

Community Service

Cutting down trees, maintaining trails, creating fish habitats in southern Virginia and clearing out mold, planting trees, rebuilding a baseball field in New Orleans doesn't sound like your typical spring break, does it?

But for 15 North Carolina Central University students, that was exactly how they spent their break.

Six students in one group went to Scottsburg, Va., to work alongside state park rangers, and nine students went to New Orleans to work with community members to continue the reconstruction of New Orleans.

"It was an experience I will never forget," said Alana Shekell, an education sophomore who went on the Scottsburg trip. "You learn so much about all that goes into maintaining and repairing the environment that it's crazy to take it for granted."

The New Orleans team cleaned mold from a home and planted trees where older ones had been washed away. Students also helped rebuild the baseball field at George Carver High School.

"We dug up grass around the bases and placed clay to make the field durable for playing again," said English sophomore Briana Bennett.

"It was a life-changing experience to see where their levees broke," said Ceslie Covington, social work freshman. "Hearing the stories of Katrina and working in a small way to help restore what was lost is something I will never forget."

In Staunton River State Park in Virginia, students marked more than five miles of trails, created recycling bins for fishing line and trimmed fire lines.

"On another day, we cut down cypress trees and drilled holes in them so we could tie them to cinder

blocks and sink them to the bottom," said Marcell Pinnix, physical education freshman. "More fish will fill up the lake because they now have places to hide and shade to stay under."

The two projects were the first weeklong out-of-state community service trips ever done by NCCU students. Ira Noble was the faculty adviser for the Scottsburg group, and Ruby Messick and Tia Doxey were the staff advisers for the New Orleans group.

"Your college years are a time for you to experience the world, and these trips allow you to do just that," said Deborah Bailey, director of the Academic Community Service Learning Program (ACSLP).

And this spring break, that's just what happened. Students had a taste of New Orleans culture as they hopped on streetcars and tasted the world-famous Cajun food.

"I had alligator tail for the first time, and it was surprisingly good," said Korey Mercer, a political science freshman.

In Virginia, students visited Luray Caverns and enjoyed campfires at night.

"We learned about the direct effects of Hurricane Katrina in St. Bernard Parrish," said Swetha Kumar, an ACSLP associate who spearheaded both trips.

According to Bailey, the success of the trips is paving the way for future community service trips.

"I hate when people say the sky's the limit," said Jaemia Pratt, criminal justice senior, a team leader for the Scottsburg group. "Who says you have to stop at the sky?"

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