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Final Internship Report

I began my eight-week internship in Haiti in a mixed state of emotions. On the one hand, I was thrilled to be returning to Haiti for my sixth time since beginning college. On the other hand, however, I knew that as a rising senior this would be my final summer working for Zanmi Kafe. So much has changed in my life since my first visit to Haiti during a spring break outreach trip in my first year at Sewanee. And now, as a senior leading a small research team, I've had time to reflect on both my personal growth as well as the projects' continued development.

As the years have gone by, I've been given an increasing amount of autonomy over the research that I conduct. During my first summer in Haiti, following my freshmen year, I simply helped out in any way that I could on the existing project. This work typically involved collecting baseline data on the biodiversity of the rural region of Haiti where Zanmi Kafe is based, known as the zone of Bois Jolie. However, during this past summer, after being given permission to narrow my field of research, I chose to conduct health surveys throughout two zones. The first zone, Bois Jolie, is one that our team has built a close and lasting relationship with over the past few years. The second zone, known as Morne Michel, was a relatively new area that we've only just recently begun working in. Both zones provided their own unique set of challenges and triumphs, and by the end of my summer internship, I felt that I had gained a valuable understanding of the health patterns currently affecting the farmers of these regions.

Both Bois Jolie and Morne Michel are located several hours up a mountain from the larger city that we live in. To get to either zone, we have to load up donkeys with our food, water, and equipment before setting out on foot towards the tops of the mountains where we

conduct our research. Over the past few years, our team has planted thousands of coffee and shade trees throughout Bois Jolie. And as of last year, several hundred coffee plants were distributed throughout Morne Michel when they became a part of the Zanmi Kafe project. At first, conducting health surveys may seem to be unrelated to a coffee-based agroforestry project. However, this baseline health information is a crucial aspect in determining the long-term effects of our reforestation project on the farmers' livelihoods. Without this health information, we could plant trees and document changes in land use, but we would be unable to directly quantify the changes that result from having healthier, more forested lands to farm.

The typical format of our week while in Haiti involved hiking up to Bois Jolie every Monday morning, working all day, and spending the night in the local school. On Tuesday we would rise early, work for most of the afternoon, and then hike back down to our house at the bottom of the mountain in a city called Mirebalais. Our Wednesdays were usually spent entering data collected in Bois Jolie and preparing for our trip to Morne Michel the next day. On Thursday morning, we would set out for Morne Michel and follow a similar pattern of working, sleeping in the school for one night, and then hiking down in the afternoon of the following day. This system of sleeping at the top of the mountain twice a week proved to be an effective way of conducting research and allowed for much more work to be done than would have been possible if we had to hike up the mountains every day.

Though Haiti is always full of difficulties, one aspect of working in the country that I've grown to appreciate over the years is that our work is rarely boring. It can certainly be hot and exhausting at times, but the constant uncertainty of working in Haiti is what keeps us all interested. If Germany is known for being punctual and efficient, then I believe the Haitians must

be the exact opposite of the Germans. When waiting for a ride, you might wait anywhere from two minutes to two hours. The more you try to plan in attempt to outsmart the ubiquitous uncertainty, the more you're left dumbfounded by the unpredictable situations you come to find yourself in. But what the Haitians lack in punctuality, they make up for in charm and genuine care for others. The people you meet working in Haiti demonstrate a culture of people raised on the idea of reciprocal respect for one another. In the years I've spent working in Haiti, I've always felt safer walking down the streets as a foreigner than I do in my hometown of Baton Rouge.

Our summer was filled with extreme highs and extreme lows. On some days I felt like we were making real progress and that the poverty-stricken regions we worked in were finally beginning to improve. And then we would learn of the government's state of turmoil or the most recent blight to ravage the locals' crops and my previous sense of dejection would come crawling back. But all in all, we found a way to take the good with the bad and not to focus too much on the problems we couldn't change. When you spend years working in a country as poor as Haiti, you learn to not let the constant troubles and setbacks dampen your spirits too much. It's easy to rattle off all the problems surrounding you when you're in a place like Haiti, and it's much harder to stay positive and keep your mind focused on the goals at hand. But often times, it's working in these difficult environments that affords the greatest amount of personal growth when it's over. The experience I gained from conducting intimate surveys on personal health issues with farmers will continue to serve me well as I pursue a career in the medical field. And in the future, I know I'll look back to the summers I spent in Haiti and be grateful for every

experience, both good and bad, because they taught me how to keep moving forward, regardless of the obstacle.