

PROVIDENCE Journal

URI engineering students helping provide prosthetic limbs in South America

Friday

Posted Mar 24, 2017 at 12:52 PM

Updated Mar 24, 2017 at 12:52 PM

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SOUTH KINGSTOWN, R.I. – A team of University of Rhode Island engineering students will visit Colombia this summer on a mission to provide prosthetic arms and hands to residents of that South American country who have become amputees.

A \$25,000 federal grant is making it possible.

“It’s a meaningful and enriching project for our students, and we’re honored to receive this prestigious award,” said Silke Scholz, who heads URI’s Spanish International Engineering Program. “The grant also affirms URI’s commitment to community service and global studies.”

According to URI, an abundance of land mines from years of civil conflict has left Colombia with the highest percentage of amputees in the world.

“Our students will better the lives of those less fortunate—and learn engineering skills at the same time,” said Scholz. “What could be more fulfilling for a college student?”

The \$25,000 is URI’s second grant from “100,000 Strong in the Americas” program, begun under former President Barack Obama to “increase the number of American students studying in Latin America to 100,000, and bring 100,000 students from Latin America to the United States by 2020,” according to the university.

The award – “Sustainable Prostheses: An All-Inclusive Approach to Designing in the Americas” – is in collaboration with SENA Centro Nacional Colombo Alemán in Barranquilla, Colombia, on the Caribbean coast.

Joining Scholz on the August trip will be Kunal Mankodiya, assistant professor of biomedical engineering at URI. The students are: James Gannon of Coventry; Cristian Witcher of North Smithfield; Laura Parra, a Colombian native who lives in Pawtucket; and Corvah Akoiwala of Providence, whose parents are from Liberia.

“It’s fulfilling to work with a team from another country whose members speak another language but face similar challenges,” said Mankodiya . “URI is truly making its mark on the world stage by reaching out to an international community that needs help.”

“This will be the first time I’ve traveled out of the country,” said Akoiwala. “It’s for a great cause. These are people who can’t do the basic things we can do in life. I feel good about giving back.”

“I think the project will help us grow as students and members of the world community,” said Witcher, who was born in Ecuador and came to the United States when he was three.

The mission is an example of the university’s engagement with the world that president David M. Dooley, **as recently as Wednesday**, has vowed to protect in the wake of President Donald Trump’s continuing attempts to prevent people from certain foreign countries from entering the U.S.

“We are not going to back off from our efforts to be globally engaged,” Dooley told an information meeting. Once again, he vowed to use all means within the law to keep URI’s international community safe while in Rhode Island.

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