

MARCH 1-13, 2024

REAL **MONTANA**

RESOURCE EDUCATION & AGRICULTURE LEADERSHIP

CLASS V **VIETNAM REPORT**



A NOTE FROM THE PROGRAM DIRECTOR

The REAL Montana international trip to Vietnam was a transformative journey for Class V. From the intense heat and bustling energy Ho Chi Minh City, to the serene mountains of Ninh Binh, the trip offered a unique blend of cultural immersion, historical exploration, and exposure to Vietnam's natural resource industries.

The international travel component is crucial for REAL Montana's leadership development program. It fosters personal growth and strengthens the bonds within the group. Class members learn how Montana commodities fit into the global picture, while gaining a greater understanding of natural resource industries across the globe.

We appreciate the unwavering support of REAL Montana program sponsors, alumni, and board members. Without you, this REAL Montana international experience would not be possible. St. Augustine said "The world is a book and those who do not travel read only one page." Through our travels in Vietnam, Class V added a life changing page to their book. We hope you enjoy reading this account of our ten days in Vietnam, as told by the members of REAL Montana Class V.

-Tara Becken, Program Director



MARCH 3RD

BY SHELBY GEORGE

We arrived at Tan Son Nhat Airport after flying for a combined flight time of 18 hours from Seattle between the two flights. Upon arrival, in the 97-degree weather, we did a short tour of the city on our way to the hotel and from the hotel to dinner. This involved driving through the old town square, which housed the location of many landmarks such as the Old Saigon Post Office and the Notre Dame Cathedral. The city was full of hustle and very busy. The streets were narrow, and had lots of vehicle traffic with motorcycles everywhere filling the remaining gaps in the traffic, while cruising around fearlessly. The buildings were of French architecture and were very narrow and tall, as there was no space to be wasted. Also, the power lines were running every direction hanging from poles, trees, and whatever would prop them up in order to get the job done.

I was blown away by the beauty of the city, even though it was very populated there was still nice trees growing in boulevards and overall, there wasn't much garbage laying around. The traffic flow was amazing and everyone on the street looked out for each other, whether they were driving a bus or a pedestrian walking. It was very different than Montana because it was a concrete jungle and it seemed as if there were more people in one city block than there are in the whole state. There wasn't much there for Big Sky Country!



MARCH 4TH: MORNING

BY JOSH SENECA

We had the privilege to spend part of the day at the US Consulate and got to talk to Andrew Anderson about his job and what it entails at the USDA Foreign Agricultural Service (FSA).

He talked about the history of the FSA in foreign countries and the importance of his job of reporting the supply and demand from his post to the USA. He talked about how agriculture is the most heavily managed business in the world, and his job is to remove barriers to help trade around the world. We talked about the differences of how things worked in a communist country vs our country. He explained to us that the average farm size in Vietnam was .74 acres which is smaller than a lot of American's yards. He told us that on that size of farm or ranch that a family can do well for themselves in Vietnam. We learned that Vietnam is very dependent on trade.

We also heard from Greg Harris who is the Principal Commercial Officer for the U.S. Dept. of Commerce. He talked about how Vietnam could be a big international trader. The concerns with this is that there is a lot of corruption and that the current leadership is very old and people are wondering who is next in line to lead. He told us that Vietnam has the #3 trade deficit in the world, and explained the tariff disadvantages. We also had a short explanation from Tu Le Van Anh a Vietnam Country Representative assigned to the U.S. Meat Export Federation. He talked about his work promoting the consumption of meat in his country and how all meat is required to be labeled where it comes from. He showed us pictures of local food stores and how they categorize where the meat is from each country. He told us that the favorite cut in country is the under belly cuts of meat.



MARCH 4TH: AFTERNOON

BY SHAUNA DUNN

Our second afternoon in Vietnam was both hot and heavy. With temperatures approaching 100 ° F, REAL Montana Class V was quickly learning to handle the heat and the 13-hour time change. After a delicious lunch and a coconut coffee (Yes, some had it iced), we arrived at the War Remnants Museum. This tour offered a confronting yet vital perspective on the Vietnam War's impact. After leaving the museum, I can only describe my heart as feeling heavy.

A display of military equipment used by U.S. forces, including Chinook aircraft, bombers, and battle tanks, is staged at the museum entrance. Inside, exhibits reveal wartime propaganda, weaponry, torture systems (e.g., tiger cages), guillotines used for executions, and war crimes like the My Lai massacre. While the Vietnam War ended decades ago, its aftermath continues to affect many. The museum's exhibit documenting the devastating effects of toxic chemical defoliants – napalm, white phosphorous, and Agent Orange – was particularly sobering. It showed in detail the devastation and suffering caused by the toxic chemicals used by U.S. military forces.



MARCH 4TH: CONTINUED

The museum's special exhibit, "Aspiring Beyond Challenges," was a breath of fresh air. It highlighted exemplary individuals impacted by toxic chemicals who have triumphed over life's adversities. I was inspired by stories of resilient spirits who demonstrated persistent efforts to rise above. Many seek to share the consequences of war and offer support to those affected, not only in Vietnam but throughout the world.

Our class enjoyed a dinner cruise on the Indochina Queen on Monday evening. We enjoyed the views of Ho Chi Minh City (referred to as Saigon by the locals) from the Saigon River and traditional music. The buffet offered a range of dishes, and it's safe to say this Montana class made a dent on the seafood selections.



MARCH 5TH- MORNING

BY TYLER TINTZMAN

On March 5th, we traveled to a crop research facility where we inspected testing plots for lettuce, spinach, and mushrooms amongst others. The research was funded by the government with a purpose of improving crop production and producing genetics that could be sold to Vietnamese farmers. The visit was interesting to better understand the local agricultural industry as well as the current research being completed.

After the research center the next stop was at a local dairy farm. The farm had approximately eighteen to twenty cows in milk production, two bulls, and a couple of heifers that were set to enter production within the next year. The cows were imported from Holland and due to the heat were under constant water from an overhead sprinkler system. The cows were producing three to four gallons of milk per day and the milk was being used for drinking quality milk. All the milk produced at the facility was purchased by the government. The primary food source for the cows was silage, and hay forages.

The last stop of the morning was at a local worm farm. The farm served two purposes, first the worms were responsible for composting local waste and manure that would then be used for fertilizer by local farmers. Once the compost was ready to be purchased by farmers, the worms were removed and sold as fish food to local fisheries. The cost to set up one section of the worm farms was \$10MM Dong, or \$400. Once set up, the farm could produce enough value from compost and worm sales to generate \$2MM Dong, or \$80 every 20 days and would be profitable after just five rounds of composting. This was one of the most interesting visits that we were able to experience during our time in Ho Chi Minh City and the class was impressed by the resourcefulness of the local farmers.



MARCH 5TH- AFTERNOON

BY BRIAN HOGUE

REAL Montana Class V ventured to the Cu Chi Tunnels, a vast underground network located northwest of Ho Chi Minh City. Stretching over 75 miles, these tunnels were originally built during the fight for Vietnamese independence from France in the 1940s. The Viet Cong then expanded them significantly during the Vietnam War, using them as a hidden base of operations.

Beyond sheltering soldiers, the tunnels housed hospitals, living quarters, and supply caches. Their intricate design, complete with booby traps, ventilation, and multiple levels, made them incredibly difficult for American forces to navigate and destroy. Exploring these tunnels, we tried to imagine the experiences of both sides. The Vietnamese perseverance in building and living underground is hard to grasp, as is the unnerving challenge American soldiers faced fighting an invisible enemy. The mental fortitude required by both sides during this conflict left a lasting impression on our class.



MARCH 6TH

BY LACEY MORRISON

On the morning of March 6th, we went south from Ho Chi Minh City to the city of My Tho in the Mekong River Delta Region. Our first stop was a vegetable farm where they spoke to us about their different farming practices that the focus on between leaf and vegetable root crops. The farmer we visited with was a mid-size farmer that contracts with wholesale suppliers. We were welcomed to a local farmer's home where we enjoyed fresh coconut water.

After the tour of the vegetable farm, we headed on a river tour where we visited Thoi Son Island, also known as Unicorn Island. The group was greeted with a traditional performance and song/dance interpretation where the women sang about the pride they have for their hometown. The group enjoyed fresh fruit and a tour in smaller boats through the village's intricate irrigation channels.

We ended the activities that day with a tour of a coconut candy operation where they were in the process of cooking the coconuts to make sugar and packaging the candy they made. After the candy operation, we visited a tilapia farm that was situated on the banks of the river channel. The tilapia farm raised over 50,000 fish together at once, where they spend approximately 7 months before they get sold.



MARCH 7TH

BY SIMON MCCANN

March 7th was a travel day from Ho Chi Minh City (southern Vietnam) to Hanoi (northern Vietnam) for REAL MT Class V. We woke up and packed our bags, then went to the airport for a short, two-hour flight. Our flight was canceled but our tour guide was able to get the entire class on an earlier flight. It took everyone moving efficiently and working together as a team to catch the earlier flight, but we all made it while gaining two more hours in Hanoi upon arrival.

Upon arriving in Hanoi, we immediately noticed the difference in both landscape and temperature. Hanoi was much cooler than southern Vietnam and with more mountainous terrain. We toured the city in the afternoon which included walking through the local markets before going to a Water Puppet show to learn more about Vietnamese culture and their history. After the water puppet show, we ate dinner as a class and found our rooms to rest for an exciting second half of our international experience.

I was impressed with both the southern and northern Vietnamese population. A young, hard-working population that welcomed us throughout our travels. The landscape surrounding Hanoi was filled with rice paddy farms and large limestone mountains. A majority of the Vietnamese population lives a very simply life due to limited income and opportunity.

Our tour through old town Hanoi and the water puppet show were both great experiences to learn more about their culture and history. Many locals rely on shopping markets daily to obtain fresh produce and protein. The markets lack refrigeration so red meat and other proteins sit a room temperature at the street markets and are often purchased and cooked in the same day. The water puppet show took our class back to 11th century history, where it originated in the villages of the Red River Delta in northern Vietnam. As a common type of art, the 45 minutes show involves many short scenes showcasing their history and beliefs. Aside from tourism, water puppet shows were historically used to celebrate the end of each rice harvest, religious festivals or even as entertainment for the local population.

MARCH 7TH- CONTINUED

Upon on arrival to Hanoi. I was most impacted by our tour through the old town markets. It was impressive, yet humbling, to see everyone living a very happy, simple life. Seeing various cuts of red meat, caged chickens and live fish in buckets seemed to take me back in time before refrigeration, meat processing plants and grocery stores. There were families of four riding together on a single moped and it really made me thankful for the opportunities and amenities we take for granted in Montana.

Like Montana, Vietnam has significant landscape variances from south to north, as Montana has from east to west. They also both have very populated, developed towns while also being 30 minutes from villages where their people still live in stilt homes that lack utilities, etc. Similar to Montana, they grow a variety of crops, raise livestock and are able to be relatively self-sufficient by living off the land and nearby aquaculture. The largest contrast to Montana would be the lack of development and differences in government. They don't have the means to invest in modern day equipment and technology that creates the efficiencies that are now common in Montana agriculture.



MARCH 8TH- MORNING

BY DAVID CRASCO

This was International Women's Day, so everywhere we went we saw women dressed in their finest traditional clothing. It was fascinating!

We started the day with a bus ride to Quan Thanh Temple. We toured the temple, where we learned about the different Buddha statues and some fascinating history about the culture. From the temple, the class took a short walk to visit the John McCain memorial and learned about the significant roll John McCain played in restoring favorable relations between the United States and Vietnam. Next, the class took the bus to a museum and learned about the different cultural regions of Vietnam, including information about some traditions and rituals.



MARCH 8TH- AFTERNOON

BY CAMERON WOHLSCHLEGEL



After lunch we visited Ho Chi Minh's Mausoleum in the government-controlled sector. At the mausoleum we witnessed the changing of the guards, who change duties on the hour. Then after a short walk, we viewed the beautiful Pagoda of Lady Budha that was built in the 14th Century. After leaving the government sector we went over to visit the Blue Dragon Foundation. The BDF was founded in order to help street kids get an education and nutrition and allowing them to do "kid stuff" instead of working the streets for food and money 24/7. Now, in addition to helping street kids, the foundation is helping save victims of sexual slavery and trafficking. The foundation helps these woman get back on their feet and escape the sex trade while also working with the government to develop regulations and laws to help end human trafficking.

The evening finished with a cycle trolley through city of Hanoi and visiting Train Street.

MARCH 9TH-MORNING

BY CASSI HAMMERNESS

We left the city streets and sounds of Hanoi and ventured out into the countryside, which we all were looking forward to. Our first stop was with a vegetable farmer who went by the name “Mandy”. Her Vietnamese name is actually a boy name, because she said her father had hoped for a boy. She married a man with the same name as her, so now she goes by Mandy. She was extremely knowledgeable and sweet and took us on a walk through tour of the morning market. We saw stall after stall of fresh vegetables, with women there to sell us the harvest from that morning. We also saw baskets filled with chickens, and a man selling them that was also administering a vaccine. There was also dog meat for sale, but that was not in the regular market, and Mandy said that is not common in this village to eat dogs, as a lot of people have them as pets. We were still a bit shocked to see that! Speaking of meat, Mandy said that the women selling meat products in the butcher section of the market get up very early in the morning, harvest an animal for the market that day, and then come to the market with the fresh meat to sell. It really does not get much fresher than that! There was a large assortment of pork, poultry, and fish/seafood for sale.

Mandy and our tour guide, T, had us play a really fun game. T told us the name of 5 items, but he told us the Vietnamese name, and he didn't tell us how to spell them. We had to 20,000 Vietnamese Dong to spend (less than \$1) to buy these 5 items. We had to interact with the locals to figure out what the items were, and then try to get the best price for them. The team that got all the items correct and had the most Dong left over won. Some of the items were hard to figure out. For example, potato was on the list, so there was a team that bought a sweet potato instead, thinking they were buying the correct item. It's safe to say this game was a favorite for everyone, and we sure loved getting to pretend to be local shoppers for a bit. This was definitely one of the top 3 things we did in Vietnam in my opinion.

MARCH 9TH- CONTINUED

After the market game, we toured Mandy and her in-laws' vegetable farm. The farms here are very small – it really looks like a big garden patch (less than 1 acre). But that is what the government gives them to farm. Each plot specializes in a certain crop. Mandy and her family were growing cabbages on one plot we visited. She showed us a neighbors' plot and said he was very good at growing tomatoes. We walked to Mandy's home to make lunch with ingredients we had purchased at the market. Her home was very clean and beautiful and three stories tall. She has three daughters, and one was there to help us with lunch. We made spring rolls, pho, a really delicious kohlrabi salad, and also a beef dish. It was lovely to prepare and share a meal together. After we left Mandy's home, we headed to the hydro electric dam.



MARCH 9TH- AFTERNOON

BY CHRISTOPHER ANDERSON

We wrapped up lunch with our family host in Cao Phong and started our bus ride into the Hoa Binh Province. The first stop was a hydro electric dam built by the Russians for Vietnam after the end of the Vietnam War. We were able to tour the entire hydro facility in depth because we were accompanied by one of the supervisors of the facility. He was able to take us deep underground to see the turbines inner workings that normally the public isn't able to see. It is one of multiple dams on the Black River that provides the bulk of the power used in Hanoi. The dam is currently undergoing an expansion to add two more turbines and add an additional 480 MW of output bringing the dam's total capacity up to 2400 MW.

After finishing the tour of the dam we visited Giang Mo village which is home to some of the Muong minority people. They are predominately rice farmers that are able to harvest two crops per year. They showed us rice grinding that can be done either by hand or powered by a motor. They performed some traditional songs and dances for us and then prepared a traditional meal for us. We did all of this in the matriarch of the village's home. She spoke their native dialect and a good amount of Vietnamese and then was able to talk to our guide who could translate for us. Other than rice farming the people of this village are known for their pillow making skills.



MARCH 9TH- CONTINUED

It was great to see their use of hydro electricity thanks to Russian support after the war. It was very interesting to learn that the whole plant had been built underground because the Russians were scared the United States might bomb the facility during the cold war. The Vietnamese have grown in population and it is good to see them expanding the dam's production capacity on their own without outside assistance. The initial construction of the dam took 15 years from 1979 to 1994. Expansion started in 2022 and they expect to complete it in 2025 barring any financial issues.

The tour of the village was very interesting to see one of the many minority groups in Vietnam. Vietnam has 30+ minority groups living through the country. Many of these groups don't speak Vietnamese as a primary language and only have a handful of people in the village that can speak to outside visitors when they come. The Vietnamese government is working to provide better education to the young people of the village so many of them are now starting to learn Vietnamese in school while using their family's dialect as a first language. Most people of the village are at a level of income just above subsistence farming. They occasionally get some extra money from their pillow making and tourism but otherwise rely entirely on the rice farming in the area to provide for their families. Some of the men will drive into one of the larger nearby towns/cities to work jobs throughout the week and then return on the weekend to help the village.

For me the most impactful part of this day and the trip at large was the drive and desire of the Vietnamese people to grow and make their homes and country a better place. I saw this in the happiness and zeal of the supervisor showing us the hydro electric facility and in the matriarch of the village we visited. They are always trying to make things better and improve and do more with what they have.

With Montana it is very similar, we are always trying to grow and improve and make better use of our resources. Most of our group in our off time is talking about some new project or building or venture they are working on to better their hometown or business or family. The difference between Montana and Vietnam is we have better access to capital and can make larger improvements because of our embrace of capitalism and democracy. I think those things give us an advantage in terms of what we are capable of accomplishing but the drive between our people and their people is nearly identical.

MARCH 10TH- MORNING

BY KATIE KUHR

We drove from Hoa Binh to Cuc Phuong, just southwest of Hanoi, to visit the Cuc Phuong National Park. While travelling to Cuc Phuong, we were able to enjoy the beautiful scenery along the way, including sugar cane plantations, rice fields, limestone mountains, dense forests and orange groves. The Park itself presented as very green and lush against the contrasting mountains. We met with a Park official who presented the Park's history. Established in 1962, the park is the oldest national park in Vietnam and provides habitat for some of Asia's rarest animal and plant species, including the Clouded Leopard and Delcour's Langur.

My Insights: I was impressed with the natural beauty of the Park and the efforts made by the Park officials to research, preserve, and protect the Park and its inhabitants.

Most Impactful: I was stunned by the beautiful scenery along the way and in the Park. The first portion of the Vietnam trip was predominantly spent in an urban setting so I was pleasantly surprised to experience the picturesque countryside.

How does this compare and contrast to Montana? Growing up, I spent time in Glacier National Park, which is very dear to my heart. I was happy to see that other countries value these important ecosystems as much as Montana does.



MARCH 10TH- AFTERNOON

BY CLAY D. REDDING

After learning about Cuc Phuong National Park, we visited the Endangered Primate Rescue Centre where we learned about endangered primates and what the Rescue Centre is doing to help. Formed in 1993, the Centre rescues the primates from illegal hunters that hunt the primates for medicine and meat. The Centre currently houses about 300 individual primates. There are 12 kinds of Langurs, 3 species of Gibbons and 2 species of Loris at the Centre. Not only does the Centre rescue the primates, they breed them and do research on all the different species. The primates are typically in the Centre for 2 years. Initially, the primates are housed in smaller areas as they arrive at the Centre. The primates then move into larger and larger areas as they near full release back into the wild.

After the Primate Rescue Centre, we then took a 2-hour hike through Cuc Phuong National Park where we traveled through very dense, muddy, rocky terrain. On this hike, we were able to grab some beautiful photos of an ancient tree that is said to be around 1000 years old and stands about 50 meters tall. The 3km hike was a great experience that showed us a very different environment than what we find in Montana.

After our hike, we traveled to Ninh Binh City. On our way there we saw very beautiful limestone mountains, rice fields, and other agricultural crops. Once at Ninh Binh, we arrived at the gorgeous Ninh Binh Legend Hotel where we finished our day with a wonderful dinner.



MARCH 11TH

BY JESSICA MURRAY

We started the morning in Ninh Binh where our tour guide, T, told us is a very rich part of the country. Many cement factories are in this area due to an abundance of limestone. This area is also becoming a very popular area for tourists so there is land being converted from agricultural uses to resorts and other tourist attractions. Outside of Ninh Binh we got on bicycles and biked through the beautiful rice paddies. We were able to see some of the local farmers weeding and transplanting rice by hand. From there, we rode our bicycles to a Buddhist temple that was located on the side of the mountain. This temple had three levels that scaled the mountain and overlooked paddy fields and the Ngo Dong River. We rounded out the morning with a Tam Coc boat tour of local limestone caves and adjacent paddy fields. Two to a boat, we were rowed by local farmers through this beautiful area they call home. After lunch, we traveled back to Hanoi to have our final dinner in Vietnam.



MARCH 12TH

BY WESTON MERRILL

Today we had the opportunity to join an optional tour offered by our guide to Halong Bay about 2 hours drive from Hanoi. I was on the fence about the tour but in the end decided to go and I do not regret it. As we approached the bay from a distance we were able to finally see some port infrastructure and even a large sign for Vietnam Flour Mills. Halong Bay itself was incredible. Ancient limestone rocks dot the watery landscape. Before being protected as a UNESCO Natural Wonder of the World fish farmers lived on floating houses on the bay. There are still a few permanent floating oyster farms in the bay that are being transitioned out to protect the waters from pollution caused by permanent floating operations. Later, the group made our way to the airport for the long trek home.



FINAL THOUGHTS

BY CHISHOLM CHRISTENSEN

My worldview ten days ago consisted of the American mainland and my Canadian horizon. I feel now as though my horizon has been inverted. On the opposite side of the globe looking at the world with a completely flipped point of view.

I have been in Vietnam these past two weeks and I am determined to never look at the world through the same lens again. The country is a different way of life than anything I have ever experienced and something incomprehensible before becoming immersed within it.

I'm sure anyone having traveled to another culture has many of the same thoughts that I'm having on this flight home. Prompted to look at the world a little differently and with a little more understanding that I can only see that world with my own eyes and from my own perspective. To anyone who has yet to physically travel past their comfort zone I would express to them to do what is in their power to broaden their horizons. Life is growth and growth doesn't occur inside a comfort zone.

Charlie Jones has a quote that 'you will be the same person in five years as you are today except for the people you meet and the books you read.' I don't subscribe to that doctrine completely and I might add 'the places you go', to that list of things that would change you but after this trip I do plan on going out of my way to meet more people, read more books, and this initial travel experience has sparked a desire for more.

Ho Chi Minh in the south, Ha Noi to the north, Ninh Binh rainforest inland, Ha Long Bay on the coast, and Sapa village in the mountains. From Cities of millions to villages of hundreds, booming urban markets to roadside vendors, alleyways to airways, business tables to barrooms and from five star hotels to dingy night buses; I feel like I received the whole of a Vietnam experience.

I never felt wholly unsafe in Vietnam. Uncomfortable a couple times but only twice in two weeks did I witness words spoken in anger and, both of those being traffic disputes - thankfully neither were directed towards me. In Vietnam the traffic just flows so I was amazed there weren't more altercations. Street lights, turn signals and right of way are more guidelines than rules and crossing a busy street of bikes, scooters, cars and busses is most safely accomplished by stepping into an empty space in the roadway and purposefully but not quickly consistently walking to the other side. The traffic moves around you much like a river would flow around a stone. I had the opportunity to ride a scooter in this traffic as well and everyone just seems to respect a very minimal bubble. As long as the moves you make are within reason and not too sporadic it seems to work. In a city of small streets and millions I never really experienced a stand still. On the whole people were very respectful, generous, hospitable, and understanding both night and day.

FINAL THOUGHTS- CONTINUED

Vietnam is a country roughly the size of my home state of Montana but with a population densities insanely different. Where my home state just passed 1 million residents, Vietnam boasts almost 100 million. 8 million and 9 million in just Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City respectively.

The population density, street markets, traffic, hospitality, and endearing demeanor of the people, to me were the most bewildering attributes of Vietnamese culture. Before arriving in the country I would have thought communism, Vietnam war animosity, and perhaps even a degree of prejudice might be the persisting sentiment. Vietnam is a communist country but much of what I experienced had the feel of a free market.

I had thought there might be some lingering animosity towards Americans after the Vietnam conflict. But I never experienced any such negativities. Even when I asked about their thoughts on the war many individuals explained that the war was in the past and 'let bygones be bygones'. They are proud that they won their independence, much like Americans with Great Britain, but it would seem the vast majority do not harbor any ill will towards their now economic partners.

Many Vietnamese expressed an interest in our politics. And, although they are a communist country, explained that they vote for local government to represent them and those individuals then work to make decisions or influence national policy. They can't own land necessarily but repeating 50 year leases are not uncommon. And how much you have to farm might depend on how many children you have to take care of or help you work it. The government gives a stipend after a certain age much like our social security and they view a happy household as three generations living together under the same roof. First story business, second grandparents, third parents and fourth children. Urban development might only be twelve feet wide and two rooms deep but at least four stories stacked and no room between most houses except a motorcycle wide alley every so often leading to deeper households off the main road.

There are things and lessons that I will take with me from this trip that I hope will last a lifetime. Things that I took for granted that I now starkly realize are not the norm for the majority of the world. Vietnam was amazing as my first international experience. I feel extremely lucky to have done it through REAL Montana with a great group of classmates and staff. It was an experience I will grow from personally and professionally and one that has certainly challenged and changed me and my classmates for the better.

REFLECTIONS FROM CLASS V



“My trip to Vietnam was a powerful lesson in reconciliation. My Witnessing how two former wartime enemies, Vietnam and the United States, have become such strong partners demonstrates the incredible power of forgiveness and moving forward. It made me realize that even the most seemingly insurmountable conflicts can be resolved. This experience inspires me to approach challenges in my own life with a spirit of understanding and a willingness to find common ground, even with those I may disagree with.”

-Brian Hogue

“Throughout our lives, we face challenges that push us out of our comfort zone and test our limits. While avoiding these uncomfortable scenarios is tempting, adopting a growth mindset allows us to lean in and embrace them. A growth mindset is a belief that our abilities and intelligence can be developed through dedication, hard work, and a willingness to learn from failures and setbacks. This mindset starkly contrasts with a fixed mindset, which assumes that our talents and intelligence are fixed traits that cannot be improved. When we embrace a growth mindset, we believe that our abilities are not set in stone and that we can overcome obstacles and achieve our goals with effort and perseverance. Throughout our REAL Montana journey, we have witnessed the beauty of a growth mindset. The Vietnamese people are no exception. We saw incredible strength and resiliency, with people embracing challenges as opportunities for growth—and most did it with a smile on their faces! One of the greatest things about travel is seeing how many good, kind, and beautiful people there are in the world.”

-Shauna Dunn



“I was reminded that leadership comes in many shapes and sizes. Whether it’s a worm farmer, or an advocate for survivors of human trafficking, or the owner of a small vegetable plantation, it takes strong leaders to make a difference.”

-Katie Kuhr





REFLECTIONS FROM CLASS V

“One of the leadership lessons I took away from this trip was the importance of perseverance. The Vietnamese have overcome intra and international conflict, remain somewhat oppressed, and keep pushing to better themselves, their families, and their country. There is a lot to learn about forging on even when nothing goes your way.”

-Jessica Murray

“One thing I learned on the trip to Vietnam was how important it is to work together, stay together, stay calm, and work towards a goal as a larger group in a stressful environment. I was impressed with how well the group helped each other, stayed calm and worked through challenging moments. This would not have been possible without the group being full of true leaders. It was a very pleasant time with great people.”

-Clay Redding

REFLECTIONS FROM CLASS V



“The most impactful part of the trip on me was the realization that other people may live differently but different doesn’t necessarily mean wrong. I was prompted to look at the world from a new vantage point and with a little more understanding that I can only see that world with my own eyes and from my own perspective and that gaining perspective is always beneficial.”

-Chisholm Christensen





REAL Montana Class V

Back (L to R): Clay Redding, Josh Senecal, Simon McCann, Brian Hogue, Christopher Anderson, Chisholm Christensen, Jessica Murray, Weston Merrill

Front (L to R): Shelby George, Tyler Tintzman, David Crasco, Katie Kuhr, Cameron Wohlschlegel, Lacey Morrison, Cassi Hammerness, Shauna Dunn