



Princeton University students sign on to aid Africa *Four seniors to begin humanitarian relief assignments*



Princeton University seniors, from left, Erin Ferenchick, Hayley Hawes, Brian White and Steven Feldstein are set to begin humanitarian relief assignments in Africa sponsored by the new Princeton-in-Africa program.

By David Dankwa
Princeton Packet Staff Writer
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Four Princeton University seniors will begin humanitarian relief assignments in Africa this summer, as part of a new program called Princeton-in-Africa.

Officially established just a month ago as an independent affiliate of the university, Princeton-in-Africa is a product of years of informal discussions and maneuvering by active alumni and faculty members.

The idea of actually starting such an organization, according to Jim Floyd of the class of 1969, accelerated when the group's sister organization, Princeton-in-Asia, celebrated its 100th anniversary last year.

Galvanized by the success of Princeton-in-Asia, Mr. Floyd said alumni and faculty decided to start a project which, in like manner, would "open up opportunities on the continent of Africa for students and alumni."

The four students selected — Brian White, Hayley Hawes, Erin Ferenchick and Steven Feldstein — will serve a year-long internship with the International Rescue Committee (IRC) in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Uganda, Somaliland and Rwanda, respectively.

"We started with only these countries because we're just starting from scratch," said Mr. Floyd, who is also vice president of the organization. However, he added, the long-term goal is "to place them (students and alumni) wherever there is an appropriate level of need."

Providing humanitarian assistance in more than 30 countries around the globe, the International Rescue Committee, a nongovernmental organization, is regarded as one of the leading agencies in the field of humanitarian assistance, said George Hritz, a 1969 graduate and attorney who offers free legal services to the agency.

Initially, Mr. Hritz said, the IRC recruited only Peace Corps veterans.

Now, "the idea is to get some fresh people directly out of school," he said. "They can accomplish something and most of them come with African studies backgrounds."

He described the four seniors as "self-starters, who have overseas experience and have demonstrated interest in humanitarian work."

At the organization's board meeting Friday, the seniors met with board members to discuss their individual assignments.

"I can't imagine a place where I can learn more about human relief work than in Africa," said Mr. White, a politics major.

Mr. White said he is so excited about going to Africa, he intends to apply directly to the IRC to extend his stay in Africa.

"This opportunity is absolutely unique," he said.

Mr. White will work in the Congo, where years of civil unrest in neighboring Rwanda and Burundi sent an influx of refugees into the country and sparked a civil war in 1996 and 1998.

In Rwanda, where the worst genocide in modern history left a million people dead in 100 days, Mr. Feldstein, a politics major, will assist refugees through field work with IRC workers.

In a country such as Rwanda, that is so destabilized by war, "safety is obviously a concern," he said. But he added that he has confidence in security measures set by the IRC to protect its relief workers.

Last year, Emily Holland, a junior, served on a two-month IRC internship in Rwanda. Ms. Holland, who was at Friday's meeting, told the seniors the trip completely changed her life. She said she was amazed how the native people, who have lost so much, can still come to work singing.

"They are unbelievable," she said. "I've never seen people who are so gregarious, so candid and buoyant."

Ms. Ferenchick, a pre-med and anthropology major from Lawrence, will work in Somaliland, where severe flooding resulting from three days of heavy rainfall in October has displaced hundreds of families. She went to Kenya with Operation Smile as a high school student, and returned to the country two years later for independent work.

"I have been to Kenya twice, and it is absolutely fantastic," Ms. Ferenchick said.

Ms. Hawes, an English major, who visited Ghana last summer, will visit refugee sites throughout Uganda.

"It was just incredible," she said about her Ghana trip, which took her to clinics throughout the West African country. "I've always wanted to do this."

While in Uganda, Ms. Hawes said she hopes to accomplish a lot, including one daunting feat.

"I plan to climb Kilimanjaro," she said with a smile.