

This summer I was given the amazing opportunity to work alongside a member of Sewanee's faculty, as well as a fellow Sewanee student, in developing a method of discussion aimed at building communities. The project, entitled Viewfinder, is meant to aid a group of people in discussing common concerns in a way that builds relationship and a shared history between community members. This in turn will build a sense of self-development and resiliency among them.

What makes Viewfinder unique is that it combines photography with a method of discussion. The inclusion of photography is important in a few ways. First of all, it allows one to objectify everyday experience. This gives one the opportunity to view it from different angles and see possible solutions that may not be readily apparent. Photography also provides clear evidence of concerns which are shared by the community and could be used by them as a tool to present their concerns to others.

Prof. Pradip Malde, Chandler Sowden (C' 14) and I first spent time in Sewanee developing a few possible outlines for conducting Viewfinder. During this time I was also trained in the basics of photography. This provided me with knowledge important for the next stage of the project. It also allowed Malde and Sowden to develop a module for training community members in photography. The time the group spent in Sewanee was invaluable to me as I was able to learn much about working in a team, as well as how to take a big idea and break it down into actionable steps.

For the next stage of the project we traveled to the Central Plateau region of Haiti. The community in which we had chosen to test the different modules of Viewfinder was Corporant. Specifically we were working with a group of students at Centre de la Formation Fritz Lafontant

(CFFL). We provided training in photography to the students. I, along with Chandler Sowden, presented a four-step discussion method that we had all worked to develop in Sewanee. This was an important opportunity for me in public speaking, a skill I believe will continue to be important. The students then went out into the surrounding communities to photograph. After reviewing the photographs, the CFFL students, who had been split into four groups, were asked to discuss them and create a presentation on possible solutions to the rest of the class.

The most exciting part for me was hearing the students talk about their photographs. I spent five years living in Haiti while in middle and high school. The country and its people are very important to me. It is a small proud nation, in many places stricken by extreme poverty. Haiti has been largely ignored throughout history. When Haiti is brought onto the world's stage, as in was in the 2010 earthquake, its story is told by expatriates. Rarely have Haitians had the opportunity to form the narrative of themselves to present to the world, and the vast majority has been left voiceless. Watching young Haitian men and women capture beautiful and poignant images of their own land, and hearing what they had to say about them was thrilling. Viewfinder has the potential to help empower communities like Corporant; to give this under-resourced community a voice with which to speak within itself, and begin to dialogue with others.

The final step for my internship was to return to Sewanee with Prof. Malde and Chandler Sowden. While here, we reviewed our notes from the field in order to refine the training we offer as a part of Viewfinder, and discuss ways to improve the method. We also used this time to explore further application of Viewfinder. This gave me further experience in working as a group in order to recognize what aspects of an idea need editing.

This internship was in many ways an incredible growing experience for me. My career goal is to be an anthropologist. I plan to focus on cultural issues that influence and are influenced by extreme poverty. As an American I have always struggled in Haiti to find ways to prod issues of poverty that have grabbed my attention. While observing the students in discussion, I was able to hear them in open and honest conversation about their communities. This allowed me a very unique view of Haitian life. I have been able to observe it for five years, and yet I was able in a few days to delve deeper into some of these cultural issues simply by watching the students.

Haitians are a people who have often been mistreated by outsiders, from the French slave owners to occupying American soldiers. Haitians are generally a very welcoming and friendly people, no matter where you come from. Some of the more difficult periods of their history, however, can at times make it more challenging to have open discussions about problematic issues. The wonderful thing about Viewfinder for me, beyond encouraging this kind of discussion among the students themselves, is that I was in some ways allowed to be an observer in a way that may not have been possible as an active participant.

I also greatly value other opportunities with which the internship provided me. Learning to work in a group setting, seeing both the advantages, and how to overcome the challenges will be invaluable. I learned about my own work style and how to more effectively communicate my ideas to others. The training in photography has also helped me to see many applications for photographs in my later work.