

# Students complete 10-day trip to Panama



Undergraduate students from St. David's School of Nursing at Texas State University's Round Rock Campus recently participated in a 10-day service-learning education abroad to central Panama. The group of 16 nursing students and three faculty used this experience to pursue the mission of the university through service, embracing diversity and fostering cultural development.

## Jayne Blashcke February 6, 2023

SAN MARCOS-Aside from learning about Panamanian cultural, health and spiritual practices, students participated in disease prevention and health promotion activities through community clinical practice with local physicians and pharmacists. They also taught children and families fun and interactive oral hygiene topics and created engaging educational games and lessons at a level of learning that was accessible to all. The students delivered all their teaching in Spanish, with only a little help from translators in answering questions from the audience.

"This trip has lasting impacts on my nursing career because it opened my eyes to not only the blessings we have in America, but also to practical skills such as creativity, making the most with what you have, communication despite barriers, and meeting people where they are in a time of suffering," said Ellen Nichols, a senior nursing student who grew up in Houston.

Students contributed to building sustainable and empowered communities through developing and holding "charlas," or chats, with local community health workers and village members on topics such as first aid, CPR, wound care, signs of stroke and other important topics. This knowledge will enhance the community health workers' ability to provide adequate care for local patients.

"I better understand now that nursing is a global profession because as frontline workers, we provided education, individualized patient care and advocated for each person that we encountered," Nichols said. "My hope is that this community and every Global Brigades community will be empowered and advocated for in the future."

The average Panamanian village may not have access to healthcare services closer than four hours away, and only a few are lucky enough to have a community health worker. Community health workers, families, children and village members expressed much gratitude for the care and education the students offered.

The students finished up the experience through a cultural exchange in which community members dressed in traditional costumes and performed dances for the students. In exchange, the nursing students performed and taught townspeople the Texas two-step.



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"Being in Panamá completely aligned with my hopes of providing care to those who are under-served and being immersed in a new cultural environment."

**- Jayme Blashcke**

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# Physical Therapy Students serve patients in Costa Rica



## Suzanna Okere February 9, 2023

Undergraduate health science students and physical therapy graduate students from Texas State University journeyed to Atenas, Costa Rica to participate in an interprofessional, service-learning, study abroad program.

Nineteen students traveled to Costa Rica in January, where they lived with host families and were fully immersed in the Spanish language and Costa Rican culture. They learned and practiced Medical Spanish (language for medical personnel communicating with Spanish-speaking patients) in multiple healthcare settings. The group visited Clinica del Dolor, an outpatient pain clinic, and Casa del Adulto Mayor, a community adult day clinic. Under the supervision of local physical therapists, students led group exercise sessions and performed walking and balance assessments to determine clients' risk of falling.

Participants studied the Costa Rican healthcare system and toured Universidad Latina de Costa Rica to learn about healthcare education. They embraced Costa Rican wellness by visiting a local farmers market and the El Toledo coffee plantation, where they learned about sustainable farming. Students also learned how to cook a traditional Costa Rican meal and dance typical Costa Rican dances. Undergraduate health science students and physical therapy graduate students from Texas State University journeyed to Atenas, Costa Rica to participate in an interprofessional, service-learning, study abroad program.

Most importantly, students on the trip personally experienced the challenges that come along with being fully immersed in a language and a culture that is not familiar," said Suzanna Okere, Academic Program Director for the Department of Physical Therapy study abroad program.

This service-learning study abroad program emphasizes diversity and inclusion. In 2023, over 50% of the students participating in this study abroad program were racial and ethnic minorities, well above the national average of 30%. Funds raised during the TXST College of Health Professions annual Pura Vida 5K and Wellness Event provide scholarships to encourage the participation of students from all socioeconomic backgrounds.

The group was led by Dr. Suzanna Dougherty Okere, Clinical Associate Professor in the Department of Physical Therapy at Texas State. Dr. Okere is a licensed physical therapist who teaches anatomy and researches the cultural competence of student physical therapists. Dr. Okere collaborates with Dr. Damian Rodriguez, Clinical Assistant Professor in the Department of Physical Therapy. Dr. Rodriguez teaches neurologic physical therapy and is a supervisor in the student-run Texas State Community Access Clinic on the Round Rock Campus, which provides pro-bono physical therapy services to uninsured or underinsured clients in the local community.



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