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Included below is a press release regarding students from Ferris State University's Michigan College of Optometry who are spending spring break in Haiti on a mission trip. Further information is available by contacting Leah Nixon, assistant director of News Services.

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### **Making a Difference: Michigan College of Optometry students spend spring break providing eye care in Haiti**

BIG RAPIDS – Being oceans apart is not stopping students from Ferris State University's Michigan College of Optometry from making a difference.

While many of their peers will be enjoying a week of reprieve from classes, exams and homework, MCO students will travel to Haiti for a spring break mission trip sponsored by the Fellowship of Christian Optometrists – a registered student organization at the University's Big Rapids campus.

Making stops in Port-au-Prince and Jacmel, Haiti, students will be providing vision care services to children and adults that would not have access to this type of care if not for the group of doctors, students and lay persons' volunteer efforts, said Erica Touhill of Big Rapids, a second-year MCO student.

"We will simulate a regular U.S. exam by checking eye health and giving prescription assistance," she said, adding the team's goal also is to provide eye health education.

"This is a wonderful opportunity for early clinicians, who are working hard at their basic skills already, to learn," Touhill said. "Most students find their skills increase greatly after mission trips."

The group's advisor, Ferris MCO professor Dr. Jim Miller, said one of the goals of mission trips such as this is to provide students an opportunity to use their professional skills and act out their Christian faith.

FCO is an organization designed as a vehicle for spiritual growth and fellowship that encourages opportunities for optometry students to combine their professional skills with mission work consistent with their Christian faith.

"If we didn't go, there's no way these people would have access to this type of care," Miller said.

Ultimately, Miller added that trips such as the mission to Haiti will inspire students to help people locally, nationally or internationally once they become doctors.

“They may decide never to go on a mission trip again but decide to give back locally, or they may decide they want to continue going to other countries,” he said, adding it’s about having a heart for this kind of service.

Miller himself has taken numerous trips, usually on the fact-finding end, and now spends his time taking care of the administrative details for each trip. “I liked to be part of the first team to go and then pass the baton to future successors,” he said.

“We’re going to places in desperate need of help that are dangerous,” he added. “We need a lot of information before I can recommend sending students.”

The idea behind the trips is to multiply the services provided because the needs of people in these countries are so monumental, Miller said, adding the goal is to make a difference.

Groups try to assist more than 1,000 people in a week through their volunteer efforts. Trips are funded through donations, with the cost running approximately \$2,000 per person. There are 10 people going on the trip to Haiti, including MCO students Chad Linsley of Mason, second-year; Steve Day of Shelbyville, first-year; and Lindsey Wynkoop of Kewadin, third-year.

Since advising FCO since 1999, Miller’s students have gone on more than 10 mission trips to Haiti, Guyana, Nigeria, Honduras, Jamaica and Ecuador. Another mission to Guyana is planned in August 2008, and in October 2008 a trip to the Philippines.

Another student group at Ferris heavily involved in international trips to provide vision care is Student Volunteer Optometric Services to Humanity. For more information, visit [www.ferris.edu/mco/people/mco\\_student.htm](http://www.ferris.edu/mco/people/mco_student.htm).

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