

Inside the Bibliothèque haïtienne des Frères de l'Instruction Chrétienne, courtesy of the Digital Library of the Caribbean.

HAITI RESEARCH GROUP'S HUMANITARIAN AID

UM FORUM FOR INTERDISCIPLINARY AND INTERCAMPUS DIALOGUE ON HAITI PUTS ITS OWN IMPRINT ON POST-EARTHQUAKE RELIEF.

From its inception in 2006, UM's Haiti Research Group has been a forum for campus-based civic engagement and interuniversity collaboration. Typically, the group focuses on immigration policy, globalization, and history and gender issues.

But since the earthquake of January 12, 2010, the Haiti Research Group has focused on the present needs of the nation, examining the earthquake's impact on higher education and cultural heritage, civic engagement, and housing. Much of the group's work in this regard has been as part of the task force formed by UM's Center for Latin American Studies (CLAS) to coordinate the university's nonmedical response to the disaster.

The task force's mission was inspired by a report, "The Challenges of Higher Education," conducted by the Port-au-Prince-based Interuniversity Institute for Research and Development (INURED), which documented how Haiti's education system had been decimated. With an estimated 7,000 schools destroyed, including the three main universities in Port-au-Prince, and with many libraries damaged or in rubble, the task force determined its priorities: support the renewal and reconstruction of higher education and libraries in Haiti.

"In light of our positioning at a higher education institution, we felt a strong commitment to do what we could to support colleagues and students in Haiti, and to help strengthen the university system," says Kate Ramsey, assistant professor of history and co-convenor (with Louis HERN Marcelin, assistant professor of anthropology) of the Haiti Research Group.

"One of the primary missions of the Haiti Research Group is to foster and encourage interdisciplinary dialogue on a range of topics concerning Haiti and to bring together faculty members, students, and administrators who might not otherwise be in touch with one another," says Ramsey. In that spirit, the group has collaborated closely with colleagues at Florida International University, INURED, and departments and schools across UM.

For example, the Haiti Research Group collaborated with faculty from the Center for Latin American Studies, anthropology, international studies, INURED-UM, Africana studies, and women's and gender studies to co-host a panel in March on "Haiti's Housing Crisis: Life in the Camps,

Community Mobilization, and the Politics of Aid." With 250,000 Haitian residences destroyed and 1,500,000 people displaced, 1,500 camps were erected, some hosting more than 50,000 people. Two of these camps were built through official channels; the rest, consisting of improvised shelters of plastic sheets and tents, no longer resist the wind, rain, and sun, and they offer no security. More than a year after the earthquake, access to a safe house remains one of the biggest challenges in Haiti. Panelists shared a mutual concern about the lack of nongovernmental-organization regulation, the importance of respecting local customs, and the need for community participation instead of the top-down approach being imposed by some outside organizations.

Also, as part of the Haiti Research Group's focus on the protection of Haiti's cultural heritage, it has been working with the Protecting Haitian Patrimony Initiative—a program of the Digital Library of the Caribbean. This partnership led to a benefit screening in February of the PBS-produced documentary *Égalité for All: Toussaint Louverture and the Haitian Revolution* to raise funds in support of preservation and reconstruction efforts.

"Our commitments to supporting higher education, libraries and archives, and civic education in Haiti are ongoing," Ramsay notes. "We will also continue to function as a forum for interdisciplinary and intercampus dialogue on a wide range of topics concerning Haiti, in close partnership with INURED-UM."

Other College of Arts and Sciences faculty members participating in the Haiti Research Group's work, including as part of the CLAS post-earthquake task force, include Edmund Abaka, associate professor of history and director of the Africana Studies Program; Pierre-Michel Fontaine, lecturer, international studies and Africana studies; Edward LiPuma, professor of anthropology; Lillian Manzor, associate professor of Spanish and director of the Latin American Program; J. Bryan Page, professor of anthropology; Sherri Porcelain, lecturer in international studies; Steve Stein, professor of history; Ashli White, assistant professor of history; and Ariel Armony, professor of international studies and director of the Center for Latin American Studies. Faculty from other UM schools and the Otto-Richter Library are also participating.

