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MIZZOU

Wonder Women

MU graduating senior leads trip to build school in Nicaragua.



In April 2013, Paige Tenkhoff, at lectern, and the MU Panhellenic Association presented \$20,000 to the Circle of Sisterhood Foundation to help build a school in a developing country. In June, Tenkhoff and 11 other women from MU head to Nicaragua for a week to break ground on the school. Photo courtesy Paige Tenkhoff.

Story by Kelsey Allen

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When Paige Tenkhoff first read *Half the Sky*, a book about the worldwide oppression of women, she felt a strong urge to act. But she never imagined she would partner with the Circle of Sisterhood to build a school that supports the education of females in a developing country. In June, Tenkhoff and 11 other women from MU will head to Nicaragua for a week to break ground on the school.

The Circle of Sisterhood is a national organization of sorority sisters who work to remove the barriers to education facing women around the world. When Tenkhoff was the president of the MU Panhellenic Association in 2013, she moved to have MU's sororities adopt the Circle of Sisterhood Foundation as their philanthropy.

“It is almost providential in a way because — not a lot of people know this — sororities were founded because women were being academically oppressed in the classroom,” says Tenkhoff, a senior journalism major and Phi Beta Phi member from Nashville, Tenn. “What better way to pay it forward from our Greek organizations than to work to empower women because that’s what the purpose of a sorority is: to empower your friends and your sisters



Paige Tenkhoff

to be the best people they can be. The two causes work well together.”

In early 2013, the MU Panhellenic Association presented to Ginny Carroll, the founder of the Circle of Sisterhood, \$20,000 to help build a school in Senegal, Africa. Impressed with the sizable donation, Carroll challenged the MU women to raise an additional \$35,000 and build a school of their own.

“She was joking,” Tenkhoff says, “But I didn’t know that. I was like, ‘Yeah, OK, let’s do it!’”

Throughout the 2013–14 academic year, the MU Circle of Sisterhood raised the rest of the money through crowdsourcing, a 5K and other fundraising events. Mizzou’s sorority community is the first to entirely fund the construction of a school. In Nicaragua, the women will work with an auxiliary organization called buildOn, a nonprofit that constructs and manages schools in developing countries, to build the school, which will have a student body of at least 50 percent females.

“I’ve always wanted to have something I felt on fire about,” Tenkhoff says. “When I found Circle of Sisterhood, that was the first time I felt super engaged with a cause, the first time I put myself in somebody else’s shoes. I try now not to wake up for class and complain or be salty when I have a lot of homework.”

Tenkhoff graduates May 17. After her weeklong trip to Nicaragua this summer, she'll move to Washington, D.C., where she'll start a job at a public policy think tank. "This has completely changed the way I look at the world," she says. "I have a responsibility as an educated woman to pay it forward."

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