

The Mercury News

The Newspaper of Silicon Valley
MercuryNews.com

Three students back at UC Berkeley after Haiti ordeal

By Matt O'Brien | Contra Costa Times | January 20, 2010

BERKELEY — After a tiny aircraft picked up two of them from a remote Haitian runway, all three of the UC Berkeley students stranded in the Caribbean nation after the Jan. 12 earthquake are now back on campus for the first week of the semester, university officials said Wednesday.

A private rescue team of military veterans says it traveled by air and land Sunday to retrieve two graduate students who were stuck in the southwestern port city of Les Cayes. The town was far enough from the quake's epicenter to not be severely damaged, but has become a refuge for Haitian evacuees fleeing the capital, Port-au-Prince.

"We were contacted by their insurer, who let us know they were potentially in harm's way," said Daniel Richards, director of Boston-based Global Rescue. "Many of the roads were impassable, and the security situation was deteriorating."

The university said its risk management office was able to keep track of the students because one of them had signed up for the campus travel insurance plan before she left.

Richards said he sent a team by land and air to rescue the students. While the ground team left much earlier, a contracted fixed-wing aircraft was able to be dispatched more quickly, landing on a small runway outside of town.

The Massachusetts-based contractor, which has partnered with governments and other institutions working on relief efforts, said the students are among dozens of people it has evacuated from Haiti in the past week. It has also carried dozens of relief workers into Haiti at no cost to them, Richards said.

The university has said two students had been in Les Cayes when the earthquake struck.

The family of another student, Glodine Jourdan, was able to charter a plane so she could fly to the Dominican Republic and on to the United States, university officials said, although they could not say when she left Haiti.

None of the students was injured during the quake or its aftermath.