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MSEC students in the Dominican Republic work directly with members of local communities to create sustainable entrepreneurial solutions to complex challenges (front cover). UMD Senior Sade Ayinde at a holy Buddhist temple called the Hsyimbye Paya in Mingun, Myanmar, courtesy of Sade Ayinde. (inside cover). Trajan’s Column and the church, the Santissimo Nome di Maria al Foro Traiano (Holy Name of Mary at Trajan’s Forum) in Rome, Italy (back cover).
UMD Social Entrepreneurs Bring New Vision to Nicaragua through Technology

For the third straight year, a cohort of UMD students traveled to Nicaragua to participate in the popular Maryland Social Entrepreneur Corps (MSEC) program. Like their predecessors, this year’s MSEC group assisted members of local communities using the micro-consignment model developed by Greg Van Kirk, co-founder and president of Social Entrepreneur Corps.

Smith Students Spark Entrepreneurship in Tibetan Youth

As part of the “ChangeTheWorld” Nonprofit Consulting Program at the Smith School’s Center for Social Value Creation, University of Maryland students partnered with the Central Tibetan Administration to spark Tibetan youth’s excitement for entrepreneurial endeavors.

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For the third straight year, a cohort of UMD students traveled to Nicaragua to participate in the popular Maryland Social Entrepreneur Corps (MSEC) program. Like their predecessors, this year’s MSEC group assisted members of local communities using the micro-consignment model developed by Greg Van Kirk, co-founder and president of Social Entrepreneur Corps. The product they helped pitch, however, marked a technological leap for all, and one that may revolutionize vision care in rural Nicaragua.

Under the larger goal of offering easier health options to non-urban Nicaraguans, MSEC students helped introduce eye examinations utilizing the Smart Vision One system. This technology involves an attachment to an iPhone camera and an application. Together, these scan the patient’s eyes, taking five pictures, and then calculate any necessary prescription using the best three pictures. “This is groundbreaking technology because you can get eye info on the spot,” explained Van Kirk, who is also director of social ventures at Smart Vision Labs. “And since it’s a startup company, students are really helping us design.” Another exciting aspect of this program is the certification process it offers for residents. Training a person who has never prescribed glasses to do it independently using Smart Vision One technology is a big part of the process, said Van Kirk.

Having previously participated in a traditional study abroad program in Cape Town, South Africa, senior finance and marketing major Alexis Marion wanted to take part in a program that could ignite change. The eight-week summer MSEC program in Nicaragua—the second poorest country in the Western Hemisphere—certainly met that test. “My experience was amazing,” Marion said. “As with anything you do for an extended period of time, my time in country had its ups and downs, but I wouldn’t have traded this experience for anything. I learned a lot about myself.”

Marion’s group focused on assisting with Smart Vision One technology. “We would work directly with local businesses and leave them with lasting deliverables they can opt to use,” said Marion. “It makes it possible for the community advisors to perform eye exams to get the exact prescription for patients without the large machine we are accustomed to in an American optometrist’s offices.”
to Nicaragua through Technology
The students performed the tests in different areas in Nicaragua, while brainstorming ideas to make the experience better. “We had to think of ways to improve the process in campaigns, and develop a plan for training new advisors in the technology based on our experience with it,” Marion said.

Senior Andrew Nurse, who was also in Nicaragua, said he enjoyed the program because he got hands-on experience in a developing country while achieving course credit. “I am grateful for the opportunity provided to me to learn Spanish through immersion and have three great home-stays, each in a different city, throughout Nicaragua,” Nurse said. “I feel as though as a group we achieved some measurable accomplishments for both the organization, and more importantly, the people of Nicaragua.”

Using Smart Vision One to diagnose the prescription patients needed for eyeglasses, Nurse explained, allowed Nicaraguan entrepreneurs to provide eyeglasses long-distance for the first time. And he, too, noted that the program will have a longer-lasting effect because it has trained local Nicaraguan staff to use the technology after the students’ departure.

Nurse also learned the importance of celebrating small victories, of focusing on his personal takeaways, and of the difficulty of international development. “From the MSEC program, I have taken away a basic understanding of Spanish, which I have already used multiple times in the week since the program ended,” he said. “I learned much about the culture of Nicaragua and Latin America and the living conditions in developing countries.”

MSEC students were paired in groups that mixed multiple academic majors and lived with host families throughout the program. “This is a very different program—students are not just visiting, but they’re learning empathy so they can understand the issues,” said Associate Director for Education Abroad Jennifer Precht. “They’re not working for the community, but they are working with it. The idea is to humble them and prepare their minds to be open, to introduce them to the foundation while teaching them problem-solving skills. We had a great group of students,” Precht said.

To learn more about MSEC, including this past summer’s other cohorts to the Dominican Republic and Ecuador, go to http://ter.ps/msec.

By Rokia Hassanein, OIA Communications Assistant
Representatives from a variety of sectors and from across the United States gathered at UMD for its first conference to discuss Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer (LGBTQ) issues in international education. The Conference on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity in International Education, dubbed “Somewhere Over the Rainbow,” addressed multiple issues, including ethnocentrism and the racial tensions that some LGBTQ international students might face in the U.S., assumptions and conclusions that study abroad students may make based on limited understanding of different cultures, and sexual harassment. The 2015 conference was the product of a collaboration of several UMD offices, including International Students & Scholar Services, Education Abroad, and the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender (LGBT) Equity Center, among others.

The event highlighted “LGBTQ issues and their intersection with international education—mostly for topics of study abroad where domestic students are going abroad or for international student issues,” said International Student Adviser Katrina Knudsen. One of these is the underrepresentation of the LGBTQ community within Education Abroad (EA).

“While it can be difficult to track students who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, etc., since many from those communities may not choose to self-disclose, the committee does believe that these communities are underrepresented in Education Abroad,” said EA advisor Conrad Zeutenhorst.

But equity for the LGBTQ community also begins with equipping professionals in international education and education abroad to support LGBTQ students and meet their needs, Zeutenhorst said. “The conference invited colleagues and professionals to share their experiences and insights into working with LGBTQ students, from which we hope to generate resources and better capability for information-sharing,” said Zeutenhorst. “It is also our hope that a better understanding of these students by Education Abroad professionals will enable them to make the most of their study abroad experiences.”

Nick Sakurai, the director of leadership initiatives at the LGBT Equity Center, said he was proud of the event process and how it brought together non-profit, government, and higher education worlds. “When we think about lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer issues internationally, there are roughly 70 countries where same-sex sexuality is criminalized, and many countries where transgender people are forced to be sterilized to access appropriate identity documents or entirely prohibited from accessing them,” Sakurai said. “When we’re sending students to and receiving students from many different cultural and legal contexts, we need to be especially prepared to serve our students and the complex needs that can arise—from safety to housing to human rights to simply understanding a different cultural context.”

Sakurai said he heard “many great suggestions and good practices” to support students about ways in which diversity and human rights issues, such as LGBTQ rights, can be assimilated into a curricula, which includes conducting LGBTQ inclusion training.

“I’m hopeful for the future of the conversation, that we are building towards more LGBTQ-inclusive and diversity-affirming practices in international education,” he said. ❖

BY ROKIA HASSANEIN, QIA COMMUNICATIONS ASSISTANT
One of UMD’s guiding principles—Fearless Ideas—aptly describes the essence of global entrepreneurship, as a team of graduate students from the Robert H. Smith School of Business learned this past Spring Semester. As part of the “ChangeTheWorld” Nonprofit Consulting Program at the Smith School’s Center for Social Value Creation, Rahul Shah (MBA/MS ’15), Veena Thangavelu (MBA/MPP ’17), Nick Fu (MBA/MS ’15), and Victoria Ryan (MBA/MPP ’17) joined forces to work with the Tibetan Entrepreneurship Development Initiative (TED) of the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA), also known as the Tibetan Government-In-Exile. ChangeTheWorld strives to prepare students to make socially, economically, and environmentally better decisions no matter what career path they pursue. TED’s mission is to mobilize and amplify the Tibetan entrepreneurial spirit by providing end-to-end support for Tibetans of the diaspora, including legal support, mentoring, and advising through a start-up accelerator, entrepreneurship education for youth, and seed funding. Working with TED to develop a co-curricular entrepreneurship program based on hands-on learning offered the UMD team a unique opportunity to apply their classroom concepts and experiences.

Over the course of five months’ work with Tenzin Norsang, program officer of student entrepreneurship at TED, the Smith team strengthened their understanding and appreciation for Tibetan culture, entrepreneurship in refugee communities, and inter-cultural partnerships. The TED initiative is an ambitious charge for the CTA, but one that could help Tibetans who wish to move beyond micro-enterprises to developing leading businesses in their industry of choice. The program created by the UMD team, therefore, has the potential to provide economic stability and job creation for an entire refugee community. In the process, these entrepreneurs may also achieve a greater level of influence in the discussion of refugee policy in India, potentially providing opportunities for land ownership and access to loans.

“The impact of this project is huge—it’s the foundation of the Tibetan government’s entrepreneurial initiative,” said Pammi Bhullar, director of the ChangeTheWorld Nonprofit Consulting Program. “Essentially, TED is hoping entrepreneurship is going to bring the next generation out of this state of dependency to become more self-reliant. This is a very different way to look at entrepreneurship—using entrepreneurship to lift up a refugee community.”

In January 2015, the students began working with Norsang via Skype to understand the full scope of the project and the potential impact of their recommendation. But it wasn’t until the students traveled to India over spring break for an eight-day sprint of conducting interviews with local entrepreneurs and school teachers, running focus groups with Tibetan youth, and meeting government officials, that the team was able to gather the insight needed to fully develop this entrepreneurship program. Smith’s Center for International Business Education and Research (CIBER) funded the participants with $1,000 grants for their travel to India.

“Being onsite was not only beneficial to the development of our project, but also generated strong buy-in from those who will actually implement the deliverable,” Shah said. “The school principal, administrator, and entrepreneurship teacher saw how passionate
the team was about the end goal of creating a pipeline of successful Tibetan entrepreneurs. The positive energy was indeed contagious, and I believe all stakeholders are now very enthusiastic about our final deliverable.”

While the students were in Dharamsala, the team was recognized at the Tibetan government’s parliamentary meetings for their work. They even had the opportunity to speak with Prime Minister Lobsang Sangay, Finance Minister Tsering Dhondup, and Speaker of Parliament Penpa Tsering.

In June, the ChangeTheWorld team presented their final recommendations for the co-curricular entrepreneurship program to the TED team. The Tibetan Children’s Village in Dharamsala then launched a successful pilot of the program, which will be eventually rolled out to nearly 70 Tibetan schools in India. To top the semester off, the team was selected to present at the Tibetan Innovation Challenge in New York City, where His Holiness, the Dalai Lama, was among the panel of esteemed judges.

Commenting on her experience, Thangavelu said: “This project gave us access to a country renowned for its rich cultural diversity that is otherwise inaccessible. Working with a marginalized population to empower an upcoming generation reinforced my personal narrative of being a global change maker.”

Opportunities such as TED have already propelled Smith students in their careers. Upon completion of this project, Shah was offered a job at Technoserve, a nonprofit that develops business solutions to poverty by linking people to information, capital, and markets. “It’s really great to be in Mumbai, on-the-ground, working with social entrepreneurs and their teams to scale up their organization and impact,” Shah said. “I have to say, ChangeTheWorld genuinely prepared me well.”

To learn more, visit http://tibetanentrepreneurs.org.

By Pammi Bhullar, Smith School’s Center for Social Value Creation

Outside of the Tibetan Children’s Village, the ChangeTheWorld team takes a break following their focus groups with 18 Tibetan high school students to acknowledge the school’s inspirational motto inscribed on the building overseeing the soccer field, “Come to Learn. Go to Serve.” (From left to right: Rahul Shah, Tenzin Norsang, Victoria Ryan, Veena Thangavelu, Pammi Bhullar, and Nick Fu). Photo by Eric Tracey.
Seven years ago, the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources (AGNR) pioneered at UMD a new model for collaborative degrees with international partners. Dubbed “2+2,” it involved students at two leading Chinese universities—China Agricultural University (CAU) and Northwest Agriculture and Forestry University (Northwest A&F)—doing their first two years of basic coursework at their “home” institution, and then applying to complete their undergraduate degree with two years of advanced study at UMD. With the success of the 60 students who have already graduated from the program, and the 50 more currently enrolled, AGNR recently announced an expansion of its “2+2” portfolio, involving new partners and topics of study.

In September, a delegation from AGNR visited CAU and Northwest A&F to renew the existing “2+2” programs, which offer degree options in agricultural and resource economics, animal and avian sciences, nutrition and food science, and plant science and landscape architecture. While at CAU, the delegation also...
concluded an additional agreement, adding environmental science and technology to the list of UMD majors open to CAU students. The delegation also completed an environmental science “2+2” agreement with an entirely new partner: Xiamen University, a top-ranked institution located in Fujian province.

“Either of these new agreements with CAU or Xiamen could double the number of 2+2 students at AGNR. Together, the two agreements could triple the enrollment,” said Dan Kugler, assistant dean for special programs at AGNR. According to Kugler, the benefits of expanding the mobility program extend to both countries. “Students from China benefit from experiencing an inquiry-based education style and cultural immersion,” he said. “U.S. students benefit from the diversity and cross-cultural experiences of these Chinese students.”

Cuiyun Wu, who began studying at UMD in 2012 and received her Bachelor of Science degree in agricultural and natural resource economics in 2014, developed a new appreciation for American culture along the way, as well as lasting friendships. “My favorite memory was group projects with classmates,” said Wu. “I learned how to raise my opinions confidently without being offensive and how to walk out of my comfort zone.” Her biggest challenges were the typical ones for international students, “to be away from my family and to study in languages other than Chinese.”

Wu, who now works as the international programs assistant coordinator for AGNR, is glad that the 2+2 program is expanding so that more students can take advantage of the same opportunities she had. “Compared to other Chinese students who did not have these kind of experiences, I have a more diversified background and I have access to really amazing resources here such as libraries and experienced professors,” Wu said. “[Plus,] UMD is in a very good location because of its proximity to USDA, JIFSAN, and other governmental or non-governmental agencies in DC, which means a lot of internship opportunities.”

BY RACHEL KEENEY, AGNR
University of Maryland’s student chapter of the international organization, Global Medical Brigades (GMB), has been traveling internationally for years, working in concert with local groups to help local communities meet their health and economic goals. Recently, that work brought UMD teams to Honduras.

While GMB provides 11 different types of services—offering assistance with medical, dental, micro-finance, engineering, public health, sanitation, and other needs determined by the local community, “here at Maryland, we typically focus on a medical brigade with the component of dental,” said Alesia Robinson. Along with Mina Tran and Stephanie Zhang, Robinson has led the recent UMD GMB Honduras projects. “We’re all pre-med,” added Zhang, “so we have a huge passion for health and medicine and also just taking care of people. This was a good opportunity to go outside of my comfort zone while doing something I love. It’s been a learning process the whole time.”

“But basically it’s just to benefit these communities, which have no plumbing, no concrete floors—basically people kind of living on dirt,” said Robinson. “It’s about empowering the community, so that by the time the different brigades leave, the residents can run the project without outside help. It’s about sustaining success.”

This past summer, for example, the group had a “Public Health Day,” where they helped build a bakery within one of the holistic communities in Pueblo Nuevo, Honduras. “That bakery will employ about 40 women from the village, and they’ll start their own system of supporting their community and families,” Robinson said. “Hopefully, they will also be branching out to sell their products in the neighboring communities.”
For Zhang, their experiences were not merely philanthropic, but also personal. “We spend a lot of time in just a few communities—so we were really connected to these communities,” she said. “We were not just helping them, setting up the clinics, or providing health services to them, but it was also great to just get to know them, too.” During their time in Honduras, the UMD groups got to know community members, play with their children, and understand their life stories. “I think that really made the trip so much more than any of us ever anticipated it to be, and that’s why we all have this kind of lust to keep going back. I remember after we came back from our first trip, we were immediately beginning to plan our next trip,” said Zhang.

When the group cannot travel abroad to help others, they localize their work in Maryland. A year ago, when the national Global Brigades organization placed services to communities within Ghana on hold due to the Ebola outbreak, UMD’s branch held a “Ghana Day.” “What Global Brigades did as a major organization was ask each chapter to host a Ghana Day on their campus to raise money for those communities in Ghana that would not have been visited by a brigade due to the outbreak,” Tran explained. “We raised about $150 through bake sales.”

The group hopes to expand their international outreach this upcoming summer by visiting either Panama or Nicaragua. Learn more about UMD’s Global Medical Brigade at http://go.umd.edu/MedicalBrigade.

“It’s about empowering the community, so that by the time these different brigades leave, the residents can run it without outside help. It’s about sustaining success.”

— Alesia Robinson, UMD Student

By Rokia Hassanein, OIA Communications Assistant
UMD undergraduates who study abroad generally expect that the experience will provide them with skills that are highly esteemed in the job market: the ability to live and learn in an entirely new environment, to adapt, to see potential in unfamiliar situations, and to work alongside diverse groups of people. But some find that their travels also lead them to entirely new career paths.

Take UMD alumnus Daniel Ottalini. Now an elementary school teacher, Ottalini has also transitioned into a successful writing career as author of the award-winning *The Steam Empire Series*. He attributes much of his success as a writer to his participation in the Winter Term 2008 course in Italy, “The Roman City: Pompeii and Beyond,” offered by the UMD Classics department. “I’ve always wanted to travel to Italy and the ancient world, and I’ve been obsessed with Roman history since I was in middle school,” Ottalini said. “One of the main reasons I chose to write about Roman history in my own books is because of the knowledge I now have,” Ottalini explained. “If I hadn’t had in person, up close and personal experiences, then I don’t think I would have been able to write as well as I do today.” While writing his novels, Ottalini used his resources, notes, and other material about the Roman Empire and culture from the Winter Term Italy program. “[The learning experience] allowed me to foster in myself a greater sense of wonder.” As a teacher, Ottalini appreciates the importance of learning about his students’ backgrounds and teaching them about different parts of the world they have yet to discover. “I think studying abroad is valued more in the experience and learning sphere, which can then carry over into your daily life,” he said. “I like to think, ‘How can you teach children about changing their lives if you’ve never changed yours?’”

UMD Senior Sade Ayinde’s life changed as well when she studied abroad in Thailand. While there, she taught in an elementary school. After graduation, she hopes to pursue a career in public policy with a focus on international development, and to work with organizations that focus on youth and economic empowerment in sub-Saharan Africa, like USAID and United Nations Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development (IANYD). Ayinde has spoken with multiple employers about her time abroad. “They generally ask ‘Why did you go abroad to Thailand? How did the experience affect you?’ So it’s my job to explain what an important role study abroad has played in how I’m moving forward with a career in international affairs,” she said. She does so by explaining the unique skills that set her apart from the competition.

During her time abroad, Ayinde was challenged to work alongside individuals who possessed cultural perspectives unfamiliar to her. “I’m used to getting things done in a certain way [in America],” she explained. “I have [Interacting] with other students, and maybe a family if you’re staying with a family, really starts to exercise the muscle of empathy, which I think is the critical ingredient of both teamwork and mutual trust.”

— Peter Hancock, president and CEO of AIG

“Study Abroad Opens New Career Horizons”

— Peter Hancock, president and CEO of AIG

Maryland International
worked at the U.S. Department of State, and that environment is always efficient and fast paced. But when I went to Thailand, I had to adapt to a much different pace.” Thailand is often called “The Land of Smiles” because of its laid-back attitude. “I was in the middle of teaching my kindergartners when, without a word, they started to line up for their dentist appointments. I hadn’t been notified beforehand because the school just wasn’t as organized as American schools are.”

USA Today College recently reported on a panel event titled “How Does Study Abroad Build a Globally Minded Workforce?” Employers from top companies explained the value of studying abroad when it comes to the job search. Students who study abroad have unique and highly valued abilities. “Having the trust to reveal more about yourself to other people in a foreign culture is a big leap of faith,” said Peter Hancock, president and CEO of AIG. “When you realize you can do that and feel safe and more connected, it gives people confidence to do it in a work setting.”

He added that hiring managers look for students who can work well in teams—a skill he says can be learned abroad. “[Interacting] with other students, and maybe a family if you’re staying with a family, really starts to exercise the muscle of empathy, which I think is the critical ingredient of both teamwork and mutual trust,” he said.

To learn more about studying abroad at UMD, visit www.umd.edu/studyabroad.

By Michelle Rosinski, Education Abroad
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