

Lens Captures India Journey

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newwave@tulane.edu

For social work student Mandy Conger, photography is a passion that has served to enhance her efforts to earn her master of social work from Tulane University.



Tulane School of Social Work student Will Moeller reads to students at the Tibetan Children's Village in Dharamsala, India. The resident school, founded in 1962 by the Dalai Lama's sister, serves more than 2,500 children, many of whom are orphans. Along with academic education, students learn about Tibetan culture. (Photo by Mandy Conger)

Conger received her bachelor's degree in journalism with a focus on photojournalism and has done photography professionally. And it was her experiences behind the camera — including working as a CNN correspondent after Hurricane Katrina — that

drew her to social work.

"What made me decide to get my MSW is that while writing stories and taking pictures, I was always drawn to social injustice issues," she says. "I eventually got to the point where I wanted to make a bigger difference in people's lives more directly, so I chose social work, and I don't regret it at all."

Conger traveled to Dharamsala, India, for three-and-a-half weeks in September, where she joined 16 other social work students as School of Social Work dean Ron Marks led the school's [trip](#) for the eighth consecutive year.

While in India, students examine the best social work practices, study with Buddhist monks and even spend a few days with the Dalai Lama.

"This is truly a life-changing experience," Marks says. "This semester, we had some of the most caring, bright students ever. It is different for each person, but it always a transformative journey."

Conger served as the group's unofficial photographer, which she says intensified the experience for her.

"The colors in India, as you can imagine, are spectacular," she says. "To me, looking through the camera and framing a picture helps me to see things in a whole new light. My favorite part of having my camera with me was letting the children I met take their own pictures with it and then showing them their own work of art."

The trip was part of a social work elective course that explores the cultural and contextual issues of Tibetan refugees in North India.

Joseph Halm is marketing/communications coordinator for the Tulane School of Social Work.