

Howard Payne University students serve in Slovakia

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BROWNWOOD—Nine Howard Payne University students ministered among the Roma and Slovak people of Slovakia this summer.

The group included students in an international missions practicum course, as well as students involved with HPU's Baptist Student Ministry. The team worked with and learned from Shane and Dianne McNary, field personnel with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

Professor Melody Maxwell's class prepared for the trip by studying short-term missions, along with the history and culture of the area and the Roma people.

"The Roma are a people group in Europe who are often marginalized and frequently live in poverty," Maxwell explained. "We were blessed with the opportunity to briefly serve among the Roma alongside the McNarys."

The HPU group taught English at a public school in Važec and led a Bible school for Roma children in partnership with Jekh Drom, a local nonprofit organization.

The students also connected with Word for the World-Slovakia, a group translating the Bible into a local Roma dialect, and the Slovak Bible Society, which will help publish and distribute the Bibles.

"This trip specifically taught me about the importance of having cross-cultural knowledge and how that shapes our presentation of the gospel," said ZE, junior. "This trip was one where I felt that I gained an overwhelming amount of great information about Slovak and Roma culture

and the culture of short-term missions.”

Before leaving Europe, the students also traveled to Poland, where they visited the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum, Schindler Museum and the Polish Roma Association Museum.

“I thoroughly enjoyed the fact that what we did as tourists directly related to who we had been working with while we were on mission,” said Kara Strange, a May HPU graduate from Fredericksburg. “Our tourism was not without a purpose.”

Tara Carroll, junior from McKinney, said the trip taught her God speaks to everyone differently.

“God transcends human limitations and can transcend cultural differences as well,” she said. “The gospel is multifaceted and can speak to everyone in many ways.

“God has used the McNarys to do beautiful work in Slovakia and with the Roma people. We were able to come alongside this work with them for a short time. They will continue to do this gospel work long after we are gone.”