

Helping Students Help the World

New Undergraduate Grant Program Meets International Need

By: Katherine Kelly

In 2008, Dr. William Schoenl and his wife, Linda, created a grant fund for students in the Honors College. The fund is called the Schoenl Family Undergraduate Grant for Dire Needs Overseas. Its goal is to help ease dire human need in locations beyond the borders of the United States by helping to fund projects that will improve conditions of life. The grant must be used to make a difference in human life, with an impact of helping to alleviate human need. The grant will be awarded to a proposed project that will serve human need. To obtain the grant, Honors College students submit a 1,000 word essay structured as a grant proposal. The recipient will be announced at the University Undergraduate Research and Arts Forum held in the spring.

The original inspiration for this award came from the Schoenl's first hand experience and observation of need in the world. Dr. Schoenl has been a member of the St. John Student Parish Five Percent Dispersal Committee at the local Catholic Church since the early 1970s. This committee donates five percent of the church's weekly collection to a charity designed to help meet international needs. Charities are selected based on their ability to get the donated funds directly to the people that need it, with as little overhead expense as possible. Working with this organization allowed Dr. Schoenl to become familiar with the vast amount of need in the world, and the many differing approaches to providing assistance for those who require it.

This local experience was supplemented by the Schoenl's own first-hand observations while traveling abroad. During a trip around the world, the Schoenls spent some time in New Delhi and Agra, India. Dr. Schoenl described the scenes they saw when they stepped outside of their hotel doorway. They could walk outside, and within a block or two see people living as they would have lived thousands of years ago. They gathered water from a common well. They bathed in the same pools as their cattle. This was true, third world poverty in the twenty-first century.

Dr. Schoenl also spoke of an "under-wing clinic" program in which a clergyman flies doctors and nurses into the bush of Tanzania to provide necessary medical care for the residents. These individuals do not have any access to hospitals or clinics. All necessary care is provided under the wing of the airplane, including general medicine, vaccinations, and nutrition assistance. Dr. Schoenl regrets the fact that even in these modern times, many in the world still lack the basic necessities of life.

These experiences inspired the Schoenls to create an award to urge undergraduate students to think outside their borders and to consider ways in which they can help their fellow man. They chose to develop the award specifically for Honors College students because they felt that the brightest students at MSU could best approach the problem and develop creative solutions. Dr. Schoenl has worked intensely with Honors College students over the past seven to eight years. He mentors one student each year through the Professorial Assistantship program. He says that he loves working with these students, as he greatly admires their dedication and ability and enjoys seeing their work as it progresses.

The two causes closest to Dr. Schoenl's heart are the need to alleviate the causes of hunger and the need to provide basic medical care to all. Dr. Schoenl notes that food

prices are rising in the U.S. and many here are unable to make ends meet. “Just think how much worse it is outside the United States?” In addition to meeting nutrition needs, medical care is also needed to provide the basic antibiotics and basic tools, the basic necessities that clinics and hospitals need to save lives. In approaching these problems, and others, students can make a true difference in the world and in the lives of those living in it.

Dr. Schoenl has been teaching at Michigan State since 1968. He obtained his Ph.D. from Columbia in the field of Modern European History. Throughout his many years on campus, he is still able to think of a favorite memory. “My greatest memory is the enjoyment I get from teaching students. Each year is a new memory for me.” He hopes that this grant fund will be able to continue throughout his life, and hopefully longer through support of his heirs. Whether or not that happens is partially up to the students. As long as the ideas and spirit are there, Dr. and Mrs. Schoenl are ready and willing to help students make their mark in the world and make life a bit easier for others.