

From good intention to good project: preparing students for experience beyond the classroom

Jane Edwards

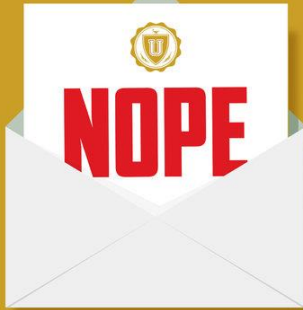
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To Get to Harvard, Go to Haiti?

SundayReview | Op-Ed Columnist

Frank Bruni AUG. 13, 2016



This summer, as last, Dylan Hernandez, 17, noticed a theme on the social media accounts of fellow students at his private Catholic high school in Flint, Mich. “An awfully large percentage of my friends — skewing towards the affluent — are taking ‘mission trips’ to Central America and Africa,” he wrote to me in a recent email. He knows this from pictures they post on Snapchat and Instagram, typically showing one of them “with some poor brown child aged 2 to 6 on their knee,” he explained. The captions tend to say something along the lines of, “This cutie made it so hard to leave.”

But leave they do, after as little as a week of helping to repair some village’s crumbling school or library, to return to their comfortable homes and quite possibly write a college-application essay about how transformed they are....

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ST. LOUIS—Calling the experience “completely transformative,” local 22-year-old Angela Fisher told reporters Tuesday that her six-day visit to the rural Malawian village of Neno has completely changed her profile picture on Facebook. “As soon as I walked into that

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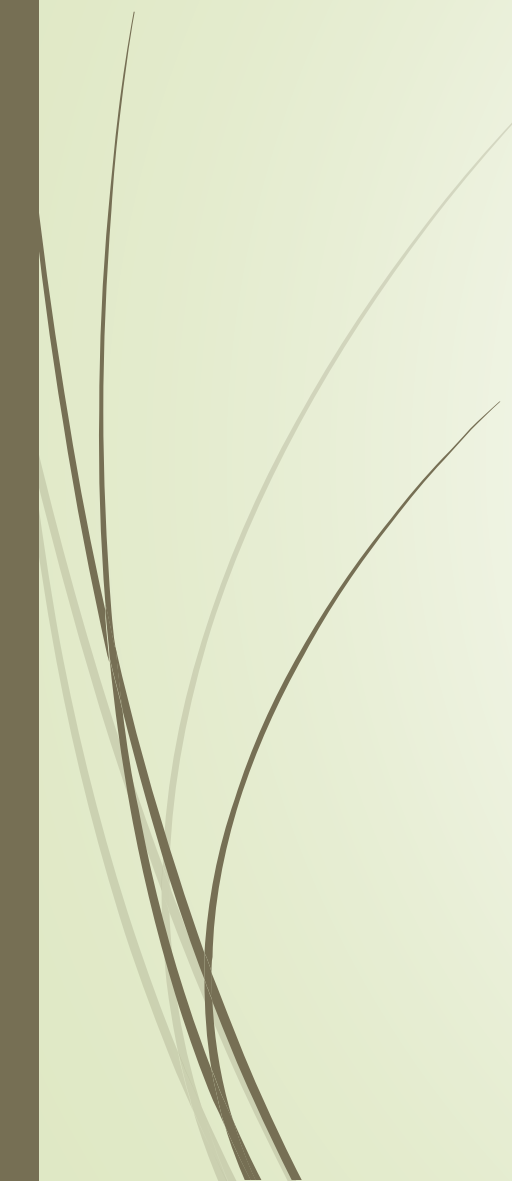
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The Zeitgeist

- This is the age of “giving back”
 - Older generations have screwed up, let the young get it right this time
 - Service is expected on your resume from kindergarten on up
 - You can crowdsource your project if it's exciting enough, and innovation is the new black
- 



Right, so who are these students?

(Howe and Strauss 2003, *Millennials go to College*)

- ▶ **Special**

Have always been treated as special and important. They may carry a sense of entitlement about them and have an expectation of frequent positive feedback. They feel they are here to solve world problems that older generations have failed to solve.

- ▶ **Sheltered**

Highly protected as children. As college students, they may expect faculty and staff to shelter, protect, and nurture them – and resolve their conflicts for them.

- ▶ **Confident**

They are motivated, goal-oriented, and confident in themselves and the future. They expect college to help launch them to greatness. They have high levels of optimism and they feel connected to their parents. They are assertive and believe they are “right”.

- ▶ **Team-Oriented**

They are group oriented rather than being individualists. They may sacrifice their own identity to be part of the team. They do not want to stand out among their peers, they want to be seen as part of the group. They dislike selfishness and are oriented toward service learning and volunteerism.



► **Achieving**

They see college as the key to a high paying job and success, and may miss the bigger picture of what a college education is all about. They are pressured to decide early on a career – and have been put on a career track orientation since grade school. Their focus is more on the world of achievement rather than personal development.

► **Pressured**

Tightly scheduled as children and used to having every hour of their day filled with structured activity. They've been pushed hard to achieve, to avoid risks, and to take advantage of opportunities. They may take on too much, and then think others should be flexible with them when they want to negotiate scheduling conflicts

► **Conventional**

Respectful to the point of not questioning authority. They are civic-minded and believe the government knows what's best and will take care of them. They value their parents' opinions very highly. They are trying to invite rules and norms back into the culture.



So how do we prepare these students for work in the field?

- Approach their strengths first:
 - Encourage them to be part of a team
 - Insist that they work in areas they have strength and knowledge
 - Work with them on the question of how an undergraduate can REALLY contribute to saving the world
 - Goals, goals, goals



Things we can do that seem to work well

- Use vignettes to encourage **humility, responsibility, ethical awareness**
- Enlist authority and require that they **validate** their plans (mentors, predecessors, research in the field)
- Help with the team-building part and demand **structure** in the experience
- Map out expectations from the beginning, and make them **high**
- Use the concrete and the specific in orientation programs (and create such programs)



Our students do wonderful work in the field.

But we all know how complicated this is culturally, socially, logistically, personally, and that we need to be always mindful of the potential impact of our students on the host community.

SO

it's a good investment to get the groundwork right.

Thank you.