Dear First Generation Students,

It has been my pleasure and honor to share the past two years with you as the First Generation Program Coordinator. I have really enjoyed getting to know many of you and hearing about your college experiences. I hope this program has opened doors and showed you about the many opportunities that the College of Saint Benedict and St. John’s University have to offer you.

While the college is still working on its plan for how to continue the program, I will be leaving the end of May. My family is working on moving to the south side of the cities and I am currently job searching.

Before I leave the end of May, I will send an email with any updates on the future of the program. If there is no news, by the time you return to campus this fall, you can contact Jody Terhaar, Dean of Students, to get update. She is located in upper Mary Commons.

For my last two cents of advice, I am putting in my favorite things to attend during the summer months! Have a fabulous summer and good luck finishing your degrees!

Take Care! Margo

Top 10 things I like to do every summer!

1. Lemonade Art Fair at St. Cloud State University, June 24
2. Pride Parade – June 27
3. Forth of July in Duluth, great fireworks!
4. Canoe the Lake of the Isle in Minneapolis
5. Long weekend at Blue Fin Bay on the North Shore
6. Summer Fest concerts at the MN Orchestra, July weekends
7. Uptown Art Fair, August 7-8
8. Roller blade around the lakes in Minneapolis.
9. Como Zoo, can’t wait to see the new polar bear exhibit
10. State Fair, need I say more?
ABE Trips to Chicago

Over spring break this year I traveled with nine other CSB/SJU students to Chicago to stay at Amate House as part of an Alternative Break Experience offered through Campus Ministry. Amate House is a volunteer program for the Archdiocese of Chicago. It housed nine recent graduates doing full-time volunteer work in the area. We were welcomed into their home for the week as we volunteered around the city at many different locations. The first day we went to a women’s shelter run in the basement of a local church. We helped organize their food pantry and socialized with the women. Another day we traveled to Bishop Conway Residence for independent elders. We accompanied them to the grocery store and helped them shop. We then ran a two-hour session of Bingo and listened to some interesting stories and wisdom they had to offer.

During the week we went to two after school programs, one for teens, and one for elementary school students. It was fun to hang out and play with the kids but hard to tell them that we would not be back the next day. One of our day trips was into downtown Chicago to a non-profit organization called Open Books. They collect books and sell them at their bookstore run by volunteers. The profits help them run literacy programs for people of all ages. During our time at Open Books we helped run a literacy program for a class of second graders. This program reviewed the principles of good writing, a designated time for the children to write their own non-fiction story as well as draw a picture to go along with it. At the children were able to read their stories in front of the group, and we were given a journal to encourage them to keep writing.

Our last volunteer site was my favorite. Woman Craft is a non-profit organization that makes handmade paper from recycled materials. They employ women for periods of three months to give them some experience in employment as well as an income. During these three months they are assisted with creating a resume and searching for a job when their time at Woman Craft is over. On the job the women create beautiful stationary, cards, invitations, and art paper. When we visited the women showed us the entire process, and in return we cleaned their work area. During our time in Chicago we were also able to explore the Hispanic community that we were living in. We visited the National Museum of Mexican Art, a local restaurant with authentic taquitos, as well as a panadería. Overall the trip was a great experience. I met awesome new people; saw many different organizations, as well as another city. The volunteering was a rewarding and humbling experience that I will never forget.

Holden Village: “Be Here Now”

I attended the Mason Jennings performance at Pinestock last weekend. He opened with a hit song called, “Be Here Now” that donned this year’s T-shirts. The lyrics reminded me of my spring break experience at Holden Village in the Cascade Mountains of Washington. “Be here now, no other place to be. This whole world keeps changing. Come change with me. Everything that’s happened, and all that’s yet to come, is here inside this moment. It’s the only one.” Sister Trish, the Spiritual Director of the trip, kept reminding the students to, “Stay in Holden.” She wanted us to be present and to fully experience the mountains, the people, and our encounter with God. S. Trish reminded us that we cannot be with God in the past or in the future. God is now. God is the present.

The Holden Village trip was centered on sustainability and nurturing a relationship with God. We took the train out to Washington, and we received journals with guided prayer and meditations. We had plenty of time to marvel out the windows of the lounge car and write in the journals—until we got tired of the snow-covered, flat prairies—and then we began card playing, talking, music sharing, and fellowship with our group-mates.

When we arrived at Holden Village, the residents and other volunteers welcomed us immediately. I enjoyed the amazing food, meaningful work, relaxed atmosphere, and 24-hour craft cave that the village had to offer. We also got a tour of the village’s hydroelectric plant that provides all of the energy required to power the village from mountain streams. On our day off, we hiked to Copper Basin, which holds the mouth of the river that feeds the village. (Continued on Page 4)
Student Leadership Conference Reflections

Three CSB students, Olga Rozmuszcz, Lindsay Ganong, and Hannah Mortenson had the privilege of traveling to Atlanta as representatives of the First Generation Program at the National Conference on Student Leadership. The trip to Atlanta had an early departure of 4 a.m. from CSB. We arrived safely in Atlanta, and right off the bat attended two keynote speakers. Marlon Smith, the first keynote speaker challenged students by posing the question, “What am I doing to make a Difference with my Life?” He shared strategies to develop authentic leadership habits. Kristen Skarie, the second keynote speaker, stressed being true to oneself by identifying and maintaining one’s values.

The second day of the conference consisted of one keynote speaker in the morning followed by three workshops. Saturday was our fullest day of leadership development with one keynote speaker and four workshops. Olga’s favorite workshop was “The Power of Personal Decisions.” She enjoyed the presenter’s style of sharing the personal impact of decisions made in her life. Hannah’s favorite workshop was “Two-Way Street.” The presentation addressed the cycle of conflict, and where people often get stuck. The speaker then went on to identify steps to breakthrough to a resolution. Hannah stayed after the presentation and spoke further to Kristen Skarie for an additional hour about the topic. Lindsay’s favorite workshop was “Building Your Cultural Intelligence: Creating Connections with Just About Anyone.” Rather than a diversity awareness presentation the presenters defined culture from family to society. They taught tools to interact with many different cultures from indirect to direct communication, task versus relationship focus, and dimensions of personal space.

During our time in Atlanta we were also able to get out and explore the city. We visited the Aquarium, Botanical Gardens, CNN Center, Centennial Olympic Park, Piedmont Park, used the train system to get to a Braves baseball game, and enjoyed a variety of Atlanta’s cuisine. The CSB delegates enriched the National Conference by interacting with people from all over the U.S. and its territories. They will continue to enrich the CSB campus through involvement with the First Generation Program and other student organizations with the tools, strategies, and new knowledge of leadership garnered from the conference.

By Olga Rozmuszcz, Lindsay Ganong, and Hannah Mortenson

Survey on First Generation Newsletters

Since the Wal-Mart College Success grant for the CSB First Generation Program is ending this May, I am looking for your feedback on our monthly First Generation Newsletters. We have created a short survey for each of you to fill out and give your opinion. I really do need your feedback for the future of the First Generation Program!

Please take a few minutes and let us know what you liked and didn’t like about the monthly newsletters!

Click here: https://www1.csbsju.edu/forms/0KIPNV0V0YPBRZ9DABDSQIGEJ70J8U.aspx

If you have any questions, please contact me at mthomas@csbsju.edu!
Reflection from Student on the Dominican Republic

This Spring Break, I participated the Campus Ministry ABE trip to Las Terrenas, Dominican Republic. On our trip, the fourteen of us worked at a library (la biblioteca) that was established by a former professor at SJU, Jose. While the library wasn’t big or glamorous by any means, it was truly a magical place. It is located in the center of an impoverished area and is a safe haven for many at risk children. The library is a place where children come to grow, learn, and realize their potential. On our first day in the Dominican, we got a tour of the town. It was shocking to see how some of the people lived. Many families were in small shacks with tin roofs as the only protection over their heads. Water access is very limited there, and many families received their drinking water from the same source that is used to bathe in as well as wash animals in preparation for food. It was truly a shock, and as cliché as this probably sounds, it made me realize how blessed we all are to have all we do.

A few days into the trip, we were fortunate enough to visit a waterfall, El Limón waterfall. After a long, beautiful hike, we reached a smaller waterfall. After hiking even further and making our way down a very long path embedded in a rocky hill, we reached the larger waterfall. It was truly breathtaking, and we were all in complete awe of its beauty. The fact that something that beautiful could exist was incredible – it was unlike anything I had ever seen. Normally we had group reflection in the evenings, but this day we had reflection at the waterfall. We all separated and spent a few moments in silence soaking in the reality of where we were. We made the hike back up when the time came. We paused at the top of the hill, where beyond us lay a breathtaking view of the waterfall. Jose turned to us and explained how even though there is much sadness in the Dominican Republic, there is also immense beauty and happiness. There is good among the bad. He finished his talk by telling us that the image of this beautiful waterfall was "a kiss from my country." This immensely touched us all, and I think I speak for all of us when I say I will never forget this moment.

I learned so many lessons from this trip, far too many to go into great depth about here. A few of the lessons I have learned are as follows. There is joy even in the seemingly saddest situations. It is important to forge meaningful bonds between yourselves & the people you serve. One-on-one connections mean everything. Time shouldn’t control us. Be critical of your understanding of freedom. Predictability is not always a good thing. Appreciate nature and your world. Doing good is not always easy. Do not be quick to judge. See the good in people and the beauty in the world, but don’t turn away from the potential for change. I have brought these lessons home with me and am making efforts to intentionally incorporate them into my lifestyle. This trip has motivated me to seek out additional opportunities to serve and make this world a better place in the process.

By Elizabeth Harrison, Psychology Major

Continued article from page 2, Holden Village:

In all, the most impactful part of the trip was enjoying the company of the village people. I felt so at peace, and I was able to stay in the present. When I returned to school, I dropped an elective class that was wreaking havoc on my mental peace, and I am so much happier now. I learned about composting, grouting and tiling, making relationships with unlikely friends on the train, molding into a group, and more about my needs on the trip to Holden. I am very thankful to the First Generation program for helping to fund my trip to Holden Village, along with the group leaders S. Trish and Ben DeMarais, and the great “Holden Family” that we created on the trip!

By Lindsay Ganong, Biology Major
Reflections from Student on Holden Village

First of all I would like to express my greatest appreciation for the money that was given to me for my Alternative Break Experience to Guatemala this past Spring Break. The trip that I attended was very unique in that it was comprised solely of CSB women. This made the experience all the more prime for bonding and getting to know each other which I feel made the trip even more amazing than it was already!

It was such a blessing to be able to travel to the San Lucas Toliman mission. When we were at the mission we were able to work alongside the people of Guatemala in their garden, in sorting coffee beans, and in helping to build their road by hand (to bring the coffee bean sacks up to the area to dry). We did a lot of physical labor, but it did not seem like we were being worked very hard. I say that because unlike the ways of society in America where the norm is to be as efficient as possible, when we were in Guatemala, the people taught us that to enjoy each other’s company and to truly experience the work that we were doing was the most important aspect. Not only did we work diligently everyday alongside the people of Guatemala, we were blessed with the opportunity to tour the town and even play a few pick up games of soccer, basketball, and kickball with some of the locals (and let me tell you they’ve got some pretty intense soccer skills)!

After many days of working, shopping, conversing, and truly experiencing all that San Lucas had to offer, on our last full day in Guatemala, our group was able to fit in a hike on the active Vulcan Pacaya which is near the city of Antigua, Guatemala. After being only feet away from a hot lava flow (an experience which left me, as well as many others from our group speechless) we were on our way to depart from the wonderful land of Guatemala that we had come to call home for our short stay.

Without the help of the First Generation Program Grant, I know that I would not have been able to partake in this amazing and life altering experience. If I have learned anything from my time in Guatemala, it is that you really do have to live every day to its fullest and appreciate the little things that bring you joy. Thanks again to Margo and everyone else involved with the First Generation Program. Your time and efforts are greatly appreciated!!

By Christine Schneider, Management Major

Dominican Republic Reflections

Over spring break, I had the opportunity to participate in one of Campus Ministry’s Alternative Break Experience trips. My group traveled to the Dominican Republic for a week at Fundación Mahatma Gandhi. A man named José, who used to be a professor at CSBSJU, started the foundation seven years ago to fix poverty, which he believes is the main cause of most social problems. His goal is to combat poverty through education, which is why he started the city’s only public library, Biblioteca Anacaona. Every day, children from all over the city Las Terrenas come to the library to read, play games, and receive help with their homework. Biblioteca Anacaona acts as a safe haven for many of the children, as there are few safe places for them to be in Las Terrenas.

At Biblioteca Anacaona, we did a lot of work to prepare the library for its grand opening at the end of the week. José and his wife had just moved the library across town to a different site, so a lot of the work we did during the week revolved around organizing book collections, painting, cleaning and doing yard work. In the afternoons, we were able to spend time with the children. Even though there was a bit of a language barrier, they wanted us to play and read with them. It wasn’t important to them that we were different; they were completely open to us. Every time we’d see “library kids” around town, they would wave across the street or come hug us on their way to school. I learned so much about the capacity to love from these kids, and I have tried to embrace their openness to love everyone, no matter how long or short someone appears in my life.

The library kids weren’t the only ones that taught me on this trip; José gave our group so many invaluable lessons, but one that really stuck out to me happened during one of our final days at the library. To prepare for the final opening, José asked us to create an alphabet for the library wall. Many of the children and adults are still (Continued on Page 6)
learning letters, so it would be an important attribute to the library’s resources. We split into groups and had a lot of fun drawing and coloring letters. When we were done, José came told us why he asked us to make the alphabet ourselves. He explained that the library had enough money to buy a standard, perfect alphabet chart, but he chose not to do so for a reason. By having volunteers make the letters themselves, the alphabet became more personal, and we forged a connection between ourselves and the community in Las Terrenas. José told us every time children look at our handmade alphabet, they’d know someone cared enough about them to make it. Volunteering is about caring and creating a connection between yourself and the people with whom you’re working.

José’s main lesson taught me that doing good is not always the easiest option, yet it is the most important step to take. It would have been easier and more convenient to purchase an alphabet without all of our mismatched letters, yet it was through our efforts that we put our hearts into our work, which ultimately makes a difference in everything you chose to do.

By Ariel Smelter, Hispanic Studies Major

Have a Safe and Happy Summer!