

## **Research Reflections on *It Takes a Village***

An Interdisciplinary Approach to Sustainable Development in Punta Cana, Dominican Republic  
Presented by Four University Scholars Students

Efforts to address issues in resource-challenged contexts can often be disconnected from the realities on the ground. This is true for Verón, a sprawling, informal, urban area in the Verón Bávaro Punta Cana touristic region of the Dominican Republic. Despite good intentions, past projects in the region have been disconnected from the realities on the ground; thereby failing to recognize social, cultural, and environmental dynamics of the community impacted.

We had the unique opportunity to contribute to a body of work that has been growing for the last 4 years in Verón in partnership with Fundación Grupo Puntacana. Our projects were designed by analyzing the results of a needs assessment, taking some of the more interesting findings and developing studies among our University Scholars peer cohort to further explore these issues. Our University Scholars-funded projects addressed: public health education and communication (Rebekah Schwartz); improvements to the regional transit system (Carlos Perez); the active engagement of youth in community development (Laura Melendez); and the establishment of a database to address regional water quality and quantity pressures (Eden Schoepflin).

Within each project, technology was not only used for efficient data collection and analysis, but as a tool to engage community members through dissemination of findings. Videos became a platform to communicate public health education while removing potential barriers to outreach. GPS technology enabled mapping of routes and illustrated the need for a more efficient transit system. A spatial surveying app was used to collect data and then visualize spatial information to maximize understanding for stakeholders. Development of a youth training and certification program through tablet-based data collection tapped into youth capacity and became an opportunity to empower youth.

Our research sought to address the importance of a holistic and interdisciplinary approach towards sustainable development in an overwhelmingly resource-challenged context. The results of these four research projects emphasize the potential for technology to facilitate data collection and research dissemination as critical components of community-wide decision-making among diverse stakeholders. We will share how our research has already provided community leaders and government officials with data-driven metrics to pave the way for a most sustainable future in the region.