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International Epidemics: Interdisciplinary Thinking and Global Citizenship

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**Summary**

The Honors College aims to serve as a crucible for curricular innovation by enriching and deepening classroom study with on-the-ground learning. The symposium is a year-long course, with the winter session field trip giving students a two-week immersion in the details of HIV/AIDS health care delivery in one province of South Africa. Upon return, students volunteer at health centers or nonprofits exploring related topics, while continuing to study the complexity of South Africa’s history and its attitudes and approaches toward HIV/AIDS at the medical, cultural, economic, and social levels.

**Field Experience and Service**

**Goals:**
- Learn about the history of epidemics and challenges in implementing public health initiatives.
- Understand the significance of the trip and the activities and experiences of South Africa
- Explain the relationship between local and global citizenship and develop lifelong commitment to civic engagement

**In South Africa:**
- Participate in three-day peer educator retreat with students from the University of Western Cape
- Meet members of Treatment Action Campaign, an organization that triggered the government to provide free antiretrovirals for all HIV+ citizens
- Visit Robben Island and District 6 to observe the legacy of apartheid

**In the Boston-area:**
- In Spring 2014, students are volunteering at Boston Living Center and Fenway Health.

**Results/Impacts**

- Year-long course has been offered 5 times since 2005
- 60 students enrolled over 5 offerings
- Students report that field experiences enhance intellectual development and understanding of course content.
- Anecdotal evidence suggests that the course increases students’ commitment and sense of responsibility to participating in their communities, locally and globally.

**Student Reflections:**

- "My trip to Cape Town has made me a new and better person. What I learned in two weeks in Cape Town is more than what I have learned my whole life put together. I am a better person for knowing [those] who came forward to tell us about their story and their contribution to this world. We keep on waiting, waiting for the world to change. Now, I refuse to wait."

- "The trip itself allowed me to develop connections between culture and society and aided me in comprehending the importance of active citizenship. I saw a direct correlation between HIV/AIDS stigma and poverty...The concepts and questions which I have developed could not have stemmed solely from a classroom, but require experience with differing cultures to truly intellectually develop."

- "I was an eyewitness of the hope and engaging spirit of this young generation of South Africans, all united in the fight against the HIV/AIDS virus. Almost all of those students, in some way or the other, had been affected by this epidemic…"