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Service in a Suitcase Benefits Many

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Service in a suitcase benefits many

“Seek Knowledge. Affirm Faith. Change the World.” A Christian perspective for affecting positive change in the world is a big reason why many students come to study at Andrews University. During the last couple of years, the Andrews University Department of Clinical and Laboratory Sciences (CLS) has become especially dedicated to this credo by focusing their students’ career plans toward mission-oriented service.

Marcia Kilsby, associate professor of clinical laboratory sciences and department chair, expressed concern with past trends indicating CLS students were unlikely to return to their home countries after completing their education to work in the developing world. “For years I have been frustrated. My faculty were frustrated,” she says. “We’ve had students graduate from 64 different birth countries [during] the past 20 years, but we’ve only had a few return home to work in a developing country. We want to keep a sense of mission before our students.”

Another frustration has been the lack of usable laboratory equipment for students who do go on short-term mission trips. “Our CLS students are going out and they’re doing blood pressures; they’re pulling teeth; they’re fitting eyeglasses; but there [hasn’t been] a lab for them to go to, to do the testing they know how to do, because there was no lab there,” Kilsby says.

Then CLS faculty learned about International Aid’s Lab-In-A-Suitcase—a portable laboratory capable of diagnostic testing, all run from a battery unit. The battery can either be recharged by electricity or a solar panel. All contained within the space of a suitcase, it seemed like the perfect solution. Kilsby contacted International Aid, and they realized the department’s goals were in line with

their organization’s mission. As a result she, along with Richard Show, associate professor of clinical laboratory science, was invited to sit on International Aid’s international advisory board. Kilsby and Show have worked with the organization to improve the Lab-In-A-Suitcase equipment.

Andrews University students have assisted as well. Two years ago, CLS students were assigned the task of identifying the key diseases in each country of the world and determining whether or not Lab-In-A-Suitcase could support the testing to diagnose those diseases. Following that research, Kilsby wrote a letter to International Aid recommending equipment improvements. Changes were made to Lab-In-A-Suitcase, altering the contents of the portable laboratory. Andrews CLS faculty accepted the task of rewriting the laboratory’s old manual to relate to the new contents.

In order to keep the new manual usable on an international level, CLS tapped into one of Andrews University’s strongest assets—diversity. The department didn’t have to look far.

“In our CLS senior class from last year, I had students who collectively spoke 21 languages. And I said, ‘Okay, it’s time for you with your red pens. I want you to rip the manual draft apart. I want you to edit it. Is there jargon in there? If it was translated into your language, would it come across in a strange way? What would make this as user friendly as possible in as many cultures and languages as possible?’” says Kilsby. “The support of the students and

the activity of the faculty—those two things came together to produce a very nice, quality manual to accompany the Lab-In-a-Suitcase.”

In October 2008, Kilsby traveled to the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (North Korea) and presented a week-long training session on use of Lab-In-A-Suitcase to the laboratory personnel at four hospitals. There she was able to see and experience the results of the department’s faculty and students’ commitment and work on the Lab-In-A-Suitcase. She says, “Diagnostic testing is vital to providing quality healthcare. It has been a privilege for the Department of Clinical Laboratory Science to be engaged in work that can help save lives and improve quality of life.”

Currently, Andrews University CLS seniors are aiding the faculty in the effort to have Lab-In-A-Suitcase receive endorsement from the World Health Organization.

Andre Weston, student news writer, Office of Integrated Marketing & Communication



Ji-Ming Yune, a senior clinical laboratory science student, repacks Lab-In-A-Suitcase equipment.