

The Chronicles - A New Paradigm: An Integration of Online Social Work and International Travel

Who Would've Thought That An Online Course Could Travel to Jamaica?

The focus of this course was to look at the challenges the Caribbean faces and improving the lives of their citizens given their current economic and social circumstances (Shillingford, 2013). The course identified numerous strategies and skills social workers have used to collaboratively build interventions within the social welfare, education, healthcare and sustainable community development arenas in the Caribbean (Healy & Link, 2011). The overarching goal of the course was to expose class participants to alternative views of professional and personal transformation processes via the method of social development as it relates to individuals, interpersonal, family, community, organizational, societal and international changes while in Jamaica (Healy & Link, 2011). With this will come an awareness of the similarity of social challenges faced by nations throughout the world.

Developing a travel component for SSW 646 International Social Work Practice in the Caribbean was at one point just an idea for the University of New England (UNE) Masters of Social Work Program Online {MSWO} (<http://www.une.edu/wchp/socialwork/programs>). After all, assuming that online students could come together abroad would be far-fetched. However, this course and its travel component to Jamaica became a reality. After creating the course, a consult was made with the Global Education Program Office (<http://www.une.edu/global/ed>) to make this online course one with travel. It is worth mentioning that UNE's Global Education Program has sponsored courses with travel for undergraduate programs. Yet, this attempt was the first for a UNE Graduate Online Program. After much negotiation and coaxing, UNE had their first online Masters of Social Work course with travel. The first trip went out on October 20 -27, 2013.

**International Social Work in the Caribbean
with travel to Jamaica** (SW 646—Advanced IFG/OCP Elective)

This course attempts to prepare students for international social work practice in the Caribbean or for work with immigrant populations. The focus of the course will look at the challenges the Caribbean faces in improving the lives of their citizens given their current economic and social circumstances. The course will identify numerous strategies and skills social workers have used to collaboratively build interventions within the social welfare, education, healthcare and sustainable community development arenas. Another overarching goal of this course will be to expose class participants to alternate views of the professional and personal transformation processes via the method of social development, as it relates to individual, interpersonal, family, community, organizational, societal and international change. *Credits: 3*

This UNE MSW online course requires an application and instructor's approval. It includes an experiential travel component to Kingston, Jamaica (tentative dates October 20–27, 2013) done in collaboration with the UNE Global Education Program. The cost for the travel component is \$1,100 and is billed as a lab fee on students' accounts. This fee includes airport transfers, accommodations, meals (except where noted), lectures, visits to social service agencies, volunteer work, activities and excursions. Participants are responsible for their own round trip airfare. For more information and an application contact the instructor, Dr. Leslie Yaffa at lyaffa@une.edu

Tentative Schedule for Faculty-led Travel Course to Jamaica: International Social Work Practice in the Caribbean—October 2013

Sunday 10/20
Arrival and getting settled at the University of the West Indies Mona Campus
Airport pickup included
Dinner included at campus cafeteria

Monday 10/21
Welcome reception
Orientation of campus, getting to know everyone
Meeting of MSW students from UWI to explore experiences of Jamaica as social workers
Tour of Kingston to understand the fabric of the city
Breakfast, lunch and dinner included at campus cafeteria

Tuesday 10/22
Class either the morning or afternoon with the MSW UWI program
Visit RISE (a social service agency) to observe the agency structure and resources
Breakfast, lunch and dinner included at campus cafeteria

Wednesday 10/23
Meeting with UNICEF Jamaica—morning or afternoon
Meeting with Youth Opportunities Unlimited (YOU)—morning or afternoon
Rockfort Mineral Baths in Kingston
Transportation included; students responsible for own entrance fee to Baths
Breakfast, lunch and dinner included at campus cafeteria

Thursday 10/24
Class on UWI campus
Night out for dinner and music in Kingston
Transportation included; students responsible for own dinner and beverage cost
Breakfast and lunch included at campus cafeteria

Friday 10/25
Volunteering for the day at an NGO or a Social Service agency
Breakfast and dinner included at campus cafeteria

Saturday 10/26
Day trip to Dunn's River Falls in Ocho Rios
Meals on your own

Sunday 10/27
Debrief and good byes
Brunch included at campus cafeteria
Airport transfer included

UNE UNIVERSITY OF NEW ENGLAND
Social Work

UNE UNIVERSITY OF NEW ENGLAND
Global Education Program

Once students enrolled in International Social Work in the Caribbean, the journeyers and faculty started conceiving itself and became task oriented via Skype, conference calls and means of social media. The main task at hand besides the course was: organizing the trip, flight schedules, budgets, fundraising for a local non-profit social service agency and working towards a group connectedness. This process took months of preparation prior to the course beginning.

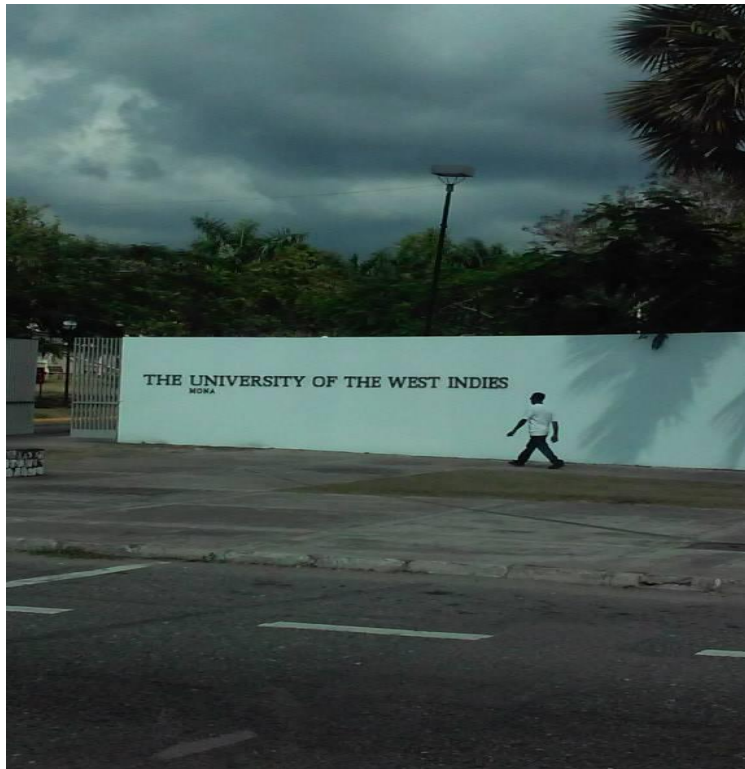
Norman Manley Airport: A Learning Circle Amongst Journeyers

Twelve journeyers (students). Two faculty (constant learners). The journeyers enrolled in the first offering of SSW 646 Social Work Practice in the Caribbean with an awareness about the travel component. This UNE MSW online course required an application and instructor's approval to travel to Jamaica. Each course at the UNE MSW online program is 8 weeks long. In the 7th week, students were required to travel to Jamaica and coursework continues online while in Jamaica. On October 20th

2013, journeyers and constant learners from all walks of life came together and met face-to-face for the first time at Norman Manley airport. (<http://www.nmia.aero/>)

An Enriching Culture Experience: University of West Indies, Social Services and Bob Marley Mon'

Welcome to the University of West Indies {UWI}(<http://www.mona.uwi.edu/>)-



Nuffield Flats.

We descended on a beautiful campus in Mona where ambience, adaptability and differences became a way of living for a week. Possibly no Internet, hot water, toilet paper, air conditioning and oh my, bugs too! These challenges were one of many that the journeyers experienced thereby fostering identity as a practitioner, interpersonal and professional skills.

The experience for MSW students in Jamaica were vast, there was ample opportunities for classroom interaction and social time for all students. These opportunities included partaking in a course taught by UWI staff, socializing and a journal presentation. The reciprocity seemed to be welcomed by UWI and variations of commonalities were understood regardless of the different academic settings.

Social service agency visits included sites ranging from orphanages to services for pregnant teens {Jamaica National Children's Home (http://www.oocities.org:jamaican_spy_c:community:jnch:index.htm) and Women's Center of Jamaica Foundation} (<http://opm.gov.jm/agencies/womens-centre-of-jamaica-foundation/>).



Each experience is unique because students hone their skills utilizing social work resources, adaptability and integrating theory to practice. The agencies in Jamaica gave the potential social worker the understanding that roles are not limited to certain social work tasks and are collectivist by nature. Furthermore, these entities highlighted topics such as mental health, teen pregnancy, unemployment and the culture of violence. The learning was profound both on a personal and professional level.

Our fundraising experience focused on the Woodford Learning Center (<https://sites.google.com/site/unejamaica2013woodfordproject/>). Community members located in the hills of Kingston run this unique non-profit agency. The treacherous bus ride into the hills on narrow winding and breathtaking roads led to

a perfect partnership. The journeyers raised \$1500.00 to keep the Woodford Center afloat for another year. This experience was far different than that of the agency visits. This part of the journey enriched us in a grassroots way describing to us that with little can do a lot.

[http://www.jamaicaobserver.com/news/138590 Woodford-takes-Michael-Manley-Award](http://www.jamaicaobserver.com/news/138590-Woodford-takes-Michael-Manley-Award)

What is an experience like this one without a little fun incorporated in the itinerary. The island is infused with a cultural mecca of music, food, colorful people and the sea. Fun ventures out were integrated and included a visit to Ocho Rios <http://www.visitjamaica.com/explore-the-island/ocho-rios>, craft markets, Bob Marley Museum, (<http://www.bobmarleymuseum.com/>)



and salt-water baths

<http://www.visitjamaica.com/rockfort-mineral-bath>. These experiences were integrated to let the journeyers understand this island of diversity.

Now or Never in the Sun

Students at the University of New England run on three 16-week semesters, Fall, Spring and Summer. Putting an online course together with travel was not

without any challenges. The decision to travel in the 7th week of an 8-week course resulted from wanting to enrich students with the material they had to learn prior to the trip. Through observation by faculty, the decision for travel at this time was appropriate, as the theories would make an impact on practice.

Course Development, Global Initiatives and Social Work Support

One of the author's experiences in Jamaica in 1996, as an MSW student. This prompted her to introduce her experience by writing a course that would have the same experience. Originally the course was to be that without a travel component, after researching UNE's resources it was concluded that working with the Global Initiatives office would provide an out component and a unique experience. The potential uniqueness of having one of the first online programs with a travel component in the social work realm provides opportunities for interactive learning.



A lot of what social work does is geared towards an integrative service-learning model – And, thus the concept was a vision that came to fruition in collaboration with the Global Education Program office.

Part of developing the program such as this one is having a collaborative relationship with UWI. An initial contact was made to the International Department at UWI and collaborating on budgeting, booking and more (i.e.: buses, overall orientation for incoming UNE MSW students). The role of the International Department at UWI was key to putting together this out trip. Partner development and reciprocity even for a week made this experience even more purposeful for all involved.

The UNE School of Social Work and Global Education Program Office understood this experience as innovating because of students who have never met coming together and the idea of not limiting learning exclusively to asynchronous education.

Future Evolutions: Our journeyers and beyond

The future includes a return trip to Jamaica in 2015. Our experiences have led us to refine the planning of this unique online MSW course. First, incoming students to the SSW 646 course will now undergo an interview process to ensure good fit with the above expectations. This interview process was conducted via online modalities such as: VSEE and Doodle Poll (<http://vsee.com/> & <http://doodle.com/>). The response to the upcoming course and visit to Jamaica was overwhelming and students welcomed the opportunity to merge their online education in conjunction with travel. Marketing happened for this round of the course in partnership with a listserv of all MSWO students and social media.

All of the above took approximately a year to plan and the second installment was easier to conceive.



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Credits: 3

Open to all UNE School of Social Work Students, Campus and Online

This UNE School of Social Work (MSW) course requires an application and instructor's approval. It includes a week-long experiential travel component to Kingston, Jamaica (tentative travel date: January 2015) done in collaboration with UNE's Global Education Program and the University of the West Indies. The cost for the travel component is \$1000.00 and is billed as a lab fee on students' accounts. Participants are responsible for their own round trip airfare, which can be covered under your financial aid.

Fee includes:

- airport transfers
- accommodations
- most meals
- lectures
- visits to social service agencies
- volunteer work placement
- activities and excursions

For more information and an application contact the instructor, Dr. Leslie Yaffa at lyaffa@une.edu.



However, we made a concerted effort to start early with our partners at UNE MSW Online School of Social Work, UNE Global Education Program Office, UWI School of Social Work and the International Office at UWI. These partners are significant to the success of this new concept of online learning.

References:

Healy, L. & Link, R. (2012). *Handbook of International Social Work: Human Rights Development, and The Global Profession*. Oxford University Press: NY

Shillingford, A. (2013). Social Work & Development: Caribbean Insights. *Caribbean Journal of Social Work*, 10: 147-170.

Dr. Amy Storch:

Dr. Amy Storch is an associate lecturer of Social Work at the University of New England, Portland ME campus. She received her Ph.D. From Walden University, MSW from Fordham University and BSW from Rochester Institute of Technology. In addition to teaching, Dr. Storch is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker and a nationally certified American Sign Language Interpreter. Her research interests are in the area of individuals with disabilities, specifically, the Hard of Hearing and Deaf Population. Other areas of focus are crisis intervention, substance abuse and mental health. Dr. Storch is an enthusiastic New York Yankees fan who currently resides in New York City. She can be contacted at :astorch@une.edu

Dr. Leslie Yaffa

Dr. Leslie Yaffa has spent 20 years in the field of human and social services and has held clinical social work positions in hospitals, community and agency settings. She

has worked with children, youth and adults in clinical, academic and community development settings. Dr. Yaffa received her EdD from Nova Southeastern University (Florida), MSW from Wilfrid Laurier University(Toronto) and BA (honours) from York University (Toronto). Currently, a full-time faculty member at the University of New England in Maine in the online MSW program. She continues also to teach face to face in the MSW program at the University of Toronto. Her research is devoted to an anti-oppressive framework and looks at program development in Jamaica. Dr. Yaffa is the founder of the Walk Good Foundation, which uses research to support program development and cost-effective services to children and adolescents in Jamaica and the Caribbean. She can be contacted at: lyaffa@une.edu