

Hands-on Learning in Malaysia

July 29, 2009 12:30 PM Fran Simon

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A group of Tulane undergraduates spent four weeks in Malaysia this summer as part of the School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine's first international undergraduate service-learning course.

Led by Dr. Latha Rajan, the course offered students the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the social contexts of infectious diseases including the challenges posed by cultural, governmental and educational policies and practices related to curbing the epidemic of HIV/AIDS in Malaysia.

In this video produced by *New Wave* team member Ryan Rivet, Rajan talks about the valuable learning experience that the Tulane students had during their time in Malaysia.

The honors course, "Social Aspects of Infectious Diseases," was offered in partnership with the University of Malaya and the Malaysian AIDS Council. In addition to their coursework and seminar class, students spent four weeks working as interns at six non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the Southeast Asian country.

According to Rajan, clinical associate professor of [tropical medicine](#), students learned about issues such as the long-standing stigma associated with the disease in populations affected and specific regional challenges such as refugee issues that hamper disease control efforts and hinder those infected from seeking appropriate health care. They also learned about governmental and religious laws prohibiting dissemination of certain information related to sexual and reproductive health.

"The projects carried out were extremely educational and imparted new service and

research skills to the class," says Rajan.

One group completed a project surveying and designing an educational manual for HIV and reproductive health education in schools for Burmese refugee children. Other groups conducted quality improvement projects that surveyed clients at drop-in centers for HIV-infected people and a hospice for AIDS patients. The organizations will use the data collected by the students to improve their services and in grant applications.