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Gene Harkless, Chair and Associate Professor of Nursing, CHHS travels to Nepal

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In January 2018, Dr. Kerryellen Vroman, Dr. Geeta Pfau, and I traveled to Nepal for 15 days with funding from the UNH Global Education Center (UNH Global). The purpose of this exploratory visit to Kathmandu Valley was to formally evaluate health, educational and social services and community resources and identify potential partnerships to support the development of UNH/CHHS student service learning experiences in Nepal. Dr. Geeta Pfau, a Nepali-born, American PhD-prepared nurse coordinated and facilitated the program and site visits. Her broad and deep knowledge of the health and social challenges and resources in Nepal and collaborative relationship were invaluable in connecting the UNH team with a variety local agencies and healthcare providers.

Dr. Pfau worked with Little Angels College of Higher Studies (LACHS) faculty colleagues, Dr. Mamata Sherpa and Ms. Shristi Limbu to organize our visit. The Department of Nursing has successfully worked with LACHS several years ago in developing a 2015 J-term course for UNH students. We are particularly grateful for Dr. Sherpa’s mentoring of two students, Stephanie Winn in 2013 and Marin Strong in 2017, for IROP/SURF-Abroad funded projects. During the 2015 visit, a number of health
and human services organizations in Nepal expressed their interest and/or willingness to work more closely with UNH students and faculty. A selection of these organizations plus the addition of others based on recommendations from Dr. Pfau and others formed our 2018 itinerary. We visited the following organizations: the Ayurvedic Teaching Hospital, Himalayan Medics/Outdoor Adventure Center, Chattrapati Free Clinic, Hospital and Rehabilitation Centre for Disabled Children (HRDC), Anandaban Hospital and Leprosy Research Center, MaryKnoll, Marie Stopes, and Sankalpa with representation from Bikalpa Guyan Tatha Bikas Kendra Nepal and the Feminist Dalit Organization. These organizations reflect a mix of health and social service agencies that have the potential to provide rich service-learning partnerships that can benefit the local community as well as UNH students and faculty across all UNH colleges. Overall, all the organizations are receptive to developing sustainable engagement with UNH students and faculty around aspects of teaching, scholarship, and service.

The trip was noteworthy for the hospitality extended to us at each of the sites visited. The visits afforded unique insights into service delivery and health care practices. Our time was short in Nepal but our meetings and site visits were arranged to our best advantage. We blended site visits with the beauty of Patan Durbar Square and Swayambhu. Both sites suffered from the 2015 earthquake but are recovering and continue to inspire awe. The effects of the earthquake are visible in many areas and they continue to be a significant factor in people’s lives. Our hosts included time outside Kathmandu, which provided a perspective on the needs of rural communities and more traditional non-urban life in Nepal. The inclusion of a short
trip to Pokhara, with its proximity to the Annapurna range, was a wonderful respite. The air was cleaner and the mountains were clearer. Seeing the Annapurnas, including Machapuchare, is not to be missed if visiting Nepal.

Our goal is to place UNH students in Nepal as soon as summer 2018. Dr. Nima Sherpa, the director of Himalayan Medic and the Outdoor Adventure Center, expressed strong interest in developing a service-learning partnership with UNH’s Kinesiology Department, especially the outdoor education program. As a result, our team is now supporting the development of service-learning opportunities with the Outdoor Adventure Center. With this project coming into focus, we are excited to further develop detailed, actionable plans for CHHS to offer diverse learning experiences in Nepal. Our next steps are to connect with HRDC and the Anandaban Hospital, as these facilities offer learning opportunities for students across all levels of nursing and occupational therapy education, along with faculty practice and scholarship possibilities, that can be accessed immediately. Anandaban, known for the research and treatment of leprosy, expressed interest in working with our occupational therapy department to develop much needed hand therapy post tendon surgery in order to restore hand function. As a result of the generous funding provided by the Global Education Center, I, along with other UNH faculty, look forward to deepening our educational and research connections and student opportunities in Nepal.