE before submitting this form. To illustrate that you understand all of these points, please enter your Notre Dame email in the box below.
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