**Honors Experiential Learning Project Proposal Form – Community Engagement**

**Basic Information**
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College: Lindner College of Business

Major: Finance and Operations Management

Title of Project: Trip to Nicaragua

Expected Project Start Date: March 16, 2013

Expected Project End Date: March 23, 2013

**Project Information:**

**1. Provide a brief overview/abstract of your proposed honors experiential learning project**

Over Spring Break 2013, I plan on going on a mission trip to Nicaragua through the Serve Beyond Cincinnati program at UC. Serve Beyond Cincinnati (SBC) is a UC student group that organizes and sends students on both domestic and international mission trips during winter and spring breaks. The organization’s goal is to involve students in multicultural world service experiences in construction, sustainability, restoration, and restructuring projects that increase quality of life. The organization is dedicated to making real change in the lives of other people and providing support to communities that need it more than we do. On the week-long trip, we will be partnering with a service group to build efficient shelter and construction projects as well as water filtration, management, and storage systems for the Nicaraguan community.

**2. Clearly state how each of the following elements will be exhibited in your work (refer to the first two pages of this document with the full description of what is expected in each of these areas**).

**SUBSTANTIAL CONTENT AND QUALITY WITHIN COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT THEME**

I believe this trip will aptly integrate all four of the community engagement learning objectives and in doing so, will strengthen my ability and desire to become an active member in my communities. The trip has a focus on helping out the members of the Nicaraguan community, bettering their quality of life.

 This learning experience will help engage me in the purpose of doing service itself. I will be learning about the local culture and its needs, and finding out throughout the week how to best use my own gifts to help them. The social issues in many countries, such as Nicaragua, are vastly different than the ones we encounter in our hometown communities, and understanding how to best handle these issues will make me a better member of the global community. Today, I have seen those issues from only one point of view – textbook reading, television news, and other books and media sources. But the clearest way to see a country’s social issues is to be involved in them first-hand by visiting the country and making a tangible difference.

 One of the highlights of the Nicaraguan trip is that we will be working cooperatively with a local service group to make changes, thus enabling us to fully immerse ourselves in their culture while still working towards sustainable change. We also will be grouped with about 10 to 15 other college students who signed up to go on the trip to work together. Our efforts will definitely leave a lasting impact on the Nicaraguan community in which we work.

 This mission trip role will furthermore make me become a more active member in the global community, furthering my understanding of what it takes to be a good and just citizen. As a citizen of the United States and coming from a fairly wealthy community here in Cincinnati, I have a lot of gifts and talents that I should be using to help other people around my global community. The fact that we have so much and they have so little is mindboggling sometimes. It only seems logical and reasonable that we use what we have to better their standards of living.

**CONNECTION TO ACADEMIC GOALS AND THEORIES**

 As a student in the Lindner College of Business at UC, I realize the importance of understanding different cultures around the world. Even though I may not do business with Nicaragua in the near future, the experience will give me a lot of insight on how to understand and cooperate with people of a different country. Therefore, I see this mission trip as a great opportunity to expand my knowledge of a different culture’s lifestyle, needs, issues, and character. It also gives me a great chance to study the social issues and political circumstances that Nicaraguan communities deal with. In preparation for the trip, I am going to read several resources regarding the Nicaraguan cultural background. Understanding the community’s experience and needs will be highly beneficial going into this trip, as it will enable me to be more prepared to work with them and promote change when I see them firsthand.

Readings:

* "A Country Study: Nicaragua." *Nicaragua : Country Studies*. The Library of Congress, n.d. Web. 03 Jan. 2013. <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/nitoc.html>.

The Library of Congress has put together a full-detailed file about Nicaragua. I focused on the Social Conditions section of the file, especially Health. Nicaragua’s poverty rates and malnutrition rates are not comparable to anything that I have ever experienced in my life. The standard of living in this country is something that I have never experienced. This data provides me with, at the very minimum, the knowledge I should know before I enter the country, so that when I am ready to work there, I am prepared to adjust to the new environment. This resource gives good insight into learning a new culture and lifestyle, one learning objective of this trip.

* "About Nicaragua." *Why We Serve in the Country of Nicaragua*. Amigos for Christ, n.d. Web. 16 Feb. 2013. <http://www.amigosforchrist.org/about-nicaragua.html>

This page gives details of the specific area in which I will be working (Chinandega) and also provides lots of details and statistics regarding the way of life in the area. Nicaragua is the poorest Hispanic country in the world. Most of the people we will work with live on less than $1.00 a day, classifying them as living in “extreme poverty.” The alarming statistics from this page will help me broaden my perspective on the world around me and see the real issues in countries outside the United States. The people in Nicaragua need our service and we cannot ignore conditions like these.

* *Helping, Fixing or Serving?*, Rachel Naomi Remen, Shambhala Sun, September 1999.

This article, written by Naomi Remen, talks about the differences between helping, fixing, and serving, and serves as a great example of describing my mission in Nicaragua. Helping and fixing can be done at a distance, but service cannot. Service occurs when you are physically connected and touching someone else, enabling you to see that other person as equal and whole. Learning about service is the most important part, in my opinion, of going on a mission trip and leading other people. If you can learn how to understand the needs and feelings of others, you can serve them best. It can only be done through touch and presence though. This trip to Nicaragua is a perfect opportunity to be of service to others.

* Payne, Ruby K. *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*. Highlands, TX: Aha! Process, 2005. Print.

This is a book written to help people like me, who are going to be or currently are working somewhere like Nicaragua, understand how to best deal with people in poverty. Poverty goes far beyond the realm of a lack of money. It involves emotions, rules, and knowledge regarding relationships and ways of living. By learning about the background scene after a person is “classified” as living in poverty, I can more clearly sympathize with and serve them.

* "U.S. Relations With Nicaragua." *U.S. Department of State*. U.S. Department of State, 14 Jan. 2013. Web. 16 Feb. 2013. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/1850.htm>

This site gave me some background information on the United States’ current relationship with Nicaragua. I figured it could be important to know and therefore, I found out a couple things: The US denounced Nicaragua’s most recent presidential and legislative elections, saying that they were severely flawed and that they limited democracy. In an effort to support the people of Nicaragua, the US is actively working with Nicaraguan officials, training them to uphold and create new practices that foster democracy at all levels. Many of the people which I will be working with on the mission trip will be directly affected by the Nicaraguan government’s policies. By understanding what they work under and how their system operates, I can connect with them on an easier level.

**INITIATIVE, INDEPENDENCE, AND CREATIVITY**

On each trip, there are two “Team Leaders” who volunteer to be the “go-to” people for the rest of the team. They are in charge of organizing people and getting them to the right place at the right time. They actively communicate and work with the trip’s service group to coordinate team activities and building projects. They also develop a personal relationship with the Nicaraguan service community and are better able to assist their team members because of it. I was chosen to be a Team Leader for several reasons.

I have substantial experience, I have a strong motivation, I like to see the results of my efforts pay off, and I love working with people. In high school, I had several leadership positions, the biggest of which was organizing and leading a four day spiritual Kairos retreat for 50 high school seniors. I was in charge of organizing all of the activities and materials needed, working with the Director to make sure people were where they needed to be and items were in place, giving a half-hour long speech, and directing the activities themselves. The experience gave me a lot of good knowledge on how to lead a group of people. In a heartbeat, I am more than willing to apply these skills to the Nicaraguan trip to ensure that our team makes a tangible difference in the community. Secondly, I have a strong motivation to get a lot out of the trip. I am dedicated to making our job meaningful and productive at the same time. My goal as a leader will be to fulfill the assignment's requirements to the best of our abilities and make sure that we did our job well. Service to others can be done by anyone, but making a tangible difference is our end goal, too. Thirdly, I lead because at the end of the week, I take pride in seeing the job we've accomplished. It boosts my own self-confidence and motivation when I see a project that I have successfully facilitated. Lastly, I love working with other people and hearing every person's input on the job. As a team leader, one of the benefits is that you get to work with every person individually on the team, thus learning about that person and helping the community at the same time. Keeping the entire group on track, but maintaining a relaxed and encouraging environment at the same time, is critical in a team effort. I am highly looking forward to increasing my participation on the trip through this position.

**REFLECTION AND DISSEMINATION**

Yvonne Woon, the author of a book called *Dead Beautiful*, once wrote, “You have to look back in order to understand the things that lie ahead.” This quote on reflection will be applied to my learning over Spring Break. I believe that the importance of reflection in one’s life can never be emphasized highly enough. Reflection is the way in which we make ourselves better people. If a person cannot reflect on his actions, he is a lot less likely to change them the next time around for the better. It is through our understanding of what our actions are that helps us improve ourselves.

On the trip, I am going to take a lot of pictures of the people I work with and the accomplishments we make. I will be documenting the places we go and what we did at each one. My goal is to compile all of the pictures into a slideshow with inspirational music at the end, which I will present to all of those interested in learning more about my trip. I also plan on keeping a journal with me, so that each night I can reflect in writing on my experiences of the past day. This will not only be a good practice to develop reflection, but it will get me thinking about the true reasons that I am on the trip. It will dig deeper into my heart than I would go otherwise. Rather than just performing the work needed to get done and see the Nicaraguan people, I will actively reflect each night and change my goals for the next day accordingly. This personal journal will be completely private, so that I can develop a personal relationship with myself and with God throughout my week-long journey. Additionally, I will most certainly post a couple pages of writing on my e-portfolio detailing the trip’s activities and learning outcomes. Friends, family members, co-workers, and other UC students can use it to develop their own understandings of service and hopefully to motivate themselves to go on a similar trip. It is also simply nice to let everyone in on what I learned and achieved over the week. One of my fundraising efforts involved a lot of different friends and family members making donations to the trip, and one of my goals is to let them all know how the trip went. I will email them all a link to the video that is to be created about the trip as well as link them to my e-portfolio page that details the trip in words.

Additionally, an Economics professor of mine recently asked if I would be willing to give a presentation to a class of his regarding mission trips and their value to students. I am willing to speak to his class and present on what I received from the trip and how other students can get involved as well. The presentation will include my experience in Nicaragua, other students’ experiences from past trips, information on general mission trips and answers to frequently asked questions, and how to get involved through Serve Beyond Cincinnati. In this manner, I am able to spread the word about the significance of a trip like this to other students and hopefully encourage them to participate in a similar experience. The presentation will likely occur during the first or second week of April after I return from the trip.

**ADVISOR**

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**BUDGET**

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| --- | --- |
| Airfare | $800 |
| Amigos for Christ Fee | $250 |
| Serve Beyond Cincinnati Fee | $100 |

The cost of the trip in total is estimated to be $1,150.00. I plan on funding the trip in several ways:

1. My Personal Fundraising Efforts

I am going to help organize and set up, in collaboration with Serve Beyond Cincinnati, a fundraising effort to help pay for the trip. This may include bake sales, t-shirt sales, promotional lunches, and other similar events. Another event we will participate in to raise funds is UC’s “Shine the Shoe”. This involves cleaning up Fifth Third Arena after a home basketball game, and receiving $800 to go towards SBC’s budget. In addition, I have organized a raffle in which local businesses and restaurants have donated gift cards and prizes to be raffled off. All willing donors make a donation to the trip and their names will be entered into the drawing for the prizes.

2. University Honors Grant

I am going to apply for a grant from the University Honors Program to help fund the trip.

3. My Own Account

I plan on paying $300-$400 out of my own pocket to help fund the trip. I have been saving money and currently hold a part-time position at a produce store.