ISEN Final Report

The Northwestern University chapter of the Global Architecture Brigades alleviates health and education needs in developing areas throughout Central America in a resource efficient, sustainable manner. Our group realizes this mission through the construction of schools, health centers and other points of infrastructure focused on bettering the community.

This year, our organization partnered with the Global Environmental Brigades in order to bring sustainable, environmentally focused change to an indigenous tribe, the Embera, in Panama. Indigenous tribes in Panama make up only 8% of the population, but approximately 80% of all indigenous families live below the poverty line. Furthermore, about 17% of the indigenous population is undernourished.

In order to address the issues of malnourishment, the Global Environmental Brigade focuses on promoting effective resource management through hands-on construction projects as well as educational seminars for community leaders. For our brigade, we were tasked with constructing 3 greenhouses, as well as assembling an educational presentation focused on different aspects of the environment. It was our intention that these greenhouses would be used to plant vegetables such as cucumbers, peppers, tomatoes, celery and other crops that the community deemed necessary. The purpose of the greenhouse was two fold. First of all, it would provide the community with a source of fresh, organically grown vegetables. Many of the community members’ diets are vitamin and nutrient deficient as the primary crops grown are starchy tubers and plants. These greenhouses would supplement the community members’ diets and provide a complete palette of nutrition. Secondly, the greenhouses would serve as an education tool for the
community. Local community members will be able to use the buildings to learn sustainable, organic farming techniques.

With the assistance of the funds provided by ISEN, our board is proud to report that the brigade was a success. The $4,000 awarded to us through the ISEN grant facilitated the brigade of 11 Northwestern students. We departed on March 21st, 2014, and were joined in Panama by 11 students from DePaul University. Together, we worked in tandem with local masons and technicians in erecting the 3 greenhouses for the Embera community. In doing so, we were able to fulfill our organization’s primary prerogatives: resource efficiency and sustainability. In terms of resource efficiency, we did not utilize foreign construction materials to build the greenhouses. Rather, all materials were purchased in country in order to support the local economy and minimize waste in transit. Next, our brigade supported sustainable development in several ways. First of all, our brigaders created educational workshops focused on promoting healthy environmental practices. These workshops are intended to help local farmers grow crops without negatively impacting their environment. Secondly, the greenhouse will allow community members to grow vegetables for many seasons into the future. In this way, the community will be empowered to improve their nutrition without the assistance from outside sources.

In closing, the Northwestern University chapter of the Global Architecture Brigades would like to thank ISEN for their continued funding and support. For the past 4 years, our organization has carried out our vision of resource efficient, sustainable change in Central America. From health centers in Honduras to greenhouses in Panama, we are dependent on generous supporters such as ISEN for funding and assistance. We are proud to report on
what we have accomplished in the past, and look forward to continue our relationship with ISEN in the future.

From the Global Architecture Brigades, the students of Northwestern University, and our affiliated communities in Panama, we thank you.

Sincerely,

The Global Architecture Brigade Board