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## Summers of Service

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In major cities and campus towns around the country, graduation season is upon us: students sporting mortarboards and flowing gowns, 'Pomp and Circumstance' echoing on the breeze, and mouths and minds abuzz with the big question:

*"What next?"*

An increasingly popular answer for students, whether graduating this season or not, is volunteering overseas. The prospect seems cheery, until we consider that volunteering is more than ever a requirement -- not a choice -- for high school and college students.

Thankfully, the reality is not so dire when we consider the work of responsible and thoughtful organizations setting the 'gold standard' in international volunteering, like the Foundation for Sustainable Development (FSD).

In the opinion of FSD's Director, Mireille Cronin Mather, "In one way the digital era is helping to connect, and in some ways it's making connections very diffuse. We're seeing more of a demand from students, but we want to make sure students on our trip are there for the right reasons."

Ms. Cronin Mather explains that too often, participants are eager to take action without realizing the implications of their behavior. FSD thus positions each participant "as a facilitator and not as a doer. And that is challenging for students who have not yet traveled outside the U.S. and think they know what apparent problems are. We ask them instead to listen to the priorities of the community they are sent to live with, to help them design programs the community wants to design."

FSD's philosophy is framed as one of "honoring the human relationship" between a foreign volunteer and the community with whom they will be living. "We try to omit from our approach to development the idea that 'foreign is better,'" she says. "Our partner communities have the capacity to make change for themselves and we ask students to help reveal those capacities."

So. *"What Next?"*

I urge readers to learn from and work with organizations like FSD, "In order to have successful experience students need to be able to put themselves out there. They need to be able to disconnect," concluded Cronin Mather.

