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College establishes new internship to address world crises

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News Staff

In response to the destruction of the tsunami, Wellesley College created the Tsunami Relief Committee to oversee fundraising projects on-campus and volunteer efforts abroad to aid victims.

Four months ago, the fourth strongest earthquake ever recorded in the past two centuries caused a tsunami wave that killed tens of thousands of people in Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Thailand, India and seven other states along the Indian Ocean.

While India and Thailand have already begun to rebuild the structural damage caused by the tsunami, several of the other countries are still struggling to attend to the sheer number of corpses that lined the beaches and roadways.

"The scope of the tsunami warranted an institutional response," said Joanne Murray, director for the Center for Work and Service (CWS). "Wellesley has a responsibility to be an active global citizen."

The committee has already begun an internship program with the Center for Work and Service for students to work as volunteers in relief efforts to rebuild South and Southeast Asia.

The program, called "Wellesley in the World: Responding to World Crises," provides stipends for students who identify relief organizations with which they would like to work in aiding tsunami victims.

Currently, the CWS has four student proposals for the upcoming summer that they expect to approve this Friday.

The proposals, if accepted, would allow four students to experience the hands-on reality of the relief effort.

One project would allow a student to work in the efforts to rebuild a fishing village, while another student would work alongside a doctor to aid survivors. Their internships would take them to destinations that include Thailand, Sri Lanka and Indonesia.

The committee plans to provide ample support for these four students and for future students who plan to participate in the internship.

Some of the money to support the internships comes directly from fundraising efforts on campus, such as the dance marathon to be held in Stone-Davis on April 30.

Students may apply for a Tsunami Relief Travel Grant for their own expenses, on top of additional equipment and money for the relief efforts of the organization.

A student working to rebuild a school, for instance, could apply for money to fund desks and chairs or supplies to build a classroom.

Murray views the program for tsunami relief as only the beginning of Wellesley's contribution to the global community. She maintains "the hope that after learning from the pilot, we can extend the program [to other areas of distress]."

Murray has two additional goals for the future of the internship. She and Melissa Hawkins, director of service and stipend programs, expect the internship to create lasting connections between Wellesley and the global community.

She also hopes students will return to Wellesley after their experiences charged with a new sense of purpose in their studies.

"It's one thing to read about Sri Lanka and the tsunami," she pointed out, "but it's another thing to go live it for ten weeks."