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## HASTINGS COLLEGE STUDENTS STUDY ABROAD



Hastings College

Hastings College students, professors and members of the Peruvian farm family stop for a photo in the field planted by hand in a single day.

# Hand planting corn, serving others part of college experience in Peru

### Special for Hastings College

BH Media News Service

HASTINGS — Walking up the side of a mountain to hand-plant corn isn't exactly what 25 Hastings College sophomores expected when they headed for Peru for a study abroad experience. Yet that day, which

involved hours in the sun handling pickaxes and seeds, was a high point of the two-week experience for many.

"It would have taken that family a long time to plant that field, but we were able to get it done in less than a day," said Jayda Paul, a psychology major from North Platte.

"It's one of those moments where you feel good, that you've made a difference in serving others. It puts the life we have into perspective."

The class traveled to Peru as part of a new Hastings College initiative that allows all second-year students to study abroad during a two-week block

at no additional cost.

Hastings College Professor Dr. Pedro Vizoso, who co-led the class, said while there are modern agriculture practices and equipment across Peru, the family the students served could not afford them.

It was a daunting task and could have been a

challenging day, Vizoso said, "but you could see the students rise to take on that challenge. They understood what this meant for that family, and even the neighbors who came to provide lunch for us. There was so much growth that day."

Students also volunteered at a nature preserve

and at a school, where they taught English and played with students.

“Despite not knowing much Spanish, we worked hard to speak it,” said Julia Reimer, a biochemistry major from Hastings. “The kids and I played soccer for an hour and the smiles on their faces was assurance enough that we had made a real connection despite our language barrier.”

Brady Rhodes, an adjunct professor who co-led the class with Vizoso, said girls in the school did not have much opportunity to participate in sports, so playing soccer with a woman was pretty special. “Who knows the impact that will have on these kids as they grow up, as they realize there are new opportunities out there,” he said.

Rhodes said they rotated student leaders each day, and charged them with managing travel logistics, asking questions and deciding

when to take a break to allow students to journal about what they were experiencing.

“These types of intentional travel experiences push students to collaborate as they work through the language barriers and plan their day,” he said. “From home stays with Peruvian families to the service projects and even the historic sites we saw like Machu Picchu, it was the intangible moments that were the most impactful.”

Grant Hunter, director of international programs at Hastings College, said the response of students who went to Peru, as well as sophomores who went to Panama, France and Canada this fall, is what the college hoped for when it announced the no-cost study abroad initiative a year ago.

Other sophomores will travel in the spring to Honduras, Ireland, England, France and Spain, plus a domestic

option to Arizona.

“We want to challenge students in new ways, to let them see the world from a different perspective and to grow as individuals,” Hunter said. “Travel and international exploration is the perfect way to make that happen. It’s an incredible stake in the ground as a college to say every student will travel their second year on campus at no extra cost, thanks to donors who support and believe in our mission.”

Paul said the exploratory course also brought her and her classmates together: “The moments where we sat as a group and reflected on the day, those conversations stay with you,” she said. “We have this connection now, this shared experience, and it doesn’t matter where we’re from or our major.”

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**Hastings College students Ali Smith and Julia Reimer, near Cusco, Peru, where they helped a family plant corn with a pickax and oxen.**