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My experience in participating in the SUNY 2019 service trip to Puerto Rico is hard to put into words. I say this because it was the most enlightening experiences of my life. This experience gave me insight, new skills, a sense of compassion, and fulfilling friendships. Not only did I meet fellow students and quickly befriend them, the natives of Puerto Rico have found a place in my heart that is irreplaceable.

Getting on the plane on the morning of July 14th, I felt nervous. I was nervous to miss my flight, nervous of something going wrong, nervous about the people who I would be spending the next two weeks of my life with. This was a new experience for me. Never before have I stepped out of my comfort zone like this. I was on board with strangers ready to enter a foreign place to do work I have never done before. I am lucky I didn't listen to the doubtful voice in my head that said, "this is not for you" and "maybe I am making a mistake". I am proud of myself for taking the leap, and getting on that plane. Never before have I had roommates. I can proudly say that I loved having roommates. We woke up together, got ready together, and went to work together. I truly would never expect to have gotten as close as I did with my roommates, in such a short matter of time. By day 2, it was as if we had known each other for years. This wasn't just for my roommates, this was for everybody in my cohort. A group of 19 students and two weeks. It took 2 days to become extremely close and great friends. I think it was because of the reason we were in Puerto Rico that had a tremendous effect on the compatibility of our group. This reason was to help, to volunteer our time to improve the lives of strangers. Nothing could prepare me for the immense enlightenment and satisfaction that came with a group of students helping those who needed help the most. I am different in comparison to the girl who walked on that plane with doubt. I am different from the girl who never participated in building a home for somebody who lost their home in a natural disaster. I am different from the girl who was there to consult the people whose government had failed to. It was an experience to be in Puerto Rico as the governor resigned. We got to be apart of the movement and participate in protests side by side with native people. I am cultured now with a new appreciation for the natives of Puerto Rico. I was not prepared to fall in love with the culture of this Island. For this, I am eternally grateful as this is what has made me grow. Since returning from my journey, I am more patient, more kind, more well-rounded, and extremely ready to get hands on and assist somebody in need.

I was ignorant before my experience. I was in the dark to all the suffering the beautiful small island had endured. Being there seeing the destruction, poverty, and the failed government has made me aware of the ignorance my past life had contained. These are the symptoms for most people. As my friends said, "you are in another country"; I can now feel angry by this statement as the ignorance blossoms through so many people's minds.

Before my experience, I was on the same level of ignorance. Being a SUNY student, I opted to receive college credit for the trip. In order to receive college credit, a series of reading were assigned and reflections each day. The readings discussed were incredibly influential and helped my viewpoint expand. People don't view Puerto Rico as part of the United States. As stated in the readings, people view the people in Puerto Rico only good for two things; reproduction and working. It is incredibly sad to think of a person in such an inhumane way,

especially one that is part of the same country. Our media projects this onto their viewers in a way to b

