Researching the impact of youth leaving their comfort zones



An August, 2003, photo of Dartmouth volunteers lagoonside at RRE.

'Outstanding'

"The Dartmouth and WorldTeach Programs gave our students in the RMI the ability to be taught by professionals from another culture, which ultimately led to broader horizons for our young people. Almost all of the visiting teachers I worked with here were outstanding. "I always viewed these programs as 'win-win-win-win' situations meaning our students, our community, the young educated people doing the teaching, and their organizations all benefited from these amazing educational experiences."

—Jack Niedenthal, former Bikini Liaison.

Is working abroad a plus for US student teachers?

'A positive impact'

"During my nine years living in the Marshall Islands, I had the opportunity to get to know most of the Dartmouth volunteer teachers. I was always impressed by their openness to learn as much as they could about the Marshallese culture, their students and the school system. I enjoyed watching them develop warm relationships with the children, the Marshallese teachers and their host families. It was clear the Dartmouth teachers who embraced the experience were positively impacted and this enriched their personal and professional development, as well as the positive impact they had on their students who will always remember them."

—Bonny Taggart, who worked with Professor Emeritus Andrew Garrod on many of his plays.



Dartmouth teachers Taylor Enoch Stevens and Emmanuel Blankson, who is at the helm of the yacht Seal in a 2014 Mieco Beach Yacht Club race. Both have gone on to gain degrees in the education field, with Professor Andrew Garrod commenting: "Two highly successful Black Students who are making their way as educators!"

KAREN EARNSHAW

Thousands of students in the Marshall Islands benefited from two significant teaching programs coordinated by Dartmouth College and WorldTeach, which was established by a group of Harvard University students.

The hundreds of young Americans who took part in these programs arrived with enthusiasm, smiles on their faces, and a hope that they would make a difference to the youth they would meet in their classrooms. In turn, the experience of working in an environment and society so different from their own had, in most cases, a huge impact on their own lives.

Professor Emeritus of Dartmouth College Andrew Garrod, former student, Andrew Nalani, and former colleague, Christina Gomez, were intrigued by exactly how the concept of teaching abroad to allow "students the chance to step outside their comfort zones and consider new perspectives" affected the students, of which there are many (in the 2018-2019 academic year, about 350,000 US students took part in these and similar programs).

The trio set about doing research on the topic and chose to do a "case study of students on a study-abroad program from a small liberal arts college (Dartmouth) to the Republic of the Marshall Islands." This resulted in a recently published essay, which includes many quotes from some of the 140 interns and volunteers from Dartmouth about their time in the Marshalls during the program's existence in RMI between 2000 and 2014.

The essay is broken down into various aspects of the experience. For example, under the title "Culture and community" Matt asked the question: "Was I there to teach students how to operate in a western world? Or, was I there to learn and assimilate into the native culture while sharing parts of my own? Twelve years later, I am still not sure I have the answer for this."

Another participant, Carly, reflected on her identity as an American: "Ejit allowed me the emotional and physical distance to really ponder what the United States meant to me personally and politically … I left with a more discerning point of view and a willingness to question our country's world influence…"

Under the title "Freedom to Do Nothing and Fail," Annie wrote: "Among other things, I learned what it felt like to commit to something that felt scary and overwhelming at times. I learned that people know when you're trying your hardest, and they appreciate it, even if your best effort isn't always perfect. I learned that being uncomfortable often leads to wonderful surprises … I learned that the single most important thing in life is love, and showing others that you care. This is some of what Ejit taught me."

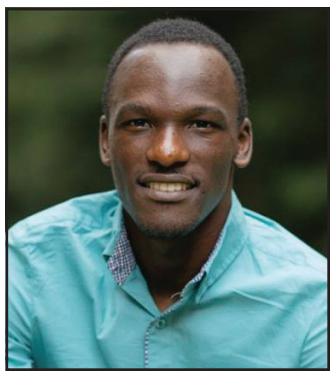
Teacher Ben told his story of spearfishing in the RMI and that when he and a fellow student first tried to fish, their attempts were fruitless: "Several weeks later we went out with the local men to an island further along the atoll, the site of a shipwrecked vessel from WWII. At low tide the shallow water was littered with black and white striped 'convict fish' idling in the debris of the ship. They were easy targets for even our amateur aim … We returned with the other men with dozens of fish that we distributed around the island to several families. We had a large cookout that evening, and my friend and I felt like proud warriors. Here was one of my first humbling lessons in the Marshall Islands. Local knowledge trumped individualism and ambition."

In the section titled "Race, ethnicity and being American" self-identified Black male Mathew was helping Marshallese students apply to colleges: "I was in many cases the only black person many of the students had ever seen/would ever see in their life. I felt like a rock star, and it meant a lot to me."

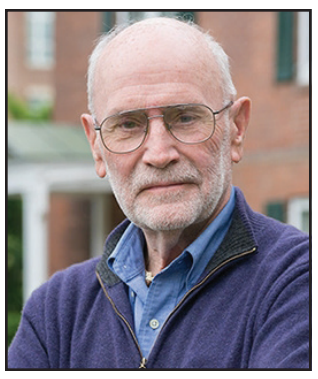
In their conclusion, the authors wrote positively about the continuation of these types of programs and the overall success of the Dartmouth program in the Marshall Islands: "Although the global pandemic has rendered study abroad programs unimaginable since March 2020, US colleges and universities will ultimately come back to 'normal' ways and study-abroad programs will once again be offered."

And: "At their best, study-abroad programs open up possibilities that have long-range effects." On this, volunteer teacher Erica wrote: "I am proud of and grateful for my three months in the Marshall Islands. I could not have predicted how it would influence the pattern of my life, but looking back, I am certain that it did. It was not an immediate catalyst but rather a brick in the foundation upon which my understanding of the world and myself continued and continues to develop."

The essay authors







The authors of the essay titled "Constructive Disequilibrium and Transformative Pedagogy: Developing Global Citizens in Faraway Spaces" are **Andrew Nalani**, who is completing his doctoral thesis at New York University, Steinhardt School of Culture, Education and Human Development; **Christina Gomez**, who is full professor at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and regularly teaches at Dartmouth; and Dartmouth College Professor Emeritus **Andrew Garrod**.