Summer Internship Report 2017

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Hometown: Nashville

Zamni Kafe
(Partners in Coffee)
Haiti

Provide an overview of the organization/research project and a summary of your responsibilities, tasks, and/or projects.
For the second summer in a row, I worked on the Zamni Kafe project (Partners in Coffee), which is run by several Sewanee staff, faculty, and students, with the help of a vocational school in Haiti. The project is aimed towards encouraging reforestation, improving the lives of small farmers and their families, and providing training and additional income. This summer I helped to conduct a survey I wrote alongside two Haitian agronomists among two farming communities in Haiti. The survey’s purpose was to get a better understanding of the farmer’s knowledge of certain agroforestry and farming practices, and where they desire/need training, so that in the future, community education projects could be implemented with a solid understanding of the need for such education.

During your internship, what did you accomplish or how did you make a difference? In what ways did you grow in your professional and technical skills?
The completion of the prepared survey was an exciting accomplishment, but it is only a part of the story. The real fruits of our labor will (with luck and perseverance) will begin next year as we start planning community educational events and returning to Bois Joli and Morne Michele with new energy and ideas to exchange and experiment. This summer was a discipline in reminding myself of the necessary longevity of community development projects, and how to engage members of our program in something that does not have an immediate or clear impact on their well being. For
example, I would often ask in the surveys what training in particular a farmer was interested, and take stock of where they were excited to grow. Other times I would take note of a particular tree or practice and share some of my own knowledge in order to show them my own investment and eagerness to engage in their livelihoods.

Describe a problem that you helped to solve at your internship. What skills or knowledge from your education at Sewanee helped you address the problem?
Most of the problems I was helpful in involved language barriers between my fellow interns and Haitians. My language skills I had to develop on my own during the school year, as there are no Creole classes offered.

In what way were your teamwork skills strengthened?
As the only returning researcher, I had the most experience with the culture and dynamics of our position in Haiti. I think the lack of reliability of schedules and plans in Haiti was a large struggle for many of my coworkers, whereas I had been well adjusted to it. I often found myself trying to counter and mediate frustrations about timing and planning, which, if unchecked, often fed more negativity and unhealthier relationships with our partners. Finding an understanding way to counter this negativity and keep our team positive was sometimes a challenge, and certainly an area of growth for me.

How did your internship affect your career plans?
I am now considering pursuing a graduate degree in agroforestry.

In what ways did your internship cause you to encounter people of different backgrounds from your own? What steps did you take to communicate effectively with such persons? What did you learn from such persons’ perspectives?
One of the gifts I have received through being a returning researcher was a much more intimate relationship with the farmers and the Haitian agronomists in our program. Time and time again, my narrow understanding of these individuals was broken, as the image of their humanness became more clear to me. I was able to return to Haiti with a much stronger language skill, which was a huge benefit when trying to explain myself or understand others. From many of these families living in the mountains, I learned of the simple joys that made their lives full and rich, how they connected with their neighbors, and how they told stories and jokes to each other.

Words of advice for future interns (housing, transportation, etc.)?
Leave your expectations at home. Come with an open mind and an attitude of extreme flexibility and patience.

Words of thanks to your internship funding donors:
Your gift has effects that will extend far beyond our own lives, and the changes caused by the spirit of our work have been enormous to many individuals. All members of the project that you enable us to help work on have been blessed.