David Edmunds,
GDS Director

A key element of the GDS experience at UVA is to encourage students to grapple with the challenge of taking their classroom learning out into the wider world. We highlight several instances of “going out” in this newsletter. The students offer compelling summaries that speak for themselves.

So what do I look for when they return from such ventures? I look for the recognition that, as one student succinctly put it, “development is hard.” I hope their experiences challenged the neat theories and air-brushed case studies we sometimes discuss in class. I like students to be humble about their claims to expertise and their role when they go to someone else’s home place in the name of development.

I look for them to have noticed that their own ideas of what development looks like aren’t necessarily a fit with the aspirations of those whom they meet. I want them to be attentive to critiques of their thinking and their actions, whether these come from Ethiopian farmers, the director of a large Cambodian non-profit, or a professional within an aid agency or local government office. Students should have found expertise, even mentors, outside the university, and a deeper appreciation for the knowledge and experience that come from years of on-the-ground practice.

But I also look for evidence that they were able to put their theoretical and methodological training to use. Were they skeptical if someone claimed to represent “all women,” “all farmers,” or “the community,” and how did they deal with local social differentiation as it became visible to them? Did they connect the local activities they participated in to things happening at the state, regional or global scale, such as investments and disinvestments in state health care systems or export-oriented plantations, or the use of social media for organizing across borders, or the shifting preference for a new technology in health care amongst donors? Did they connect global processes to local contexts, as should be the case when climate change initiatives enlist the labor and resources of specific people? Were they able to connect these and other classroom discussions to the work they did while away?

And in the end, were they able to use their training, observations, and labor in a way that was helpful to those whom they visited? Our students want to be helpful, and that’s a good thing. Many of the people they visited asked them to contribute in very specific ways, and they prepared for their roles for months before leaving. Ultimately, I look for them to be careful and self-reflexive about how they fit into processes of social change and to treat development as being inherently “hard.”

I think these students met these expectations. And that’s good news.
Engaging with networks of small-holder farmers in Ethiopia

Edlawit Tessema (GDS ’15) and Marta Woldu (GDS ’15)

This past April, just a few weeks before we were to complete our undergraduate careers at UVA, we had the tremendous opportunity to travel to Axum, Ethiopia for a workshop on Participatory Innovation Development (PID). The workshop was hosted by PROLINNOVA, an international network of locally led NGOs directly serving smallholder farmers. Participants included organization leaders and development professionals from nearly a dozen countries, with diverse backgrounds, eager to share their experiences.

We prepared for the workshop the previous semester through an independent study, researching a question identified by PROLINNOVA as important: how to scale-up innovations without marginalizing the farmers who came up with them. The topics discussed at the workshop included specific technical innovations, the role of social innovation in PID, regional programs promoting climate change adaptation, and opportunities to strengthen partnerships across the network’s platform. Not only were unique perspectives of “on the ground” development practitioners shared during the workshop, but we also discussed the complex inner-workings and challenges of coordinating an international learning/development network.

We also went on a few field visits and met with farmer innovators. In Mai Tsaeda, a town outside of Axum, we met with a farmer who was experimenting with different herbs to create bio-pesticides. Another had constructed a small irrigation dam doubling as a fish pond. In another town, we met Abadi, a farmer innovator and former freedom fighter who was incredibly active with experimentation on his own farm, and shared results and methods with his community. His beekeeping association is interested in reaching markets outside of their local vicinity and aims to evolve into a packing and distribution site.

We saw time and again how these innovation and development programs work best when they are led by farmers defining problems, planning activities organizing resources, carrying out experiments, and recording the lessons learned. This ideal is not always met, but PROLINNOVA’s commitment to farmer autonomy is strong.

Following the workshop and field visits, we met with different partners involved with PROLINNOVA Ethiopia, including Axum University and the Best Practices Association (BPA), our host NGO. We learned more about their roles and capacities in working with smallholder farmers and discussed possibilities of a collaborative relationship with the University of Virginia’s Global Studies major. In our travels to Mekelle and Addis Ababa, we followed up with other PROLINNOVA affiliates at the universities. We were enthused to see how many faculty were integrating farmer knowledge and practices into their agricultural studies curricula.

We left Ethiopia with confidence that, working together, we could address the prominent challenges facing PROLINNOVA’s learning network. We have identified new ideas to pursue with our PROLINNOVA colleagues and hope to share insights with current and future GDS students through a fall workshop on Grounds. We are now working on a paper to deepen our initial analysis, based on these experiences in Ethiopia.

We hope and anticipate that by sustaining the relationships we’ve made, this learning experience will open doors for GDS and other UVA students to learn and contribute to the work of small-holder farmer innovators and their supporters. Although it was not feasible to make a deeply impactful contribution with one short visit, we are certain that the foundations of truly collaborative and promising partnerships have been laid.
GDS student attends UN Climate Talks

Dyanna Jaye (GDS ’15) spent five weeks in Peru during winter 2014 while participating in the 2014 UN Climate Talks. Dyanna was part of the delegation of SustainUS, a network with aims of advancing sustainable development by amplifying the youth voice within the United Nations. Over the past few years, she has worked locally to build climate action networks through the UVA Climate Action Society and the statewide Virginia Student Environmental Coalition. Attending the UN Climate Talks was an opportunity for her to connect local work to the global context of climate change.

While in Peru, Dyanna also conducted research for her GDS thesis. She observed how the inclusion of the youth voice affects policy outcomes and sought to understand where youth voices have agency in the UN negotiations. After attending the Talks, Dyanna traveled for a few weeks with fellow youth leaders from several countries, learning about the structures and priorities of youth climate movements in different parts of the globe. She will be leading the next SustainUS delegation to the UN talks in Paris in November 2015. She intends to move to France in the fall to prepare for these talks, collaborating with European Youth Climate networks to organize a Conference of Youth and support youth engagement in the UN process.

Honors and alumni notes

- Anna Boynton (GDS ’15) will travel to Sri Lanka to participate in the Fulbright English Teaching Assistant program.
- Daniel Ng (GDS ’15) has been awarded the U.S. Department of State’s Critical Language Scholarship to study Bangla in Dhaka, Bangladesh.
- Anna Conn (GDS ’11) has completed her first year in the M.A. Law and Diplomacy program at the Fletcher School, Tufts University. She will be conducting research and leading workshops about disability rights in Namibia this summer.
- Rachel Diniega (GDS ’14) will begin studies for a master’s degree in Human Rights and Cultural Diversity at the University of Essex (U.K.) thanks to a Fulbright grant.

Alumni—please be in touch with your former professors with your own notes. We will be happy to include them in our next issue.

New scholarship opportunities

- The Aigrain Fund Scholarship was established to provide support to undergraduate students interested in 1) carrying out a research project in a developing nation or 2) taking an internship in an emerging market. Fall competition deadline: October 15th 2015.
- Study Abroad Grants are available for all UVA students with demonstrated financial need. Consult with the International Studies Office to consider your options!
- The Hannah Graham Memorial Scholarship will be bestowed annually to a student with interests in global health, French culture, and service.
Investigating the impact of short-term medical clinics in Iquitos, Peru

Ricky Anjorin (GDS ‘16) and Grace Finley (GDS ‘16)

In the early summer of 2015, we traveled to Iquitos, Peru to investigate the impact of short-term medical clinics. Our first objective was to understand the structure of the community. Iquitos is an impoverished city of about 370,000 people located in northern Peru. Iquitos has no roads leading into the city, and this isolation has contributed to the stunted development of certain areas of the city. We chose to research communities in Punchana, San Juan, and Maynas, based upon their lack of resources.

Through semi-structured interviews with community members, we gained valuable information regarding the clinics and the Peruvian health care system. Interestingly, not many people were familiar with the traveling clinics since they usually visit a particular community only once. Of those community members who were familiar with the clinics, they were overwhelmingly pleased and grateful to the volunteers.

The single consistent criticism expressed was that the clinics should return to their community more frequently and regularly. This criticism piqued our interest as to why these communities valued the clinics so highly. While the ephemeral nature of the clinics made them ill-equipped to treat chronic diseases, they were able to offer treatments for acute health issues like malaria. Nurses from the clinics often urged community members to follow up with medical care at their local government-funded clinics known as postas. However, because the clinics offered better treatments (by taking the time to listen to the needs of the patients), as well as free and effective medications, people in the community were profusely thankful for them and critical of the postas.

Finally, we experienced the nuances of field research. We faced challenges with co-authorship and how best to represent the thoughts and opinions of our research participants in constructing a holistic narrative. In carrying out our investigation in a predominantly Spanish-speaking community, we grappled with issues related to language, translation, and interpretation. We learned about the logistics involved in administering a survey in communities with what we saw as very little organization. Thinking through these challenges required perspective, something the Global Development Studies curriculum aims to cultivate in students.

In short, our investigation of the impact of short-term medical clinics in Iquitos was productive. We will offer recommendations to our partner NGO in Peru on possible ways to improve the structure of their medical clinic program. We intend to pursue broader questions that have arisen from this investigation, such as how these medical clinics fit within the larger structure of the healthcare system in Peru.
The GDS major began as an initiative of a UVA student group, the Global Development Organization (GDO). Beginning in 2006, GDO students researched similar programs at other universities, created a curricular plan, and recruited a faculty advisory group. The GDS major was approved by the Faculty of Arts and Sciences in May 2009 and the first group of GDS students graduated in 2011.

In 2014, GDS became part of a larger Global Studies major, which now has four tracks: global public health, security and justice, environments and sustainability, and global development studies. GDS has been generously supported by students and their families, as well as other University donors interested in developing global curricular opportunities for students.

Best wishes to the GDS/GPH class of 2015

GDS
Pranay Advani
Clarisse Awamengwi
Madeline Botticello
Anna Boynton
Jewel Crosswell
Natalie Geleta
Sam Gips
Meg Gould
Catherine Hartshorn
Taylor Henkel
Callie Jacobs
Dyanna Jaye
Anaïse Jean-Phillipe
Christina Leas
Caitlin Levine
Kelly MacDonald
Paige McDermott
Gabrielle Michnoff
Kevin Muir
Kristen Musselman
Peter Nance
Daniel Ng
Ariane Talma
Edlawit Tessema
Susan Tewolde
Kathryn Thompson
Marta Woldu
Ayla Yurtaslan
Holly Zajur
Elshi Zenaye
Clare Burchenal
Elizabeth Burke
Denise Catbay (graduated 12.14)
Corinne Conn
Joseph Dardick
Mary Davis
Estelle Gong
Rachel Henderson
Emily Huesgen (graduated 12.14)
Yanna Jackson
Amber Kuo
Nakawala Lufumpa
Augustina Mensa-Kwao
Rahul Monga
Emily Schutzenhofer
Meghan Smith
Caroline Stewart

GPH
Shantell Bingham

Richard Handler, Director- GS Major
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http://globalstudies.virginia.edu