

Rachel Pope: I have wanted to go to Ghana in West Africa since high school, so although the location is somewhat random, it had become specific to me. After searching through the plethora of programs that guide students and make all of the arrangements for you, and gasping at their asking price, I decided to follow a suggestion from a friend to set it up on my own. I wanted to live with a host family, for both financial and cultural reasons. I had lived with host families in my previous travels and knew that they were an integral element in understanding cultural nuances. Because of my church's connections to other churches in various cities around the world, I knew that there was also one in Tema, Ghana. I sent a simple e-mail to a contact address and asked if the individual would make an announcement for me, asking if anyone would be interested in hosting me for a summer.

Sure enough, there was a generous and friendly family who enthusiastically wanted to host me. They replied to my e-mail with, "Just tell us the date and time you arrive, we'll pick you up, and you can stay as long as you want!"

I told them that I was interested in doing some sort of volunteer work during my stay and explained that I was interested in health, education, and the environment, particularly for children. The father of the family knew about a small local Nongovernmental Organization (NGO), Hands Across the Ocean Foundation (HATOF), that fit this description precisely since it addresses health and environmental issues among children in Ghana. I sent them my resume and shortly thereafter I was guaranteed an internship. The director created a schedule and flexible plan for my two months stay based on my interests in projects that he already was working on. We began environmental clubs all over the city to get children thinking and caring about the environment and talking about how it affects health (specifically in Ghana, how it increases malaria). We also met with the local Waste Management departments to coordinate projects and with public and private school boards to seek their approval and support of our projects. After our first meeting, I realized how important it was to have this first experience in public health with a local NGO. Instead of being the outsider, the foreigner, encroaching upon a society I did not yet know, I was able to be the "guest", the "side kick" so to say, to a native of the area who knew not only the needs and desires of the community, but also the basic customs and ways to interact with the various people with whom we would work.

I thoroughly enjoyed this challenging and yet exciting work and I was able to implement a couple of my own projects and ideas for the community. It was just a brief encounter of a whole world of work and application of anthropology, but I would recommend it to any one interested and willing to live in a "developing" country for a summer. I understand that most students do not have the connections that I had for this particular experience and would encourage anyone interested to contact me for more information. The director of HATOF has asked me to open the opportunity to other students to intern with the NGO. They will arrange housing, so your main cost would be the flight, though that could potentially be covered by one of the many experiential learning grants offered by Case.