



All Things Ignatian



Lights, Camera, Theology

Dr. John O'Keefe, Dr. Carol Zuegner, Mr. Tim Guthrie, Mr. Kyle Woolley

Following the Jesuit value of being men and women for and with others and a journalistic value of bearing witness, a theology professor, a graphic design professor/video artist and a journalism professor joined forces for a different kind of learning experience for undergraduate students. The course, called Backpack Journalism in the Dominican Republic, was a faculty-led, five-week, summer international experience made up of two parts: theology and journalism. The first two weeks in Omaha and then 11 days based at the ILAC Center in Santiago, Dominican Republic. The theology component introduced the Church in Latin America and the Dominican Republic as well as how the Church was transformed by Vatican II, specifically through the Council's affirmation that Scripture enjoins us to work for the Kingdom of God. The journalistic component came in practical applications of learning how to write feature stories, how to blog and how to shoot and edit a video documentary as well as the power of journalism to tell stories that make a difference. The nine students spent a busy two weeks studying theology and learning to write journalistically and to shoot and edit video. The students and professors then spent 11 days in the Dominican Republic.

The theology and journalism came together in using journalistic tools to help tell the story of how one man, Pedro Almonte, a Catholic deacon, is driven by his faith and his belief that the Church has a responsibility to work for and with the poor. The students shot and edited footage for a mini-documentary on the work Almonte has done for more than 20 years to help the people of Cien Fuegos – a sprawling slum next to the garbage dump in Santiago, Dominican Republic – better their lives through soup kitchens, education programs and neighborhood groups that stand up to crime and violence or work to stop environmental degradation



Emily Hanigan, left, Kyle Woolley and Scott Peak interview Pedro Almonte, a Catholic deacon, at Cien Fuegos, Santiago, Dominican Republic.

Reflection on action

The students wrote blogs and feature stories as well as producing the video. The journalism, theology and social justice elements came together as students immersed themselves in the culture by living for three days with families in a rural village called Majagual. The group built latrines and helped pour concrete floors. They also travelled to the border of Haiti and the Dominican Republic.

Reflection on action is an important part of Jesuit education, and the reflection sessions allowed students and faculty to share their feelings and emotions. The sessions, led by Kyle Woolley, gave all members of the team a chance to focus on their emotions after experiences that were challenging — filming in Cien Fuegos, the border between Haiti and the Dominican Republic — and inspiring — the immersion at the campo. The reflections also focused on what each of the participants would carry with them from the experience.

The students' work, including the blogs, stories and the video, is available on a website, called www.backpack.creighton.edu. The video, called "Esperanza," (Hope) won Best of Show and Best Documentary in a local film festival.

In June 2011, 14 students and O'Keefe, Guthrie and Zuegner will travel to Uganda to profile Catholics who are working to build peace in the African country.



The backpack journalism team and the people of Cien Fuegos working for a better community gather for a photo at a soup kitchen in Santiago