

The Activism Attribute

Humanitarian service is an important part of the Haverford culture, and it takes on a variety of forms. Nearly two-thirds of the current students at Haverford are involved in some kind of service. Many do their work under the auspices of the Center for Peace & Global Citizenship; recent student interns for the Center have devoted their time and efforts to U.S.-Cuba relations, conflict resolution in the Bronx, and promoting disarmament in Cambodia.

Service speaks to the College's Quaker roots and the egalitarian values that run deep and strong. For some, the very idea of Quakerism is defined by service to society. And service projects have a way of pulling current students and alumni together in ways no one quite expected.

When Gwenn Rosenberg '04, a religion major from the Baltimore area, was considering colleges, her perceptions of Pennsylvania and its people were less than flattering. She was determined to look elsewhere for a large school in an urban environment.

After her mother encouraged her to apply to Haverford, however, Gwenn wound up taking the Admission tour and her perceptions changed. The Quaker values, the Honor Code – it all made sense to her. “The tour guide told us that these four years were critical, formative years,” she recalls, “and how important it was to find an institution that lined up with our own personal values.”

During her sophomore year, Gwenn did a Peace and Global internship at the Kiteto Secondary School, in Kibaya, Tanzania. The internship was an outgrowth of a partnership between the Center for Peace and Global Citizenship and the Jifunze Project, a grassroots literacy and education project started by Carrie Oelberger '99. Gwenn taught students in an ethnically mixed school and also found herself dealing with the language barrier as well as social and cultural tensions between two groups, the Swahili and the Masai. (The two groups have very different ideas about land use and family structure, for example.)



Gwenn Rosenberg '04 in Tanzania

Carrie's involvement goes back to 1996, when she wrote to Victor Kimesera '66 in Tanzania, offering to volunteer and teach for a couple of semesters in Kimesera's native country. After this experience, she started formulating plans for a study center in Kibaya. A Haverford newsletter article sparked the interest (and the philanthropy) of Buster Alvord '44, John Henkels '49, Skip West '77, and John Whitehead '43, and things started to happen. Carrie conducted a book drive in 1999 and sent the container to Tanzania the next year. She formed a local steering committee and a management team, working with residents and local government officials to ensure the project's successful growth. In November 2002 construction of the educational center was complete.

Carrie continues to spend three quarters of the year in Tanzania as the project's executive director and one quarter in the States networking and fund-raising. She spends much of the time in Tanzania painstakingly building the project's infrastructure, setting up training programs, and acquiring and organizing educational materials.

Creating a true sense of ownership among the local people was a key element. “The goal is to make this center sustainable,” she says. “It can't depend on me to be here. I've planned it so in five to 10 years I'll be able to pull out and the center will run smoothly.”

“Carrie's an incredible person,” Gwenn says. “I watched her make decisions by consulting with everyone to get buy-in. It takes five times as long that way. Carrie's not self-centered or self-satisfied in any way. She's put the people in that community in charge so they're able to handle it.”

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