

ADVANCING HUMANITY IN CAMBODIA

Learning Community

Jo Ann Burkhardt, Ph.D., McMaster Fellow
 Jeffrey Weaner, MSW, McMaster Fellow
 Donald Buerk, Ph.D., McMaster Associate Fellow
 Nathan Griggs, Ph.D., McMaster Associate Fellow
 Lori Robison, LISW, ACSW, McMaster Associate Fellow
 Craig Burke, McMaster Scholar
 Jennifer Creighton, McMaster Scholar
 Kirsten Harmon, McMaster Scholar
 Kelsey Huff, McMaster Scholar
 Britney Huffman, McMaster Scholar
 Corynne Long, McMaster Scholar
 Sarah Plas, McMaster Scholar
 Andrew Pratt, McMaster Scholar
 Candice Schmitt, McMaster Scholar
 Nicholas Weber, McMaster Scholar
 Lindsay Whitman, McMaster Scholar
 Nancy Preis, McMaster School Advisory Board
 Krystal Miller, Friend of McMaster School
 Rex Robison, Friend of McMaster School
 Richard Caldwell, Friend of McMaster School

REFLECTING ON FIVE YEARS OF PARTNERSHIP

Jo Ann Burkhardt, Ph.D., McMaster Fellow

The McMaster School for Advancing Humanity at Defiance College has supported the work of the Cambodia learning communities since the 2004 academic year. During this time, 35 Defiance College student scholars and 10 faculty fellows and associate fellows have participated in these living and learning structures. The student scholars have represented every major on campus, while the faculty fellows have represented all but one of the college academic divisions. Many faculty members, not formally associated with the Cambodia project, have lent their expertise and time to the Cambodia learning communities. In addition to students and faculty, a number of

friends of Defiance College have participated in the learning communities along with members of the college administration and the board of trustees. In conjunction with our community partners, The Southeast Asia Children's Mercy Fund and the Cambodia Women's Crisis center, we have established mutual goals, identified areas of need, and shared in the challenges of working in partnership for the common good. As we engage in this community-based research with our partners, we have learned that working in partnership has mutual benefit.

When we work in the schools in Ba Prey and Phnom Penh, we provide training for undertrained teachers. However, teacher candidates at Defiance College gain insight into the influence of culture on learning. In our work at the Cambodia Women's Crisis Center and Shelter, we teach English phrases to women to assist them in procuring better paying jobs in the hotels and restaurants in the tourist areas of Cambodia. However, social work students learn to communicate and gather information from women who do not speak English. When we teach midwives in rural areas how to use battery operated fetal heart monitors, pre-med and athletic training students learn how to apply their academic skills in authentic settings. Often, as colleagues working together with professionals with varying levels of academic training as our partners, we realize a small part of Helen and Harold McMaster's vision for advancing humanity.



Helen and Harold McMaster called us to examine root causes of human suffering. As each learning community studies to prepare to work in Cambodia, we examine the reign of the Khmer Rouge from 1975 to 1979 which resulted in the genocide of over 1.5 million Cambodians (Williams, 2005). We learn that societal and governmental structures were decimated resulting in the destruction of the healthcare, public works, and legal systems (Santini, 2002), and the demise of both public and higher education (Ayres, 1999).

Although thirty years have passed from what is considered “one of the darkest periods of human rights violations in modern history (Williams, 2005, p. 447), much work remains to be done. We continue to work and study with the hope of contributing to the McMaster vision.

REFERENCES

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