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DEVELOPING THE FUTURE TO PRESERVE THE PAST

BY BECKY ST. CLAIR

Andrews University students Noël Harris, senior French studies and community and international development major, and Anna Kim, senior community and international development major and music minor, spent three months this past summer working in Jordan, performing varied duties for the Tall Hisban Cultural Heritage Association, a local non-governmental organization (NGO) focused on educating the local people and helping them internalize the cultural and historical significance of the archaeological site.

It started out as an internship opportunity and grew into a guiding experience that will contribute heavily to both girls' futures.

Both Anna and Noël filled several roles during their time in Jordan. Anna lists some of hers:

"I wrote a grant request to the United States Agency for International Development, worked to improve site management related to tourism, translated signs from English into Korean and taught English to local students."

A native of Seoul, South Korea, Anna is no stranger to foreign culture or language. The latter came in handy in her work; the number of Korean

tourists and visiting businessmen in Jordan is so high that many tourist-heavy areas, including the Tall Hisban site, include not only English and Arabic on the signs, but also Korean.

As part of the community archaeology program, Anna and Noël taught English classes to students of all ages. This came about when a survey of community members revealed that they desperately wanted to learn English. The girls agreed to teach with the goal that this approach to community development would lead to increased psychological and emotional ownership of the Tall Hisban site.

"We had students of varying levels of English fluency," says Anna. "Some

Anna Kim and Noël Harris taught local people to produce sustainable food sources within their community through a rooftop gardening project started by the Tall Hisban Cultural Heritage Association.



Anna Kim, an international and community development major at Andrews University, chats with one of her English students in Jordan after his graduation from the program in August.



Noël Harris (second from left) and Anna Kim (second from right) spent three months in Jordan this year doing various tasks with the local people, including teaching them English.



students could hold a decent conversation with us and others didn't know how to count." To remedy this, Anna and Noël led an advanced speaking session for some of the students before each class began.

It is crucial that the local people understand the historical and cultural significance of Tall Hisban, as many Jordanians still come to the site to dig for gold, not realizing the futility (and destructiveness) of such activity.

"Although there isn't any gold present, they don't understand what the site actually is," explains Noël. "Education is the first step to preserving Tall Hisban."

Although they originally requested 8–10 students each, they began teaching with about 30 each. As the weeks went on, Anna and Noël found they had increased numbers most days, and, near the end of their time in Jordan, Noël taught a class of 100 girls.

Fortunately for Anna, this was not her first time teaching English, which made her task in the classroom a bit more relaxed. For the last four years she has spent her summers in Korea teaching English to kids ages 7–18.

"This time was a bit different, though," she admits, "because I couldn't speak Arabic — I still can't! — and my students' English levels varied so extremely."

According to Jordanian culture, male and female students are not allowed to sit in classrooms together, hence the disparity in fluency levels in Noël's and Anna's classrooms. They were not allowed to combine students based on comprehension levels, which offered additional challenge to their assignment.

"This particular experience gave me not only wisdom but also tools I know I will use in my career," says Anna. "I had to be patient despite the constant inability to quickly communicate with my students; I had to be creative and come up with my own curriculum and teaching materials; and I had to be cautious against offending the culture or the people, since I was in a foreign place and still learning cultural norms."

Both Noël and Anna are planning to find careers in community development. Spending time in Jordan working in that field was eye opening and affirming for both of them.

"I think I've always wanted to live a life of service," says Noël. "My time in Jordan solidified even deeper my desire to empower people and facilitate their growth. Working with these kids was fulfilling to me because I knew they badly wanted to learn English, especially the older ones who wished to use their language skills to find jobs. I was able to help them achieve something they desired, and it's a really good feeling to be able to give someone that."

The classroom wasn't their only point of contact; Noël and Anna also worked with local women and children on rooftop gardening.

The brainchild of Connor Smith, an international agriculture student at Andrews University, rooftop gardening in Jordan is an attempt to encourage sustainable agriculture to ensure healthy food options for future generations of Jordanians.

"We want to educate the people on how ecosystems work and why we need to take care of ours,"

Anna explains. “We also want to increase community involvement for women and children.”

In partnership with Connor, Anna and Noël conducted an on-site, hands-on feasibility study.

“Roof gardens are relatively easy and affordable to implement,” says Noël. “And since all roofs in Jordan are flat, rooftop gardening is plausible there.”

Anna and Noël implemented two rooftop gardens during the summer, one on the elementary school and another on the girls’ high school, both in Hisban. They worked alongside the teachers and students through the entire process, planting local flowers and herbs and teaching them how to care for the garden.

“We wrote a curriculum as we worked,” Noël says, “including explaining ecosystems and why they’re important, innovative ways for teachers to practically teach these concepts to students and focusing on the specific plants that can be grown in Jordan. It’s a very dry, desert climate, so it is important that future generations learn how to grow more crops and take care of their country.”

The curriculum they developed was then translated into Arabic and will be distributed in local elementary and high schools in Hisban.

“It’s another way we can get the local people interested in taking care of their community,” says Anna. “It’s not just about learning English and how to garden; it expands to taking care of the Tall Hisban dig site, too.”

Kelsey Curnutt, research specialist and special projects coordinator for the Institute of Archaeology who supervised some of Anna’s and Noël’s work stateside, points out the irony that archaeology is a destructive discipline.

“It spoils natural landscapes and exposes ancient ruins to destruction by natural processes, looting, modern construction projects and urbanization,” she says.

It is estimated that in the country of Jordan alone there are over 50,000 archaeological sites that have been identified, and archaeologists have explored hundreds of these with little concern for long-term protection and preservation of the sites they have dug.

“Archaeology is about uncovering the past through mostly small objects and seemingly mundane items. Pieces of pottery, coins, a fragment of an inscription, part of a wall — they all work to reveal

the daily lives of local inhabitants,” says Kelsey. “If we as archaeologists do not work with the local community now, what use is our work in revealing and preserving the local community of the past?”

The hope is that the Hisban Cultural Heritage Project, for which Anna and Noël spent their summer working, will lead the way toward a more sustainable future for Jordan’s archaeological heritage by developing capacity in the local community to help care for the site.

Noël and Anna attribute at least portions of their choice to both spend time in Jordan and work toward careers in community development to inspiration from Jesus and his life of service.

Anna quotes Romans 12:9, 10, 13: *Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves ... Share with the Lord’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality.*

“I think these verses describe very well what development work is,” she says thoughtfully. “Sharing love, knowing which people are in need, being empathetic. These are the virtues that I need to grow in order to become able to excel at helping communities.”

Anna wants to become more skilled in creating classroom curriculum in developing countries. She also hopes that someday the opportunity will present itself for her to utilize her love of music as a tool in her passion for and work in community development.

Noël, who hopes to continue working in the Middle East, specifically with refugees and the underprivileged, finds motivation and inspiration in Jesus’ life on earth.

“When we look at the example Jesus set for us, he served everyone — even the lowliest,” she says. “In order to follow his example, we must do the same. We must serve everyone, even those we might be uncomfortable serving. We need to step outside our comfort zones because that’s what Jesus did, and because it’s rewarding to everyone involved. God not only gives strength, but he gives joy. Serving others is beautiful, fulfilling and fun. Love and joy don’t come from anything but true, selfless, agenda-less love for others.”

Becky St. Clair is the media communication manager at Andrews University.



Ivan LaBlanca

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