I have been volunteering at the interfaith shelter downtown since November 2010. There was a CSO fair at the beginning of the fall semester where all sorts of volunteering services were there. Immediately when I went to the shelter’s table where Barbara Blumenthal sat I was very interested in learning more. I have rarely had any contact with homeless people and I wanted to know more about what the shelter was doing for these people.

I have taken away from this experience an appreciation for people of all backgrounds. So often people are judged by where they live, what they look like, what they wear and we rarely stop and ask them who they are. We don’t ask what is important to them and what has their life been like. I love hearing people’s stories and it is remarkable to me what some people go through. A typical night volunteering involves helping with chores such as sorting the dirty laundry into bags and sometimes folding clean laundry and putting it away. Depending on the dinner crew we put dishes in the dishwasher and run it. We do everything else that staff needs us to do and then we socialize with the guests in the main living room. We also get anything from the kitchen that the guests ask for, like something to drink.

There are some moments that stick out. Just recently I was talking to a guest and he was telling me about his two little twin girls. He was joking about them already having crushes on boys and they are only in kindergarten. I could tell he really loved his children and took pride in them. There was also a woman who grew up on a Native American reserve and that was absolutely fascinating to me. Sometimes I feel that I’m not doing enough for the shelter but I just try to be a listener for those who want to tell their stories. Some nights there are more people and more conversation. This year has been a great opportunity to meet wonderful people who face difficult hurdles in their lives and I hope next year I get to meet even more people and hear their stories.
TECC Summer Program in China
By Haomin Yan ’14

TECC (Technology and Education Connecting Cultures) is an international non-profit organization comprised of university students from the United States and China. Recognizing the importance of technology, education, and service, it strives to use those means to directly benefit our communities. TECC’s summer projects, TSI (TECC Summer Institutes) and YPAM (Youth Ambassador Program for Minorities), focus on closing the technology and education gap between urban and rural China through the joint efforts of student teams in China and the U.S.

This summer, I participated in TECC’s TSI program in Wuding, China. Wuding is a small county in southwestern China with a population of approximately 270,000. 48.3% of residents are ethnic minorities in China. We taught English to students in Wuding Nationalities Secondary School for two weeks and built an unbelievable friendship with the students.

In the first day of class, the students were extremely shy and even unwilling to introduce themselves in class. However, after a few days of interaction, they became more active and engaged in class. We were actually shocked by their eagerness to learn. Most of these kids are from ethnic minority families and do not have access to the internet at home and do not have other resources for learning English. Their pronunciation of English is very poor because even their teachers do not know the right pronunciation. However, they are eager to capture every opportunity to learn. Every time we taught them a new word, they took notes quickly and remembered it by heart. When we played an English movie in the class, many students just stared at the lines and wrote down words they did not understand. We also visited a few students at home, and were very impressed by their self-discipline. Many of them study for a huge amount of time even during summer vacation.

At the end of our program, everyone was so unhappy to leave. Our students wrote cards and made little gifts for each of us, and came to say goodbye at 5 am when we were leaving by bus. It was such a unforgettable experience for me this the summer. I learned so much from these lovely hardworking students and hope that we can do more for them.

TECC has TSI and YPAM summer programs in different parts of China every year. If you are interested, please contact Wenyan Zhu’13 at wzhu@smith.edu for more information.

Enchanted Forest: October Short Term Project

Enchanted Forest is a fun family-friendly event that each year uses walks on pumpkin-lit trails through the forest to teach children something about the environment. This year seven volunteers from Smith went to Hitchcock Center on October 14th, supervising game and craft stations, and helping to clean up and collect pumpkins. It is a great opportunity to have fun with kids and help them learn about creatures in the environment!

First year students in 2011 First Link program, building a hoop home for Nuestras Raíces.

In Spring 2011, CSO fund drive chairs organized a fund drive: “Crossing Borders- Immigrants in Our Community” to educate the Smith community about the needs of immigrants locally, raising $1,000 to donate to the Center for New Americans for bus passes for their adult learners and The Gray House for 22 pictorial dictionaries for adult ESL learners.

The CSO short-term chairs organize over 10 projects, involving 250 students in projects with our community partners.

35 CSO house reps work all year to promote community service engagement in their Smith House community.

The CSO community outreach intern organizes two large Community Service Fairs with our community partners to recruit Smith students to sign up and get involved in a community service project.

10 students on the CSO executive board meet throughout the year to organize, promote and support student engagement in the community.

The 2011 First Link orientation program engaged 47 new students and seven undergraduate team leaders in working with four community partners.

Kensington School Refugee Tutor/Mentor Program: Long Term Project

The mission of Kensington School Refugee Tutor/Mentor Program is to encourage and support the refugee children’s learning by providing 1-1 focused support in the classroom at the school. The goal of this program is to recruit teams of volunteer tutor/mentors to go to Kensington School in Springfield to work with a small cluster of refugee children in grades 1-5. The major goal for the volunteer is to enhance the refugee students’ learning, especially vocabulary and reading comprehension.

More and more students are involved in this program this semester. As Tierzta-leah Schwartz, the director of CSO said, “We are working with 21 children who are refugees from a variety of countries including Nepal, Burma, Eritrea, and Burundi. I am so delighted that we recruited 12 volunteers to provide mentoring and individual support for these children.”
**Recent Events:**  
**CSO Blood Drive**

The CSO’s blood drive and organ/tissue registration took place in the Campus Center at Smith College on October 19th and 20th, giving students a chance to have a positive effect on people’s lives without leaving campus. 157 people donated, of which 44 were first-time donors. The blood drive is organized by La’Kesha Francis, the CSO Blood Drive Chair this year.

Join Us! If you are interested in participating in any short-term or long-term projects, please contact your CSO house representatives or ask Tiertza-leah Schwartz at TSCHWART@smith.edu for more information!

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**Alumnae Perspective:**  
**Wonderful experience, Wonderful memories**  
By Kat Freeman

I harvested squash at the Food Bank Farm—big yellow ones that looked like baby geese. I cut back vines at Nuestra Raices, I recruited Springfield residents for an anti-war rally with ARISE, and I volunteered at Chestnut Ridge Middle School in Springfield where I fell in love with teaching. If I follow the yarn of where I am now back through the why’s and how’s, that last place—Chestnut Ridge Middle School—is where I end up. Big double doors, the front office, miles of tiled hallway, seventh grade special education, Jesus and Roberto laughing at some joke they’d made that was not about multiplication. Every story begins somewhere.

Each year I spent on Smith’s campus, I worked somehow with CSO, the community service office. I liked the people I met, the work we shared, time away from stacks of books about heteronormativity. Although I didn’t realize it while it was happening, what I did there shifted my course, brought me in a way to where I am now.

Baltimore isn’t all that far from Northampton, but some days it feels like another country. Water taxis, old libraries, trash in the harbor, plastic flow- ers in window boxes, community gardens, all kinds of people sitting out on their stoops shouting to neighbors down the block—it’s an eclectic, loud, crazy little city. Some days I miss the green of Western Mass, the mill river, so many people on bicycles, that kind of quiet in the evening so deep you hear your heart beating, looking up at a sky full of stars.

But there are wonderful things where I am now, most of all my students. What started at Chestnut Ridge has landed me here at the Baltimore Urban Gardening with Students after school program where I teach art to 2nd to 5th-graders from an East Baltimore elementary school. East Baltimore is full of concrete, corner bodegas, and boarded up houses.

When Ariyonna, making a string of gimp and beads as long as her arm, tells me how the other kids at school call her a nerd, I bite back a smile and tell her, “It’s the nerds who end up being the most interesting after high school.” She gives me a funny look and asks, “Were you a nerd?” I laugh thinking of Smith and community service, the long yarn of a story, of years passing that keep me tied to Chestnut Ridge Middle School, to Lamont House, to books upon books, to where I’ve come from. “Oh yeah,” I say, “definitely.”

Here, most of my students hang out in the courts of the projects-ducking clotheslines, falling off bikes until late at night when they remember they might have to be somewhere tomorrow. I feel so lucky to spend my days creating art with these children who are spirited and smart, hilarious and wonderful.