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CAMPUS NEWS

Social Work part of statewide collaboration to build sustainable village in Haiti



SUNY Chancellor Kristina Johnson (wearing hat and striped shirt) listens to a presentation during a recent visit to Archaie, Haiti, site of the proposed sustainable village and learning community.

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Laura Lewis, assistant dean for global partnerships and director of field education
School of Social Work

Faculty members from UB’s School of Social Work (UB SSW) will join colleagues from 10 SUNY campuses in various disciplines and five not-for-profit organizations to work on an innovative project to create a sustainable village and learning community in the town of Archaie, Haiti.

The W.K. Kellogg Foundation awarded the statewide collaboration an \$800,000 grant for the project that will address multiple community needs and develop a range of valuable services for the nearly 200,000 residents of Archaie, including education and economic and social programs and services, while also providing hands-on training and education for students.

“We are thrilled that we can bring UB’s social work, human rights and trauma expertise to the project in Archaie, Haiti,” says Nancy Smyth, dean of the School of Social Work. “This SUNY-Kellogg Foundation partnership highlights the broad range of knowledge and skill that we have in

SUNY, and the UB School of Social Work is honored to be part of this important work.”

SUNY’s “Learning through Development” program provides service learning, and research and development opportunities for SUNY students and faculty through guided and supported placements in the developing world.

“We became involved because of the overlap with what we do at UB SSW,” says Laura Lewis, assistant dean for global partnerships and director of field education. “Our mission is to link social work research and practice through community partnerships. We prepare students to make a positive difference, whether it be in local communities or abroad.

“Social work has knowledge and expertise around advancing human rights and social justice, providing direct service to people, engaging with communities and beneficial approaches to community development,” she says.

But the project is also an applied learning environment for students, and Lewis sees potential contributions on many levels.



Posing with Haitian partners Jean Sampson Edourd (far left) and Elie La Fortune (far right) at a Haitian school are SUNY project members (from left) Filomena Critelli (UB), Laura Lewis (UB), Amy Nitza (New Paltz) and Kelly Patterson (UB).

“We envision student participation, faculty participation, teaching and research projects, and collaborations that build new programs and services,” she says. “I’m excited about the potential for students to make a meaningful contribution.”

A sustainable village and learning community provides a whole continuum of services, Lewis explains. Where the social service area is concerned — which is what UB brings to the project — that means everything from helping people meet their basic needs to developing new programs.

“This may include recreational programs for youth, specialized programs around mental health and trauma, and women’s empowerment,” she says.

Lewis, who has been with the project since it was conceived in January 2016, left for Haiti on Saturday to continue additional work with colleagues Filomena Critelli and Kelly Patterson, both associate professors in the UB SSW. A colleague from SUNY New Paltz, Amy Nitza, a psychologist who specializes in mental health training and group counseling in international context, will join the UB social work team for the trip.

“We’ll be in Haiti for a week completing a needs assessment,” Lewis says. “Part of what we’ve done to date is meet with people on the ground who are already doing good work to ask what’s needed. Now we’re going to be talking more directly with a wide array of people in the community. We’re expanding our reach into other parts of the region to understand in a more sophisticated way where we’re going to start in terms of services.”

In addition to the expertise UB brings to this multi-organizational and community participatory process, other SUNY campuses will each provide different specialties: University at Albany, international development for management; Binghamton University, public administration; SUNY Buffalo State, performing arts; SUNY Cobleskill, agriculture and fisheries; SUNY-ESF, landscape architecture; Nassau Community College, nursing; SUNY New Paltz, disaster mental health; Stony Brook University, health sciences; and Upstate Medical University, public health. Also taking part are the African Methodist Episcopal Church Service and Development Agency, Effort Commun Pour Le Developpement de L’Arcahaie, Haiti Development Institute, Hope on a String and YouthBuild International.

“There is a lot of need in Haiti and SUNY has the resources that can be beneficial,” Lewis says. “This is a partnership that can look holistically at the needs of this community and commit to long-term involvement.”

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