



Making A Difference:
Students worked with Indianapolis architects and Dominican Republic residents to construct a roof for a new medical clinic.

Engineers Without Borders

Students Cross Global Horizons and Barriers to Assist Others

Story by Stacie Muncie | Photographs by Dr. John Gardner

Since 2009, members of Rose-Hulman's chapter of Engineers Without Borders (EWB) have been making a difference in the lives of citizens in the Dominican Republic community of Batey Cinco. The group's projects have ranged from constructing a hurricane- and earthquake-proof roof to providing a sanitation system for a former sugar plantation building getting new life as an in-patient medical clinic.

Though EWB's projects are primarily structural in nature, only two members are civil engineering students. That doesn't stop the dedicated members from working wonders in this gratifying hands-on international program.

Chemical engineering major Abby Grommet was drawn to EWB because of her interest in humanitarian work.

"I thought it would be an interesting and relevant way to get involved and use my engineering skills in a real-world situation," Grommet says.

She's not alone. The group's president, Angelica Patino, a biomedical engineering

major, also wanted to use her engineering skills to help others. She also has enjoyed the chance to travel.

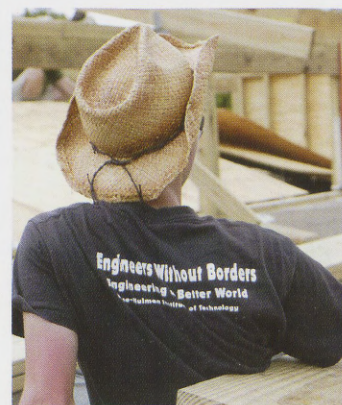
Last summer, EWB started installing a septic system for the clinic—just in time for hurricane season. Although a brush with Hurricane Irene caused some anxious moments for friends and family back home, the team of four students and two mentors was never in real danger.

"The only problem was—every single day—heavy rains," Patino explains. "That really set us back on some of our construction. We'd dig, it would rain, and water would fill up the hole."

Grommet adds, "We were bailing water by hand from a nine-foot pit."

With a limited time to complete the project, EWB members had to use every opportunity to catch up.

"Sometimes we'd stay until the very last bit of light was left for us to see," Patino says. "If you don't finish something it just doesn't get finished, and leaving the project unfinished is the worst-case scenario."



EWB members' goal is bigger than just finishing the project. "It's not like you do a project and leave. You monitor the project afterward, and by doing that you have a bigger impact on the community," Patino explains.

For students, playing a key role in establishing the Batey Cinco Casas clinic has offered unique hands-on learning and teaching opportunities. "We teach (community residents) things so that when we leave they can build something for themselves," Patino says.

From 2006-2008, EWB chapter members built a brooder house and training center in Obodan, Ghana.

EWB's national organization requires chapters to maintain a relationship with the communities they serve for four or five years. Students plan to build latrines this summer to further address Batey Cinco Casas' sanitation needs.

Keep track of Engineers Without Borders activities at www.rose-hulman.edu/ewb. ■