Mission

Global Brigades is the largest student-led sustainable development and global health organization in the world. Global Brigades has a vision of improving global equity and fostering social responsibility amongst students. Alongside this vision, the overall mission of Global Brigades is to empower young volunteers to establish sustainable solutions in under-resourced communities.

Global Water Brigades (GWB), one of the nine sub-programs of Global Brigades, works alongside communities in Honduras to help provide them with better access to safe and clean water. Northwestern University’s GWB chapter has the specific mission of facilitating outside-the-classroom learning in order to give students the tools to create sustainable solutions to problems both in the United States and around the world. Northwestern University’s GWB chapter consists of Northwestern undergraduate students in all four classes, with a variety of majors including Engineering, Biology, Environmental Science, Anthropology, and Social Policy.

The concept of sustainability is one of the core values of Global Brigades and the Northwestern GWB chapter. While working with communities in Honduras, Global Brigades takes many steps to ensure that the new or improved system can be maintained and managed by the community. GWB helps each community establish a Water Council and a Basic Sanitation Committee to continue educating the community and to monitor the project’s progress and system upkeep. Education of the communities by both the Global Brigades volunteers and the local citizens helps ensure the sustainability and continued success of each project. The projects developed by Global Brigades use a bottom-up method to empower communities to manage their own health, environment, and financial stability.
This year, the Northwestern chapter of GWB participated in a brigade in Honduras from March 19 to March 25, 2012. A group of seven students from a variety of backgrounds was able to travel to Honduras for one week to work on an ongoing project. The group traveled to the communities of Palo Verde and Bella Vista daily. Unlike in past years, this year’s project was to construct an entirely new water system. In assessing a community with limited or no access to clean water, GWB in-country staff and community leaders identify problems and propose realistic solutions to the current water system. The brigaders from Northwestern helped implement these solutions while working alongside community members and local engineers. Such community involvement helps promote commitment to the project in a larger context.

**Results**

The work on the Palo Verde and Bella Vista project consisted of digging trenches, connecting pipes, and covering the pipes by filling in the trenches. Dozens of local residents worked on the project simultaneously, completing over 500 meters of the project during the week. In addition to the physical work, the brigaders prepared three lessons on hygiene and presented these lessons to approximately 30 students in the school closest to Palo Verde. The students, who were between ages 5 and 12, learned about proper hygiene practices to prevent the transmission of microbes from contaminated water or food to their bodies.

Northwestern GWB’s March 2012 brigade allowed the group to gain an understanding of the components of health, sustainability, and development it involves. The combination of experience in engineering, community development, and public health will enhance the academic focuses of the students who participated. The spring break brigade is one means by which students at Northwestern are able to engage themselves in a global cause, applying real-world use of their Northwestern education.