Case Study
International Service Programs

Challenging Philosophies of International Service

You are preparing to participate in a service program this summer in Uganda for five weeks where you will be working as a health educator for a clinic that serves small rural communities, disseminating information to local villagers about HIV/AIDS and malaria. You carefully selected this program because it felt like an effective service project surrounding an issue that you feel passionate about.

The week before you leave for your trip, you are having a conversation with a classmate, Sean, whose opinion you have always respected. During your conversation, Sean tells you that he is not in agreement with your service trip. He believes that for the amount of money you are spending between flying to Uganda and paying program fees, you could have sent that money directly to the clinic in Uganda where it would have sustained a fulltime Ugandan staff member for more than a year. Sean also questions the effectiveness of your prospective efforts - in five weeks, it is not possible to make a significant impact, especially since you are not a trained health professional. By the end of the conversation, you are frustrated and questioning your decision to participate in the program.

- What would you respond to Sean’s questions and opinions?
- How would you articulate your purpose in a short-term service project?
- What are realistic expectations regarding a short-term service experience?
- What impact do you hope will be made through this experience?
- How would you guide/advise another student in your position that was questioning the value of their service work abroad?