Sacred Heart University

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From top left, clockwise, are Guatemala, Roanoke, VA, Nicaragua and Costa Rica.

Dozens of Sacred Heart University students participated in service trips around the globe during their recent spring break. Groups of students traveled to Guatemala, Costa Rica, Nicaragua and Colombia to work on a number of projects for marginalized communities. Other groups traveled with the University's Habitat for Humanity club within the nation—to Virginia, South Carolina and Georgia—to build and remodel houses.

Andrea Canuel, SHU's assistant director of Volunteer Programs and Service Learning, joined the students who journeyed to Costa Rica. Canuel said SHU's undergraduate students paired with their peers from the Institute of Technology in Costa Rica, Limon campus (TEC-Limon), to volunteer at the Gandoca-Manzanillo Wildlife Refuge in the southeast corner of Costa Rica, about 15 miles from Panama. The groups worked at a local school, cleaned a nearby beach and patrolled the beach at night for sea turtles laying their eggs. Students, along with local guides, assisted conservationists in the area who work to protect the endangered turtles' eggs.

For the fourth year, SHU also sent a spring break group to San Miguel Pochuta, a rural farming community in the mountains northwest of Antigua, Guatemala. "The group worked closely with the nonprofit CERNE, which operates a school and a medical clinic in the community," Canuel said. Ten undergraduate students and two advisers, Arlete Carmona of the Office of Volunteer Programs and Service Learning and Francesca Schenker of the Office of Global Affairs, worked with children in the community and installed five eco-friendly stoves for families in the town. "These stoves run on small

amounts of fuel, which saves families from collecting firewood," she said. "Additionally, they emit very little smoke, unlike the firewood, which has led to pulmonary problems in the community."

Another group, comprising seven undergraduate students, one graduate student and three advisers, went to Nicaragua, to a region by Lake Nicaragua. This group was led by three faculty members from the Department of Social Work—Bronwyn Cross-Denny, Patricia Carl-Stannard, and Derek Brown. The team worked with the nonprofit Viva Nicaragua, Canuel said. Students engaged schoolchildren in an after-school program and stayed with local families.

Eleven undergraduate students went to Colombia to work with the nonprofit Rise and Walk Foundation, which operates a community center. Accompanied by Matthew Kaye from the Office of Volunteer Programs and Service Learning who was evaluating the program for future service trips, students worked at the center for the week.

While many students went abroad, others stayed in the states to help with Habitat for Humanity efforts. One group went to Stone Mountain, Ga.; another went to Isle of Palms, S.C.; and one group went to Roanoke, Va., said Amy Ricci, director of student activities. Approximately 14 to 18 students, a SHU staff member and a SHU graduate assistant attended each trip and completed eight hours of work per day.

"These programs are important for our students, because they open their eyes to new cultures and ways of life," Canuel said. "The programs help raise students' awareness of global issues such as poverty, lack of political freedoms and social marginalization."

Canuel said when students immerse themselves in a community as part of a service project, it creates a magnified impact. "Living, working and learning alongside community members provides a deeper experience for students," she said.