

## Senior applies for Fulbright National Geographic Digital Storytelling Fellowship

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Michael St. Marie, a senior Integrated Studies major specializing in Graphic Design and BORG, has applied for the Fulbright National Geographic Digital Storytelling Fellowship. St. Marie hopes to use this grant to sponsor a trip to Uganda. Once there, he will use photography, his chosen medium, to raise awareness about the jigger, a parasitic arthropod that is known to burrow into exposed skin, where it will eventually lay and hatch eggs.

St. Marie originally traveled overseas in 2011. Since then, he says that he has spent two months in Kenya, three weeks in Ethiopia, one month in Zambia, and over the course of several years, roughly two months in South Africa.

“I’m proposing to tell the story of jiggers in Uganda, because it’s a huge factor in people’s lives,” he said. “People are really ashamed of having jiggers. They don’t talk about it.”

Parents, out of shame, do not even speak about jiggers with their children. While they know how to remove the fleas, they likely will not pass on their knowledge because they are embarrassed to even acknowledge the problem.

Removal, says St. Marie, is as easy as cutting the jiggers out with a safety pin, but the longer the infestation lasts, the more the jiggers multiply. “There was one family that came in, and the kids had close to 500 jiggers on their entire bodies. There were four kids; each of them had hundreds and hundreds of jiggers.”

Their mom, however, only had nine, as she knew how to cut them out.

“That’s where it’s a social problem,” St. Marie said. “As a whole, it’s not a life-threatening issue, but it affects all areas of life. It affects education and occupation, it affects social life.. you can’t go and play soccer if your feet are full of little bugs that inhibit you from walking or running. It’s about quality of life.”

St. Marie has been working for Sole Hope, a non-profit organization dedicated to education about jigger removal and the destigmatization of the condition. Now, he hopes to travel to Uganda again in May, where he will spend the first three months of this project working with the MICAH initiative (Mission for Civic Awareness and Health), which is based out of Uganda Christian University. MICAH will send students from different areas of public health and public administration into rural areas to collect data on jigger patients.



“It’ll be the first comprehensive academic research on jiggers in Uganda. I’ll traveling with these students, going to the villages, talking to people and interviewing people—trying to get a view of how this affects people’s lives in the country,” St. Marie said.

The next phase of his project will be spent comparing the perception of jiggers in an urban setting to the perception of jiggers in a rural setting. These comparisons, the data collected, and St. Marie’s interviews will all contribute to the third phase, in which St. Marie will create infographics to help raise awareness.

“It really feels like the stars are kind of aligning for this project,” he said. “It’s a good time because 2016 is an election year in Uganda. I think that there will be an opportunity for some attention to be drawn for this issue in the country and maybe get some long term solutions for this problem.”