

Emily Reeve

Graduation Year: Senior

College: Engineering

Major(s): Civil Engineering

Minors(s): None

Scholar Group Membership: No

Did you received other funding for this project?: Center for Social Concerns

Could you have completed this project without CUSE funding? No

More details on CUSE funding assistance? NDSEED is a program with a rather steep cost and thus we rely on many different donor sources. The experience is only possible if the total project budget is secured. Without CUSE funding, we would have needed to find a source to replace those funds. As I see it, CUSE was a core component for us to reach our budgeting goal, as was every other donor that contributed - every part counts!

Project Title: NDSEED: Cooperative Construction in Rural Nicaragua

Project Location: Las Pencas, Leon, Nicaragua

ND Faculty Mentor: Dr. Tracy Kijewski-Correa

Project Type: Service-Learning

Why did you undertake this project/experience? Deepen your knowledge of a topic or issue, Career discernment and/or preparation, Internationalize your Notre Dame experience

Did your funded experience help you:

[Deepen your understanding of your coursework or field of study]: Very Much

[Discern your interests and post-bac goals]: Very Much

[Become confident in your ability to set and achieve your goals]: Very Much

[Gain a more nuanced view of local, national, or global communities]: Very Much

[Improve your written and verbal communications skills]:Very Much

Tell us about your experience.

This summer, I spent eight weeks in a rural community called Las Pencas in the mountains of Nicaragua. NDSEED, Notre Dame Students Empowering through Engineering Development, collaborated with a non-profit called Bridges to Prosperity to design and fund a pedestrian footbridge for the community. There is a ravine that separated Las Pencas, as well as many surrounding communities, from access roads to major cities, upon which they relied for resources such as markets, hospitals, and schools. During the rainy season, their only mode of passage was over a fragile ladder, constructed from logs and sticks, and laid across the narrowest part of the ravine as a make-shift bridge. Myself, along with seven other Notre Dame students, worked alongside the people of Las Pencas six days a week to help construct a suspended footbridge across a ravine. A lot of our day-to-day work was manual labor for the construction of the bridge. The most important thing I learned this summer was the power of

empowerment. We worked on the same tasks as the community members, for the same hours, and we built relationships with them as we worked. We got to know them, and tried to encourage them through words and example that they have the power, brick by brick and rock by rock, to change the situation in which they lived. It was an incredibly humbling experience to live the way in which they lived, and yet see the amount of joy with which they lived each day.

Describe the impact this project had, both on you as a student-scholar and on the people you worked with.

This project showed me through first-hand experience the importance of infrastructure. I have always felt passionate about developing infrastructure. However, there is a major difference between saying "a bridge is important because it provides safe, quick access to healthcare," and you yourself being very ill and in need of a hospital, but having to walk a mile, over an unsafe bridge crossing, and then drive three hours to the capital in order to be treated at a decent healthcare facility. Your perspective changes completely when you have lived through it. That is why it is so important that we did not have lush accommodations - we lived alongside the community, and it allowed us to build authentic relationships with them. Of course, the existence of a safe, well-designed pedestrian bridge will transform their lives, but I hope and believe that we transformed their lives through the friendships we built with them.

Describe how this experience is connected to your plans as a student or future professional.

My personal role was construction manager, and this was something in which I had no prior experience. I learned throughout the summer that my job was to document every part of construction, from the number of people working on each task to the length of time and amount of materials required for each task. I used my documentation to project the schedule for construction and evaluate our progress compared to the schedule I created iteratively throughout the summer. I can now say that I understand much of the job of being a construction manager, and I thoroughly enjoyed it. I will most likely go into a career in construction engineering after graduation, and perform many of the tasks that I performed this summer, every day.

What advice would you give other students who are planning to pursue similar projects?

Find something you are passionate about. I love bridges, and civil engineering, and developing infrastructure. When you find a project you're passionate about, put your whole heart into it. I love speaking Spanish, I love building things, I love getting to know people, I love trying new foods, I love playing soccer, I love being sore at the end of a hard day of work, and I love living simply. Every challenge is a gift, even if it doesn't seem like it when you're exhausted and putting Icy Hot on every part of your body. I would also say, don't get overwhelmed by the scope of the project. Building a bridge seemed like a huge, near-impossible task at the outset, but with the right team supporting you and a skilled advisor guiding you, you can accomplish truly incredible feats.

I acknowledge that this form has been filled out truthfully and to the best of my ability. I understand that this information will be shared with many different CUSE constituencies. As such, I have provided as much useful information as I was able. I understand that CUSE will not complete my award disbursement until this form is successfully completed. If I have any questions or concerns, I will contact CUSE before submitting this form. To illustrate that you understand all of these points, please enter your Notre Dame email in the box below.
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