

## Dominican students return from Ugandan immersion trip

A Dominican contingent returned during summer 2014 from a two-week stay in the heart of the village.

"It gave us all a significantly different experience. We became immersed in the community," said Sister Carla Kovack, who recently retired as Associate Director of [Campus Ministry](#). The trip offered a different perspective to some of the nine Dominican students who participated in and engaged in the immersion trip.

"We fell in love with the place," said Alexis Valdovinos '15, who majored in chemistry with a minor in biology and aspires to attend medical school. "I just felt it changed something in me."

For Victoria Escalada '14, that something was a deeper sense of appreciation. She assisted in teaching a seventh-grade math class in St. Matia's Mulumba's Primary School.

"I learned how important the implementation of resources is in general and in education," said Escalada, who graduated from [Dominican's Barowsky School of Business](#) where she majored in business with a concentration in finance and minored in pre-law and leadership studies.

"It's different researching it in class and then going to countries and actually experiencing it. In some parts disproving what you thought. I was amazed. I always thought micro financial nonprofits weren't really helpful and then going there and seeing the positive-ness of it is really cool."

Joining Valdovinos and Escalada on the trip were undergraduates Misha Teng, Jessica Salinas, Abigail Cardelina, Lilly Fuhman, and Jacqueline Germaine-Bewley plus MBA students Tracy Ware and Erica Jordan, who took wonderful photos of the Ugandan experience.

What impressed the Dominican party of 14 the most, though, was the care their hosts at St. Matia's Parish took in accommodating them and the longevity and effectiveness of the bond Dominican has established with the community. They were touched by the warmth and generosity offered by Sister Christine Nazziwa and her staff and the children who gravitated to the parish in the hub of the village.

"I saw how much their relationship with Dominican had changed lives and structures for the school and the nuns and for the people working," said Mojgan Behmand, Dominican Associate Provost and Associate Professor of English in [Dominican's School of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences](#). "The connection was simply about us putting aside a lot of different trappings and just interacting with each other on a very human level. We are people building community. Just being us made it all work."

The Dominican entourage brought big donations such as 75 E-Readers from the Worldreader program preloaded with 100 children's reading books and two suitcases full of vegetable seeds collected from local donors by LeeAnn Bartolini, psychology professor and trip organizer. They also brought little donations such as hand stamps and star stickers. Dominican students used the trinkets to reward and give positive reinforcement to Ugandan children in school. Sister Carla said it is their hope that these children become educated and, eventually, volunteer as future educated parents to serve as teachers' aides in crowded classrooms that can have as many as 100 students.

"To envision a new way of education has been a gift and blessing we have left there," Sister Carla said. That's what Sister Christine confirmed. She shared her concerns and realized there is hope in resolving them. "She said Kiganda will never be the same and I believe her," Sister Carla said. "The effect of friendship that has been engendered in our students and faculty who have gone there and the empowerment of the projects we have been involved in are really affecting this small part of the world. We can't change Uganda, but I think we have been very effective influencing and empowering the people there."