

*Reflection helps students stretch beyond borders to a more connected, integrated perspective on community building.*

Melissa Gilbert

### *Give Them Shelter*

*We wanted to take the students out of their comfort zone.*



#### **Building Concepts—and a House—with Cultural Universals in the Post-Katrina South**

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Food, clothing, and shelter are basic human needs, and studying these “cultural universals” helps explain why cultures differ in different times and places. Current and prospective social studies teachers gained a powerful experience of the element of shelter that they will use to create service-learning experiences for young children they will later teach. In collaboration with Habitat for Humanity in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, students participated in the building of a house in the hurricane-ravaged area. They also studied the theoretical underpinnings and applications of social studies teaching through cultural universals, using the disciplines of history, geography, politics, government, civics, cultural studies, and economics.

One of several cultural differences the students discovered in Hattiesburg was the pace and approach of the service-learning project. Eager to get busy right away, students were slightly frustrated that the onsite project managers wanted to take some time to get acquainted before actually beginning to work. They also learned from the elderly woman whose house they were building. An immigrant to the United States, she told them stories of her early life in Morocco as well as her experience surviving Hurricane Katrina. This project was the beginning of a university-community project that will continue in subsequent summers, helping more elementary school teachers learn by doing.