



Left: Members of the community and William Paterson students on the air on Radio Vieques; Right: Students (from left) Matthew Mullins, Nick Gomez, Aziza McGill-Ayinde, and Richard Potenza playing and coloring with the children of Vieques

Students, Faculty, and Staff Travel to Puerto Rico to Help Restore Hurricane-Ravaged Radio Station



From left, student Aziza McGill-Ayinde, Radio Vieques general manager Rob Rabin, student Jacob Martinez, Vieques resident Margo Cheney, Sebastian Escobar '15, Vieques resident Eva, faculty members Diana Peck and Lori Ramos, (front) student Shaney Lara, IRT member Dante Portella, students Tiernan Doyle and Matthew Mullins, (rear) students Nicholas Gomez, Thomas Smith, and Richard Potenza

Nine communication students traveled to Puerto Rico during the winter break to help restore hurricane-ravaged community radio station WVQR 90.1 FM in Vieques. The trip, organized by Lori Ramos, an assistant professor of communication who has long-standing ties to Vieques, was part of a service-learning course during the winter session. The students were joined by Diana Peck, professor of communication; Sebastian Escobar '15, station manager for William Paterson's award-winning radio station WPSC 88.7FM Brave New Radio, and University audio technician Dante Portella.

WVQR's studio was hit hard, as was the entire island of Vieques, by

Hurricane Maria last September. While the station was back on the air, it lost vital equipment and sustained damage to its transmitter. It played an important role as people on Vieques struggled in the weeks after the hurricane, informing them of where they could obtain supplies and assistance.

Through the efforts of Rob Quicke, chair of the communication department and general manager of WPSC, the College Radio Foundation donated a new computer to the station and arranged for professional audio editing software to be donated as well.

After learning about the history of Puerto Rico and the island of Vieques, the students had the opportunity to study the role of community media in

times of crisis and report about the experiences of the people who lived through the storm and its aftermath. A goal of the trip is to establish a sister station relationship between WQVR and WPSC, with a weekly hour of programming being supplied by WQVR.

In addition, students met with ham radio operators on the island who were instrumental in maintaining communication throughout the storm and in the crucial days immediately following.

The students were chosen to participate in the course for their specific expertise. Nick Gomez '19 and Shaney Lara '18 are active in WPSC and helped create podcasts and other programming. Matthew Mullins '19 is the president of the Pioneers Amateur Radio Club, which brings together students with an interest in ham radio; Tiernan Doyle '21 is an active member of that club. Jacob Martinez '18 and Aziza McGill-Ayinde '18 brought broadcast journalism skills and Richard Potenza '19 and Thomas M. Smith '18 assisted them as camera operators. Michele Ciz '18 served as the social media coordinator.

In addition to their work with community media, the group assisted island residents with delivering meals and other service tasks organized by local residents. They also had a chance to explore the history and ecosystem of Vieques, including its bioluminescent bay.