

Haiti's Odyssey of Recovery

An outpouring of help from colleges and universities since the devastating January 2010 earthquake aims to support Haiti and improve education for its citizens.

Within days after the catastrophic earthquake on January 12, 2010, community members start recovery efforts.

JON BOUGHER

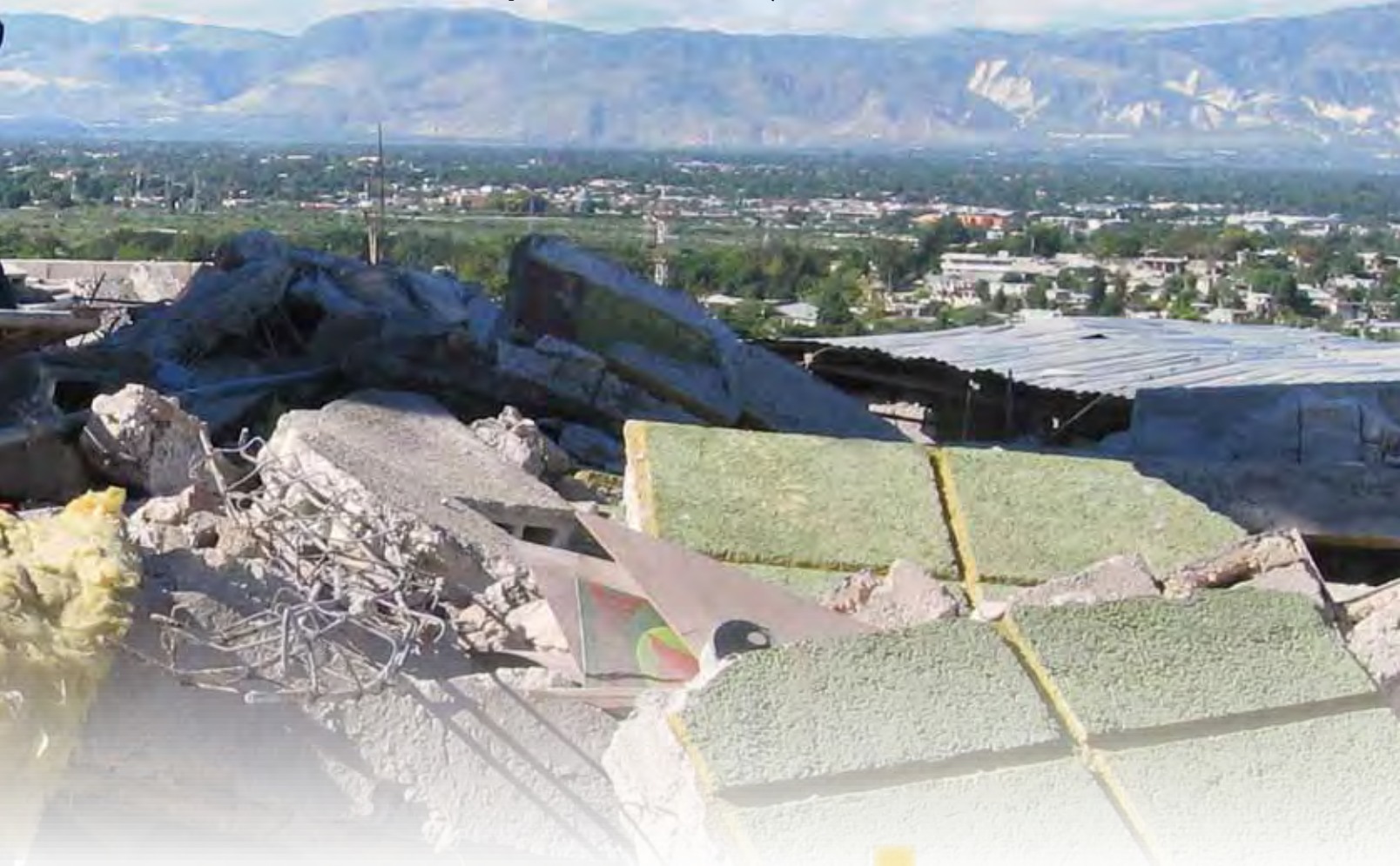
Earth Sh

THE MESSAGES AND CALLS to Shenandoah University President Tracy Fitzsimmons began flooding in soon after the first news bulletins about the earthquake that had ripped apart Port au Prince, Haiti. “They said, ‘Let’s go, I’m ready. I’m a graduate student in nursing. I’m a pharmacy faculty member. I’m sure they need us. Let’s go,’” recalled Fitzsimmons, a political scientist who has spent years in Haiti. “Those were the hard moments for me, because I wanted to go, too. It was a very personal disaster. I was worried about friends, people we’ve worked with and done research with for years. My two Haitian students hadn’t heard from their families.”

And yet, she realized, “it didn’t make sense. It wasn’t wise for an institution that doesn’t have an expertise in disaster relief

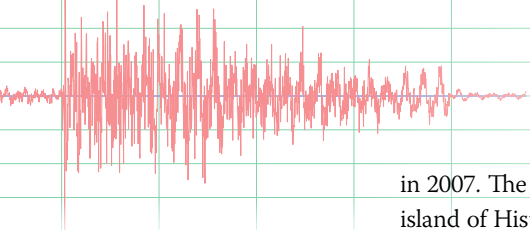
or trauma to go down and try to be part of the solution but instead end up being part of the problem.” Instead Fitzsimmons sat down and wrote a 1,400-word blueprint that appeared in *InsideHigherEducation.com* for how U.S. colleges and universities could best help long suffering Haiti, starting with educating their own students, faculty and communities about the world’s poorest country outside Africa.

Haiti’s education system was in shambles long before the ground opened beneath the capital at 4:53 p.m. on January 12, 2010. Eighty percent of its nearly 10 million people lived in poverty and a majority can neither read nor write. Only a tiny sliver of the population attends college—40,000 by a count the Ministry of National Education and Professional Formation took



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■ By Christopher Connell



in 2007. The Dominican Republic, which shares the island of Hispaniola and has a population of similar size, enrolled eight times that number in 2005, including 1,915 Haitians. The Institute of International Education, in the 2009 *Open Doors*, counted only 857 Haitian students at U.S. campuses in 2008–09 and 1,102 in 2009–10. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security said 1,127 Haitians had F-1 visas at the time the quake struck, including some in elementary and secondary school.

Hundreds, perhaps thousands of Haitian college students and professors lay among the 230,000 dead, and most of the universities they attended were wrecked. The Interuniversity Institute for Research and Development (INURED), a Port-au-Prince-based think tank, said 28 universities in Port-au-Prince were destroyed and 87 percent of all 159 universities in Haiti seriously damaged.

What could U.S. universities do to help?

They began with an extraordinary response by dozens of U.S. medical schools, led by the University of Miami's Miller School of Medicine, which airlifted in surgeons, nurses, and other trauma specialists, set up its own tent hospital and saved countless lives. They sent down civil engineers and architects to help Haitians build safer structures, and dispatched seis-

mologists to better map the fault lines that cut through Haiti and the Caribbean. They began helping Haiti's universities begin the digital reconstruction of their libraries, and offered students opportunities to take courses online. They held teach-ins and staged fund-

raisers. Campuses also embraced their own Haitian students, providing scholarships and breaks on tuition and meal plans so they could stay in school.

Now, 12 months later, faculty, and institutions are engaged in the longer term efforts to train teachers, rebuild schools and give Haitians opportunities that most have never had. With 1 million people

still living under tents, Haitians remain in desperate need of health care, sanitation, and shelter. But they hunger as well for education. As Haitian President René Préval told the Clinton Global Initiative in New York on September 23, 2010, "In addition to bridges and roads, to improve our country we need men and women who are capable."

Here are the stories of some who experienced the earthquake and some who came to Haiti's help.

A Challenging Place

Scores of American faculty and students were in Haiti when the quake struck. Some were conducting research or carrying out development projects. Some were volunteers' doing humanitarian work. Haiti was not on the itinerary for most education abroad programs. Only 45 U.S. students studied abroad in Haiti in 2007–08, compared with 1,205 in the Dominican Republic, according to the 2009 *Open Doors*. Few took classes at Haiti's beleaguered universities.

Another impediment was the Department Travel Warning from July 14, 2009: "The State Department warns U.S. citizens of the risks of travel to Haiti and urges that they exercise a high degree of caution when traveling there. While the overall security situation has improved, political stability in Haiti remains fragile, and the potential for politically motivated violence persists." Universities that did venture to Haiti usually went only after extensive planning and help with logistics and planning from a partner organization with deep local roots and understanding of Haitian culture and life.



Children in Jacmel, Haiti, participate in a summer camp in 2010. Haitian students studying in the United States went back to their homeland in summer 2010 to help children who suffered due to the earthquake.

Shenandoah University President Tracy Fitzsimmons embraces Rachel Saint-Fort with Cindy Saint-Fort standing by as they examine earthquake damage. Rachel and Cindy, and their brother Jerry, are all current Shenandoah University students from Haiti who were reunited with their parents during the university's trip in March 2010.





The damage to College Catherine Flon in Carrefour, Haiti.

University of Miami student Kristina Rosales first went to Haiti in 2008 as part of a Latin American studies class taught by Louis Herns Marcelin, an assistant anthropology professor who also heads INURED. She helped found a small student organization called Soleil Ini to raise funds to build a community center for youth in the slums of Cité Soleil and they were back in Haiti scouting locations when the quake struck. She and fellow students Austin Webbert and Arielle Duperval were downtown when the quake struck, but escaped harm. They later were evacuated on military flights.

Their organization, Soleil Ini, raised \$30,000, including grants from the university and the Clinton Global Initiative, but it has shelved for now the idea of a community center and is looking instead at holding workshops to train youth leaders inside Cité Soleil. Rosales, 22, who is now working on a Fulbright in the

favelas of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, hopes universities don't shy away from sending students to Haiti. An earthquake "doesn't happen every day," she said. "Students can go and do their work, volunteer and make some change possible, but everything has to be planned."

Lynn's Loss and Legacy

Ten Columbia University students were in Haiti, most from the School of International and Public Affairs with their professor, Elisabeth Lindenmayer, a former UN peacekeeper. Rebecca Evans, a Blue Ridge (Virginia) Community College accounting professor, a colleague and two students were building rabbit cages in a village as part of a Students in Free Enterprise project. Two University of Florida graduate students, Jon Bougher and Roman Safiullin, were filming a documentary about two aid workers' help-



Blue Ridge Community College student Megan Samples and volunteer Richard Davis oversee construction of the “BRCC SIFE School for Disabled and Orphaned Children” in Riviere Froide, Haiti. Professor Rebecca Evans and Megan Sample visit the construction site to check progress (opposite page).



ing homeless children. Others, who were working on agricultural, health, and engineering projects in Haiti when the earthquake struck were from Virginia Tech, Tufts University, the University of Notre Dame, New York University, and the University of Wisconsin, Madison. All got home safely.

But tragedy struck Lynn University’s contingent of 12 students and two professors who arrived January 11, 2010, to spend five days volunteering in schools and orphanages with the Florida-based humanitarian organization Food for the Poor. The Lynn students were to write reflections and receive two credits for this “Journey of Hope” combining service and learning.

A second group was in Jamaica on the same mission. They were by far the most challenging of a global array of experiential learning courses that Lynn offered its 2,200 students during a two-week January term. The catalog said, “This trip with Food for the Poor will change one’s life as students meet and visit the truly poor and destitute people of Haiti Surrounded by the hungriest and poorest people in the world, students will experience kindness and beauty in a new way.”

Faculty members Patrick Hartwick and Richard Bruno were apt role models for this journey. Hartwick, 53, was an authority on special education and lifelong advocate for handicapped children who came to Lynn in 2007 as dean of the Donald E. and Helen L. Ross College of Education. Bruno, 59, a Duke graduate and physician, joined the Lynn faculty in 2006 after a globe-trotting career as a medical officer in the U.S. Foreign Service.

The dozen Lynn students and the professors flew in Monday and went directly to Food for the Poor’s warehouse and feeding center. They clambered atop a mound of 50-pound bags of rice for a group photo.



They stopped next at the Little Children of Jesus Home for the Handicapped before checking in to the Hotel Montana, the four-star, 145-room mountainside hotel regarded as one of the safest places to stay in Port-au-Prince. On Tuesday they assisted at Food for the Poor's distribution center in the massive Cité Soleil slum and played with the children at the Maison d'Amour girls' orphanage. Britney Gengel, 19, sent her mother back in Rutland, Massachusetts, a text message saying, "I want to come back here and start my own orphanage."



They were to meet after dinner at the Hotel Montana to reflect on what they'd seen. Most of the students were out by the pool writing in their journals as 5 o'clock approached. Hartwick and Bruno had gone to the gym. Five students were back in their rooms, including Missy Elliot, when the temblor struck. "I thought maybe a bomb went off," she later told the *Today* show. The third floor gave way, but she made it out through an opening and down to ground level with only cuts. Lost inside the hotel with dozens of other guests and staff were both professors and Britney Gengel and classmates Stephanie Crispinelli, 19, of Katonah, New York, Christine Gianacaci, 22, of Hopewell, New Jersey, and Courtney Hayes, 23, of Douglas, Georgia.

Amid the chaos and panic that engulfed Port-au-Prince, the eight Lynn survivors, holding hands and shepherded by a U.S. Embassy worker, Angela Chainer, made a 2½-mile trek to the U.S. ambassador's residence. They were driven to the overcrowded Embassy, where they slept on the lawn and later evacuated to Santo Domingo and flown home Friday on the private plane of a Lynn benefactor.

For two weeks Lynn held out hope, but on January 27, President Kevin Ross announced, "We've waited for good news and hoped for a miracle, prayed for a different outcome, but apparently this is not to be. Now is the time for us to grieve and to begin to heal."

That grieving goes on but so does Lynn's Journey of Hope. At the March 12 memorial service on campus, Ross vowed to keep sending students on international service trips. "Dr. Hartwick, Dr. Bruno, Stephanie, Britney, Christine and Courtney died while doing something that they were passionate about, something that they believed in. And if we end these trips with their departure, then we are doing them a disservice," he said. Lynn has created a Global Citizenship Scholarship Memorial Fund to help send students on such journeys, and Food for the Poor is building homes, a school and a community center in remote Anse à Veau, Haiti, that will be named the Lynn University Memorial Village.

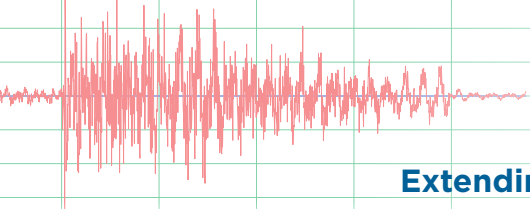
The father and brother of Britney Gengel subsequently made their own journey to Haiti, hired an architect, bought land, and soon will break ground on the orphanage, as she dreamed of doing. And the Crispinelli family already has built a school in the Jamaican village their daughter visited twice in 2009.

Lynn has kept a sense of unity and purpose with the families that some other campuses struck by tragedies struggle to maintain. Another Journey of Hope class was headed to Jamaica for seven days in January 2011.

Not only is Lynn University going back to Haiti—they are opening their doors to Haitian students whose studies were interrupted by the quake in their homeland. Gwendoline Darguste, 20, whose own university in Port-au-Prince was destroyed, is now a freshman at Lynn on a full scholarship donated by a Boca Raton couple, Doug and Peggy Briggs. Before arriving on campus, she wrote her benefactors: "When this dark day came and took away almost everything, my parents and I were asking ourselves if really all those years of sacrifices and hard work were in vain? A million times thank you for everything; you are giving me something most people in their lifetime don't get to have: a chance to realize and live their dream."

University of Florida graduate students Jon Bougher and Roman Safiullin were filming a documentary about two aid workers helping homeless children when the quake struck.





Extending Financial Lifelines

The first priority for many U.S. universities was to help the Haitian students on their campuses cope with the tragedy and stay in school, even if their finances were in peril.

The Institute of International Education's (IIE) Board of Trustees swiftly allocated \$200,000 from reserves and raised \$61,000 from donors for a Haiti Emergency Assistance for Students fund. It asked international student offices to submit up to five applications for students with the most compelling needs, got more than 300 nominations from 160 universities, and began making the emergency grants on February 23, 2010. Some 114 students received \$2,000 in aid and 33 others received \$1,000.

Chrispin Gabriel, 27, got a \$1,000 IIE grant to complete a bachelor of science degree in civil engineering at the University of Kentucky. Gabriel also was helped with more than \$2,000 from UK's Haitian Student Assistance Scholarship and funds raised by student groups. He graduated in May and now is a teaching assistant on the Lexington campus, working on a master's degree in engineering.

Gabriel was left at Good Shepherd Orphanage in Carrefour at age 4 by overburdened parents who had eight other mouths to feed. He excelled in school ("I loved to study. I was disciplined. That usually helps.") and became a mainstay in helping the elderly Haitian pastor, Ernst Cassy, who founded the orphanage in the 1950s. A Hebron, Kentucky, family who met Gabriel at Good Shepherd brought him to the States in 2004 to live with them and attend Northern Kentucky University.

Gabriel always goes back to Haiti over Christmas to help at the orphanage. Twice he's brought students

from Northern Kentucky and UK to help on construction projects. He had returned days earlier when he heard on CNN news of the earthquake, "I wanted to go the first day, but it took a week to get there." He and two men from Hebron flew to the Dominican Republic, rented a pickup and filled it with 20,000 pounds of beans, rice and water. No one died at the orphanage, but the buildings were unsafe. They got two large tents from the United Nations to shelter the 75 children. "We put the tents together, gave them a lot of safety training and made sure they had the basic necessities to survive," he said. Gabriel returned with two engineers over spring break, and led a third group of volunteers down in August. "The kids are still outside," he said. "Most of the buildings need to be torn down or repaired extensively."

Religion is a large influence in Gabriel's life, but he feels "called to a different type of ministry, more on the practical end." He wants to help Haiti build earthquake-proof buildings and water systems. "I choose engineering because I thought it would be a good, practical way to help."

In-State Tuition at SUNY

The Board of Trustees of the State University of New York extended in-state tuition to Haitian students for 18 months extending from January 2010 through June 2011, from January 12, 2010, a move saving them at least \$8,400 a year in tuition. SUNY took the same compassionate step in 2005 to help displaced residents of New Orleans and the Gulf region after Hurricane Katrina. SUNY enrolls nearly 60 Haitians on F-1 visas.

The tuition break helped Binghamton University junior Christelle Dossous, 20, return to college this fall after living through the quake. Two brothers, Karl-

Volunteers from the University of Miami School of Medicine help in Haiti after the earthquake.





Christa Brelsford was volunteering at a school in Haiti in January 2010. A chunk of cement fell on the bottom part of her leg during the earthquake; her leg had to be amputated beneath the knee. An avid climber, she is back to climbing. Here she is in White Rock, New Mexico, at a climbing area called “The Old New Place” in summer 2010.

Henry, 23, and Clermont, 20, had already returned to their undergraduate studies at Weber State University in Ogden, Utah. Christelle had a return flight booked for January 14 and was in a hair salon when the quake hit. “I saw part of the house falling down. People were screaming,” she said. Her notary public father spent the night digging a worker out from the rubble of his office. The Dossous’ home was intact, but they spent the next week sleeping outside in a tent. With the city and its economy in ruins, she wanted to spare her parents the expense of sending her back to college. But they insisted that she return to the United States. She spent the spring with an aunt in Virginia and then returned to Haiti in June to volunteer in a program for traumatized children in the port town of Jacmel.

Dossous said Ellen Badger, director of international student and scholar services at Binghamton, contacted her in July “and told me the school would be able to help financially.” This included not only SUNY’s in-state tuition, but a textbook allowance, meal plan (in exchange for part-time employment) and other help. Dossous is majoring in Arabic and aiming for a nursing degree as well. “I want to earn

my master’s in public health and nurse midwifery so I can go back to Haiti and help in a hospital. We really need people that know what they’re doing,” she said.

The University of Miami’s Medical Airlift

No medical school in the United States was better situated nor better prepared to respond to the catastrophe in Haiti that the University of Miami (UM) and its Miller School of Medicine.

Twenty years ago, neurosurgeon Barth Green went on a brief medical mission and “fell in love with the people of Haiti and their extraordinary stoicism,” said Green. He and fellow UM physician Arthur Fournier co-founded Project Medishare in 1994 to furnish community care that went beyond brief volunteer stints. Today Project Medishare’s community health program has a full-time staff of 100 doctors, nurses, and other health workers serving 110,000 of Haiti’s rural poor.

Twenty hours after the quake Green and four UM trauma specialists landed in a borrowed jet at the battered Toussaint Louverture Airport with dressings, saline and other medical supplies hastily stuffed into garbage bags. President Rene Préal, whose own National Palace lay in ruins, was there to greet them. They set to work treating the hundreds of badly wounded being brought to the UN compound at the airport. Over the next week several flights a day on borrowed planes ferried in more doctors, nurses, and technicians. On January 20, 2010, the Miami team opened its own field hospital in four large, air conditioned tents brought from Miami and donated by former Miami Heat basketball star Alonzo Mourning. The field hospital operated through June, with UM coordinating the efforts of thousands of medical volunteers from across the country and ultimately raising some \$7 million for Haiti.

Christa Brelsford Keeps Climbing

Christa Brelsford was among the first patients Green had flown back to Miami for treatment at the Ryder Trauma Center in UM’s Jackson Memorial Medical Center. Brelsford, 25, is an Arizona State University graduate student whose right leg was crushed as a house collapsed at the adult literacy project where she and a brother were volunteering. Brelsford, a rock climber who was raised in Alaska, stayed calm as they dug her out and a Haitian friend drove her on his moped to a UN peacekeeping outpost near Leogane staffed by Sri Lankan soldiers. They kept her overnight, then secured a military ambulance to take her and two other wounded Americans to the airport.



Christa Brelsford, a graduate student at Arizona State University, was volunteering at Cabois Community School in Haiti when the earthquake struck. The school was devastated by the earthquake. She was committed to rebuilding the school afterward. A \$100,000 grant made it possible to rebuild the school.

The surgeons at Ryder had no choice but to amputate Brelsford's leg below the knee. A smiling Brelsford told reporters from her hospital bed, "I am so thankful to be alive. And so terribly sorry for the people in Haiti who don't have adequate medical care."

Within weeks, Brelsford was back climbing walls with her prosthetic in a Phoenix gym and on the mountainsides of Arizona and New Mexico, riding 25 miles at a clip on her bike, and raising \$135,000 for Christa's Angels, a charity she and her family formed to build a school in Haiti. She gave the commencement speech in May at her alma mater, Bard College at Simon Rock. She also has a civil engineering bachelor's degree and a master's in climate and society from Columbia University. She returned to Haiti over Thanksgiving break to see the already completed school "and confirm to my friends back in Haiti that I'm alive and OK and that I still care about them." With fellow ASU graduate students, she also is studying resilience in post-quake Haiti.

"What we need to do now is figure out how to help Haitians build Haitian capacity, how to put them in charge, not just the wealthy, university educated ones, but the poor folks out in the rural areas or in the slums also need the social capacity to self-organize," said Brelsford.

Temporary Protected Status

Within days of the disaster, Secretary of Homeland Security Janet Napolitano extended temporary protected status for 18 months to all Haitians nationals in the United States when the quake hit—an estimated 100,000 to 200,000 people—to help them cope with financial upheavals. This meant that they could stay in the United States and work legally until July 22, 2011. Immigration officials also said that F-1 students from Haiti who were unable to continue to cover the cost of full-time study could apply for authorization to work off-campus. The DHS Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVIS), in a January 22, 2010, memo, said, "If the student must find employment to offset their educational expenses, a TPS designation may be appropriate. This would allow the student to remain in the United States and work or study at the same time."

On September 15, 2010, Immigration and Customs Enforcement issued a Special Student Relief Notice further explaining how Haitian students "may obtain employment authorization, work an increased number of hours while school is in session, and reduce their course load, while continuing to maintain their F-1 student status." Many campuses provided legal aid and counseling to help Haitian students sort out their choices.

Haitian Academics Take the Lead

Haitian Americans in leadership positions at several Boston area universities took the lead in convening a conference in Port-au-Prince on October 26–27, 2010, to form a new international consortium to rebuild and improve the Haitian higher education system. Among the participating Boston-area institutions involved in forming the consortium include the University of Massachusetts, Boston, and the University of Massachusetts President's Office; Boston College; Boston University; Harvard University; MassBay Community College; Massachusetts Institute of Technology; and Wheelock College. Educators from universities in the United States, Canada, Europe, and across the Caribbean sat down with Haiti's prime minister, education minister, the rector of University of Haiti (Université d'Etat d'Haïti) and others to shape a strategy for both the short and long term and bring cohesion to international efforts to help. Marc Prou, chair of African Studies at the UMass Boston, said the challenge now is to help Haitian educators "take control and ownership of their own system" and build "a system that responds to the needs of the nation." UMass Boston and its Trotter Institute for the Study of Black history and Culture

were playing a lead role in creation of the consortium. Other participants included the president of Massachusetts Bay Community College, Carole Berotte Joseph, the first Haitian-born U.S. college president.

Institutions were finding other ways to help, too, from training teachers to sending seismologists and civil engineers to Haiti to consult on scientific and construction projects. Florida International University, which has 600 students and 100 faculty and staff who were born in Haiti or are of Haitian descent, brought the rector and vice rector of the State University of Haiti. With the Digital Library of the Caribbean, FIU is leading a Protecting Haitian Patrimony (PHP) Initiative to support Haiti's libraries in recovering and protecting their valuable historical and cultural resources.

Virginia Tech, whose engineers and agronomists have longstanding ties with Haiti, is providing 20 internships for Haitians students to complete their final year of college in Blacksburg. Jason Herbeck, an assistant professor of French at Boise State University who was in Port-au-Prince on January 12, 2010, for an international conference on French film and literature, returned home safely after "the scariest 24 hours of my life" and was instrumental in arranging the sale and shipment of 110,000 pounds of Idaho seed potatoes to a US AID-funded project in Haiti. Tom and Jean Paradis, of Grand Junction, Colorado, who have volunteered for years at a children's hospital and school in Haiti, are paying for Haitian students Marckenson Estinor and Pierre Mackenje, both 23, to attend Mesa State University. "We feel this is how we can really help Haiti, by educating two people at a time. That's what the country needs," she said.

Shenandoah University's Response

And what about Shenandoah University?

President Tracy Fitzsimmons personally took her two Haitian students, siblings Jerry and Cindy Saint-Ford, down to Haiti to reunite with their family and see the damage to College Catherine Flon, a K-12 school for 5,000 students that her father runs in Car-

refour. Fitzsimmons has made the rebuilding of that school a priority for Shenandoah and its Winchester, Virginia, community. "We are helping them rebuild. It will cost about \$400,000. We've raised \$100,000 so far," said Fitzsimmons, who made two subsequent trips to Haiti, bringing structural engineers, a psychologist, physical therapists and her physical plant director. They arranged to bring a teacher and his 5-year-old daughter, Meloonda Bregard, to Shenandoah for physical therapy. The child suffered brain damage from oxygen deprivation while trapped for



two hours under their collapsed house. Once immobile, "now she can laugh and smile. She spends weekends in my house," said Fitzsimmons. The Saint-Fords, who received tuition help from Shenandoah and a free meal plan from Sodexo, are back this fall, along with five new Haitian students, drawn by what they'd heard about Shenandoah's work.

Shenandoah followed its own president's advice, tackling "one or two projects where we felt we could actually make a difference, and we're sticking with it," she said. "We're not going to change the world. We're not going to change Haiti. But if we can get 5,000 students back in school, I think that's a good contribution for a small university to make."

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CHRISTOPHER CONNELL is a veteran Washington, D.C. education writer and author of NAFSA's annual *Internationalizing the Campus* reports.

Christelle Dossous, a Haitian student attending Binghamton University (middle, wearing glasses), traveled to Jacmel, Haiti, in the summer of 2010 to provide psychological, moral, and social support to children in Jacmel who were affected by the earthquake. She participated as part of a project proposed by a Haitian student attending George Mason University, which was funded by the Catholic Medical Mission Board.