

AGGIELIFE

THE BATTALION

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Save the children

Two students take day care project out of classroom, into Honduran village

By Jimmy Hisson
THE BATTALION

When attempting to contact project partner and classmate Jose Mahomar, Robert Furr must pass over the contact numbers in his cell phone for a Hispanic engineering firm, two Catholic missionaries and the office of Honduras' first lady.

Mahomar, a senior finance major and native Honduran, and Furr, a senior management and information systems major, are currently working on a plan to construct a day care center in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, as part of a class assignment.

Students enrolled in the three-hour international studies course led by academic instructor Dr. T. H. Kwa are asked to participate in a newly-formed global perspective project designed to impact international communities and Texas A&M's community.

"Basically, the project guidelines are relatively loose. The project has to tie the international community and the University. Beyond that, it's their own creativity that limits them," said Susan Mallet, program coordinator for the Academy for Future International Leaders.

The proposed projects range in size and scope. "When I first started thinking about things to do, I came up with the idea to build a school in somewhere of need. I've had an interest in Latin America, but the idea pretty much seemed like a long shot," Furr said.

By February, Furr's long-shot idea had turned into a blueprint.

First conceived for the spring 1998 semester, the Academy for Future International Leaders provides an opportunity for student leaders around the A&M campus to gain an international perspective on current and future local and international affairs. Eighteen applicants are chosen from A&M's nine colleges. These 18 students meet every Thursday evening to discuss topics from global security to energy consumption.

Varying vantage points and various backgrounds allow participants to observe a number of views on a single topic.

"I try to get students to fertilize their own ideas with the viewpoints of others," Kwa said.

Degree plans and academic classifications are the beginning to the diversity around the table. A number of the speakers hail from different parts of the globe so to add to the international experience.

"But the classroom discussion and the speakers are just part of the academy," Mallet said.

The students are also paired with an international mentor and encouraged to participate in one of many international opportunities the academy provides.

Possibilities for student projects are presented before an international board composed of the mentors who aid students throughout the semester. These mentors are leaders from business, industry and public service. Many are presidents and vice presidents of corporations with international appeal. This board of mentors evaluates the international and local appeal of the students' proposals.

"Robert Furr kind of came to me with the idea for a school, but wasn't real sure where to go from there. I thought it was a good idea too, and started asking around when I went home for the Christmas break," Mahomer said.

The first step was finding a potential location in need. Mahomar contacted people who would eventually lead him to the site for the proposed project. Mario Orlando Salinas Avila, president of one of the boroughs of Tegucigalpa, offered a plot for the future location of Furr and Mahomar's project. It was determined that a day care center would better suit the needs of the area. With no place for children to go during the day, parents are forced to either give up working and stay home or leave the children at home unattended.

"Much of the area is subject to extreme poverty," Mahomar said. "Something like (a day care center) would definitely help, but money is such a big issue."

After contacting two Catholic missionaries in Honduras, Father Juan Matoses Torres and Father Luis Lopez Martinez, Mahomar and Furr were able to establish liaisons between A&M and Tegucigalpa. The missionaries would oversee the



COURTESY OF JOSE MAHOMAR

Volunteers survey the future site for the day care center project spearheaded by two A&M students, Jose Mahomar and Robert Furr.

construction and handle finances. The only missing factor was money.

A Honduran engineering firm has estimated the construction costs to be 285,000 lempira, or \$15,800. Raising funds has consumed the majority of Furr and Mahomar's participation in the construction of the Honduran day care center.

"The mentors we've met through the academy serve as an excellent contacts for corporate donations, but we would also like to involve local businesses and ultimately, the students in the process," Furr said.

Armed with photographs, contacts, an engineering estimate, location, official endorsement from Honduras' first lady and an approved project proposal, Mahomar and Furr are ready to embark on their capital quest.

"It would be nice to organize fund-raisers that

involve international students as well as local students to give the project all the more of an international appeal," Furr said. "The money needed for this project isn't overwhelming. If only one or three students were able to contribute a dollar to the project, our needs would be more than met."

Mahomar and Furr intend to meet their financial goals by close of this spring semester. At that point, the construction of the day care center can begin.

"It would be great if this was the beginning of something. Maybe academy projects in the future could follow up on this one," Mahomar said. "I like to go and visit the (day care) center in Tegucigalpa some day. It would be really neat somehow we were able to physically display the Aggie symbol or something showing the Aggie spirit somewhere on the center."

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