# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABOUT THE FUND</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SERVICE LOCATIONS</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABOUT THE STUDENTS</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STUDENT STORIES</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baughn, Hannah</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brodsky, Andrew</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burruss, Matthew</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chandrashekar, Anoop</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choi, Dylan</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohn, Elizabeth</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elbarkatawy, Mohamed</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fei, Mianmian</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feltes, Jenna</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fitzgerald, Abbey</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hommes, Audrey</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horton, Stacy</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaigirdar, Lamya</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Krishnan, Naveen</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kwon, Sean</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latson, Javan</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lee, Celine</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Li, Lingfeng</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lindeman, Madison</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lo, Jessica</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malhotra, Sameeksha</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miles, Rachel</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mwarumba, Tuzo</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oh, Morgan</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Osterlund, Benjamin</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perry, Kelly</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pettit, Riley</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pillai, Raunak</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### TABLE OF CONTENTS

Pitt, Cory........................................................................................................................................60
Raharjo, Karima............................................................................................................................62
Reilly, Shawn..................................................................................................................................64
Roenfanz, Hanna............................................................................................................................66
Schafer, Emily..................................................................................................................................67
Shah, Ruiy..........................................................................................................................................69
Spencer, Charles................................................................................................................................71
Spencer-Davis, Charlie.....................................................................................................................73
Stodghill, Breck.............................................................................................................................74
Watson, Isaiah....................................................................................................................................75
Weil, Kyle...........................................................................................................................................78
West, Heather....................................................................................................................................80
Willard, Kelly.....................................................................................................................................82
Witt, Atlee..........................................................................................................................................84
Yim, Tracy Ann..............................................................................................................................86

**THANK YOU** ..............................................................................................................................88

---

*Mia Alexander, Raven Delk, Cya Johnson, Pauline Mireles, Griffin Patterson, and Lucija Tacer were also 2018 Nichols Humanitarian Fund recipients.*
The Nichols Humanitarian Fund was established in 2006 by the E.C. and Lucile Hamby Nichols Trust, and by Edward C. Nichols, Jr. (JD ’70) and his wife, Janice Nichols. The Fund is a companion scholarship fund to the Nichols-Chancellor’s Medal, and encourages Vanderbilt students to become better citizens of the world and to broaden their thinking by volunteering for humanitarian efforts. The Fund enables students to volunteer for domestic or international humanitarian service opportunities by making support available for educational, travel, and living expenses during their time of service. The Fund distributes awards based on merit and need to Vanderbilt students to pay the expenses of their humanitarian activities.

Students are encouraged to develop their own service opportunities in communities where they can work to address an area of need. In past years, students have served in communities all over the world, including Greece, Nicaragua, Rwanda, India, Russia, and more.
SERVICE LOCATIONS

Bulgaria
Democratic Republic of Congo
Ecuador
India
Indonesia
Lithuania
Morocco
Mozambique

Namibia
The Netherlands
Norway
Russia
Rwanda
South Africa
South Korea
United States
Forty-nine students were selected to receive the Nichols Humanitarian Fund Award to pursue humanitarian projects during the summer of 2018. The award enabled students to work with and in communities to address many issues including: public health, human rights, immigrant and refugee rights, early childhood education, mental health, and environmental sustainability. Students traveled to 16 countries including: Bulgaria, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ecuador, India, Indonesia, Lithuania, Morocco, Mozambique, Namibia, Netherlands, Norway, Russia, Rwanda, South Africa, South Korea, and the United States.
STUDENT STORIES
My experience in Russia has been one of the defining moments of my time at Vanderbilt. I got to engage in service experiences in several different avenues, such as special needs education, working with animals, and helping preserve historic places. While each of these experiences helped me connect with current issues in Russian society, the most rewarding experience of the trip was the ability that we had to interact with the Russian university students. We did many different things together, from taking part in these service experiences together, to having dinner and going dancing together. It was such a great way for us to get more absorbed into the culture of Russia, as we did the very things that young people in Russia enjoy.

One of the factors that made our interactions so successful in interpersonal diplomacy was the fact that we could speak a common language. The students were all studying English as their primary major in their university, and they were very advanced English speakers. For other people that we met, I acted as a translator, and the fact that we could communicate directly allowed for us to get more personal and open with each other. It was such a joy to be able to get to know these people over the course of a month, and being able to communicate with each other directly helped us develop relationships that were much deeper than I expected.

Some of the conversations that we had with the students there included some of the current events and trends in Russian culture, politics, and foreign policy. These topics can be pretty divisive, and getting to know how to negotiate understanding between diverse groups is one of the main things that our world's current discourse is lacking. We were able to have deep conversations about our thoughts, concerns, worries, and hopes for the future of our two countries, which was one of the most insightful components of the trip. I remember talking to a university student who is studying law, and he was one of the only people who was very engaged in the opposition party in Russia. He shared some of his concerns for his country, but it was obvious that he had great hopes for his country, as it was his homeland. We brainstormed different ways that both Russian and American society could be improved, and different ways to remind ourselves that we should always stand up for the underrepresented.

Of course, there were days that were sweaty, challenging, and rewarding due to direct service opportunities that we had in Russia. We helped prep for construction in a center for kids with special needs, which is a huge and growing issue in Russia. The special needs community is completely disrespected, and the educational system is just now beginning to focus on ways to reach this community.

There aren’t enough resources in the educational system, and there are underlying community biases against these people. The parents that I met who were deeply involved in this project were some of the strongest people I met, as they experienced prejudices that no parent or individual should ever experience.

It made me grateful for my special needs friends in the United States, as they have
greater access to accessible education and other things crucial to survive. However, it made me realize that there are still some of these underlying assumptions in regards to disability, and it made me more passionate in combating some of these prejudices in America and Eastern Europe.

My experience helped me fall in love with Russia, but it offered a more balanced perspective as we engaged in community service projects that showed a different side of this beautiful country. It inspired me as I met like-minded individuals on the other side of the globe who were just as willing to engage in service as I am.
Directly before embarking on my journey to Morocco this summer, one quote from Anthony Bourdain was racing through my mind. In his book No Reservations, Bourdain articulates that “Travel isn’t always pretty. It isn’t always comfortable. Sometimes it hurts, it even breaks your heart. But that’s okay. The journey changes you; it should change you. It leaves marks on your memory, on your consciousness, on your heart, and on your body. You take something with you. Hopefully, you leave something good behind.”

I had very little idea of what to expect of my six weeks in Morocco prior to my arrival in Rabat in early June, but I did know that I wanted to do everything in my power to leave a positive impact on those communities that I served and open myself up to being impacted positively by those same communities myself. I was terrified. I was overwhelmed. I was unsure of myself. But more than anything else, I was excited for all of the potential that the summer held.

Despite my fears and anxieties, though, I can say for certain that my time in Morocco culminated in impacts that I could never have even imagine before the trip. I like to think I was able to fulfil Bourdain’s imperative that “you leave something good behind.” Throughout my time in Rabat, I had the opportunity to work with the Attadamon Institution - an organization that focuses on providing vocational education to citizens who wish to gain skills in a new field.

My function within the organization was to teach English to these students in the time outside of their other classes. My students ranged in age from 7 to 65 and from having never spoken a word of English in their lives to being able to carry on full conversations with seemingly no thought. Some students, then, wanted to be taught every word they would need to communicate in the U.S. or U.K., while others simply wanted someone to talk to and practice their skills with. While I can’t say that I was truly phenomenal at either of these tasks (who really knows what a gerund is anyways??), nothing I have ever experienced has been more rewarding than seeing the immense amount of progress that my students were able to make over the short six weeks that I was with them. I can’t say that I was able to teach my students in a way that they couldn’t have obtained from some other source, but the pride that I saw in my students’ faces when they were able to correctly conjugate the past imperfect form of a verb without looking at their notes told me for certain that I was able to instill in them the confidence that they could do anything they set their minds to.

On the other end of Bourdain’s statement, I can say for certain that my time in Morocco “[left] marks on [my] memory, on [my] consciousness, on [my] heart, and on [my] body.” Without a doubt, in fact, my students left a much larger mark on me than I was able to leave on them. My students came from all across the city - some traveling more than an hour each direction - to voluntarily take English classes. That dedication astounded me and is almost unheard of in most U.S communities.
If I’m being completely honest, I may have learned more about the English language from some of my students than they learned from me (again, who in the U.S. really knows what a gerund is??). Beyond that though, my students taught me, more than anything else, about the commonality of the human experience. At the onset of this excursion, I was terrified that I would stick out like a sore thumb in Northern Africa and that I would have nothing in common with those I would be living and working with for six weeks of my life. Instead, what I found, halfway across the world, was a community of humans who shared so many of my core values, beliefs, and experiences that I was able to relate to and connect with them almost instantly. On the surface, so much of our lives had played out completely differently from one another, but at our cores we had all experienced the same joys and the same sorrows, the same highs and the same lows, the same loves and the same heartbreaks. My time in Morocco impacted me in ways that I am still just now beginning to understand, but what I know will always stay with me are the connections I was able to form and the realization I was able to make of how similar we all truly are.
Before I took my first breaths underwater for my scuba diving training, my instructor reminded me that all I had to do—whether I became anxious or excited—was breathe. It was a simple reminder that below the surface the game was still the same. Still, when I took my first short gasps underwater and looked around, I knew it wasn’t. Underwater colors disappear and sounds become more like booming echoes. Currents carry you from place to place, and you get this feeling that you could be floating through another world—in fact, you are in another world. A world in which we are not designed for. If you dive below 30 m, you may experience nitrogen narcosis due to the elevated pressure increasing the body’s intake of nitrogen, causing you to feel dizzy or even drunk. If you accidentally touch the wrong piece of coral, you may receive a painful sting and blister and could likely kill the animal too. But among all these differences and inherent dangers, there’s a connection and unity with life.

The turtles, sting rays, sharks and the rest of the inhabitants have called the corals surrounding Gili Air, Indonesia home for millions of years. Their day-to-day life is largely shielded from the world above. Yet when you dive and swim alongside them, you catch glimpses into the reality of the situation which is that the barrier separating us is thinner than it appears. I have only the utmost respect for organizations like the Gili Air Shark Conservation program who not only realized that the problems facing marine life are fundamentally our problems but who also took initiative to address the issues.

The Gili Air Shark Conservation Program aims to make the areas surrounding the Gili Islands in Indonesia a shark nursery by 2019 and to collect data on the underwater ecosystems to help scientific and conservationist efforts. They also have started several programs to maintain the pristine of the coral reefs around the Gili Islands such as providing water dispensing stations and reusable straws to reduce the use of plastics. They support the local economy by working with dive shops to promote healthy interactions with the coral reef and in return help market their business in local magazines.

Every week they conduct several survey dives to collect data on the local species, a cleanup dive to collect underwater trash, and watch several hours of underwater footage that may reveal information that the dives did not. They are in active communication with the government to impose better regulation on fisheries to reduce over harvesting and are the sole provider for updates on species living in the island’s reefs. They even teach a class on conservation at a grade school and train the locals to scuba dive for free. They do all of this with minimal resources and thus rely heavily on the aid of volunteers and donations.

Underwater, everything seems magical and seeing a piece of trash floating by or bleached coral seems to break the spell. However, above water, I am reminded of the complexity of the issue. Economies and entire underwater ecosystems are dependent on our decisions, yet not everyone has the resources to make the environmentally friendly choice. The responsibility is not held
by a single entity nor evenly spread out among individuals. Collectively, we share accountability and should contribute to our capabilities. Yet the key here is to push ourselves to do better. The Gili Air Shark Conservation program is proof that in sometimes discouraging circumstances that we can.

Thank you Ed and Janice Nichols for helping me contribute to this cause. Without the generosity of the Nichols Humanitarian Fund, this dream never would have been made a reality.
Anoop Chandrashekar
India

Inspiring and frustrating. Satisfying and exhausting. These are just some of the words I would use to describe my service in India, a trip that quickly oscillated between highs and lows. My partner on the trip, Raunak Pillai, and I represented the Vanderbilt chapter of Project RISHI, a national non-profit organization that aims to provide sustainable solutions to core problems affecting rural Indian communities. Our chapter has traditionally worked with the public primary and high school in Pamulaparthi, but this year we were also able to expand to the public primary and high school in the neighboring village of Gowraram.

During the first few days in Pamulaparthi and Gowraram, we simply gathered information about the efficacy of previous years’ projects and assessed for areas of improvement and future growth. We soon realized, however, that the projects we had spent months planning for would not be necessary after seeing the facilities first hand. Cue the frustration. Seeking to make the most of our trip, we began researching alternative projects and seeking out contacts, both new and old, who could help us realize our ideas. During this frustrating time, I am incredibly grateful for the rest of Project RISHI’s executive board who provided support by way of much needed words of encouragement and assistance with research and project planning.

With a notebook full of ideas and hearts full of hope we began reaching out to companies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) who could assist in completing our projects. We found a local NGO whose mission was to improve technological facilities in rural India, and with computer donation being a high priority project, we sought to meet with them to discuss a collaboration. After many unanswered calls and emails, the NGO’s leader invited us to his office to discuss our project. We left the meeting excited and inspired after he pledged to help us acquire computers and taught us about navigating the sometimes slogging bureaucracy that is the state government. But as the project end date rapidly approached, our calls and emails to the NGO to inquire about the computers went unreturned and the once promising collaboration suddenly fell through.

But for however disappointed we were with the interaction with the NGO, we were equally pleased by our interactions with others. One of our projects was to restore power to some of the classrooms in Pamulaparthi high school after vandals entered the school and destroyed the earlier wiring. To purchase supplies for this project, we visited a local hardware shop, where the proprietor of the shop sold us his merchandise for his distributor price after we mentioned what the supplies would be used for.

During our trip, we did not have an external volunteer coordinator who could help us navigate meetings with companies or assist us in our daily activities. Rather, Raunak and I had the daunting challenge of seeking out companies ourselves. While a volunteer coordinator could have reduced the burdens both of us felt, the freedom that came along with this situation allowed us to grow and adapt to
challenges in unique ways. As I reflect on what I have gained from this experience abroad, I come back to grit. Entering my sophomore year at Vanderbilt, I am bound to encounter difficulties, but I have solace that my ability to roll with the punches will help me reach my goals.

As more RISHI members return to India for service, I look forward to seeing how our interventions have impacted the quality of life and education in the village. Thank you to Raunak for sharing this experience with me. Thank you to the people of Pamulaparthi and Gowraram who welcomed us into their communities with open arms. And thank you most of all to Mr. and Mrs. Nichols for helping me serve Pamulaparthi and Gowraram, and as a result grow into a more developed individual.
Prior to my departure to South Korea, I had very little concern, if any, regarding my endeavor in South Korea. Not only was I born in South Korea and am fluent in Korean, I have spent my past two summers in South Korea. However, without any exaggeration, I was taken aback ever since the beginning of my endeavor. From the beginning, my arduous trip from Philadelphia to my grandmother’s house in Gwangju, South Korea, which began at 5 am on May 29th Eastern Time and ended at 2 am on June 1st of South Korean time (1pm on May 31st Eastern Time), lasted roughly 56 hours, as a result of my absurd pursuit of the cheapest plane ticket possible. The trip began in Philadelphia, which was followed by 15 hour long transit in Los Angeles, then an unexpected stop in Hangzhou, China, another stop in Chengdu, China, and almost ended in Seoul, South Korea. However, I had to travel another 4 hours to Gwangju, South Korea, finally finishing my seemingly endless travel.

Furthermore, a few days after my arrival in South Korea, I was notified from Advocates for Public Interest Law, an organization that I had originally intended to intern, that I would only be able to work on a temporary basis, in times and cases that the organization is in need of service. As such organization is the type of organization that I hope to work for after becoming an attorney, to let go of the opportunity to learn from such organization was undoubtedly disheartening. Afterwards, I inquired upon nearly all other public interest lawyer organizations in South Korea, which are unfortunately only a handful, regarding the possibility of service. My inquiry was rather unsuccessful, as a few organizations that did accept interns limited the qualification to law school students.

Fortunately, I was able to find a labor law firm that did accept an undergraduate student as its intern. As the goal of my life is to become a human rights lawyer or a public interest lawyer with expertise on labor law, the opportunity was particularly more appealing, due to the fact that the law firm deals solely with the labor law. In addition, since the new South Korean government raised the minimum wage and limited maximum weekly work hours from 68 hours to 52 hours, which is a causing surprisingly large amount of unrest, particularly among small and medium sized businesses and those that are self-employed, this summer would be the perfect time to intern in a labor law firm and learn further about Korea’s labor law and issues surrounding the country’s labor market.

My main function in the law firm was to translate the U.S. labor laws or U.S. court cases pertaining to labor issues. I had translated such employment laws as Fair Labor Standards Act, as well as union laws like National Labor Relations Act and Labor Management Relations Act. In addition, as the new South Korean government’s policy to limit maximum weekly work hours from 68 hours to 52 hours was an issue of intense political debate, there were many legal cases that involved the weekly work hours. Thus I researched various precedents, relating to weekly work hours, from the U.S. court
cases. Furthermore, based on the need for individual court cases, I researched and translated anything from various countries’ legal minimum hourly wage and criteria of unfair labor practices to standards on film production time.

While I believe that I did have some contribution to the labor law firm, mainly thanks to my bilingual ability, I was, nevertheless, disappointed that I could not work very closely with each court case and that I had limited interactions with individuals behind the cases. Despite this slight yet obvious frustration, as I am not an attorney, I learned various significant lessons from my experience in the labor law firm. To begin with, while previously, I only had a vague idea that labor issue pertains to safeguarding employees or laborers’ rights and dignities, through reading, understanding, interpreting, and finally translating each word of various labor laws, I was able to learn specific legal rights of employees and employers, as well as the economic equations that pertain to labor issues. Furthermore, through constant communication with many attorneys in the labor law firm regarding various labor laws, I was able to learn that even the laws that were created with only the good intentions may have negative unexpected consequences. Thus, I was able to think critically about government’s role in policymaking, particularly the necessity of policies to be detail oriented and being able to truly represent and reflect the best interests of those affected by the policies, which would greatly benefit me, as I am a Public Policy major.

I am truly grateful for the generous support of the Nichols Humanitarian Fund that allowed me the valuable opportunity to learn and strengthen my dream of becoming a human rights lawyer. Finally, I would like to make a promise to myself, as well as anyone reading this writing, that I will strive throughout my life to use my academic and legal abilities to contribute in improving and protecting the lives of the weak, minorities, or oppressed, to create a society in which all people are truly equal under the law.
When preparing for my summer in South Africa, I talked with several peers about their prior summer service adventures. They spoke so fondly of their time. They emphasized how changed they felt, how strong the bonds they created are, and ultimately how much they wished they could be back. Each time, I nodded and thought to myself, “oh man, what a total cliché.” Fast forward three months. I’m sitting in the back of an Uber ugly crying and blowing my nose into anything that would work as I drove to the Cape Town airport to fly home. The driver and I make incredibly awkward eye contact in the rear-view mirror. He asks “why are you so sad? Don’t you get to go home and see your family?” He was not wrong. Just 32 hours of travel later I would be back with my mom, dogs, outlets without converters, and showers longer than 2 (okay 7-10, sorry) minutes. But somehow, I felt as though I was leaving my true home, a place where I was the most myself I could ever remember being. I know, I know- cliché, but oh so true.

When thinking ahead to my summer in South Africa, I felt so incredibly anxious I knew one person on the trip, and I kept forgetting her name every time I saw her. Not off to a great start you could say. I knew I would be working with a non-profit of sorts but had yet to be assigned to a specific one. What if I get put with something that is the absolute worst possible fit for me? Like teaching math or upper-body strength or hand-eye coordination sports? My mind reeled for days with all the ways this trip could go wrong. But the biggest fear in my mind was always, what if I do not change at all? What if I go to the other side of the Earth and have nothing to show for other than some over-priced academic credits? What if it is just another voluntourism sham for privileged Westerners to go “save” locals? Fortunately, I could not have been more wrong.

I took two classes while in Cape Town, one on Poverty and Development and another on Community Partnership. Both classes revolved around the complex racial history of South Africa and its continuous role in the society’s inequalities today. The major part of the course centered on my involvement at an orphanage in the high-poverty, high-crime township of Mitchells Plain. The orphanage cares for children ranging from just a few days old to several very advanced 12-year-olds. I had initial hesitations about working with children due to the harsh emotional impact it could have on them and on myself. However, my peers and I mostly focused on helping at the organizational level.

In all honesty, it was a rather emotionally challenging site. On my first day, we went on a tour of grounds. We met the children ages 2 to 12 and all the caretakers. As we were heading to what I thought was back home, one caretaker said with a grin “now we get to see the babies.” We then entered in a room full of cribs holding the tiniest, cutest humans you could imagine. Each reaching out and smiling at you. One was just three weeks old. It was all of a sudden too much. I completely lost it. I sobbed right then and there. These pure little souls that could not even turn over without assistance were already put into one of the
more challenging positions in life. No family, no money, minimal education opportunities- it all just piled up. Despite my efforts to hide it, everyone turned and stared. I felt overwhelmed by seeing all of the injustices in South Africa forced into little boy who weighed just five pounds.

Over the next two months, my peers evolved into my closest friends as I explored this untouched side of myself. We worked at the orphanage to help put on an art show showcasing strong community female leaders and assisted the caretakers in cleaning the facilities and feeding the children. Each one of us cried at the horrors we witnessed that no one should have to endure. And each one of us laughed until we cried while making memories I will never forget. And that girl whose name I couldn’t remember? She’s now one of my closest friends. I saw how much life can change, and how important it is to be in the moment. Always. I cannot imagine where I would be or who I would be without this incredible summer. So, thank you Mr. and Mrs. Nichols for the opportunity to learn how to change the world and ultimately change myself.
Seven years ago, I watched as Egyptians rose to protest a regime that oppressed underprivileged citizens. After the successful removal of the regime, there were competitive elections for both the house and presidency. Two years after the success of the revolution, the military, with public support, took power. At first, I thought it was because of the removal of an unpopular and incompetent president, but soon I saw that most of the public no longer wanted drastic change. They wanted stability. I became incredibly disappointed in Egyptians and decided to leave the country and pursue something other than social work.

Time helped me put my anger aside and I saw my faults during the time of the revolution. I, like many young activists, was out of touch with the people I was trying to help. The general public wanted social equality and freedom, but they did not want to suffer through uncertainty for prolonged periods of time to potentially get it. I believe there is a way to bring about change without provoking instability - law. It is much more efficient to work within an existing system, rather than trying to tear everything down. Working for an organization like the ABA in the United States is perfect because they have sufficient funding and weight to influence change and I would be able to work from DC, a city that values public policy.

Working for the ABA was incredibly interesting and although there were no projects involving Egypt, I felt that I was able to contribute to progress while learning quite a bit about the international legal landscape. I was also able to learn about different regions and to tailor my writing to various situations. I also gained invaluable experience with litigation, statutory analysis and human rights. Finally, I was able to get candid advice from lawyers about what I would do with my future which has been indispensable in helping me develop a plan for the next 5 or so years of my career.
This summer, with the generous gift from the Nichols Humanitarian Fund, I spent three months in Washington D.C. with the Institute on Philanthropy and Voluntary Service of the Fund for American Studies (TFAS). As an international student in social science, I am so thankful for getting the chance to live in the capital of the U.S. for three months and experience first-hand how the city functions as the policy headquarters. Moreover, I got to explore further my interests in public policies and nonprofit management through the TFAS’ Community Leadership and Service Program.

The core of the program is a summer internship. While most people in my cohort interned at traditional charitable nonprofits, I chose to work at an advocacy group called the US-ASEAN Business Council. Although I have a strong interest in the nonprofit world, I was not sure if I am interested more in the policy or the management aspect of it. I found the Research and Policy Internship under the Council to be a perfect fit as it would expose me to both. Also, I am passionate about Southeast Asia, and have studied abroad in Thailand, Brunei and Vietnam. Through drafting biweekly updates, attending regional conference calls and assisting in roundtables, I not only learned how the Council runs as the leading voice in promoting mutually beneficial trade relationships between the U.S. and Southeast Asia, but also gained knowledge in trade policies regarding Singapore, the Philippines and the energy sector. In addition, since the Council acts as the middleman between the ASEAN governments and American corporations, I also for the first time learned about the for-profit world and how the private and government sectors interact.

The Community Leadership and Service Program itself, on the other hand, focuses on developing students essential skills for working at charitable organizations. An important part of the program is a three-credit class on Behavior Economics for Nonprofits at George Mason University. As a Human and Organizational Development major, I found the class fascinating as I got to extend the general behavioral economics knowledge I learned at Vanderbilt and apply to nonprofit organizations and charitable giving. Another learning component of the program is the Philanthropy Project, where we participated in several fundraising events ranging from sport tournaments to raffles and eventually raised over $2,000 for the Spanish Education Development Center over the course of six months. During the weekends, the program also took us to various local nonprofits in D.C. for site briefings and voluntary service, during which I gained a deeper understanding of social issues such as residential segregation and urban poverty.
Mianmian Fei
United States

I am forever grateful for the Nichols family for making this wonderful summer experience possible. I not only developed professionally and personally in the three months, but also gained a clearer vision of my career path after I graduate.
Responsibility. A word that is often associated with menial tasks, like doing the dishes or paying taxes. Responsibility, for an American student at a private college, like myself, is mostly personal. On rare occasion, the word extends to friends or family. Yet, peering beyond that scope is unfathomable, almost impossible. Global, let alone national, responsibility is simply not a concept that many college students encounter today. Global citizenship is not written into the typical narrative of research, internships, and applying for grad schools. After spending a life-changing 6 weeks in Morocco, I am certain that we must shift this narrative.

With the help of the Vanderbilt Office of Active Citizenship and Service, as well as the Nichols Humanitarian Fund, I was able to live in the rich, breathtaking city of Rabat, Morocco, a city that I will forever associate with the word “home”. My physical home was nestled in the winding roads of the Rabat medina, the old, walled portion of the city, with the most unimaginably loving host family. Mama Khadija, Baba, Shama, my host sister, and Jhed, the personality-filled 2-year-old host brother, were the first people I saw, with sleep-crusted eyes, across the table for breakfast, and the last people I saw for late-night dance parties before sleep took over. In those 6 weeks, I viewed the country of Morocco, and the world through their eyes. It was a world filled with unconditional love for family, friends, and strangers. It was a world in which helping others trumped personal problems or discomfort. It was a world of laughter, music, and food. However, it was also a world of stagnation.

Many Moroccans, my host family included, feel little political or economic power under a constitutional monarchy run by King Mohammed VI. The citizens who yearn to leave frequently encounter barriers such as language, economics, and strict visa requirements. Such citizens, though, are also matched by those who bear immense national pride on their sleeves and take the initiative to fill in societal or governmental holes themselves in the form of the hundreds of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) sprawled across the country.

One such NGO, where I spent much of my time, is OPALS, the Pan-African Organization in the Fight Against AIDS. For over 20 years, OPALS has been providing invaluable services like HIV/AIDS testing, medical consultations, psychological counseling, and educational workshops for populations at risk of HIV infection or other harmful sexual health outcomes. From walking through the ever-bustling clinic each day to attending a laughter-filled empowerment workshop for women, all in their Arabic dialect of Darija, I could feel a palpable sense of ambition. Ambition from all of my incredibly hard-working and genuine coworkers, but also ambition from Moroccans and the large population of Sub-Saharan African immigrants to craft a better life for themselves, despite a steep mountain of challenges.

Although working on the logistical end of operations, making educational infographics and proofreading financial documents, sometimes sparked a yearning
for more hands-on work, the experience was invaluable. For one, it brought to light the idea that work and effort are not defined by their numerical or physical results. Service can adopt a multitude of forms, from providing immunizations to building houses to translating documents. Some forms feel more satisfying to the “Type A” Vanderbilt student, accustomed to instantly viewing test grades online, than others. Regardless of the shape that the service adopts, there are always impacts that reach beyond the realm of the measurable. The conversations exchanged between myself and OPALS coworkers, for example, certainly shifted my perspectives on the country and the state of health care, and I hope that a reciprocal experience was felt as well. Yes, service is work-centered, but it is also human-centered.

Both my homestay family and work experience added another piece within the narrative of responsibility: global responsibility. As a member of the global community and of the future generation, I must recognize that there is a world beyond the walls of a dorm room. A world of immensely caring and unique people, trying their hardest in their situation. There are valuable, and necessary lessons to be learned from those in other countries, religions, and economic backgrounds, and vice versa. People across the globe may speak and act in different ways, but everyone shares a sense of humanity. It is each person's responsibility to recognize this fact and get to know his or her neighbors of the world.
My expectations of what it would be like to teach and serve in Lithuania during the month of July were not matched with the reality in which I found myself. During the month I taught at LCC International University, I learned the power of language. Not only language as a whole, but also the privilege associated with being a native English speaker. Almost all other cultures are now being expected to acquire English as a means of intercultural competency, proving the importance of international liberal arts institutions like LCC International University in Eastern Europe. Although some days I felt very unequipped it was an even further privilege to learn from such bright and motivated students from across the globe. In reflecting on my experiences, I can best summarize what I learned through five main takeaways.

1. Kindness is a universal language. As an American amidst a classroom filled with students from various cultural backgrounds, I discovered that I was unique in my habit of openly and outwardly showing emotions, enthusiasm, and expression. The first couple of weeks proved difficult as I ran into challenges with not only verbal communication, because of language barriers, but also nonverbal communication, due to limited facial cues and body language. However, in all the differences and adjustments in communication, it became clear to me that kindness is something that people from all cultures appreciate, understand, and reciprocate. Through small acts of kindness, I attempted to connect with students: walking a lost student to their classroom, taking extra time to slow down my speech, or asking how their day is going before class. Although it was hard to communicate through words, I was able to connect through displaying that I cared in my actions.

2. You cannot give if you cannot receive. I have always loved giving and serving. Although I am often willing to freely give of my time, energy, words, and food, it is hard for me to willingly and graciously accept the gifts of others. I discovered in service that effective service is not all about how we give, but also how we receive.

3. It is crucial to be curious and ask good questions in the process of pursuing intercultural communication and understanding. Like the story addressed above, I learned that in circumstances where you are among cultures unfamiliar to your own in any aspect, it is critical to maintain curiosity and openness. This often looks like asking questions with a desire to listen and understand their perspective. Many of the conflicts, frustrations, or miscommunications I experienced were a result of unclear communication from a lack of listening, or a lack of asking clarifying questions.

4. Teaching is a means of learning. Each day in class signaled a new day and another opportunity for learning. At SLI, the teachers used the ‘student-centered’ model of education. This meant that we based lessons, activities, and discussions off the student’s experiences, backgrounds, current English levels, and interests, rather than a lecture-based model where a teacher feeds information and students just digest it. This allowed students to not only learn the explicit skills of English pronunciation, vocabulary,
and reading skills, but also the less easily taught skills like intercultural dialogue, active listening, public speaking, and controversial topics. With this class format, I was able to learn from student’s cultures, varying language abilities, activity preferences, and unique perspectives. Although a teacher might theoretically master their specialty subject, with such variety of students, they will never be finished learning from students during class every day!

5. The most valuable mindset is that of the life-long learner. The elementary class of students by far improved and impressed me the most. The students were eager to learn; they not only finished worksheets and projects ahead of time but also continued to ask questions with persistence until they received a sufficient and clear answer to satisfy their curiosity or confusion. The best teacher in the world can’t make a student learn. I am convinced that self-motivated learning in all areas and all stages of one’s life is critical to growth and the ability to adapt to ever-changing life circumstances.

With this mindset, I know I will continue to learn throughout my life from my time spent in Lithuania this summer. Thank you again to Ed and Janice Nichols for supporting my efforts to educate and serve this summer. People across the globe may speak and act in different ways, but everyone shares a sense of humanity. It is each person’s responsibility to recognize this fact and get to know his or her neighbors of the world.
This summer, thanks to the Nichols Humanitarian Fund, I had the chance to participate in the OACS Morocco program in Rabat. Though the program was only for six weeks, I learned so much about Moroccan culture, human rights, and politics, thanks to not only my work, but to being able to experience diverse aspects of life in Morocco, and to my amazing cohort and site leader for pushing me to always think deeper.

During my time in Morocco, I had the opportunity to work for the Rabat branch of OMDH, the Moroccan Organization for Human Rights, a nonpartisan human rights organization, using my French skills to help them translate documents from French to English. I was actually quite glad to be doing this, because it felt like something I could feasibly do – because I don’t really speak Darija and had no exposure to Moroccan culture before going on the trip, I would’ve felt more hesitant and unqualified had our work been anything else. Additionally, I would’ve been more doubtful of the quality and “use” of my work had my French been anything less than what it is, which thankfully wasn’t the case. There were a lot of potential difficulties for miscommunication and mistranslation, but thankfully, we were able to avoid or mitigate most all of them.

I wrote about many of my reflections in my blog for the trip, which goes into more depth about my experience, but there are definitely things that I’ve only realized once I got back to the U.S. One of these is how this trip, for me, threw into stark contrast the impact that language can have upon one’s entire life. As someone who is multilingual and speaks French, a common lingua franca of Morocco thanks to colonization, fluently, there were opportunities and doors that were open for me that weren't for other members of my cohort, such as having in-depth, complicated conversations with anyone I met that could speak French. However, had I spoken Darija and Arabic in lieu of (or in addition to) French, even more opportunities would have been available to me to communicate and explore.

Lingua francas are necessary in the world, but there is no substitute for being able to communicate in someone’s native language – which is why I tried very hard to pick up what Darija I could during our lessons to use in my day-to-day.

For me, learning more languages is a convenience – I don’t necessarily need them to get by, though it does help. However, for the Moroccan people, learning multiple languages is necessary to be able to get a decent-paying job. Aside from the Classical Arabic and Tamazight that are taught in schools, most students of means go on to take classes in French, English as well if they can, and maybe even German, Dutch or Spanish on top of that. This is in addition to the Darija or Tamazight they might speak at home, of course. This trip made me think very critically about how one’s language can convey certain facts about their upbringing and background and can be the deciding factor for many opportunities in life. It makes me very grateful for my own abilities, but also very cognizant of how that has given me a very specific advantage over others, even
disregarding my other privileges

A big challenge of the trip for me was to be in a situation that I was very unfamiliar with – not in terms of being in a foreign country, but insofar as doing serious organized service with a very critical cohort. It is something I really relished, because in many of the other service opportunities I’ve participated in in the past, participants are oftentimes very self-congratulatory about doing service, to the point that they can critique others’ approaches, but not their own. Our cohort this year did a good job of talking to one another about these issues and calling each other out for potentially troublesome ideas, which served to further strengthen our purpose (and our cohort as a result.) The presence of the cohort, in particular, helped me learn how to navigate differing perspectives and opinions to help arrive at a common goal, as well as how to examine your own motivations for doing things critically in order to refine them.

Thanks to them, as well as this was my Moroccan host family, Lauren, OMDH, and the CCCL, this is an experience that not only deeply impacted me while I was there, but that has continued to influence my decisions and thought processes upon my return. It has pushed me to be more cognizant of not only my own impact (and the impact of others) in the world, but to take steps toward helping create a more just world. I am immensely grateful for being able to participate this year.
Going into the Bulgaria/Norway OACS trip, I had high expectations about what I would be able to contribute to the service sites. However, what I got most out of this program was a humbling experience that one person, no matter how eager they are to help, cannot step in somewhere new and change everything for the better. Instead, they are only a small part that can help in small ways, but if we all take action like this, it will have a great impact. Overall what I realized about myself, my cohort, and college students across the nation is that while we have a certain skill set to bring to the table, we are not as valuable to any service as we like to believe. All we can do is give our time, have a positive attitude, and try to step away from ourselves and learn from others.

However small my contributions were abroad, I am still satisfied with what I was able to give and learn in the process. While in Bulgaria, I was able to help two different nonprofits with video projects. I was especially excited that I was able to serve while working with a medium I am passionate about. With my main organization, Time Heroes, another member of the cohort and I created an advertisement promoting volunteerism in Bulgaria. Time Heroes is a platform that connects volunteers with service opportunities, but they are still relatively new and wanted an ad to help spread the word of who they are and what their mission is. The second project was interview based, a very different genre of video, but one that I was equally excited for. I collaborated with the director of Single Step, the LGBTQ organization our cohort partnered with, to interview my peers on the trip about their service experiences. I gained a lot from this project because I was able to work on documentarian skills that will be helpful in my pursuit of that career, and because I was able to learn from others while aiding this organization. Reflecting on the two projects, I think I better enjoyed making the latter because I got to experience the passion that my peers had for their project and be inspired by what they accomplished.

Overall, I am happy to have come out of this experience with a more mature view of myself and my place in the world. No matter what, being a small part of something is still a valuable experience. I don't need to change the world in six weeks, but just provide my time and give my best effort to the people who are willing to let me be a part of their mission.
It has been a couple months since I have traveled to Ecuador—a lot has changed, but my love for Ecuador and desire to return one day will always remain.

Looking back, it all feels surreal. My time in Ecuador was a time where I felt peace with myself, with the nature of life. With independence, I traveled to a foreign country and immersed myself in a new culture. I was free and bubbling with curiosity, ready for an adventure I won’t forget.

Here in the states I am constantly reminded of Ecuador, with every hour I spend volunteering to every glass of juice I drink (I miss jugo de mora)—I am able draw back on my wonderful old memories. My trip to Ecuador has taught me so much about myself and the world around me.

I found value in imperfection to serve as an agency to invoke change. I practiced patience as a virtue. I paid attention to detail both small and large to find nuanced meaning in everyday life. I grounded myself in daily reflection to gain control and further my understanding of the world. I forced myself to be uncomfortable while remaining mindful of my surroundings.

At the end of the day, though I found purpose in the work I conducted for the clinic working on developing and implementing a sexual health education curriculum for adolescents; it was not solely what I did that mattered but how it has shaped me into who I am at this moment.

Who I am in this moment, is a young woman that is even more aware of injustice and inequality in society and barriers that lead to systemic issues within communities. Even though I cannot be in Ecuador right now, now I can and will combat similar issues that still exist here in the states with a global perspective.
As a member of the LGBT community, I was aware of the fortunate conditions of my citizenship as I lived in a country which did not criminalize my identity. As a result, while I developed a passion for healthcare access towards marginalized groups, I became curious about how those who share similar aspects of my identity have to overcome various barriers to receive healthcare in their respective cultures. As I approached the issue of healthcare access towards a section of the LGBT community, specifically the MSM (men who have sex with men), I developed an interest in this with a Sub-saharan context.

With regards to my experience in Mozambique, I was excited about the role I was able to make in the society as my research was able to ascertain the wider issue of how healthcare is actually delivered to my target population. I structured my research into work with Mozambique's only LGBT organization, Lambda, where I interviewed many employees on how they navigate legal challenges facing LGBT individuals within the entire country. Additionally I was able to extend this research to healthcare providers, specifically the CDC's director in Mozambique who oversaw HIV/AIDS targeted treatment and prevention towards gay and bisexual men in the country. After then meeting with numerous LGBT individuals, I was able to document stories and instances of discrimination within the country. These stories were particularly difficult for me to initially collect due to the personal and serious nature of this matter.

However, I really felt I was able to leave a noticeable difference in the situation due to the fact that I was successfully able to identify a list of key problems faced by LGBT individuals in the country. Additionally, I was able to basically create a short roadmap for how to effectively navigate healthcare access towards LGBT populations in countries with similar tolerance levels to Mozambique. This was observed after I observed how Lambda engaged in an effective network of 'community agents' who were the actual boots on the ground who were able to directly connect with LGBT individuals and offer them access.

One surprising revelation I saw was that people weren't aware of their own rights or legal mandates to healthcare. For instance, Mozambique has outlawed discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation for cases of termination of employment. However, it is still not uncommon for entities to discriminate against members of the LGBT community, specifically against transgender women in the country.

Also I felt I now am able to leave this society with a marked impact as I was able to connect with significant government and organization leaders to share my research of ways other countries over the course of history have tackled this problem. Additionally, I was able to engage in a wide variety of issues that were related to the healthcare space, specifically the legal areas which were associated with one's right to access. Specifically, I became more aware with how dynamic the healthcare space is across a certain country because even if one
Naveen Krishnan
Mozambique

is able to mount legal reforms to create government programs surrounding healthcare access, the individuals who are providing access towards marginalized populations often bring in instances of bias and discrimination on the part of an individual’s rights were an unanticipated problem I encountered through my research.

This overall research project has made me much more passionate about pursuing further work in LGBT communities across the world and I intend to pursue additional projects in the field of healthcare access towards marginalized identities. This project has truly illustrated the concept of how central adequate healthcare access is towards an individual’s identity. The effects of healthcare often spill over into other areas of one life such as employment and socioeconomic advancement. My travel experience with this volunteering has definitely changed my world view on the intersection of identity and healthcare.
What’s more honorable than giving back where you came from? In order to understand why I founded Illumna and how much successfully capping off this summer’s program meant to me, it’s important to know a little bit of my background.

My teenage years were filled with failures and hardships. As a first-generation, low-income immigrant from Korea who came to America towards the end of middle school years, everything was a trial and error. When I realized how difficult it was to learn everything in a brand-new language that I didn’t know how to speak, I gave up on myself and did not care about anything. However, years later, right when I became motivated and decided to push myself, I realized that I really had no idea what to do in order to do well, because of the lack of both human and monetary resources.

Despite all of the difficulties, I’m very proud of where I am in my life. My family survived in America. I attend prestigious Vanderbilt University. Even though I worked relentlessly to become the person I am today, I’m not here because I’m incredibly talented or intelligent. I’m where I am simply because I got lucky. Time after time, I realize that resilience and will-power are not enough. Nothing would have worked out if I weren’t fortunate enough to have met the right people at the right time, along with my parents working, grinding their bones just so that I could stand on the same starting line as others. This is why I decided on founding Illumna. To help guide students who are going through similar or worse situations that I had to go through. When I put my thoughts into action and gathered the right people to pursue this unique opportunity with, something incredible happened.

According to the survey results, all of our mentees felt 70% more ready for the “real world,” 60% more that they have a mentor they can rely on, 77% more confident about their public speaking skills before and after the program. I can truly say that I loved changing lives of my mentees every day. The personal connection with the mentees stood out the most in the program. The relationship between the mentors and the mentees felt more of a friendship than a formal relationship, and throughout the month of July, we witnessed many mentors and mentees hanging out together all throughout our branches. For example, every day in the library, at least five mentees were seen reading together and playing cards together. On another occasion, two mentors and four mentees hung out at one of the mentees’ house to play video games together. This type of organic relationship is most difficult to build, and accordingly, most lasting and fruitful. Many of the mentees felt that they lacked a role model in their lives, and having this community of accomplished and inspiring mentors with other passionate mentees helped foster their personal and academic growth.

Illumna is by no means a panacea for all symptoms of uncertainty in a young adult’s life. For mentees, the upcoming years are filled with standardized testing and college admissions: processes notorious for their unpredictability. Likewise, mentors cannot be
too sure of their futures either, as we all find ourselves within years of entering the job market in pursuit of careers. Illumna cannot make one certain about one’s future, but it absolutely can help make one more certain about one’s self. Illumna is about more than learning how to speak in public and develop a prestigious resume, it is about learning how to discover yourself and become comfortable in your own shoes. Thanks to Illumna, I was lucky enough to watch brilliant high schoolers develop into polished and motivated young adults, and I cannot begin to express the pride I feel in watching them undergo this process. Despite all the uncertainty I witnessed in running Illumna this year, if there is one thing I am certain of, it is that our mentees accomplished a great deal this summer, and great things await them in the near future. Moreover, I am certain that Illumna succeeded in achieving its mission in its inaugural year, and I am equally certain that Illumna will continue to have this outstanding outcome in years to come.
When I first found out about my acceptance into the OACS Morocco program, I was filled with curiosity and a million questions. What would it be like in an Islamic nation, would I be able to express myself freely since the country is a monarchy, and how would I navigate the language barrier? Cultural differences that exist? Being the person that I am, I did a lot of research on Morocco to gain as much information as I could about the place that would be my home for six weeks. However, when my time in Rabat came to a close I found myself leaving with more questions than I came there with, a desire to learn more about this part of the world, wonderful memories and amazing friends.

Morocco is a country that is seen by most people through the lens of orientalist stereotypes (orientalist being a word that I learned about during the summer). During my time there I was able to interview local people about what they wished Americans knew about Morocco, and a lot of their responses focused around changing the perceptions that people had about their country. Kareema, our point person in Morocco, told me that she wants to dispel the misconception that her country is ultra conservative and wishes that outsiders knew that Morocco was not entirely desert and to change the stereotypes associated with African nations being poor. Some of my students from my work site wished that Americans would learn about Moroccan culture and local traditions. Instead when you look up Morocco, all you see on YouTube and various blog sites is tourists emphasizing the deserts, souks, and pictures individuals wearing traditional Berber clothing.

While all of these things may indeed be present in Morocco a lot of the time this aspects of culture are utilized to appease the expectations of foreign visitors that arrive having this romanticized vision of the Arab world. Looking back on it I did have some of these misconceptions, however during my time there I took away a few things that I would like to talk about.

The first one is to be open to new things. By accepting the offer to travel to Morocco I was already taking a big leap, but once I got there it was important that I immersed myself as much as possible in the local culture. Learning Darija, trying new foods, going with my students to places outside the range of tourists gave me the opportunity to examine my environment in a different way. Often times when we go places we expect the place where we go to provide us with the same comforts we enjoy at home but I feel like this defeats the point. Had I just stuck to the things I knew, ate only the foods I was familiar with, and only went to the sites Google Travel recommends my time would have been much different. Learning how to just say yes and step outside of your range of comfort can go a long way when performing acts of service especially in a nation with entirely different norms.

My second takeaway from the summer is to always know what the community wants and cater your actions to their desires. Many times when people engage in service learning projects or volunteer work they fail to ask the local population what they want and how they want things done. I believe by having a community based
partner like the CCCL helped to negate this issue to a degree as they were the ones that decided where we interned and the jobs that we were slated to do. However, as I got to know my students and people in the community I realized that so many times when engage in service we feel as if we are the ones giving and don’t think about if what we are giving is what they want. Also we may feel as if since we are there for our work that they should listen to us and conform to the standards and requirements that we create instead of us trying to assimilate and learn more about their way of doing things.

Now, if I ever engage in service whether foreign or domestic, I will make sure to do my best to make sure I am always listening to the people I working with. One of the major things that came up during my time as a teacher in Morocco was the fact that my students, “fight” to learn our language yet most of us don’t know or try hard to learn their language. This is so important and I felt that because there were some people that I know are so nice and have so much to say, but couldn’t communicate with me because we didn’t speak the same language. People like Leila, Amal, Meryem, and even my host mom and brother were individuals I spent so much time with and formed good relationships with but those bonds could have been much stronger if I knew Darija or French. Being open, listening to the community, and familiarizing yourself with the local customs and language so you can be more effective in work and reach more people. These are the lesson that I have learned from my time in Morocco and I hope to apply them in whatever line of work the Lord has in store for me.
This summer, I had the opportunity to participate in the Vanderbilt Internship Experience in Washington D.C. (VIEW) hosted by the OACS office. I am extremely grateful to the Nichols family for providing me the ability to intern at the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.

The Center on Budget Policy and Priorities is a nonpartisan research and policy institute that pursues federal and state policies that reduce poverty and restore fiscal responsibility. As the EITC outreach intern, I worked on a variety of tax-related projects with a heavy focus on helping gig workers this summer since we have seen a rise in the number of people participating in the gig economy. I've created numerous shareable social media toolkits and easy-to-understand graphics. Along with the graphics, I've also written several blogs advising people on how to correctly file their taxes and directing them to the appropriate help they need. Furthermore, I've also had the honor to host two nationwide webinar trainings on embedding financial coaching and increasing split refunds for our campaign partners across country.

Before this summer, I never really understood the ins-and-outs of taxes. I was also not aware of the different tax credits and resources that are available. During my internship, I realized that I am not the only one that was not aware of these tax-related information and resources. Millions of Americans today are still unaware of the benefits that they are eligible for, especially the Americans who need it the most. This summer, I was glad that I had the opportunity to learn more about how taxes operate within the United States and I was grateful to be part of a campaign that helps connect Americans to the benefits and resources they are eligible for. During this experience, I learned that most families rely on their tax refunds as another source of income and the different items that Uber and Lyft drivers can list as deductibles on their tax return. I've also had the opportunity to connect with our campaign partners to talk about their tax season. After speaking with them, I am forever in awe at the amount of effort and time they have invested to help others in need. They have truly inspired me to further my efforts to advocate and distribute tax knowledge and resources to those who might need them.

Throughout my time at the Center, I witnessed the incredible dedication and passion my coworkers have towards resolving issues that affect the low-income Americans. At the Center, we have dedicated a department to each issue that impacts low-income Americans. Not only have I learned about taxes, I've also learned about SNAP food benefits, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Medicaid and Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP), housing assistance, and more. One memory that I will never be able to forget is when the entire Center is waiting anxiously to see whether or not the new Farm Bill will pass. Everyone in the food assistance department had worked tirelessly publishing articles and conducting research in hopes
of securing the benefits that the low-income families are entitled to. Once it had passed, you could hear happy cheers across the floor and big smiles on all of our faces. The hard work paid off and that feeling is priceless.

My summer has been nothing short of amazing and inspiring. My position this summer helped me understand the importance of tax credits and other government benefits. It has also furthered my interest in a career in public service, where I can serve my fellow Americans. I am grateful to the Nichols Humanitarian Fund for allowing me to learn how I am able to serve others through advocacy and for opening my eyes to an impactful career path that I never knew existed.
A help to others is a help to one's self. This is a belief that I always keep for myself and one of the reasons that I keep volunteering. My trip to Russia did not prove me wrong, and it indeed was a fruitful trip for me.

The economic situation in Russia is not in a good shape. Just like a Russian political professor who gave us lectures said, the Russian economy has not recovered from the recession since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Such condition can be observed in many different levels.

There are seldom new buildings being built in Russian cities. In Vladimir, which is a small city I lived for a month, the city government is aiming at developing the city, but they don't even do well at maintaining the city: the roads are bumpy and barely usable, curbs on many roads are lacking, and the paints on most buildings have eroded badly. Cars are not in good shape, and there are not many prosperous streets across the city. Many people are not satisfied with their lives. Because not many families have enough money to spend on education, many students opt for making money as early as possible and not going to graduate schools. For those people and organizations who need our volunteering work, they oftentimes need resources or manpower to keep up or develop, and, to my eyes, they are in very grim situations. The way Russian people live their lives impress me the most. If I were put in a similar situation, I would probably be desperate or depressed, because it seems that the situation would never improve, and I would be stuck in such a kind of life forever. There is always so much work to do, and the amount of work that we did there can only save them a couple of days' work, which is far from enough. The stark contrast between the grim reality and their light-heartedness towards difficulty is so outstanding that their profuse optimism is contagious. Just like an old Chinese saying, “thrive in calamity and perish in soft living”, my way of life is constantly filled with anxiety and unease, as there are so many imperfections to be improved and problems to be solved in both short term and long term.

On my trip to Russia, all my worries are washed away during the labor work and interaction with those lovely Russian people. The trip was very exhausting for me physically, but at the same time, I was wholeheartedly enjoying the trip. I cannot remember a period of time in my life that I was happier and more convivial than my time there on the trip to Russia. Partly I guess because it is me on a trip, and partly I only shared their optimism but I didn't share their concerns. More importantly, the Russian society is very different from the Chinese or American ones. It is less materialistic and less sophisticated, and it seems to me that the goal for most members of the society is just trying to enjoy their lives. It is a common thing there that people know each other well in small cities, and children and teenagers in close neighborhoods still play together on the playground nowadays, which is rarely seen in China or in America.
Lingfeng Li
Russia

On the trip, everything and everyone I met is lovely, and every moment, now looking back, is a piece of jewelry in my memory. Perhaps the only hardship I encountered during the trip is the labor-intensive work, but what I got out of the work weighs much more than what I committed. After the trip, I would say my attitude has been positively changed, and now I can feel myself being more outgoing and open towards challenges and new opportunities. Volunteering in many ways is an exploration and learning experience for me. Now I feel fully prepared and excited for all the explorations upcoming.
I spent my summer serving at Open Table Nashville, a “non-profit, interfaith community that disrupts cycles of poverty, journeys with the marginalized, and provides education about issues of homelessness.” Going into this summer, I had worked briefly with people experiencing homelessness during Alternative Spring Break, but for the most part, this type of service with this population was incredibly new and completely outside of my comfort zone.

Homelessness in Nashville is a much bigger issue than people make it out to be. The way the system counts people on the streets is inherently flawed – the official count of homeless folks in Nashville is around 2500, but Open Table and other advocacy groups estimate that it’s closer to 20,000. Once you start walking the streets, searching out camps, and paying a little bit more attention, it becomes easy to see how pervasive homelessness has become. Nashville is in the middle of an affordable housing crisis, so the need for people to serve the city’s homeless population is great. Open Table, for instance, has a resource line people can call if they need housing or shoes or anything else – we field dozens of requests a week, and have a waiting list to be directly connected with our outreach workers. Nashville, unfortunately, is no different from cities across the US in terms of this issue. It’s estimated that there are close to 600,000 people on the streets in the US, and that’s likely a huge underestimate like in Nashville.

I feel like I did a lot of good this summer, some of which will have a lasting impact. I got to engage with issues of homelessness and poverty from both a direct service perspective, and also from a policy and public health perspective. I started work on a criminalization survey that I’m turning into a senior thesis on homelessness and human rights. I participated in Open Table’s foot clinic every Wednesday in downtown Nashville, where I was able to become friends with many people living on the streets. I did weekly rounds with Open Table’s street chaplain downtown, meeting people where they were and passing out water, food, hygiene products, and resource guides. I picked folks up from the hospital, helped fill prescriptions, helped get people IDs and legal documents, brought food and cleaning supplies and furniture to people who just moved into housing. I was able to attend meetings of the Metropolitan Homelessness Commission, the Nashville Homeless Organizing Coalition, and the Public Health Department to learn about how city government engages in issues of poverty. What I’ve realized the most about my role in society is just how much the little interactions matter. I keep bottles of water and socks in my car, because they’re two things people on the streets always need, and they’re easy to hand to folks on the corner (you should start doing that, too!). It takes no effort to smile at the woman sitting with her belongings on a bench and ask her how her day was, and yet it means so much to her.
Madison Lindeman
United States

The $5 it takes to buy The Contributor from “Bill” on the corner of 16th and Demonbreun when I get off the interstate downtown makes a much bigger difference in his life than it does in mine.

Going forward, I plan to keep doing the little things that make a difference in the lives of those experiencing homelessness. At this point, I’m also planning to pursue a career in housing policy and urban planning. A career in working on issues of homelessness and poverty might not be glamorous, but this summer, I built such a passion for the work I did and the people I worked with. I cannot fully express my gratitude to the Nichols family for giving me the opportunity to work with Open Table Nashville this summer. This work has changed the course of my life, given me new perspectives on what it means to serve, and redefined my place in society. Thank you for your generosity, for your passion for students and service, and for believing in all of us!
My time in Ecuador was everything that I hoped it would be, yet it was also so different than anything I could imagine. The service we did really spoke to me on a professional and personal level since I believe the education is key to living a fulfilling life where a child can access the resources and obtain the knowledge needed to achieve their dream. Although we didn’t teach academic subjects, sexual education is just as important to the well-being of the teenagers that were our target group. Ecuador has one of the highest rates of adolescent pregnancies in girls between the ages of 12 and 18; even during our presentations there were teenage couples present with their toddler. It was a great learning experience to work in a field related to medicine where I was not doing medical work, but more statistical analysis, group work, and education. I had never written a survey before nor analyzed data gathered from surveys and I always took for granted any questionnaire that I filled out. After a few minutes into devising the questions we were going to give out to teenagers in the region, I realized that there was so much more to this kind of work. I had to word every question carefully to make sure it was easily understood but also gathered the maximum amount of data possible. Then we had to distribute the surveys on the street and in schools and I learned to approach people, ask them for their time, and get used to people either saying no or just ignoring me – all in Spanish too. The data input and analysis took me a step further into the more clinical side of research which I had never dabbled in before because all my lab experience came from “wet lab” benchwork where the holistic human aspect does not play a large part. All this culminated in a presentation that we tailored to the results we collected which revealed the common misconceptions about pregnancy, STDs, and contraceptives held in the community. I’m glad the work was sustainable because I know that even if I never have the opportunity to go back to Ecuador, the next volunteer group to work in that clinic can use our pilot presentation and widen its spread in local high schools.

On a more personal reflection, Ecuador gave me a place to reestablish the balance between academic, social, and emotional well-being that I had lost during the school year. My sophomore year was filled with self-doubt, self-degradation, low confidence, chronic fatigue, sleep deprivation, and general unhappiness because I felt that my playful, outgoing self was lost in a flurry of stress. For the beginning of the service trip, I began to pick up the pieces of myself that had broken down after constant self-criticism. Very slowly, I recovered my feelings of self-worth, a positive mindset, and self-forgiveness. As these qualities came back to me, they fueled my strength in being able to maintain strong work and study ethic, actively fostering intimate relationships with my friends, family, and mentors, and doing my best to make others feel as happy as I was beginning to feel. Being able to walk about the city, explore the natural beauty of Ecuador, and do meaningful work each day gave me a stepping stone to achieving a state of maturity and resilience that was
Jessica Lo
Ecuador

stronger than I have ever had before. Through talking with my host family, the program supervisor Melissa, and other mentors in the program who were passionate about their work and acting as a sponsor for international volunteers working in Ecuador, my world view widened and suddenly I didn’t feel caged in a box of academics and inevitability anymore. I had been closing that cage in on myself all year as I became wrapped up in a blizzard of deadlines, decaying friendships, toxic work environments, and a state of constant confusion in class, but having time to work and relax unraveled the worried coils of my thoughts and reminded me that there is a whole world out there outside of my struggles. Knowing that I wasn’t alone and that I did have choices comforted me and started me off in the right mindset for another year of academics that I’m sure will test my resilience once again.
I’m not sure exactly how to sum up a two month life-changing experience in a two page reflection essay, but I can only start with saying that serving and living in Quito, Ecuador this past summer truly did change the way I see the world and how I choose to live my life in the hope of impacting the world in a positive way.

When I first arrived in Quito, I was overwhelmed by the jarring change in culture, along with a new language, but our partners at the Simon Bolivar Spanish School helped make this transition as smooth as possible. Jorge, Daniella, German, and all of the rest of the staff met us with welcoming enthusiasm and were eager to share and teach us so much about their culture. I remember initially being frustrated trying to translate my English thoughts into Spanish words while keeping up a conversation, only to feel like I wasn’t able to communicate more than just a surface-level idea. However, by the end of June, I was confident enough to discuss things like Ecuador’s healthcare system and debate on the pros and cons of universal healthcare in Spanish with Dr. Andres, who we worked within Clinica Bastet.

I said in my first blog that, “I hope that in the weeks of service to come that I am able to act with compassion and intelligence… to create a sense of family with the people that I will be working with. I think that that is so necessary to make real progress in the project, because we will hopefully both be able to learn from each other in order to supplement the oral health education curriculum in Quito”. Other than the fact that the project that I worked on completely shifted from oral health to working with drug abuse in adolescents instead, I really do believe that I accomplished this goal for the summer. I found a new family not only in my Ecuadorian host family, but also in the Simon Bolivar school, Clinica Bastet, and the rest of the OACS cohort. My host parents were truly some of the best people I have ever met, loving unconditionally without expectations for anything in return, and were just as eager to learn about my Indian culture as they were to share their Ecuadorian culture. In doing so, I was able to find so many similarities between my own roots and how my family in India lives and the entirely new culture of Quito, which made me feel so much more at home and comfortable.

For our service work, we broke up the cohort into two groups – mine worked with alcohol and drug usage, and the other group was focused on sexual health education. We first created surveys in Spanish to give to Ecuadorian adolescents to determine where the biggest gap in education about these topics is, and used the results of the surveys to create a thesis to present to the Ministry of Public Health, so that future volunteers can effectively make curriculum to teach in local schools. Although we were not able to actually be the ones teaching in schools, I think the foundation that we were able to set for future work was both vital and sustainable, two things that are essential in all service work. I also hope that involving the Ministry of Public Health may help shed some light on the need for drug abuse and sexual health education in government
initiatives in Ecuador. We also incorporated the mental health aspect of addiction in our presentation to show that addiction is a neurological and mental health condition that should be treated as such, and people addicted to drugs like cocaine and heroin often need a holistic mental health therapy approach to treat the other illnesses associated with addiction, such as depression and anxiety.

Finally, thank you, Mr. and Mrs. Nichols, for enabling me to have this experience that has made me take a step back in my own life and see if I truly am making the most impact in my community as I can, as I learned to do this summer. Thank you for enabling me to find a second home and family in Ecuador. And, thank you for enabling me to serve in a community where I was able to make a sustainable difference and hope to return to one day.
Rachel Miles
Norway and Bulgaria

This summer’s trip to Norway and Bulgaria truly taught me so much, not only about myself and my place in the world, but also how it functions as something so much larger than myself and the ways that I will one day be able to shape it. As an aspiring physician (physician-scientist, rural physician? To be determined), to be able to explore healthcare systems around Europe was a markedly unique experience. Especially having never left the country before, visiting a nation outside the United States was extraordinary. Not only did I have the opportunity to visit Norway and Bulgaria for the sake of the trip, but I also got to visit many other places, like my ancestral homeland of Serbia and, after being a Latin student for more than eight years, Rome, among other places. Most striking of all in these nations was access to healthcare. Although it differed throughout Western, Northern, and Eastern Europe, and there were positive and negative aspects of each system, it was clear to see that most people generally had greater access to care than anyone in the United States could imagine. Those who are not exorbitantly wealthy are now relying on donations of colleagues’ sick days while undergoing cancer treatments, or forced to crowd source costs of life-saving medical treatments, and all the while insurance companies refuse treatment to many others for the sake of profits in a nation where health care is far from socialized.

At the nonprofit at which I worked, Single Step in Bulgaria, we did a lot to bridge these gaps and more. One of the big projects I worked on was an HIV/AIDS education project in partnership with the geosocial networking app Grindr in an attempt to provide self-testing kits to those using the app and provide them with information and access to care if they tested positive for HIV. I also learned more about nonprofit structure, grant-writing, and organizing events as big as Sofia Pride.

All the while, I learned how to be so much more independent and grew immensely as a person on this trip. For many years I have aspired to serve in the Peace Corps after graduation, and being in an environment where I have to fend for myself and live almost entirely on my own gave me the confidence that this is something I will be capable of doing. Service is one of the few things in life that makes me feel whole and good, and I know that helping others will always nourish my soul. I hope to continue this kind of work in the future, both in the long-and short-term, and will be forever grateful for the financial support to pursue such a project, without which it would not have been possible. I am so grateful.
I’m willing to bet that any physical and action based thing that I did in Rabat has worn out or disappeared altogether. I bet the library at Moroccan Association for Human Rights (AMDH) is more or less back to the disheveled state that it was before Ruthie and I organized it. The translations from French to English we did made more grammatical sense than the organization’s usual method of placing paragraphs through Google Translate. Hopefully international organizations will be able to better understand the types of problems AMDH are tackling. Now that there is an intern fluent in French and English though, the translations will be done much more efficiently. I did learn more about Morocco and its history, but that was a by-product of the research Issam, our supervisor, made us do in the first few weeks. It didn’t really serve him or the organization.

At my homestay family, I can’t imagine I did anything or gave anything that has lasted to this point. The soccer ball I left probably hasn’t popped, but it’s definitely worn down by now. Hiba, my host sister, is probably taking good care of the wallet pouch thing with the flowers on it. She really liked it, but it has to be pretty dirty at this point. Even Mama Sanae’s picture frame is probably worn for wear, seeing as I dropped it on the way from Stillwater to Rabat. There’s been nothing physically there or an action I took that has stayed in the same condition as it did while I was there.

Relationships with my homestay family and supervisor have outlasted anything I’ve done, given, or received during my experience. WhatsApp video chat has been a godsend. I am so thankful for that. I’ve seen my host brother play with goats on Eid, my host mom enjoying concerts and taking pictures with famous singers, continued discussing American and Moroccan politics with my supervisor, and send thanks for putting up with me. They’ve met my roommate, my dad, my younger brother, my baby cousins, and my mother. Knowing that I do have a home in Morocco, that they have a home in the US, is a feeling that lasts forever. Actions get forgotten, physical objects fade, but what they represent is the relationship that’s built.

My trip to Morocco broke my faith in definitions and actions. I don’t know what service is, or if I did it while I was there. I couldn’t keep up with some of our cohort discussions when we got down in trying to define service or whether we could accomplish an ideal we couldn’t define, and I mentally checked out a few times. Maybe one day I will focus on getting right what it means, but this trip made me realize that I don’t care anything about its definition. This experience taught me that too much focus on definitions, self-reflection, and action leaves less room for thinking about the people and is detrimental to the flow that’s required to build relationships. There were so many times during my experience where my focus was on my own actions and how they were being perceived and that anxiety got in the way of my desire to do things with my host family, supervisor, and other people I interacted with. When I shifted my focus towards what was going on around me and the people that I was with, I was able to spend more time with my family and learn
even more through making mistakes, being reprimanded, asking questions, and listening. When I let go of being afraid of being wrong, the experience opened up to me, and I thank my host family, supervisor, and friends for having the patience and kindness for accepting me.

I think the real work begins now, in ensuring that the relationships don’t die. But because there is genuine love behind the messages the video calls, the emoji’s, on both my end and theirs, I’d say that I’m in pretty good shape. Issam, Mama Sanae, the whole gang, have a whole lot of love and they shared it with me. Thank you.
As I settle in my Towers 3 suite for school, I decorate my side of the room with what a normal college dorm might have—a tapestry to which mine has three rows of the word “FEMINIST” bolded on it, pictures that capture the past year or two such as when I first entered Vanderbilt or the bustling market in El Salvador I’d always walk past every day during my gap year, cute sparking lights from one edge of my bedframe to the other, and then a new edition: a yellow banner written in Korean and name cards with pictures of my halmonis—grandmas—Lee Ok-Sun and Kang Il-Chul, survivors of the Japanese “Comfort Women” issue. The issue of the “Comfort Women,” is the cries of over 200,000 girls and women from 11 different countries who were shipped to brothels run by the Imperial Japanese Army during World War II. The term was from what the Japanese government would call these ladies since they were used to provide “comfort” to the Japanese soldiers.

The yellow banner reads “Wednesday Demonstration demanding Japan to redress the ‘Comfort Women’ problems.” It’s a daily reminder for me that the issue is still ongoing and that every Wednesday there are people in front of Japanese embassies participating in the world’s longest peaceful protest to bring justice regarding the issue. It’s a sharp reminder that the survivors, my halmonis, are literally fighting with their lives, vowing that they will not die and stop testifying until the day the Japanese government finally acknowledge the past and provides an official apology. This wasn’t my first time doing community service abroad.

I lived in El Salvador for eight months working with women in my community; however, this was my first time doing a service project in the country of my mother’s tongue. And this changed the entire dynamic of the experience.

As a Korean American, I wasn’t doing this project as an “outsider” but at the same time, this didn’t mean I was an “insider”. I knew the language. I knew the culture. I knew the streets of Seoul like the back of my hand. I lived in Korea for more than half of my life but here I was representing my “American” side. I wasn’t someone who came from Europe or the United States, who never have been to Korea nor spoke the language. Apart from the makeup and the way I dressed, I looked Korean (and am ethnically Korean). However, it was exactly because of the makeup, the way I dressed, and the way I’d speak Korean like English, that I couldn’t be 100% written off as a foreigner but nevertheless no way considered Korean. I was walking the uncanny valley life and in some ways, more than most Asian Americans who immigrated to the States when they were young. I would walk down streets I remembered 13-year-old me would walk every day, only to notice how much has changed. I’d find myself surrounded by tourists at my favorite hideouts and somehow I too felt like a tourist in a place I once called home. I was what people jokingly would call a fake local. The benefit, though, was that it was my Korean American-ness that helped me interpret the complexity behind the issue of “Comfort Women.” To name a few, it is the strong patriarchic and misogynistic system still
present in Korea, the limited support of women’s rights, the effect of war on Korea and its citizens, and how the “Comfort Women” issue had been pushed aside due to the messy political agendas of Korea, Japan, and lastly, the United States. I had enough insider tips but also an outsider’s perspective to see what was happening. The “Comfort Women” issue is not just a dispute between Korea and Japan. It is a women's rights issue. It is a sex trafficking issue. It is a sexual harassment/abuse/assault issue. Even in a society where the #MeToo movement is circulating, how is it that these women are regarded as prostitutes but not victims? More than ever, after my time in Korea, I’ve been thinking of taking time off to do more research and service towards this issue. The trip has only added more fuel for me to do my share of bringing awareness in the States and specifically back at Vanderbilt. I thank the Nichols family for providing me with this opportunity. It has been truly a life-changing experience, one I will never forget and one that has help me find what I am passionate about.
Before this summer, I had left the United States twice, for a day trip in Canada with my family and for a week-long service trip to the Dominican Republic where I mainly spent time with my youth group. My Nichols Humanitarian experience in the Chillos Valley of Ecuador opened me to new perspectives, helped with my own language development, and allowed me to reflect on international development as well as my role as a US and global citizen.

My project included a four-week service/internship with an international non-profit called Manna Project International. Manna operates in Nicaragua and Ecuador, and initially I was slated to head down to Nicaragua; unfortunately, the tensions and provocations between the Nicaraguan government and protesters forced the site to shut down, and in April of last spring I had to quickly pivot and prepare myself to head down to Ecuador. The site in Ecuador is centered in the Chillos Valley area close to the capital city of Quito; I was part of a cohort of 11 other undergraduate students, and we lived with 3 program directors in a compound in a neighborhood called Seis de Deciembre. Over the course of the four weeks, I had the opportunity to engage with a large variety of holistic development initiatives, including teaching English classes, conducting a community needs assessment to help the organization plan effectively for the future, and spearheading reading and recycling initiatives. I also led an exercise class (similar to the role of a P.E. teacher) and planned a Día de los Niños (Day of the Kids) party for children in the community to celebrate Ecuador’s holiday.

I loved all the different activities, although some were more difficult than others; for example, during one exercise class, I tried to teach a group of about a dozen young Ecuadorians how to play American Football, which was met with confusion, impatience, and a lot of dropped passes. After the first few days, I knew I wanted to concentrate my experience on teaching English. For the members of the Chillos Valley community, learning English is seen as a skill that opens doors and provides economic mobility opportunities. I taught young children, whose parents had them enrolled to start their language development early. I assisted in a class for teenagers and adults, and was consistently amazed by the dedication of the adults, their willingness to study, ask questions, and do any extra item to learn English. Manna also connected me with the unique ability to help teach two higher level courses, one at a local university and one for English teachers seeking a higher certification by passing the “B2” exam. I put a lot of effort into lesson planning, attempting to break the class down into activities to re-enforce the learning. My specialty was crafting resource sheets for my students, so they could have additional practice problems and condensed lessons at their disposal. Even in the short time I was there, I made strong connections with my students and now still keep in touch with several via WhatsApp.

My experience beyond my service role was fun and eye-opening, showing me the amazing value of traveling and the rich learning that stems from navigating language and cultural barriers. Alongside members of
my cohort, we hiked two steep Ecuadorian mountains: Ilalo and Ruco Pinchincha. During our trek through Ruco Pinchincha, a six-hour hike, we scaled rocks, sand, and expansive plains, battling the high altitude as well. As we came down, we got to stop and look over the Quito cityscape, viewing all the vivid colors of buildings, cathedrals, and houses stacked upon one another. I made sure to commit to my Spanish development, and I motivated other members of my cohort to do the same. I would write down words I came across during the day and pore over our English to Spanish dictionary at night; other days, I tried to go the whole day without speaking English, and many of my cohort members followed suit. We spoke with taxi drivers, community members on the bus, street food vendors, forging connections and developing as Spanish speakers. Upon returning home, I found that the language and the community was what I missed most; in Ecuador, even in the Panama area, I felt a special thrill at having to figure out the Spanish translations and get myself around. Ultimately, my Nichols Humanitarian experience taught me a lot about international development, and how initiatives of an organization must be meticulously planned and tailored to meet the needs of community members. I learned about being a cultural ambassador, and how much fun it can be to share American slang (teaching my Ecuadorian friend Jonathan what “word” meant, or “hype”) while gaining some Ecuadorian slang in return (“Chévere”). The connections I made, with community members and my cohort, and the new perspectives from teaching and interacting with a very different environment than I am used to, have invigorated me to continue to seek international opportunities (I am applying for a teaching position in México now!). I want to thank Ed and Janice, and all the staff at OACS, for availing me this opportunity, which has had such a formative impact on how I see the world and my steps forward as a global citizen.
Kelly Perry  
Morocco

 Shortly after our program in Morocco ended, a report, the 2018 Global AIDS Update, was published right before the International AIDS Conference in Amsterdam began. The report’s title: “Miles to Go: Closing Gaps, Breaking Barriers, Righting Injustices.” A quote from Mandela graces the first few pages: “AIDS is our number one enemy. This enemy can be defeated. Four principles – love, support, guidance, and care for those affected – can make us winners.” While participating in the OACS Global Service Abroad Program in Morocco, I served at OPALS (L’organisation Panaficaine de lutte contre le sida; Organization for the Fight Against AIDS) for six weeks and glimpsed Mandela’s quote come alive.

Human rights work is a convoluted matrix of advocacy, capacity building, raising awareness, and education – fusing together to achieve the primary objectives of social justice, poverty eradication, and equity. I aspire to be a part of this convoluted matrix as a public health servant, and wish to devote my life to fighting health inequity, uplift those whose voices are drowned by society’s injustices, and empower individuals who have been stigmatized (whether because of their identity or because of their disease) through the power of community and mobilizing its constituents. Such power goes a long way. I have seen this power firsthand while volunteering at OPALS – participating in capacity building work such as proofreading and organizing financial reports, verifying written and online patient records, and creating up-to-date publicity materials (brochures, infographics, etc.). The power of community breathes structure into the inevitably messy human rights work: Tariq and Munir handle the finances of the nonprofit, Oumaïma and Madame Ouzen tackle awareness and education, while other staff members treat patients with HIV/AIDS, oversee the upkeep of the OPALS headquarters, and handle patient documentation. Indeed, the work is messy, with multiple parts developing at once, but it translates into tangible change because each person recognizes they are part of a catalyst larger than themselves, a movement toward health equity. This movement is nothing without the power of community.

Having recently graduated from Vanderbilt, I feel inspired and rejuvenated to continue on my public health path and of serving the community, with OPALS greatly informing my path, shedding light into the value of grassroots community work. However, I recognize that there is still a lot to be done in the realm of healthcare and public health. Back to the 2018 Global AIDS Update, “Miles to Go: Closing Gaps, Breaking Barriers, Righting Injustices.” We made incredible advances yet, as the report’s title states, there are miles to go until real health equity is achieved. There is an increase in incidence of children with HIV as a result of failing to prevent mother-to-child transmission of HIV in Nigeria; there is an increase in drug overdose deaths and HIV prevalence in Russia; even the United States itself ranks among the top ten countries with a ravaging AIDS epidemic. In Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) countries, Morocco included,
only 5% of people in desperate need of HIV/AIDS treatment can actually access it – the worst rate of all countries labeled as the global south (Arab Human Development Report 2009, 161). Heavy stigma in this region is the prevailing force that denies that AIDS is a problem. And these statistics only center on AIDS alone – not even touching on other pressing public health issues and human rights violations. Honor and shame twist around women’s bodies – the subject of sexual double standards that impart an imbalanced burden of guilt on women when it comes to unwanted and/or (un)sanctioned sexual activities. I have witnessed firsthand the denigration of Moroccan women, alongside other individuals deemed subaltern including sub-Saharan immigrants, people with disabilities, and the elderly, to name a few. Health equity and social justice can never be achieved if people are labeled “other,” and if their lives are deemed of lesser value. There are miles to go, and I am ready to join other public health advocates to walk this road together. Over the next few years, I will be working on large-scale public health projects, such as drug repurposing, genomics research, and biobank management and utilization – aspects of public health that I have almost no experience in. I look forward to learning, contributing, and exposing myself to new avenues of the healthcare field – all while keeping Morocco, the relationships I formed, and the lessons I learned close to my heart.

I will never forget Morocco, OPALS, my host family, and the Vanderbilt cohort – nuclei of love and hope that have taken up space in my heart. Experiences of joy flutter through my mind as I type this…the goodbye party at the CCCL (Center for Cross-Cultural Learning) with Moroccan treats, tea, dancing and music…playing Ninja with Audrey and Niama…linking arms with Nouhayla and Niama while walking through Mohamed V…eating my host mother Khadija’s heavenly food…cheering (loudly) during World Cup matches in Café Oudayas…moments I cherish and say “shukran ala wegi” (thank you for everything). I want to thank the Nichols family, the Nichols Humanitarian Fund, and the OACS office for gifting me with the opportunity to broaden my understanding of global health, observe new avenues in which systemic injustices feed on those less privileged, and transform the lessons I learned into action. This was the gift of a lifetime, and I am extremely grateful for the investment you have shown toward my personal and professional development; it will not go to waste.
Riley Pettit
Norway and Bulgaria

The experience of participating in the Office of Active Citizenship and Service Global Service trip to Bulgaria and Norway is something that has allowed me to have a lot of confidence going into my final year at Vanderbilt. As I reflect back on this experience from the lens of beginning my job search process, I am shocked by how much more confident I feel speaking to my own abilities and experience to others; this is partially because of the wonderful experience that I now am able to discuss after having the opportunity to travel outside of the country for the first time. However, I also believe that much of this comes from the personal growth I experienced during my time abroad – it makes you develop some personal skills to be constantly surrounded by 15 strangers! My ability to work effectively in groups, as well as my confidence in my own leadership and intelligence improved significantly during my time travelling – between participating in the OACS program and working in Spain for almost two months following that, I was away from close friends and family and in a foreign culture for over three months, which was at times very challenging, but has allowed me to stretch my limits.

Outside of feeling incredibly grateful for the personal development and growth that I experienced, I was also able to have an amazing and multi-part experience with a particular service issue in the 2018 year. Prior to attending my Nichols-funded OACS Global Service trip, I had led an Alternative Spring Break trip to Baltimore, Maryland that focused on serving the refugee population. Both in preparing for this trip and during the trip itself, I became very immersed in what the process of gaining refugee status is in the United States and the various problems facing the refugee population in the States. This was my first experience working with refugee populations, or, to be frank, really contemplating my own thoughts, biases, or opinions on refugees.

During that service experience, I developed a passion for working with vulnerable communities and enlightening other Americans who have a biased and unfavorable view of those who are merely seeking safety. This is where I feel like I can make some of the biggest impact for this community – utilizing my privileged, and now educated, perspective, I can assist in bringing light to a more even view of the reasons behind people seeking asylum and refugee status. I continued to develop an even more broad understanding of the ways in which the refugee crisis is affecting other countries and communities during my OACS Global Service trip. The issues that the U.S. faces in addressing the refugee crisis pale in comparison to the problems faced by countries that are a bit easier to access from the places where most refugees are fleeing. Bulgaria was a particularly interesting country to work with refugee populations, because, even though it is a very safe country, it is not known to be a particularly wealthy country, making it less popular for permanent refugees. While the number of long-term refugees attempting to stay in Bulgaria is not that large, there is a significant number that still needs assistance. This made the work that the Refugee Women’s Council of Bulgaria was doing even more important, as the
Riley Pettit
Norway and Bulgaria

government struggled to meet the needs of the populations coming to their lands. This also served as a wonderful experience for me to understand how important community building activities are for immigrant and refugee communities – it was uplifting and powerful to see the way that simply providing inclusive spaces would affect the women that were served by RWCB.

I hope to remain engaged in the refugee communities in the United States moving forward and continue to serve as an advocate for the community to other Americans who don’t understand the reasons behind the crisis. I would also like to submit a final thank you to the Nichols who helped make this experience possible for me!
As I think back to my time in India, the main feeling I have in my mind is one of surprise. Surprise at our ability to carry out projects I would have never thought possible in the US—let alone on the other side of the planet in a region where I didn’t speak the native language. Surprise at the care of the teachers and school children we worked with over their daily activities and endeavors. Most of all, I felt surprise at just how quickly it all seemed to have passed.

In my first blog post, I mentioned that at times I “wish[ed] our service would happen a little quicker.” Two and a half months later, as I look back in earnest, wishing my time in Hyderabad could be stretched indefinitely, I remain confused at how I ever thought such a thing. In all reality, however, the situation was likely somewhere in the middle—my nostalgic recollection makes the trip seem short by pitting it against the much longer time I wish I could have stayed, while the hardships and daily issues faced in India culminated in the mild frustration expressed in my blog post at the time. In any case, I think it is fair to say that such a tension is characteristic of a good service trip. On the one hand, setbacks and struggles are inevitable during the course of the stay, but on the other, the sense of finality and accomplishment that comes at the end is incomparable to any other.

I refer to this sense of accomplishment not to be bombastic or to suggest that mark of good service is the impression it leads on the volunteer. Rather, I claim merely that the success of the trip (measured, of course, by the achievement of goals set out for the villagers we were working with) is apparent my being proud of the trip. As I sit and write this paper (or, at any of the other numerous times I look back to my time in India this summer) I can say with confidence that thanks in small part to my actions (and in large part to my team at Project RISHI, the Nichols, and the workers, school teachers, and others supporting us in Pamulaparthi) there is out there in the world a child who can now drink water comfortably at school, who can study in a classroom with lights and fans and a working projector, who can use their restroom in peace, or who can eat their midday meal and play on the school grounds without the smell and intrusion of wood-smoke permeating their lungs.

These are the true measures by which I evaluate my time in India, and when I think accordingly, I am always delighted to have had such a wonderful opportunity to take part in such a wonderful process. More than delighted, however, I also remain holistically changed by the process. As I apply to graduate school to study issues of education, or even as I slip back into my roles as a student, teaching assistant, or extracurricular leader on campus, I keep in mind the privilege I have in being able to access all kinds of incredible educational resources. From this privilege stems an obligation—one with immense urgency—to use these resources to ensure others who may follow me have similar opportunities. From this perspective, I am glad to be able to have worked on such an issue this summer in India.
Furthermore, I know that my involvement in Project RISHI will be one that helps make this kind of impact even beyond this summer. As I begin my duty as Senior Advisor for this organization, I am working to impart my knowledge on the underclass students joining the executive board of Project RISHI, and to help them carry out the tasks required of them by their new roles, all with an urgency warranted by my first-hand experience of the projects we are working towards in India. This summer, I was fortunate in many regards to be able to write a chapter in the history of Project RISHI and Pamulaparthi. Now, it is time to equip my peers with the skills required to keep this story going.
Cory Pitt
Rwanda and Democratic Republic of Congo

My introduction to Nat Robinson and the Leaf Team still seems oddly coincidental. Breck Stodghill and I had been reaching out to various members of the Vanderbilt community with the aim to bring together students and faculty from across the undergraduate and graduate schools. We had both developed an interest in blockchain applications the past summer, and we were determined to use our final year at Vanderbilt to gain experiences with real-world, impactful projects that brought together various disciplines. After a series of conversations with students and faculty from the Law School, Owen, and the Undergraduate Schools, we found ourselves in a coffee shop with Nat, the founder of Leaf Global Fintech. Nat was discussing his plans to test pilot in Rwanda the following Spring and he mentioned how we might be able to get involved with the tech development. One thing led to another, and with the help of the Nichols Humanitarian Fund, Breck and I led the technical aspect of the pilot in Rwanda for Leaf.

Leaf is developing a mobile application platform to facilitate cash to virtual currency conversion using blockchain technology. In much of East Africa, mobile money is cash. Individuals use telecom credits as a means of transacting in their everyday lives. However, in times of crisis and displacement, this mobile money is not interoperable across borders. Additionally, carrying cash across borders can be extremely dangerous, often putting the carrier at risk of robbery. By facilitating financial accounts on the Stellar blockchain, Leaf opens a wide variety of services to be offered to refugees and the underserved, who lack access to basic financial services that are often taken for granted.

It was a surprise to me that the most impactful moment I had in Rwanda stemmed from meeting a man named Henri, a refugee studying at a school in Kigali while living in one of the nearby camps. Breck and I were discussing the plausibility of our tech with Henri to gauge user interest. Henri explained his story to us. He had fled from the Congo over ten years ago, living with just his grandmother for some time. Eventually, however, the US government granted his grandmother refugee status in the United States, permitting to seek refugee in the states with the family of Henry's uncle, Imana. However, since Henry is not in the direct bloodline of Imana, he is not permitted the same status. After a few more questions, I found out that Imana lived in Phoenix, about an hour from my parents' house where I would be visiting a week from then. Next thing I knew I was sitting in Imana's house in Glendale, Arizona, getting jumped on by Henry's cousins.

Imana's family had me over for dinner and at the end of the evening I showed them Leaf's mobile application and described to them the fees it had the potential to reduce when sending money across the world to their friends and to their family, to Henry. "When can I use it?", was one of the first things out of Imana's mouth. After showing the app, I showed them a picture of Henry holding one of the Leaf soccer balls I had brought to test out social remittances (please see my blog for more information). Imana's eyes teared up. I had no idea that something so simple could have such a powerful impact. In any business,
but particularly in ones that have the capability to change the lives of its users it is crucial to remember the customer, to put a face to the customer. If these series of seemingly random occurrences hadn't happened I never would have known the need for such a product, but more importantly, I never would have known the feeling of showing some a product that could bring him closer to a loved one.

There are too many stories to count from our time in Rwanda. However, the encounters I had with Henry and his family will always stick with me. As I continue in my career I hope to re-encounter that look I saw in Imana's eyes by finding and developing a product that renders positive and global change.
Karima Raharjo  
Morocco

I left for Morocco knowing I was going to be tasked with teaching English to English Language Learners at varying levels. I did not realize I would be part of an organization teaching all kinds of trade skills to adults young and old, who also found time to attend English classes time to time. Our English classes were also a place for some teenagers and children to attend while they were on summer vacation. The work of the organization seemed intended to tackle an issue that was brought up in our seminars: a limited job market and an education system citizens find unsatisfactory. Morocco certainly seems to be in a position where there are many eligible workers that cannot find careers. A few years ago, there were protests about the lack of access to jobs in the public sector. Moroccans also seem to be fighting for education reform. There is much disparity in the quality. We learned that while 95% of kids that graduate from private school will be employed, less than 50% of students graduating from public school will. Another issue we encountered was illiteracy among women. Two out three women are illiterate. But the amazing thing is that 90% of illiterate women are enrolled in literacy courses, because they see literacy as an opportunity to help their children and to access religious practices. Unfortunately, I do not know too much more about the extent of the issue and it is definitely something I would love to go back and explore more. But in our work, we did witness some evidence of these phenomenon that I can share.

Illiteracy was something I saw act as a big barrier for some of our students that wished to learn English. Because we already had limited communication with many of them since we did not share a language, writing words on the board became a necessary process of our teaching. The students that had experience reading Latin letters because of learning French or English were able to follow along a lot more easily than those who could not. I regret that I failed to recognize this earlier. This even limited my interactions with my host mom. I remember trying to show her a Google Translation once, but then she communicated to me that it wasn’t going to work. That’s when I realized she could not read Arabic letters. And I believe some of the women and boys at the school also were in that position. But even the students that could read Arabic letters were severely disadvantaged in our English language learning class. There was one student named Bujumaa, who was definitely one of the most dedicated and hardworking people we taught. He brought in his own book that taught him phrases to say in English. I looked more closely at his Arabic to English book, and I found that the English words were spelled out phonetically in Arabic letters. I thought it was super interesting and it was finally clear to me why he always looked so confused when we would write on the board. He can’t read Latin letters. Or even if he can, it probably makes much more sense for him to read the pronunciations in Arabic letters. I could certainly relate because even though I can read Arabic letters a little, it was much easier for me to learn and understand Darija words when they are written phonetically in Latin letters.
It was hard enough to learn English for the students that have the background in reading and writing French, but it must have been next to impossible for him to follow along in class. And he certainly wasn’t the only one. Many of the boys his age were in the same situation. But Bujuma’a always amazed me at how he tried so hard to communicate with us regardless of the complete lack of overlap in the words we know. He liked to choose a few phrases from his book to say to us. But even when we would answer, it didn’t seem like he understood us. However, whenever this man would greet us as he walked into class and when he would call our names to get our attention with a smile, I just would just think about how I wanted to get to know this guy better. He seemed to have such a genuine light. And he seemed to be someone who underestimates himself. We were looking through his book one week and came across a section was talking about some adjectives you can call people. I pointed out the word ‘intelligent’ and pointed to him. He responded with “shwiya” which has been often used to mean ‘kind of’ or ‘a little’ to me. I didn’t have the language to communicate to him that based on what I had seen, he was very intelligent, and even more importantly, he had a commitment to learning. I saw that in so many of our students: the younger kids who are spending their summer vacation in our classroom, to the older women sparing an hour and a half of their time to come sit and learn from some young Americans. We are often taught that the economy and society will reward such hardwork and dedication, but often times this is not what happens. In this case, here are some adults embarking on careers as hairdressers, barbers, makeup artists and chefs which such a dedication to their work that even extended to motivating them to learn some English. I can’t imagine the market is set up for them to earn a significant amount of money, but I can only hope there is work for them to earn a comfortable living. This is certainly something I believe everyone deserves. But like any country, including our own, there are injustices. But I desperately hope that these people who have shown me so much kindness will have their hard work rewarded. And I hope Attadamoune and other NGO’s will continue doing great work to address these injustices.
Shawn Reilly  
Catawba Nation, USA

My time with the Catawba Cultural Preservation Project was an incredible experience both personally and professionally. Working directly with young people and with the Earth provided much needed nourishment for my soul. The work being done by the center there is incredible, transformative, and revolutionary. By working to awaken the sleeping Catawba language, and re-establishing their community’s connection to ancient foodways, the CCPP is doing the hard work of decolonization.

Working with the gardening project gave me tons of useful knowledge on plants and farming. With the CCPP, I learned about different helpful plants indigenous to Catawba land that can be used for food, medicine, and dyes. I learned how to ferment beverages, and have even began fermenting cider in my own home for consumption! These real world applications of the incredible plant life around us gave me a number of ideas for my work with young people. I will be incorporating natural dyes, fermentation, and medicinal plants into my science lessons this year, and work to identify the plant life around the schools and communities I work in to see if they can be incorporated into my classrooms. I also plan to leverage the Nashville Public Library’s seed library to use with my students, and model for my young people how to use the community resources that surround us. Seed preservation is another important aspect of my learning during my trip that I hope to bring into my work as a youth worker.

Incorporating language development into my lessons is another thing I learned about while working with the CCPP. While there, the facilitators taught the young people the Catawba words for things like beans and berries. Although this wouldn’t be appropriate with the communities I work with, I plan to crowsource and ask the young people I work with what words in their own languages are used to explain the different things we work with. I work primarily with schools in South Nashville, which have a great benefit of rich linguistic diversity. By leveraging this asset, we can build our communal language knowledge and learn about the different ways cultures name different things.

Personally, working with this Native community in a responsible and impactful way helped me grow my understanding of the place of allies. In fact, it helped me shift the understanding of myself from ally to accomplice. Instead of just cheering on communities and individuals that I want to support, it’s important to (in this case literally) get your hands dirty, and do the work that communities ask of you. It is important when doing community work to not bring your own presumptions of what the community needs, and to listen carefully to the actual gaps and the ways in which they need them filled. In this case, pulling up weeds, tilling soil, and doing manual labor is what was asked of me. I was happy to do these things, and happy to do the burdensome but necessary things that usually pull the staff away from doing the youth and community centered work they are actually passionate about.

Overall, I am beyond grateful for the opportunity that the Nichols fund gave me to work in solidarity with the Catawba
nation. My experience was invaluable and helped build up my repertoire for working with young people. There, I created and strengthened relationships I will have for a lifetime, and I plan on returning next summer to continue to support the work they are doing there.
Hanna Roenfanz
Ecuador

I told Melissa I wanted to leave the Friday we were in Baños. I had been thinking about it for the majority of the 2 weeks we had been in Ecuador. Nothing felt quite right the entire time I had been there, but I had a lot of good reasons to stay. Melissa talked me off the ledge, and we came up with a game plan to make my experience better. The next day was the best day I had in Ecuador. I went white water rafting, had a massage, made some new friends, and explored the night life in Baños. Everything kind of went downhill from there. I got food poisoning Sunday night and passed out on a bus on Thursday. Every time I thought I was getting better, I pushed myself too hard and wound up back at square one. I feel very guilty when I’m sick; I have since I was a child. That whole week, I felt like, no matter what I did, I wasn’t getting better. Being sick really amplified my frustrations with my experience in Ecuador. Friday night at dinner, I was really excited to go to a restaurant and eat some “tourist food” so I’d finally start feeling better. I took one bite of the trout that I was served and knew that I wasn’t going to be eating dinner that night. It was a breaking point for me and the moment I knew I needed to go home. I booked a ticket that night and flew home the next day I don’t know if I can describe what the problem was while I was in Ecuador, but I didn’t feel like myself there. I can say that I spent my entire college career trying to feel like a more complete person. I went to therapy, learned to cook, and lived alone. After four years, I felt like I was very in control of my personal life and I was really happy about that. Being in Ecuador made me feel like I was the same person I was at 17 when I started college. I was watching all the work I put in slip away, and nothing is worth that. I feel so much better since I left.

This program was not for me. I really wish it would have been, but I’m so happy I left when I did. The best piece of advice my mom has ever given me is “People always say ‘You made your bed, and now you have to lay in it.’ That’s not always true—you can change the sheets. You can buy a whole new bed if you want.” I know that it’s not always possible to change the sheets or buy a new bed and sometimes we have to do things we don’t want to do, but in this situation, I had the ability to leave, and I’m so happy I had the courage to do so.

I’m not sure I did any meaningful service while I was in Ecuador. Most of my time was spent adjusting to life in Quito and trying to keep my head above water. I could see myself being happy in Quito. I loved to walk around the city and imagine myself as someone living in one of the apartments with a for sale sign, walking a dog, and buying produce from a woman on the street. That wasn’t my reality though, nor is it a possibility right now. I’d love go back to Ecuador. There are so many things I still want to see there. As for now, I’m very happy to go back to my life. If I learned anything from this program, it’s that I need to have control over my personal life, and I need to make sure that I put myself in positions where I can do that.
As a participant in the Global OACS Morocco program during the summer of 2018, I obviously witnessed countless examples of cultural, societal, and religious differences between Morocco and the United States. I was particularly intrigued by themes of women's rights, privilege associated with language and literacy, and negative stereotypes of Islam. However, one topic that I didn't expect to be confronted with heavily was the differences between NGO operations in Morocco and the United States.

The nonprofit organization that I volunteered at, the Moroccan Organization for Human Rights (MOHR), delves into nearly all aspects of human rights, including women's rights, socioeconomic freedoms, the death penalty, educational access, and more. To fully appreciate the difficulties of their role in Moroccan society, it is crucial to recognize the passivity of the Moroccan government in enforcing human rights matters. Even when laws are put into place, it can take decades for the government to consistently implement it, because it often fights cultural and societal norms. For example, while the Tamazight language recently became one of the national languages of the country, the Amazigh people still have significantly less access to equal opportunities in economics and education. Also, although the Moroccan government was pressured to create laws around the fair treatment of women after rape and justly punishing the perpetrator, these are rarely enforced outside major cities, and the stigma surrounding sexual assault is still monstrously present. NGOs like MOHR and a similar organization, the Moroccan Association for Human Rights (MAHR), truly have their work cut out for them.

When viewed from only a Western lens, the MOHR's approach to making progress in human rights can feel strange. In the United States, we easily exercise our right to freedom of speech, where peaceful protest is accepted and even encouraged as a hallmark of democracy. In Morocco, protest isn't viewed as positively; instead, it is shut down quickly and often punished. MAHR operates similarly to NGOs in the United States, taking a strong stance against human rights violations and aggressively calling for action, but this leads to the slow destruction of the organization due to lack of funding from the government. On the other hand, MOHR wants to create change in the realm of human rights, no matter how incremental, by working alongside the government, instead of against it. They recognize that working against the government may risk their ability to create any change at all. The executive board prioritizes a sustainable relationship with the government, even when it slows the pace of progress and doesn't allow MOHR to take as progressive as a stance as it would want. I originally felt very unsettled by this idea, because as someone who is passionate about human rights, I would prefer enormous changes that benefit the Moroccan people. However, we need to appreciate the circumstances that forces MOHR to use this approach, even if it differs from the majority of human rights organizations across the globe. That way, as volunteers at MOHR, we can better empathize with their struggles and support them in the best ways possible.
As Americans, we have a lot of privilege surrounding our freedoms of expression and therefore how we run our organizations. This is just one example of how, during international service, it is crucial for us to put aside our Western biases and think about a situation through a different lens. I feel that this theme will be relevant to my future path and professional development as well – as a research scientist, the ability to see the same information through different perspectives can boost the creativity necessary to solve complex problems. I would like to continue to work on this skill moving forward in my career.
When I left for Norway and Bulgaria this past summer, I expected to examine structural differences in these two disparate societies and come to a conclusion about the nature of happiness. The plan, as I understood it, was to learn as much as possible about why Bulgaria was ranked so low on the UN’s world happiness report and Norway ranked so high. My personal theory was that happiness would be related to feelings of support, and that those who felt more supported by their government, friends, and family would be the happiest. However, as we traveled and spoke to shopkeepers, train conductors, bus drivers, and other professionals, I found that personal happiness was much more dependent on individual circumstance than feeling supported, and had little to do with the factors measured by the UN survey.

Looking at the UN's report last spring, my peers and I noticed that happiness was, in large part, measured by variables that reflect feelings of stability. However, though my travels this summer, I have come to feel that a more accurate representation of happiness would measure feelings of excitement and hope. In Bulgaria in particular, I met many people who told me they did not have all that they needed, yet were happy with their lives. In the richer country of Norway, more people expressed that they had all they needed and most of what they wanted, but were discontent and felt their lives were lacking. This was most true of those in the college age range. The young adults I met in Bulgaria spoke of how much they love their country, and while they recognize problems within it, they hope to improve their home and felt hopeful about the future. They were bright, and happy with the lives they had been given. In Norway, I spoke with multiple groups of young men who spoke of a restlessness in the culture. For those who wanted to be supported, they said, life is easy enough, but there is not a space for young and ambitious people to pursue their dreams of wealth and success. I spoke at length with college students who felt that Norwegian society, while generally good enough, provided little opportunity for these kinds of dreams because it lacks the freedoms other societies have. The high taxes and government’s role in private enterprises in Norway prevented the kind of entrepreneurial spirit we saw in the youth of Bulgaria.

I spent much more time in Bulgaria than Norway, working with Single Step to provide supportive services to LGBT youth. It struck me that in Bulgaria, we were working to provide the same feelings of safety and support that we found in Norwegian youth. However, in Norway, the young adults we met wanted nothing but the freeness and lack of oversight of counties like Bulgaria or even the United States. Happiness is not straightforward, and neither were the results.

Through my service, I learned a lot about non-profit work. I researched for grants, wrote many research summaries, and helped put on major events like Sofia Pride. However, I learned so much more than just these tasks. I learned about how to ask questions that lead to productive discussion; asking ‘are you happy?’ was a lot less helpful than asking ‘what makes you happy?’ My experiences will help me to improve my
Ruiy Shah
Norway and Bulgaria

research work at Vanderbilt, make me a better employee, due to my time doing administrative work for Single Step, and have already made me a more compassionate human. For this, I want to thank Mr. and Mrs. Nichols. I have learned more on this trip than I could have imagined possible.

I will conclude with a message to any young people who wish to travel. Don’t just look at the world as you perceive it. Try to understand what makes a city or a country different from one or another. I tried to do as much of that as I could this summer, and through my travels to Bulgaria, Serbia, Greece, Italy, Turkey and Norway, I feel as though I have a better picture of happiness than ever before.
I consider my time in Morocco to be a defined chapter in my life. It is not just a great time I had, not it is just a clear moment when I gave my heart to service, educating myself while being involved in the education of others and building beautiful relationships. While that is critical to the reason I wanted to go, what I found instead was an enlightenment that became the defining moment for me in understanding what I can, but more importantly, want to do in life. This was a moment that refined my ambitions and gave me a much clearer insight into how the world really is. With every person that I encountered I think I learned something new about myself no matter how positive or negative the experience came to be. It is because of this period in my life that I have grown to appreciate and criticize the world for what it is now but also to envision how beautiful it all is can be-and how I can plant that same beauty in my understanding of my development as a human being.

I worked at Remess which translates into the Moroccan Network for Social and Solidary Economy. My understanding of social and solidary economy basically means that you economically uplift people in your community without exploiting one another. In building your business you can work in tandem with other businesses to support each other while still growing-together and never at the expense of the greater whole. The bulk of the work that I had to do was translation work. Now, I had never thought that I would have the opportunity to do translation work so I relished the opportunity to do so. It was rather difficult at first but with time it became easier to grasp and it became more meaningful to me each time I did it. This work made me appreciate the power and complexity of language. With this work I think I began to understand that language is such an odd concept. There's just so much meaning that humans create and at the same time so much that we destroy. We use language to express our thoughts and ideas but at the same time because we voice these notions in a particular way, when you translate them out, there almost always seems to be a little bit of nuance that is lost. But despite the threat of that loss, there is much to be said about the diversity of language because even though we lose meaning going from one language to another, we gain a different understanding of the same material. What we lose outweighs what we gain. We ultimately become better because of the multitude of languages that are at our disposal but we never experience this new loss and creation until we begin to use a language different than our own and process the context in which languages themselves are living in. Even though I knew French, I was still left in a world of meaning that I never fully gained access to because of the social status that French had in the community. French, being a colonial language, is still ingrained in the roots of the community, but the perspective that surrounds the language is so different than how it is in America. The language is socially upheld as a more crucial means of access. Businesses don't learn how to speak Darija, the Moroccan dialect of Arabic, they expect Moroccans to learn French. French, to them creates a space of necessity and demand, where if you are to succeed in life, if you are...
to have any luck in climbing the tall and rigorous social ladder then you have to learn French. Whereas for me, I learned the language as an extra means of access, not one that was ultimately necessary for me to move up in the world, but rather one that might help.

In translating French into English, I exercised that basic linguistic process oscillating between the creation and destruction of meaning and nuance. What I did not intend to help create, however, was the further devaluation of a beautiful native tongue. But in that I found myself truly as a part of a social and solidary economy, because I can not deny that they needed this skill to thrive, but in order to grow from that privilege I had to deem it just as necessary to learn Darija. I had to give more of myself than I thought I possibly could in order to properly grow from my work experiences. To have the tables turned on me, where I am the one who is the learner, I am the one cut out of the conversation, I am the one left without the power I need to gain comfort made me feel how this is what I must commit my life to. Life is hard for me, but while it may be hard there are others that I can help who have not been granted what I have, and I make it now my mission to to humble myself before them. There is no community without work being done to make that community, and I want to build a better community.
Service for and with others is a lifelong commitment. My summer, generously funded by the Nichols Humanitarian Fund, gave me the theoretical and practical underpinnings I will need to pursue service opportunities once I graduate from Vanderbilt Law School. Through the Vanderbilt in Venice Program, Vanderbilt Law Professors taught me about human rights law, the law of war, and the ways in which we as lawyers can ensure all of those rights are being protected and acknowledged regardless of the circumstance or domain. During my Internship for Global Rights Compliance in The Hague, I spent time applying what I learned in Venice to subjects ranging from international environmental protection to human rights violations arguments for certain occupied territories. In concert, these experiences give me the foundation to advocate and serve others long after I leave Vanderbilt.

The Vanderbilt in Venice Program is designed as a crash course in major international law topics. We spent more than four hours in class each day distinguishing human rights law from humanitarian rights law, comparatively analyzing the environmental laws and policies of countries throughout the world, and fleshing out how exactly you “serve” parties in different international jurisdictions to compel them into court. The substance, though challenging, provided the framework I would need to dive into tangible questions in the service of others. Working in The Hague, the home of the International Court of Justice, gave me the opportunity to apply what I learned in Venice to rights issues across the spectrum. Getting to apply the law and doctrine to meaningful human rights issues was eye opening. One project in particular resonated with me: I spent the majority of my internship researching and drafting an investigative manual for non-legal experts tasked with gathering evidence to establish and prosecute war crimes. The process of drafting the manual and collecting examples of evidence brought into sharp relief the persistent violations of human right and humanitarian rights throughout the world every day. And without my time spent in class in Venice beforehand, I wouldn’t have been prepared to draft the investigative manual.

This summer, funded by the generosity of the Nichols Humanitarian Fund, concreted what I will need going forward in my career: to serve others in need, and champion the rights of all people no matter the context or circumstance. I am excited to graduate from Vanderbilt Law School and take this service-driven approach into the world with me.
Because of the Nichols Fund, Cory Pitt and I were able to spend our spring break working with refugees on the border of Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo. We were on this trip with a group of Vanderbilt Business School students to pilot a new social venture called Leaf. Leaf is a mobile technology that allows refugees to affordably save and send money across borders using just a mobile phone. We spent a full week in Rwanda meeting with government officials, representatives from aid agencies, and telecommunications executives to get a better understanding of the challenges and opportunities Leaf will face in trying to provide this service to refugees in Rwanda. We also got the unique opportunity to conduct a test pilot of Leaf on the border of Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo, a border that hundreds of thousands of refugees have crossed since 2000.

Even though we only spent a short time in Rwanda we learned so much about the country, its people, and the long list of crises that face refugees living in refugee camps. We spoke with numerous individuals who had fled the Democratic Republic of Congo with all of their belongings and had them stolen from them while en route to large refugee camps in Rwanda. In fact, most of the people we spoke with arrived in refugee camps with little to no money. It is extremely powerful to hear these tragic stories that have unfortunately become commonplace for the hundreds of thousands of refugees currently living in Rwanda. When you hear these stories in person, you feel the need to do whatever you can to help. That very feeling is largely the reason why Cory and I got involved with Leaf in the first place and applied to the Nichols Humanitarian Fund so that we could make this trip and do our part to help in person.

Our trip was just the first step for Leaf in its quest to transform the way that refugees transport money across borders. Thanks to our experience in Rwanda, Leaf has successfully raised money from social impact investors and is working hard to conduct another more comprehensive pilot this fall. The opportunity to work with Leaf for the past year and go on this trip have impacted me greatly. There are far too many social problems that exist in other parts of the world that us Americans are blind to. As I pursue a career in technology, I will make sure to continue to do my best to get involved in projects that empower individuals with less fortunate circumstances than I.
If you were to ask many different people what happiness means to them, you would likely receive such a variation of answers that it would prove extremely difficult to narrow down happiness to one definition, one overarching perspective, or one statement. This summer, I had the amazing opportunity to explore and research happiness in the Scandinavian context- which historically ranks among the top regions on the Gross Happiness Index- as well as volunteer for a young Bulgarian non-profit, Single Step, which helps youth across the nation who are struggling with their sexuality or gender identity. Through this journey, I have been able to draw conclusions about what constitutes happiness on both a mass, surface level and personal level.

**Happiness in Norway**

Norway is a country which consistently ranks amongst the top 5 countries in terms of national happiness- a term coined by Jigme Wangchuck who proposed the idea of happiness being a measure of good governance. From an outsider’s perspective, it is hard to imagine why anyone living in a country of wealth with a minimum wage of $25 an hour could possibly be unhappy. When even the most basic jobs distribute wages which are livable wages, what could there possibly be to complain about? Economically speaking, Norway has what many countries have gone to war for- natural wealth and oil reserves. Furthermore, it is a largely environmentally sustainable country deriving much of its energy usage from renewable resources. Crime rate is low while employment is high. On the surface, the citizens of Norway have it all. Therein however, lies the problem.

If you ask any Norwegian “are you happy” you will likely receive an answer similar to that given by Erik, a Norwegian that I had the pleasure of interviewing one night for research purposes. He shrugged his shoulders and stated “I’m content. I have everything that I need and live comfortably”. This, I found, turned out to be a popular sentiment. Additionally, mentioning that you’re in their country studying happiness, they will likely snap back with “you should have gone to Denmark, they’re the happiest” or “we aren’t happy”. I have deduced two reasons for these responses that were given by an overwhelming number of Norwegians during my stay:

It is no secret that Scandinavians are humble and is a region which could be described as “collectivist”. People work not for themselves, but for the common good. Taxes are high but so is government and social security. People of Norway find security in knowing that if they fall, the government will be there to pick them up. You likely won’t have a Norwegian stranger smile at you on the street or make friendly small talk while riding public transportation. This isn’t because they are unfriendly, but rather, they are more reserved compared to individualist societies such as America. This being said, the nature of Scandinavians makes it easy to see why bragging is not a socially accepted and widely done thing.

Because of security provided by the government, as well as some of the highest wages in the world for the most menial of tasks, many Norwegians described a feeling of “complacency” and a sense of having
nothing to work for. Erik, the aforementioned interviewee, described an empty feeling that many Norwegians possess. He explained his perspective on the value of knowing that you have to go out and work hard and do strenuous physical labor for necessities as simple as putting food on the table for your family- a feeling unknown to many Norwegians who have white collar jobs.

**Unhappiness in Bulgaria**

Conversely, within the past 5 years, Bulgaria has peaked at 100 and fallen as low as 144 on the World Happiness Index. The country has a longstanding history of communism, ties to Russia and Germany, and patterns of social oppression. Bulgaria is a country where even the most basic of human rights came very recently as they joined the European Union. Some social issues still have a very long way to go such as the legalization of gay marriage and acceptance of varying gender identities. Socially oppressed groups aside, Bulgarians, despite what’s indicated by their ranking, found a lot to be happy about. Ivan, a Sofia native that I interviewed about happiness, mentioned not finding happiness in what Norwegians seemingly lack (a sense of purpose), but rather happiness in life’s simple pleasures such as family or having the opportunity to share a beer with friends after work. Upon finding out about the nature of my study, many Bulgarians joked that of course Norwegians are happy due to making so much (the grass is always greener on the other side).

Societal culture in Bulgaria was radically different than that of Norway. Bulgaria is a seemingly more social country where it’s typical for friends, colleagues, and family to go to restaurants and socialize over drinks for hours (often anywhere from 3 to 5). Every evening, you would inevitably find a plethora of friend groups sitting around benches at the parking talking, laughing, drinking, and performing. Have spent twice the amount of time in Bulgaria than I did in Norway, I was able to draw many more inferences and more closely inspect more societal elements than my time in Norway permitted. This, I found for my reflection on the two societies to be crucial due to the masses of information and research available studying happiness in the Scandinavian context compared to the little information out there exploring it in a Balkan sense.

**What can we Take Away?**

There are many things that I concluded from my study and experience in Bulgaria and Norway that would be beneficial to change and employ in the United States, a country that falls between Bulgaria and Norway not only in the World Happiness Index, but also in social mannerisms. My conclusions are as follows:

A higher minimum wage is not the key to happiness and success. Many psychological explorations reveal that money only buys happiness up to a certain point. Once someone has enough to sustain themselves and live comfortably enough to relieve many financial stressors, they do not become happier the more that they make.

Hard work and a sense of purpose should be valued more. America is known worldwide as the country where dreams come true (the idea of the American Dream). Many Americans even still believe in this as they
look for “get rich quick” schemes in order to ascend social rankings. People however, need to recognize that a path of hard work and determination leads to a more rewarding outcome.

Something that contributes to Norwegian happiness are social and governmental constructs that protects the mental health and financial security of its citizens. This is where the U.S. could use a lot of work. More government resources should be dedicated to education and social security and many workplaces should implement common Norwegian programs and practices such as longer and less stigmatized maternal and paternal leave, longer vacation allotments, and shorter working hours.

Finally, continuing in the direction of social liberties is instrumental to the future success of the United States. This should not only mean legal protections for minority groups, but also social acceptance of them and active inclusion.

Conclusion

I am really grateful for the time that I got to spend in two amazingly beautiful countries. It has been an unparalleled learning experience as I got to expand my service and learning outside of the classroom and my community. I would like to great thank OACS and the Nichols for providing me with this opportunity for learning, growth, and active citizenship and service.
A blink of an eye. That's how fast this summer has seemed to have flown by for me. It feels like just yesterday Matthew and I were in the library, taking a five-minute break from studying for exams to discuss an article on how global warming has begun to affect aquatic ecosystems. The problem seemed overwhelming, something distant and remote. How could two kids in college ever do anything to solve global warming? A short six months later, Matthew and I were halfway across the world in Indonesia working to combat environmental change through volunteer work on a shark conservation project.

A blink of an eye. That's how long it took for the first black tip reef shark to pass my line of during my first dive in the waters surrounding the remote island of Gili Air. The shark veered to the right approximately a foot in front of me before darting off to deeper waters. Most people would be terrified at having a shark dart towards them, but to me, it was exhilarating. Friend after friend questioned why I wasn't afraid. “Don't you know sharks are dangerous, Kyle?” “Have you not seen Jaws before? You have to be crazy to dive with sharks.” “You guys had spear guns to kill the sharks that attacked, right?” It seemed like everyone I knew harbored a negative, cautious view of sharks. To be fair, I carried a similar view of sharks before my trip to Indonesia. Our media has long perpetuated the view that sharks are evil and dangerous, even dedicating a whole week of programming to belabor the point. This was the foundation I had when I first arrived at the conservation headquarters.

A blink of an eye. That's how quickly my view of sharks seemed to change. It started gradually, when I first met the staff, researchers, and divers involved in the program. They were so passionate and animated when discussing their work in shark conservation. They spoke so warmly that if you had omitted the word ‘shark’, you might think they were talking about how much they love puppies. The idea started to creep in. Maybe sharks aren't as dangerous as I thought. Our first week in Indonesia involved hours of classes and studying as Matthew and I obtained our Shark Aware and Research Diver certifications. It was our first lecture where my new perspective was cemented. Did you know that in 2017, there were only 155 shark attacks (5 fatalities) while over 100 million sharks were killed by fisheries. You are statistically more likely to be killed by a champagne cork than by a shark. Our society has been conditioned to have an irrational fear of sharks simply because they are apex predators. We do not have the same fear of lions, bears, or eagles. We respect their predatory characteristics and use them as symbols towards which we strive. Sharks should be treated the same way.

A blink of an eye. That's how long it takes for the average human to make a decision. To make a decision to protect Earth's future. All of Earth's future, including the ocean. This once-in-a-lifetime experience taught me the importance of being the person to help make a change. Some problems might seem overwhelming. They make you feel like your drowning with nothing you are able to do. This trip taught
me to not underestimate the change a single person can make. Even something as small as reducing plastic usage by refusing straws at restaurants can add up and make a real impact. Never be afraid to take the first step simply because you think it is too small to make a difference. Everything counts!
There were two different types of disaster assistance that we engaged in during our trip down to Texas in May 2018: relief and recovery. “Relief” has to do with the immediate needs of a community affected by disaster, while “recovery” describes the tasks that help restore the community to what it once was before a disaster. Our main focus was the recovery stage, which is an essential element to disaster assistance but often forgotten about. Additionally, with each nonprofit we worked with, we discovered that there were many other ways to provide help after a disaster other than rebuilding houses and businesses, which is what is typically thought of as the main need.

Our first stop was the Disaster Assistance Center at Ferncliff, whose volunteer program focused on the relief aspect of disaster assistance by putting hygiene kits together for those who had lost all their belongings from the hurricane. While we were obviously too late to help the hurricane victims in this aspect since the distribution of the kits was immediately after the disaster, we assisted by replenishing the supplies that were given out to the victims in September. We volunteered at Ferncliff during an “off season” of disasters, as they receive almost all of their volunteers immediately after a disaster. They cannot accommodate so many volunteers in a short period of time, and in a way the volunteers’ inspiration is wasted if they are not able to volunteer immediately, and often dissipates altogether. This creates a shortage of supplies for the Disaster Assistance Center for the next disaster that may strike.

In Dallas, we worked with RETREET, which was heavily involved in the recovery aspect of disaster relief. We learned that the absence of trees following their destruction from storms can be devastating to a community, both in terms of the environment as well as overall morale. We planted trees and worked at the greenhouse facility where RETREET’s trees are planted and maintained. At Farmshare Austin, we learned about the damages to farmland after flooding from Hurricane Harvey and assisted with harvesting food that would go to areas who have not fully recovered from the loss of surrounding farmland.

Not only was this trip an opportunity for us to help others, but it also proved to be a great educational experience. This trip has produced 6 members of society who are not only more committed to volunteering, but who have also learned valuable skills that can be used in many facets of life. Before going on this trip, I had never planted a tree or harvested vegetables. Now I feel confident enough to own my own greenhouse. I wasn’t exactly sure what a stud was before my time at All Hands and Hearts in Houston, but now I feel ready to build my own house. Learning these new skills filled us with excitement for using them in the future, and many of us have planted trees in our own backyard with great success, and have thereby contributed to creating a healthier ecosystem. One of our members was so inspired by one of the programs, Farmshare Austin, that he decided to spend a year there helping their mission to provide resources to food insecure areas in Austin.
We expected to meet victims of the natural disasters directly—especially in Houston. However, while we worked on victims' houses and schools that haven’t been functional due to flooding, we never met any of the residents, teachers, or students that were affected. In some ways, we were a bit discouraged, since we did not receive that instant gratification for the assistance we were given. But our spirits were rejuvenated by the other volunteers that we met who haven’t had much contact with victims either. These volunteers did not need praise to be inspired to do the right thing. They felt a pride and a gratification by doing hard work and seeing clear results and improvements to the communities that were affected, and that’s what made them continue to do this work for many months, or even years. Our team soon adopted this perspective, and I believe we will carry on this selfless desire to volunteer when the next natural disaster strikes.

Thank you so very much for giving us this opportunity to serve and learn. This trip has been one of the most fun and rewarding experiences of my life. We would not have been able to do this without you!
As I sat in my seat on my journey back to Cape Town, South Africa, I felt nervous. I had been so enamored by the idea of returning to Cape Town to work in a children’s hospital, that I hadn’t yet taken a minute to recognize the unknowns that I was about to face. Although I had spent a semester studying at the University of Cape Town two years prior and volunteered at the hospital I was returning to serve, I still found the next few months nerve-racking. Would the city be as magical a second time around? Would I make friends other than the babies at the hospital? Would I recognize any other children from two years ago? Would I be able to make change in the hospital with my knowledge of evidence-based practices and research? Would I be welcomed at the hospital, or kept at arms distance because of my home country, relatively short duration of service, or skin color? Time would tell.

As I entered the house that I would be living in with eight total strangers, I felt a wave of relief sweep over me. My house was comfortable, cozy and homey. My housemates proved to be thoughtful, intelligent, compassionate, and adventurous. I lived with three girls from the Netherlands, two boys and a girl from Georgia, one boy from French Guiana, and a girl from Minnesota. From thought-provoking conversations at ‘family dinner’ to treacherous hikes up Table Mountain to breath-taking sunsets on Signal Hill, we became fast friends with unsuspecting commonalities and respect for one another. Concerns about making friends and enjoying all that the spectacular city had to offer were placated immediately. I quickly fell back into the familiar way of life – spontaneously making the most of each day, intently learning from those around me, genuinely questioning the lens through which I see the world, and consciously prioritizing my daily needs (and those of others) over the frivolous wants that come from my place of privilege.

About a week later, I drove to Sarah Fox Children’s Convalescent Hospital for my first day of work. Many of my concerns about making friends and settling in had been alleviated, but I still worried that I would not affect change or give the children as much love as they deserved. The hospital is home to infants and toddlers, who have a medical diagnosis – generally TB, HIV, chronic malnutrition, or a developmental delay or disability. I came to quickly realize that all of Sarah Fox’s patients could not go home for some reason or another, whether it be food insecurity, substance abuse, physical abuse, or a history of defaulting on medication. Some, especially those with cerebral palsy or other disabilities, did not have a home to return to and would be ‘stuck’ until they were eventually put in foster care or moved to residential children’s homes. It seemed to me that their realities were devastating and their futures were bleak. However, what is more depressing is the fact that these children were far luckier than many of their peers out in the community, who did not receive necessary medical attention, have a roof over their head with access to a balanced diet, or have meaningful...
interactions with caregivers and toys to promote their development. This realization helped me grapple with the fact that I recognized a handful of children from my work two years earlier. Nevertheless, my heart ached for each patient, which motivated me to give everything I could to these children, in the form of love, attention, praise, patience, and opportunities for learning. It also provided an interesting comparison to early childhood in the United States, particularly for individuals with disabilities. Although we know that the United States has a shortage of highly-trained special educators and early interventionists, the legal framework mandates free and appropriate education in the least restrictive environment, as well as intervention services, to all children with disabilities. Resources, access, and training are certainly inadequate in most of the country, but they do exist. In South Africa, services are very limited, and certainly not legally mandated, while attitudes toward individuals with disabilities are extremely narrow-minded. In my observation, there seemed to be a lack of knowledge about what these individuals are capable of and how to support their growth.

Particularly in the beginning, I felt a tangible divide between the nurses and myself. Although some introduced themselves and took an interest in sharing their culture, most looked past me, barked orders, and were quick to criticize. I anticipated this and was not discouraged. After all, they are with the children each and every day, feeding, changing, and bathing around the clock. I was another volunteer, working in the day and exploring on the evenings and weekends, for just two months. While their work is incredibly important, I got the sense that they are underappreciated. I recognized that parallels exist in American culture, particularly in the fields of teaching and education. As time went on, I built relationships with many of the nurses and consciously tried to demonstrate my gratitude for their work. When appropriate, I shared my knowledge about responsively interacting with children with disabilities, but, in all honesty, it was very difficult to break deeply entrenched attitudes and patterns of behavior. This will also be the case in my future career, as I hope to train parents how to interact with their children with disabilities to prevent pervasive challenging behavior. It will be my job to present parents with evidence-based practices and gradually shape their behavior to support their child. More often than not, parents will already have firm beliefs and habits, that may in fact be perpetuating challenging behavior. My interactions with the hospital staff proved to be extremely educational and gave me insight that I will carry into the future. I am extremely grateful for the opportunity to practice many of the skills I will continue to rely on and develop a realistic perspective. Changing attitudes is no easy task, and certainly does not happen overnight; it is a lengthy process that begins with building a rapport and understanding different points of view.
Atlee Witt
Norway and Bulgaria

In reflecting upon my time in Oslo, Norway and Sofia, Bulgaria with my Vanderbilt OACS cohort, it feels as though it was just yesterday that I landed in the Oslo airport with a mix of excitement and apprehension at the coming six weeks. Little did I know that this trip would not only inspire a sincere appreciation for international cultures and service, but also a group of friends with whom I still share many laughs and will continue to form memories with for years to come. All of this would have not been possible without the generosity of the Nichols Fund, so thank you – many, many times over! – for creating this fund and for opening so many doors for students, Mr. and Mrs. Nichols!

After returning from Europe and reuniting with my Vanderbilt classmates, I was peppered with questions surrounding the logistics of the trip, where we stayed, what we ate, and whether or not I will be returning to these countries. However, these surface level questions, while fun and silly to reminisce about, gloss over much of what the trip was actually about, including how rewarding, albeit challenging at times, my daily service at the Agapedia Bulgaria orphanage was. Most importantly, I was struck by how close I became with the orphaned girls at my service site and how much I learned from them in such a short period of time. In viewing this experience from a macro lens, I realized the clear importance of education in these Roma girls' lives and how damaging the classification of "other" could be towards the Roma population in Bulgaria.

In addition to my service in Sofia, I elected to analyze “happiness” by both interviewing university students in Sofia about mental health as well as observing surgeries and patient recovery in the St. Ekaterina hospital. Once again, the contrast between the Western notion of mental health and health care and the discussions about mental health in Eastern Europe is stark, especially considering the stigma surrounding mental illness is so severe in Bulgaria. However, it became clear that Bulgaria's low wages and poor economy preoccupied the population more so than therapy and mental health awareness. I'm looking forward to turning this research into an independent study project this fall to compare my results from Bulgarian university students to those in Nashville in order to better understand mental health from a more international perspective.

I believe that my role in society, both throughout this trip as well as during my service endeavors in the Nashville community, should be to help where help is needed and seek out every opportunity to learn from others. I originally went into this trip with preconceived notions about how I could best serve the communities in Sofia, Bulgaria; I quickly realized that the "volunteer" does not determine where or how they are needed, but rather should enter a situation with an open-mind and serve where the need is greatest. My one regret about this trip is how I overlaid my own opinions over the culture of Bulgaria in lieu of asking questions to better understand everyone’s stories. Instead of saying "this must be
true because that's just the norm in Bulgaria", I wish I had considered the underlying beliefs or customs of the culture without a “Western mindset”.

I am incredibly grateful for the generosity of the Nichols family and for the opportunity to travel to Norway and Bulgaria. Throughout the trip, I gained a new appreciation for open-mindedness, compassion, and patience – thank you for the opportunity to learn via an international lens and for the chance to experience parts of the world that I never knew could be so wonderful!
I walked out of the Urban Justice Center (“UJC”) and called for an elevator from the ninth floor of the 40 Rector Street building for the very last time, yesterday. Eleven weeks went by so quickly. I was one of the three or four interns who were remaining at the UJC that week and the past week, and this last couple of weeks felt like months. Nevertheless, it feels like the whole internship was like a breeze of wind. This past summer went smooth and fast, while it was full of ups and downs.

I would describe my experience with the Asylum Seeker Advocacy Project (ASAP) has a number of binary aspects. Fighting for asylum seekers under the current administration is a difficult task. Meanwhile, I observed many people with passion. Passion to help each other for the good. Where there is a light, there is a shadow behind an object. Where there is zero, then there comes one in a binary world. This is what I learned from assisting immigration lawyers during the turmoil of immigration policies that the Trump government came up with this year.

My second week with the ASAP started with the news that the ASAP’s clients with horrible past torture experiences were denied asylums in the United States. Cases like these clients would have ended with favorable reliefs in the past. However, this is the time when the U.S. Attorney General calls attorneys helping asylum seekers “dirty lawyers.” No matter what he calls people I have worked with and consider as my role models, I enjoyed learning interpersonal skills as well as legal knowledge from lawyers who advocate asylum seekers.

I conducted legal research related to a group of women who had suffered from persecution for her family ties and that of women who had been persecuted for relationship that they could not leave, such as marriage. As long as the ASAP establishes that these two groups constituted particular social groups (“PSGs”) that met definitions required for getting an asylum, these women should be able to qualify legal standards. That was my understanding when I was doing the research in the early June, for the ASAP’s preparing of a hearing for one of its clients. When I was revising my memorandum on the PSGs, the Attorney General reversed a ruling that was very important to the most of the ASAP’s clients, women. He reversed the Matter of A-B-, which held that a woman who could not leave her marriage is a member of a PSG. The Attorney General’s opinion in June changed fates of so many women who escaped violence that they have suffered in their country of origin. This ruling came as a shock to all my attorneys, interns, and myself, along with the new policy that separated mothers from their children when they crossed the U.S. border.

Then a miracle happened. A bunch of donations came every morning and afternoon. Anonymous donor gave invaluable amount of money to organizations and teams like the ASAP. While I was assisting my supervising attorneys file briefs and prepare for clients, I was devoting majority of time processing a lot of donations at the time. I was frustrated; but I was also excited. There are lawyers like attorneys at the ASAP and attorneys from a variety of law
firms doing pro bono for the ASAP’s clients. There are a lot of neighbors caring for mothers and children who come to the United States looking for shelters.

On the other hand, so-called bad lawyers truly exist. As the ASAP helps its clients file complaints against their previous representatives for ineffective assistance of counsel, I was stunned by how these lawyers had taken advantage of these marginalized people. These lawyers reminded me of importance of self-regulation. Yet again, I observed lawyers trying to correct their mistakes in their previous asylum cases by helping the clients file complaints against them.

The client that I had done the PSGs research for attended the hearing in early August. She was before a judge with a very low rate of granting an asylum relief. She was denied. Nevertheless, this is a bittersweet moment. She has advocates who will continue and appeal for her. Moreover, I see a silver lining in her case, based on a workshop that took place as a response to the Attorney General’s June opinion and my earlier research on Circuit decisions.
THANK YOU

Nichols Humanitarian Fund
2017-2018

“Be courageous. Challenge orthodoxy. Stand up for what you believe in.”
-2018 Nichols-Chancellor’s Medal recipient Amal Clooney