

2001

Profile: Global Health Corps Short-Term Health Education Missions

Linda K. Miller
University of Northern Iowa

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarworks.uni.edu/ijgh>



Part of the [Public Health Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Miller, Linda K. (2001) "Profile: Global Health Corps Short-Term Health Education Missions," *International Journal of Global Health*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 2 , Article 7.
Available at: <http://scholarworks.uni.edu/ijgh/vol1/iss2/7>

This General Interest Article is brought to you for free and open access by UNI ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in International Journal of Global Health by an authorized editor of UNI ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@uni.edu.

PROFILE: GLOBAL HEALTH CORPS SHORT-TERM HEALTH EDUCATION MISSIONS

Linda K. Miller, MA
University of Northern Iowa

Global Health Corps is a non-profit organization that provides a field-based training program for post-secondary students in the area of cross-cultural community health. Students practice a variety of culturally appropriate community health activities domestically in the United States, as well as villages and shantytowns around the world.

Preventive health activities include basic health assessments, hypertension clinics, program evaluations, health fairs, breastfeeding promotion, hygiene programs, fitness promotion, safety and first-aid programs, violence prevention programs, and educational programs on topics such as nutrition, dental health, prenatal care, well-baby care, reproductive health, infectious disease prevention, cancer prevention, school health, and many others.

SHORT-TERM MISSIONS

Short-term missions have included Haiti, Venezuela, Cuba, Mexico, Estonia, Ecuador, St. Lucia, India, Israel, Bangladesh, and Romania. Regular missions take place in St. Lucia, West Indies and Cuernavaca, Mexico. Students conduct community health programs for under-served populations under professional staff supervision, often working with local non-governmental organizations and local ministries of health. Selection for mission participation is competitive, and students must first complete specialized coursework and a semester of domestic activities. Additionally, students must participate in pre and post departure meetings, and submit a reaction paper describing the mission. Trips generally last ten to 15 days with an average of five or six students participating at each location. University credit is given for successful completion of mission requirements.

Students participating in Global Health Corps missions increase their exposure to, appreciation for, and understanding of cultural and economic diversity. Additionally, their knowledge of the health patterns that are characteristic of diverse and under-served populations, and the complex socio-economic, behavioral, and related factors contributing to those conditions are enhanced. Students also improve their skills in designing, implementing, and evaluating community health programs with diverse and under-served populations.

MEXICO MISSIONS 2002

Eleven Global Health students participated in short-term missions to Cuernavaca, Mexico this year. The students met several times for predeparture meetings and were instructed on the topics of international travel health, Mexican culture, health conditions specific to under-served populations in the state of Morelos, and student expectations.

Students then met on their own to create poster presentations, and practice health education demonstrations. Students were also expected to educate themselves on a variety of health topics and the Mexican culture. Some of the prepared topics included nutrition, diabetes, breastfeeding, dental health, reproductive health, Chagas, hypertension and respiratory infections.

Our Mexican contact is a woman who directs a language school in Cuernavaca, and who holds a degree in dietetics. She is also very knowledgeable about the history of Mexico, and has a variety of contacts with indigenous villages through her volunteer endeavors. This affords a wide range of opportunities for our students.

Everyday students and staff attend a two-hour Spanish language class. Survival Spanish is practiced with an emphasis on health-related terms. Students and staff are housed in private residences that facilitate exposure to Mexican culture and an opportunity to practice Spanish.

Our itinerary is always full. After Spanish lessons, the mission group travels to a variety of sites to provide health education. Sites include medical and hospital clinic waiting rooms, elementary school classrooms, and St. Vincent de Paul community breakfast sites for the poor, indigenous villages, marketplaces, and rural community roadsides. After spending several hours at these sites, our group visits historical sites or tours local medical facilities.

As the mission leader, I constantly remind the students that they must be flexible and “play it by ear,” as some of our best opportunities have occurred unplanned. On one of our missions to Mexico, we were invited by a young boy to join his family for lunch after we held a hypertension clinic at a rural church in Acolman, Mexico. The young man rode with us to show us his family home, and upon arriving at the edge of town, we discovered that his family owned a large weekend home. His father and uncles worked as professionals in Mexico City and spent weekends in Acolman.

The family entertained us for three hours, serving a delicious lunch and hoisting the American flag next to the flag of Mexico. This spontaneous cultural experience allowed us all to share a variety of information on health and our countries. One of the hosts is a physician who offered to assist us at any time with health needs or medical contacts. This gentleman referred to the great earthquake of 1985 that resulted in considerable damage and loss of life in Mexico City, and how grateful they were for assistance received from the United States. The mission group left with even greater positive feelings toward the Mexican culture, and additional opportunities for future missions.

Student reflections of our mission trips have indicated tremendous personal growth and professional skill enhancement. Students acknowledge that they often feel inhibited and insecure at the beginning of missions, but quickly learn that under-served populations are very receptive to listening and learning about various health topics. Nearly every student confirms that the Global Health Mission has been one of the best experiences of their lives, and that they are inspired to continue to work with diverse populations.

For more information on the Global Health Corps, please visit our web site at www.globalhealthcorps.org where additional contact information can be found. You may also write to the Global Health Corps at the University of Northern Iowa, 220 WRC, Cedar Falls, IA 50614-0241.