

Dickinson College
New Orleans Service Trip
Winter 2013



The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.

~ Ghandi

Why are we STILL going to New Orleans?

Aren't they FINISHED rebuilding down there?

Why don't we go to other important areas?

Why don't we go somewhere CLOSER?

Questions about why Dickinson continues to serve the New Orleans/Slidell, LA, areas through service trips began as faint whispers in the background but have grown louder as time continues to pass from Hurricane Katrina. The questions are complicated and spark debate, but one truth remains clear: rebuilding in the Gulf has never been easy. The past few years have shown that the rebuilding process in the Gulf is one that requires energy, compassion, and selfless dedication of time from volunteers from all across the country. The 2013 Winter Break Service Trip to New Orleans/Slidell marks the 11th service trip to the New Orleans/Slidell area, and the dedication, drive, and passion from Dickinson students are as strong as the first trip in 2007.

From January 12-19, 2013, 17 Dickinsonians experienced firsthand what Martin Luther King, Jr., meant by, "Human progress is neither automatic nor inevitable... Every step toward the goal of justice requires sacrifice, suffering, and struggle; the tireless exertions and passionate concern of dedicated individuals." The path was not always easy -- flight cancelations, personal losses, and challenging weather created definitive obstacles for the team. However, by overcoming challenges and through participation in eye-opening reflections, the students considered for themselves what service, engaging the world, and active citizenship personally means to them. Through everything, their passion and dedication never wavered. Epitomizing King's quote, they quickly learned the difference that individuals just like them, just like past Dickinson groups, have made and continue to make in the New Orleans/Slidell area.

Through evaluations of the experience, students were asked to describe their service trip experience in one word. While the popular fried chicken restaurant "Canes," claimed one of top spots, others were more expressive. "Impactful," "enlightening," and "important," were themes that emerged in the evaluations, showing that the impact of this winter break service trip is not left behind in the houses in which they worked in Slidell, LA, but remains alive in the individuals themselves. While a service trip is an experience where "you have to be there" to truly understand the experiences of the student participants, it is possible to gain a glimpse of the journey. You are invited to read below to see how sacrificing one week of vacation to serve others opened eyes, changed perspectives, and provided one of the most important gifts students can give to those who struggle -- hope.

Saturday, January 12

It's the first time I have come to New Orleans. I've heard of New Orleans thousands of times because the New Orleans flavored chicken wings are very popular at KFC in China. Unexpectedly, NOLA members told me that there was nothing special about NOLA chicken wings. The other thing beyond my expectation was that our flight was delayed for 9 hours and we needed to wait in the airport. Fortunately, I got a chance to play Catchphrase, Apples to Apples, and Taboo, which I had never played before. We had lots of fun and became closer as a group. We arrived in NOLA around midnight. The foggy and humid weather made me feel nostalgic. My city in China has really humid weather too.

Di Yang

Saturday, January 12

The first day was a bit of a challenge because of the flight delay and us arriving so late. However, I found that spending the day waiting for our next flight at Harrisburg Airport was kind of relaxing. It was the first time in a very long while that I was able to simply sit and read or talk with people with no other obligation hanging over my head. It was a nice time to bond with my fellow travelers and to play "Apples to Apples" for the first time

Pat Mullane

Saturday, January 12

The first day of our trip became a very long day when we got to the Harrisburg airport and learned that our flight had been cancelled. Luckily, we were able to get all of us on another flight, but we had over 10 hours to kill in the airport before taking off. The day passed quicker than I expected it to! We explored every restaurant the airport had to offer, (although only a few). We also played Apple to Apples and Catchphrase and some people even walked through the concourse. Soon enough, we were boarding and on our way. After two short and smooth flights and a quick layover in Charlotte, we have landed in New Orleans! Finally, for the last leg of the trip, we made our way over to Slidell in the vans. While it was a long, tiring day that began with a setback, in remembering where we were headed and why, I realized we could not complain. Losing 10 hours to the Harrisburg airport is nothing compared to what the people of New Orleans have lost and the hardships they have faced since the hurricane. It is 7 years later now, and many of them are still waiting for their "out" from the mess and suffering: talk about a delay.

Becca Feldman

Sunday, January 13

Today was a very important day for our group- after a rather arduous journey we finally made it to Slidell last night around 1 AM. This morning we woke up, had breakfast and went to the most welcoming church service I have ever attended. We were greeted by the community with smiling faces and open arms. The music and the joy felt by the choir and the churchgoers was palpable. I've never experienced that much joy in my own church, so it was very refreshing. After Church we grabbed some Mickey D's then headed to George Washington Carver High, where alumni Leigh Harlow spoke to us about her experience as a teacher for TFA and as a teacher in NOLA. This part of the day was my favorite because Leigh, and her friend Katie were completely frank about their experiences. In transitioning the school from public to charter there have been major roadblocks, certainly in respect to the attitudes of the Students towards the changes. Many students were

wary of the new system and new teachers, which of course created problem for Leigh. Leigh also described racial tension between students and faculty. I really appreciated Leigh and Katie's dedication to their work and the kids of Carver. After Carver we headed to the Lower 9th, where Chuck and Amanda described the significant changes of the area since 2005. They also informed us of what the quadrants mean on the houses, one part signified the searchers, one part signified the bodies found, animals, and people found alive. This was very heavy information to try and digest but important nonetheless. We have this conversation with the new levee and storm clouds above us and it seemed appropriate. Overall, it was a very educational day.

Hannah Anderson

Sunday, January 13

The day has been full of highlights but I think my favorite was talking to Leigh Harlow about the education system. Although I knew a lot about the education system and have a broad basis already, it was really interesting to hear about the more detailed aspects of the system and especially in their individual classrooms. It was inspiring to listen to them talk about something they are so obviously passionate about doing. I think about the hopes they still have after all the challenges and difficulties they have faced so far, and that they have such drive; That is what's really impressive.

It was also really interesting hearing about the comparison between the different schools and how that affects the system and the students. It's just such a different system then the one that I grew up in and even now it's still hard for me to conceptualize all of the different pieces and the huge knot it has created here. Although, I'm apprehensive about the Charter School system. I think it's good that they are trying something really different since the old system was so obviously failing for so many years. Hopefully in the next 10 years the system here will begin to pick up, though it is extremely sad that so many students will miss out on opportunities because of the current system's state. And it's sad that it will take so long to really change and move in the right direction.

On a lighter note, it'll be great finding out and getting out to the sites tomorrow, I can't wait to get to work!

Colleen Berger

Sunday, January 13

Today was definitely a jam-packed and busy day – although not quite as busy as originally planned. The best part for me, hands down, was going back to the ninth ward. Hearing about the education system and visiting the church for service were both very interesting and mind opening, but it was the 9th ward that really got me. Five years ago, almost to the day, I was wearing my NCCC uniform living at Camp Hope, and driving through the 9th ward on a daily basis. I was serving every day, the people of New Orleans and helping the recovery effort. I am amazed at what has changed (and what hasn't...) in five years, especially the musician's village. I remember the dirt roads, the piles of lumber and the buzz of power tools recovery. Now the completed neighborhood is full of kids, and homes – as it should be! I felt like I came full circle in a sense, because so much of my own life has changed in five years. My time in New Orleans changed my life five years ago and set me on the path on which I am today – coming back especially with a group of students who wanted to serve was a perfect culmination of everything.

Amanda Hanson

Sunday, January 13

Yesterday, Saturday, January 12, we were scheduled to depart from Harrisburg at 10:55am. To our surprise the flight got cancelled and instead we're made to wait at the airport for a good ten hours. The wait wasn't too bad. It was fun playing Apples to Apples, and reading the new book I had bought... (10 hours of waiting and 4-5ish hours of flight)... And then finally arriving at New Orleans! Woot woot! Tired and exhausted from traveling, I was ready to fall asleep in bed.

Saturday was interesting with a couple of surprises. Sunday has been great so far. My favorite part of today was going to Carver HS and meeting Leigh Harlow and her friend and hearing them talk about the education system in N.O. and the changes that have been happening to this specific school. I was really content after hearing what they had to share with us. Teaching and working with students is something I have in my future. Sometime after graduation I'd like to work at a school that will challenge its students to succeed. Also, this session with these first-year teachers at a struggling school confirmed or gave me a recap of what I learned in my education course: Social Foundations of American Education. This talk/session with them made me very excited and reaffirmed my desire for working in developing communities.

The tour of the 9th Lower ward was very informative and it was interesting to see the Make It Right Foundation homes. I could sense and see that the houses though they were really nice looking, they looked out of place. So far the New Orleans service trip has had a great start. I'm really looking forward to the rest of the trip and start working tomorrow on homes. It has been two days so far, and I've already heard and have engaged in very educating, controversial, and interesting conversations about education, the government, politics, and the inequalities found in different systems.

Time to go eat at Bear's Grill

Yessenia Tostado

Sunday, January 13

Today we went to a Methodist church and met really nice people there. A coincidence was that I met an old lady who visited Dickinson College twenty years ago. It was the third time I went to a church and I had a lot of fun. As long as we step forward to explore and to experience, we can always find connections with others, helping us to not feel lonely anymore and feel beloved. I also learned a lot by visiting George Washington Carver School. I am glad I got to know more about advisory system in the school and Teach for America as well as the Charter School system. Teachers there are really passionate and contribute a lot of personal time to their career. They have close personal connections with every student, teaching and taking care of student's lives. It's totally different from my experience in high school. There were more than 3000 students in my high school and each class has more than 60 students. Thus, we did not have that close of relationships with teachers. There are similar programs like Teach for America in China. After hearing teacher's experiences I feel there are still many problems that need to be solved. For example, when teachers finished their two years term and left, how can the next teacher figure out what level students are and how they can catch up them up to the goals.

In conclusion, by comparing my background of Chinese education with American education I understand diverse cultures better and developed the general idea on how to improve our education. I'm looking forward to experiencing more culture here.

Di Yang

Sunday, January 13

I really enjoyed today so far. It was really enlightening to get an inside look at the school system and infrastructure in New Orleans from people who have lived and worked here. I am very much looking forward to getting to work tomorrow. I saw the excitement and pride that Amanda and Colleen experienced in reaction to seeing Musician's Village completed and I want to serve people well enough that I too can feel that way about our work here. Also, I'm kind of homesick, so I think the work will help take my mind off of that! The weather here is fantastic, I keep thinking that it's springtime! The schedule says I will be journaling next on Friday, so I'll check back in at the end of the trip.

Alex Kasznel

Sunday, January 13

I am journaling exactly one day after Mr. Kasznel. We finally arrived in New Orleans last night. We attended a church service today that seemed more like a communal self-help event than a weekly religious obligation. I was truly astonished by the sense of community displayed and jealous that it is not that way in the North. Afterward we toured a public school, guided by a Dickinson alum. It was really insightful to see how NOLA is trying to rebuild their public school system, I thought that they seemed to be trying to actually use Katrina as an opportunity to reinvent their educational system. We then toured the 9th ward and viewed Brad Pitt's relief efforts. The homes he built were beautiful but I think he is better at organizing fight clubs.

Matt Miller

Monday, January 14

Today was a good first work day. The team got ready on time and we had our orientation with Dale promptly at 8:00am. This is the third time I have had orientation here and it is still interesting to hear the stories. I did start to wonder about the kind of work being done here and how much of it is Katrina related. Both of the houses we were working on were actually damaged by Isaac but disaster relief is disaster relief, and these people still need help.

Our house is soon ready for the owners to move in. We are finishing the painting and should get most of the flooring done. The family is living in an apartment but they have to move out by the end of February. It is always nice to work on a house at the tail end of the project. It feels more significant even though I know every part of the work counts. There is nothing like seeing things come together at the end of a rebuild though. Our team is already working well together. We divided and tackled rooms efficiently and also worked well together to fill in when anyone needed help. Hopefully as the jobs change this will stay the same.

Dinner was excellent. I must remember to ask Celeste for her chicken recipe

Chuck Steel

Monday, January 14

The first day (of service) I didn't know what to expect when I signed up and applied to go on the service trip to New Orleans. Frankly, I have learned to not create high expectations because I have been let down too many times. I know this is only the beginning of the trip, but I am already thrilled with my experience thus far. I love group experiences and interactions and I thrive on meaningful discussion and connections. This is my first experience in a very long time in which I have been able to enjoy meaningful self-reflection.

The day before we toured parts of the city and talked with two TFA representatives and I found their dedication and passion for education truly inspiring. Also, Dale's dedication and inspiration really motivated me throughout the day. I am realizing things that people have said more and more as my experience progresses.

I am very thankful to be here. I knew this would be an amazing experience, but I didn't quite understand how it would until today. I hope that the process continues and I continue to grow throughout the process

James George

Monday, January 14

Today was an emotional and physical adventure: our first day the day with Dale, the Epworth Director, shared an energizing speech about how meaningful and important helping rebuild these homes is, and truly exposing how much destruction and need exists today. The home our group was assigned to work on is located on a very pleasant street, in what appeared to be an untouched neighborhood. Upon entering the house, it became evident that Isaac had struck hard, with new dry wall reaching 4 feet high. All of their belongings had gone with the storm. I think I speak for the group when I say our simple mission to paint this family's walls because a deeply personal task that had to be done right. This family of 4 with 2 small children is counting on our assistance in their recovery, and I couldn't be more excited to make their house a home once again. I loved our teams efficiency and spirit, and am proud that we finished painting each room's first coat. After a delicious dinner prepared by Celeste we gathered together for a moving reflection and I was inspired by each and every story shared, re-affirming how service brings reciprocal joy. Giving is receiving.

Casey Merbler

Monday, January 14

Why do people from New Orleans still want to live here? Why do they keep returning after disasters such as Katrina and Isaac? Residents here say it's because New Orleans has a certain spirit and culture in the air. They have pride and can't imagine their lives being happier anywhere else. Well, I think this years' service team has grasped this certain New Orleans spirit. Today Dickinson students felt emotion during our 1st day of service and has shared how important it is for us to help this place.

Our morning started with Mr. Pale sharing his appreciation and telling about our placements. He stressed that change and help is rooted by volunteers. Along with this he told us about Epworth's mission and priorities. I was really proud to be working again with this dedicated organization. My team got placed to Ms. Regina's house. She got help from Epworth after hurricane Katrina, but then Isaac once again gutted her house. It's unexplainably difficult to lose your home once, I can't imagine twice. I wish her grand faith and hope wherever she may be. I know for a fact my team is working with love for her.

In general, I think Ms. Regina's house surprised many of us. It was very large and spacious for a one story shot gun house. Furthermore, her neighborhood is extremely diverse. We saw a purple house, various big houses, and a couple of gutted homes. It fascinates me that there is such variety in the same neighborhood.

In our home we completed all of the primer. Mr. Pat motivated us to complete it and we learned fairly quickly how to paint correctly. It amazed me that we did so much in one day. Matt also played some awesome music on his Pandora Station. We all loved painting to it.

After we were done with the primer, we didn't have anything else to do, so we packed up at Epworth and took a nice relaxing jog and then enjoyed an amazing dinner. Celeste can make a fine chicken! It must have had some giggle juice in it too because afterwards many of the girls could not stop laughing hysterically. I haven't laughed that hard in a long time.

The evening ended with a very personal reflection. Everyone gave beautiful contributions. This day was a great 1st start to our service. I am certain it will only get better and our emotions will only become more attached to our service.

Thank you, Lord, for today. May you bless my sleeping peers, our families, New Orleans and Mrs. Regina. Amen.

Gaberella Ramos

Monday, January 14

It's been almost a year since I was last here and I began today with a sense of excitement and a little bit of anxiety. Excitement in seeing what the week would bring in terms of work and group chemistry and nervousness about my own role in facilitating this process. Am I good enough for this? Will I be able to handle the things I need to? I feel like I have big shoes to fill after being on Martin's team and benefitting from Christina's knowledge last year. I'm so thankful to be able to benefit from the experience Amanda, Pat, Chuck, and Colleen bring to the table.

This memory when Dale came to speak to us for our Orientation it was hard not to see the passion he has for what he does and stands for; I think everyone was inspired. I wasn't aware that his own home was damaged and he gutted it with the help of his family. I don't think I've yet met a person directly involved with service who doesn't have an amazing story to share.

After getting kind of lost, we arrived at Ms. Regina's house on Mally St. I knew we were painting, but I wasn't sure what to expect. When we got inside, it was grey. Some red, but still dismal drywall grey. It was almost like a continuation of last year; we were going to take the house from a guy and bring some life to it. We did an amazing job today. We primed the entire house in six hours, something I hoped for, but wasn't expecting. I'm glad to see everyone getting along and hope things continue to grow in the days to come. I think I'll go finish my friendship bracelet now.

Jamie Leidwinger

Tuesday, January 15

It's really hard to know where to start a journal entry about the day because each day is so long and filled with information, emotion and experiences. Today my team (Team Blue Tape) finished the second coat on the house as well as cleaning and preparing for flooring. It was really exciting to complete the paint jobs and when we cleaned the floors it really started to look like a home again. I can't wait to start flooring and see how much progress our house has made by the end of the week.

My favorite part of today was when we were waiting for the flooring to be delivered. We played Uno as a team and it was so fun and so funny. I laughed so hard that I cried. I feel like it was a really great bonding experience for my team. And James George.

PS James George

Layla Meyer

Tuesday, January 15

Each day we spend in NOLA, the experience becomes a better one, as our projects develop more and more and become closer to completion, we grow as a team with every room painted and every reflection shared we learn more about each other and in turn more about ourselves and the world we live in. In this way, we gain as much from service as the family gaining the new home, if not more. But as Colleen just reminded me, that is what reflection is for. Hence, I want to return to the painting and priming we did today. In the Slidell Ave house I am so proud to say we have finished painting the entire house, and will begin flooring tomorrow we even had time to spare today, so we played Uno and laughed at people laughing. We also had a couple visitors: both Epuertu staff and volunteers who luckily caught us when we were actually hard at work. We also had a great lunch with the company and the other team who came to see our house. All in all a good day and a lot learned by all.

Becca Feldman

Tuesday, January 15

Today was full of ups and downs but mostly ups. When we got to the site, I was ready to dive into painting and to get some color on those walls. I worked on cutting. I really like cutting. Every time I do it, I am reminded of my dad. He painted the entire exterior of my house many years ago and is in the process of redoing it. While I was working I felt like I was channeling the precision he has when working with paint. After reflection yesterday, hearing about how perfect everyone wants this house to look gave me motivation to do my best for the homeowners and for my crew. We worked really hard and nice at the other house. The other house looks awesome when we got back to our house. I noticed an extra bucket of paint that was marked with rooms that we had painted a different color. It turns out we made a mistake. I wasn't deterred by the issue because I knew it could be fixed but I was concerned about the lost time. To me, that's something that's very important during this trip. A little bit later, Miss Regina showed up. Hearing her story was so emotional and moving because she's been through so much but she's still so positive. She's truly resilient and very religious. She told us multiple times that her house is blessed and that she loves us. Her unconditional love was amazing to me. This woman just met us and doesn't know us but loves us. That's so inspiring. She looked around the house and it turned out to be a good thing that we messed up the paint. Miss Regina was able to have a say in the paint more and was able to make it more custom. She offered to buy us pizza for lunch Thursday, which is incredibly generous of her. After Miss Regina, left everyone worked a lot harder. We knocked out the rest of the gold paint and painted the entire kitchen. Tonight was our night to cook dinner. It turned out delicious. Reflection tonight was very deep and very good. I look forward to it every night because it's a great way to end the night. The next couple of days will be full of a lot of work but it's worth it.

Cindy Baur

Tuesday, January 15

Today was absolutely amazing! I connected with the members of my crew more than I thought I ever would. Today, we painted on the second coat of paint for the entire house all before lunch. We were so focused, apt, and motivated to do a great and efficient job for the homeowners. After lunch, the crew and I played UNO while we waited for the flooring company to deliver the floor parts. It was intense! WWWW! Chuck Steel was the enemy along with his ally Yessenia (haha), while Layla was on my team. By far the longest game of UNO I have ever played in my life, but there was something about having healthy, competitive fun that made me

appreciate the members of my crew even more. I had seen a different side to Chuck who is usually the less spoken, content one in the group and saw the Mussolini in him that was waiting to burst out! I feel so much closer to my crew and all of the people who are on the trip. In just a short period of time, people have started to unravel layers of themselves that are authentic and portray the true essence of their spirits. Through conversations about religion and spirituality I have realized that spirituality and God have been a driving force in my life and is the primary reason I appreciate such authentic spirits. I look for the humanistic and candid aspects of people's souls because I believe that one can learn a lot about oneself when they encounter truthful and insightful people. I have found that here in New Orleans. Dinner was also awesome! Chocolate chip pancakes, Bacon, eggs, chocolate covered strawberries! Livin' the life for sho'

Celeste aka C-Bear

Wednesday, January 16

I am glad that I got the chance to learn cutting and rolling of painting. I felt like I was creating an artistic work. Besides those enjoyable workings, we have really interesting discussions every night. Tonight's topic is about why people choose to stay in NOLA after experiencing so much flooding multiple times. In my opinion, it's really hard for people to step out of comfort zones. Local people have strong feelings and pride for their communities. For many people, NOLA has their most precious memories as well as their cultures, friends and careers. It's too cruel for people who spend most of their lives there to give up rebuilding their homes and losing hope. Looking back to my study abroad experience in the US, I have really appreciated the amazing people who I've met and have shaped my mind. Due to my personal experience and the language barrier, I didn't have very close American friends. I was very lonely and also felt helpless. I was too afraid of making mistakes when I spoke. I was too doubtful about my ability to make a change. I could not find the meaning of my life except for keeping outstanding academics and finding a well-paid job. I lost my faith.

Fortunately, I met many awesome people who believed they could change something and really make the world better by insisting their faith of helping others. My American friends tell me not to wait for others to change their attitudes – you should open your mind first and speak for yourself to let others understand. I have tried my best to join clubs, activities, and community services events. The more I built up connections with people, the braver and happier I became. Most important thing was that I found my faith back. I remember the person in church who said that the reason we believe in God was to feel that we are not alone and that we are loved.

Some people keep telling me to be more realistic and to focus more on my own affairs. Why do you waste time to paint the house when you know there is a high possibility the house will be flooded again? Why not use these times to find a meaningful internship which can be written on your resume? No matter what you do, there are always some people who doubt what you believe and persuade you what the “correct, mature” thing is. I don't want to judge that. However, for me, doing something for others brings me inner peace; letting me feel my existence, my life is meaningful.

The faith of love and humanity brings us together. I've learned so much through this trip. I really appreciate our NOLA team members. Also, this trip helps me develop clearer plans to do something to make my hometown better.

Di Yang

Wednesday, January 16

Today was another great day at the work site- even though we were a man down since Layla was recovering from tonsillitis. We accomplished a lot. In the backroom, Colleen, Yessenia, Becca and I had some struggles with flooring, but powered through! We had lunch at the other team's house which was beautiful, and I loved seeing the progress they have made. They have had the opportunity to meet their home-owner which has

clearly inspired them to do flawless work. After lunch we slowly-but-surely made progress putting the closet flooring down while Celeste, James, and Chuck sped through flooring the pink room and hallway. Dinner topped off the day deliciously with pasta made by the admins. Looking forward to seeing the French Quarter tomorrow!

Casey Merbler

Wednesday, January 16

It's the middle of the week. We have been working at the work site for three days, and a lot has been accomplished. It's great to see the determination that both groups have towards meeting their goals. The houses are starting to look and feel like a home. It's great to see that as a group we have become very comfortable and trustworthy of and around the other members. I've really enjoyed the reflection discussion, they are very interesting, thoughtful and deep. It's been fun hearing what the other people's opinions are toward the questions that are asked. It's been an emotional roller coaster in discovering and finding more about oneself and others, about New Orleans culture, and the struggles that residents have faced. Food has been delicious, I've enjoyed all of the dinners. I've enjoyed learning how to work on flooring, painting, and using hard duty tools. This trip has been so far an amazing experience, and I can't wait to see the finished product on Friday

Yessenia Tostado

Wednesday, January 16

It's the middle of the week and at this point I think everyone is feeling pretty tired, including myself. At the same time to be tired is a great feeling because it means we are working very hard. Despite the efforts, our team has faced some challenges today. Once again we painted some of the rooms the wrong color. The candlelight color was not mixed correctly, so therefore looks like a grey color instead of yellowy candlelight.

This mistake wasn't our fault, it was most likely a manufacturing issue. However it is a set back and I timely hope we can fix it for Ms. Regina.

Despite this, we worked really well together on the site. I love my team. We began the day by saying compliments to the people next to us and it was really beautiful to hear how people appreciated each person's unique qualities.

Our team also got some yummy HOT chocolate today! Yay. That was delightful because the temperature was pretty cold today. I think everyone expected it to be warmer. I guess the Carlisle weather wanted to follow its students abroad.

Due to the fact everyone was tired today, many took naps before dinner and woke up to the wonderful smell of homemade pasta, sauce, garlic, bread, and salad. This meal was made by the admins and I give them two thumbs up. Everyone seemed to enjoy it. Afterwards we celebrated James George's birthday with brownies and cake and batter, played some catch phrase, and had another impressive reflection.

Being a returning service member, I am noting that this group's reflections are outstanding. We both comment and listen very well and discuss for a lengthy period of time. Even when the reflection is over, many remain and share thoughts. Our communication is a gift for this service and I hope we can also share our many opinions and experiences to others.

Dear Lord,

Give us the strength to complete our tasks here and faith to share with these proud people of New Orleans.

Amen.

Gaberella Ramos

Wednesday, January 16

James' Birthday

Today we had our third day of work and we had quite a few setbacks in regards to painting. First we painted the rooms in front the wrong color but we met Ms. Regina and she actually liked the color in the bathroom. I felt such a relief when she understood that everyone makes mistakes, and was so much nicer than I would have been if it was me. Even though we messed up we all came together to fix it. After we left the site we had a great dinner made by the admins and a cake for James' birthday. I made brownies after and it was great to see James' face when I handed him the bowl of brownie batter. The best part of the night was seeing James get Pat out at word assassin during catch phrase. I'm looking forward to finishing up tomorrow and seeing the finished products.

Hannah Anderson

Thursday, January 17

I think Thursday was my favorite day of this trip, though, even after writing that I'm rethinking that statement because every day has been amazing and special in its own way. After taking a sick day Wednesday I was really worried I was going to be sick for the rest of the week and have to stay back for the rest of the trip. Waking up Thursday morning I felt really sick and had low hopes for the day maybe that's why it ended up being my favorite day. My team got so much work done on the house (and I was even able to work for a while), I was so proud of everyone. Going to the French quarter was amazing. It felt like a reward for all of our hard work and for that reason I am glad it was at the end of the trip and not the beginning. It was also really interesting to experience that side of New Orleans culture after the other aspects. Lastly, it was wonderful to spend time with everyone in the group and to talk and bond with people who I may have just met or may have known in other contexts for a while. I am grateful for this trip, the people on it and the experiences we have shared. <3

Here's hoping for a safe and swift journey to Carlisle!

Layla Meyer

Thursday, January 17th.

YES! Chuck you are the ultimate loser <3

Layla Meyer

Thursday January 17th.

Today we finished painting our house for the most part. We left early to go to the French Quarter. It was great to actually explore the city. We ate at a delicious restaurant, Stanley's, and explored the vices of Bourbon street. The culminating experience was a group picture holding a sign that read "Huge Ass Beers."

Matt Miller

Thursday, January 17th, 2013

I had been feeling nauseous all week, but this morning it was the worst it had been. Food and tea were absolutely repulsive. Chuck joked that it was morning sickness and I told Amanda there was no way it could have been morning sickness unless it was immaculate conception. Thus, I spent most of the morning trying to

be just as peppy as I had been throughout the week so as not to let on that I wasn't at my best. It helped when there was work to do, but we only had so much equipment, and only so many people could paint one confined space. I ended up going to sit in the van because the shop vac was giving me a headache. The van was also much warmer than the house... so much for that heat turning on in the next couple of days. I guess I didn't compartmentalize as well as I thought because Alex very kindly asked twice if I was alright during lunch. I really appreciated it. After picking at my food, I finally felt like I could eat. As I slowly ate my PB&J, I perked up for the remainder of our time at the worksite. We left our worksite early to head into the French quarter, and it was a good thing we did because we ran out of things to paint... again. While I like painting better than mudding because of the distinct visual progress we make, waiting for either to dry is equally as frustrating.

It was a beautiful day to head into New Orleans. I was slightly disappointed walking through the French market because we hit the tail end of their open hours and it wasn't as vibrant as I remembered. Yessenia, Di, Matt, Gabby, Alex, James, and I ended up splitting into a group. I was happy Yessenia and James stuck with us because I had been wanting to get to know the members of Colleen's crew better and finally had the chance to do so. We explored for a little bit, but finally Gabby bravely asked a local man for a suggestion on where to eat because Di was ravenous. We enjoyed a great dinner at Stanley's on Jackson Square. They had some great gumbo and I was thrilled to try alligator meat again (thanks tummy for letting me eat!). Di has the metabolism of a champion: the waiter's face when she kept asking for more bread was priceless. After, we detoured into several shops (including two voodoo shops; the first one very kitschy and the second actually treated the religion seriously. The latter was much cooler than the former), and encountered a jazz band on Bourbon Street. We ended our night with a sugar overload at Café Du Monde before returning for reflection.

Looking back on today and my experiences from this week, it really hit me that much of life is based on trust. Trust is hard. To trust, you must put yourself in a position of vulnerability (something I strongly dislike and struggle with) and hope that people don't take advantage of it. Trust comes in so many different facets: Ms. Gina took a leap of faith, trust (and some pixie dust) as she let us, a team of complete strangers, help her pick up the pieces of her life this week. Trust is also as simple as being able to step back as a leader and let your team manage themselves, telling a friend that you're not alright, or asking a complete stranger where to get food. Opening ourselves in these small ways lets us grow and stretch ourselves in new directions. Being vulnerable doesn't make you weak; it shows that you're strong enough to let yourself try a new experience. I know I grew this week, and I'm going to really miss the openness of the environment we've created. What a great start to the semester.

NOLA Love,
Jamie Leidwinger '15

Friday, January 18

I'm not going to attempt to sum up everything that's gone on in the past week amongst this group and in this community. There's just too much to say. However, I feel that the only thing I have to express is gratitude. I'm grateful to have been able to be a part of this trip, to get to know new friends and become closer with old ones, and most importantly to serve. It's been hugely fulfilling to be able to play my role in the restoration of Mrs. Regina's home. I really find comfort in the thought that our team only played a part in the overall restoration process, the idea that so many people have put their time and effort into the finished product. As a result, our one week has made us forever a part of that home as well as of the expansive team of volunteers that made it possible. There is so much left to do in this region, just as there is so much to be done all over the world. The enormity of need for service in our world can be discouraging to me at times, and even worse it can

instill me with a sense of guilt over the comparatively privileged life I lead. A loving family, food on my plate, a roof over my head, and a fantastic school to attend are needs and luxuries that many are in need of. However, this trip has made me realize that being discouraged and guilty is a waste in this context. It is better to simply do whatever you are capable of to help whoever is in need. If everyone in the world did at least that much, we would be in better shape. Maybe someday that will be the case, but even if we never reach that point, I now know that it won't stop me from doing my little part in the overall service of the world's needs. It's a humble job, but the sum of all our efforts really can add up to something meaningful in the end.

Alex Kasznel

Friday, January 18

This morning Jamie's crew was able to knock out our last painting and floor cleaning work very quickly. We are able to get it done so fast because we pulled together and had everyone doing something. For lunch, Hannah, Matt, and Pat surprised us with Caines again. It was delicious! After lunch everyone finished up the cleaning that Colleen's crew had started. Since both groups finished so early today we didn't rush to the airport. I really enjoyed making friendship bracelets and listening to Celeste's Stevie Wonder mix. At the airport, once again we had extra time which we enjoyed outside in the sun and beautiful weather. I'm really going to miss New Orleans. I had a great week with a great group of people. I feel like I learned a lot and it was all worth coming here because we were able to touch and better other's lives. I hope that our spirit and our passion as a group spreads through all of the people we met here so that the victims of the hurricanes in this area and their families know someone cares about them. There's still hope.

Cindy Baur

Friday, January 18

What a day! I am currently on the smallest plane known to man right now. Feels like I'm on my own private jet... with 25 people on it hahahahaha! Today was so eventful. This morning, we were able to see our finished product! We added a third coat of white paint to the trim in the living room and finished the flooring in both the living room and the maroon room. It was extremely gratifying to visually see all of the hard work that we put into the house. We finished in about an hour and had time to come back to Epiworth, shower, clean, EAT CANE'S CHICKEN TENDRES! AAAANND beat "The Chuck Steel" in uno. This is the best day of my life!! New Orleans has provided me with a renewed sense of diving for 2013. The hospitality and genuine people of New Orleans was a breath of fresh air and reminded me that my purpose in life is to work hard. I have so many goals and aspirations going into this spring semester that I am so excited for. This service trip gave me the push that I needed to go forth with all of my endeavors. As I recap my time in NOLA and remember all of those barricaded homes with a number of people and pets that were found dead and seeing the distraught town with happy and jovial kids and families having fun together despite their circumstance, I see what true strength is. You have to be strong to come back to your neighborhood in a chipper mood when your friends that you have known your whole life are gone due to a natural disaster that basically raped your neighborhood and stripped it of all of its memories. You have to be strong to smile when your own country turns their back on you and calls you refugees when you try to look for a better life in another state as if you weren't even a citizen. It hurts to feel like you don't matter and yet these people are hospitable and nurturing and stick together so that they can look out for one another. Monday, President Barack Obama will be swearing in for a second time. It is a historical and ground breaking moment for black people all over the world, but why is it that the black communities in NOLA are being forgotten and are not given the help that they deserve? As a

young black woman, it's infuriating; and although there are many volunteers offering their time and hands to help, some just don't understand. No one wants to be helped when they know that their helpers may look down on them or take pity on them, and I feel like for that reason my crew was not able to meet the homeowners of the houses that we were working on. Some people cannot handle that reality and to be quite frank, neither could I. I grew up in a Caribbean community in Brooklyn with my mother and sister in a one bedroom apartment. Literally a twin bed, full bed and a baby crib with 3 dresser drawers and a closet in one bedroom. My dad was non-existent at the time and provided little to no help. My mom was an immigrant from St Lucia who hardly knew her way around but had no choice but to make it work. I felt forgotten and completely abandoned. I still live in that community and grew up with kids who now either have babies, are incarcerated or dead through gang activities. While we were driving through the lower ninth ward, I saw my community and listened to some of my teammates take pity in them. It almost drove me to tears because I felt like they were looking down on me. They don't know my background and it isn't their fault but I completely understand how the people of NOLA feel. I am so grateful for this trip and all of its components. It has showed me that I am the answer to my ancestors prayers. They envisioned me when they fought for the rights of black people in future generations. Not many people make it out of my hood but I made it and so will people in NOLA.

Celeste Hippolyte

Friday, January 18th

Today was a long day to end a long week. Our team was able to finish up at our worksite rather early in the morning which was a first for me. Normally we are rushing to finish a project and then rushing to finish a project and then rushing to get back to Epworth to clean and get ready to go. Our team (both teams, really) worked so hard throughout the week, however, that we were able to take our time and finish up. We even had time for a friendly game of UNO before lunch. Most of the day was spent traveling and things went very smoothly. Not a single delay and our last flight were even twenty minutes shorter than expected. We got back to Carlisle before midnight which was a nice bonus for the trip. This was my tenth trip with the college and I will look back at it fondly.

Chuck Steel

Friday, January 18th.

It was definitely a busy day on the site for Jamie's team. The student's whole heartedly surprised me when they blew through work. I anticipated taking the whole morning in about two hours. Students NEVER cease to surprise me with their energy, drive, and determination to finish. Although it was a great day on the site, it was not without challenges- I had two students feeling under the weather, and the house was quite chilly (which always "dam pens" the mood). Hot chocolate in the afternoon was definitely the perfect uplifting moment for the team. I was also reminded tonight just how much I truly love the city of New Orleans- it's been five years, and I still felt totally at home in the city. There is definitely something about this place that draws you in and steals a piece of your heart- forever, as I have learned.

Amanda Hanson

Friday, January 18th.

We are on the last flight back to Harrisburg and everyone is exhausted. We had a great week of service in Slidell.

I have never engaged in this type of service before and I am very thankful for having the opportunity to do so. Before considering going on a Dickinson Service Trip, I sporadically volunteered for other charity organizations and really enjoyed the experiences, but this service trip felt incredibly productive and influential. I loved the group atmosphere and the thoughtful reflection at the end of every day. As an English major, I love to discuss important concepts and ideas. I really enjoyed a lot of the comments and opinions shared in reflection. I felt like everyone took the sessions very seriously and put forth their best effort to push their perspective on the trip and service in general.

Personally, I felt like my perspective on many things have altered throughout the trip; most importantly, service and my Dickinson education.

When I began the trip, I was never surrounded by a group of people that cared very deeply about serving others. I have had friends with similar interests in service but I was never a part of a large group connected by a common goal. It was an amazing experience. Being able to share in a week of service and personal reflection was much needed in my life at this point. Over winter break of this year, I felt compelled to apply for summer jobs/internships and basically figure out my life for the next few years at least. I enjoyed many discussions about study abroad and planning for a productive senior year but I never stopped to breathe. This has been a problem recently – just taking a break and reflecting on the things that really matter to me.

My impression of Dickinson has never been bad – in fact, I rather love it there and I am very grateful to have chosen to enroll. I have experienced a lot and met very interesting people on campus, but engaging with a group of mostly strangers off campus has greatly changed my perspective of Dickinson. Getting to share this great experience with peers and administrators at my own college is ideal because it created an open dialogue about typical Dickinson (college, world, life) problems we are all well aware of. Issues such as social environment, academics, policy, and others were given a lot of thought. I really enjoyed getting an intimate look at perspectives of such a diverse group of students.

After gaining so many positive experiences and relationships on this trip, I feel motivated to fully engage my college community, my local community, and my many future communities in a new and passionate way. I am ready to take every interaction and opportunity head on and gain everything I can from it.

I know it is thanks to this trip that my true Dickinsonian spirit has been more fully realized. I feel compelled to share this enthusiasm and experience to further inspire explorations, growth, and engaged outlooks at Dickinson.

Thank you to everyone on the trip and to everyone that made the trip possible! I love you guys!

James George

Friday, January 18th.

We're flying home now and I can't believe the trip is over already. The week just flew by- great team, wonderful conversations, and so many laughs. I hope and I think that we all understand New Orleans culture better and why people are drawn here and stay here. It's amazing watching the light-bulbs come on for everyone on the trip. I just hope that we continue to go back to this area so that others can have that same realization. And I hope that we tell our friends and family about the amazing people here and the power of believing in the individual.

The French Quarter was a good way to end the week; it seemed like a nice reward after a week of work. Plus the weather was ten times nicer and I'm so glad it wasn't rainy or anything. Coffee and beignets made the night complete. I hope that everyone really understands why I love this city so much and why these people are some of the most incredible, resilient, kind people I've ever met.

Colleen Berger