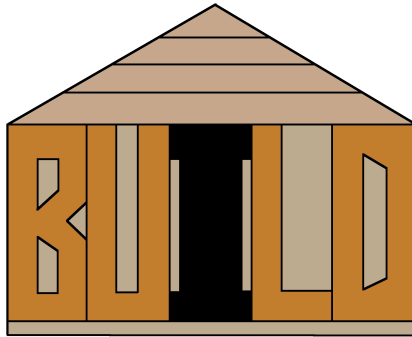


Program Summary 2007-2008: BUILD



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About

Building Understanding through International Learning and Development (BUILD) is a year-round interdisciplinary student program that works with rural communities in Central America to achieve sustainable solutions for social and economic development. Formerly known as "Bridges" and then the "Tufts International and Intercultural Learning through Experience and Service" (TIILES), the program started in 2002 when several students developed a winter service learning trip to Siuna, Nicaragua, where a group of Tufts students assisted with local sustainable development projects coordinated by the non-governmental organization (NGO) Bridges to Community. The program has grown and evolved since its inception and is currently searching for another rural Central American community to work with in order to create a more direct relationship with the community and to reduce overall trip costs. The group's latest excursion, a pilot project on several rural cooperatives in Guatemala, is expected to lay the foundation for the next BUILD project site. The BUILD service-learning model consists of four parts:

- I. Preparation:** students participate in preliminary research and technical trainings as preparation for their research and service.
- II. Trip:** students travel to a rural Central American community for service learning experience that includes assisting with community-led sustainable development projects, working side by side and interacting with local residents and, in some cases, university students.
- III. Spring Course component:** through in-depth research, unique faculty lectures, and student-led classes, the participants critically learn about sustainability and development.
- IV. Project Proposal/Implementation:** participants, working together with faculty and community leaders, generate project proposals and plans to address community-identified needs.

Mission

BUILD seeks to inspire and prepare participants to engage in understanding, developing, and implementing sustainable development projects hand in hand with members of the local communities in which they work. The BUILD model consists of four key pillars: Education, Leadership, Action, and Solidarity. As such, the BUILD experience is intended to provide Tufts students the opportunity to gain the knowledge, skills, experience, and perspective necessary to become effective leaders in the field of sustainable development, while providing tangible benefits to partner communities.

## Goals

1. To develop participant skill sets for planning, organizational, needs assessment, and qualitative research through group activities and training sessions
2. To educate participants about various aspects of the field of sustainable development, including technology, economics, politics, ecology, through reading, coursework, presentations, fieldwork, and dialogue with professors and practitioners, local community members, and each other
3. To tangibly support (through resources, labor, and ideas) a rural Central American community working on sustainable development projects
4. To encourage students to design, plan, and implement innovative sustainable development projects in collaboration with the study community in which they work
5. To expand the educational model of BUILD to other locations in Latin America and, eventually, elsewhere in the developing world

## Year In Review

### Fall 2007

The fall semester of the BUILD program was dedicated to selecting the BUILD team for the year and preparing the team for its service-learning trip to Nicaragua in January. Students were selected for the BUILD team based on their written application, including a personal statement describing their interest in the program, as well as a group interview. Once accepted into the program, BUILD members were asked to reflect on their specific personal and intellectual interests in sustainable development over the course of the fall semester. In addition to studying the basics of the sociopolitical, historical, economic, and ecological context of rural Nicaragua, each group member conducted background research specific to his or her own topic(s) of interest (e.g. civil engineering, education, public health). The specific background knowledge each student gained before the trip was intended to provide them with a more nuanced lens through which to investigate the sustainable development projects they were supporting in Nicaragua. Over the course of the fall semester, each BUILD participant became the "resident expert" on their topic within the group and each student was encouraged to contribute what they had learned to conversations among group members and with community partners and the collaborating university students on site. Also in the fall semester, BUILD split up its membership into four committees, two of which were dedicated to helping the group prepare for the January trip and two of which were focused toward developing plans and contacts to facilitate BUILD's transition toward greater financial and operational independence from Bridges to Community and, potentially, to a new location in Central America. The former two committees focused on fundraising and coordinating guest speakers and curriculum for the spring academic course, respectively. Another committee sought to research other potential sites and partners for future BUILD programs and the last committee investigated the possibility of collaborating with the Points of Light project (also based in the Institute for Global Leadership), which was working to develop a social enterprise business plan to create sustainable eco-power structures to promote ecotourism among local entrepreneurs in rural Latin American communities.

### Spring 2008

#### Siuna, Nicaragua (January 2008)

Over the course of the fall semester, ten Tufts students prepared for their winter service trip to Nicaragua by researching the country's current and historical sociopolitical context. Each student also researched a topic of personal interest relating to sustainable development and presented their findings to the group before the trip. During the ten day service trip in January, group members worked on a variety of sustainable development projects with the communities of Siuna and Santa Rosa in the eastern autonomous region of Nicaragua, under the guidance of their NGO partner, Bridges to Community.

## Guatemala (May 19 - June 26, 2008)



As part of the group's effort to seek out alternatives to the collaboration with its NGO partner in Nicaragua, BUILD organized a pilot trip to Guatemala. During the first part of the trip, the group researched the legacies of the civil war in Guatemala City, meeting with the UN Development Program, the Network in Solidarity with the People of Guatemala, former Guatemalan military soldiers, and a long-serving member of the Guatemalan Congress. By meeting with these organizations and individuals, the group sought to develop a broader understanding of Guatemalan history and the history of social and economic development in the country.

In the second and third parts of the trip, BUILD students visit two rural cooperatives in Guatemala. Currently, BUILD students are working with families of Santa Anita La Union, a cooperative marked by a violent past. It is composed entirely of the families of ex-guerrilla fighters who decided to take advantage of the land grant opportunity and repatriate into Guatemalan society in exchange for putting down their guns. Now, their cause of justice and equality is lived out not through violence, but through the promotion of fair wages, fair trade, education, and economic self-determination.

The third portion of the group's work will be carried out with the people of Comunidad Nueva Alianza, a cooperative of 40 families all working on the production of fair trade macadamia nuts and coffee. The community is an example to other villages and cooperatives of sustainable agriculture practices and renewable energy initiatives. The workers at Nueva Alianza worked for years under an oppressive landowner who refused to pay the workers for 18 months in the late 90s. The refusal to pay resulted in legal action against the landowner by the working families. During the proceedings, the owner filed bankruptcy and the workers at Nueva Alianza petitioned the government to allow them to take over the farm themselves as a land grant under the Peace Accords. Since the acquisition of the lands, the community has developed and become one of the most prominent cooperatives in the region.

This project is about sustainability--sustainability of energy, agriculture, environment, and community. Students are conducting a hands-on group research study of post-war reconciliation and sustainable development by living and working with the people of fair trade cooperatives. The group consists of seven selected students and a team of leaders, all but one of whom are first year students.

## Strategic Direction

In 2006, the BUILD program was expanded to include a student-taught academic course on sustainable development during the spring semester. This year, students were also encouraged to research and design community development projects that could be implemented in the partner community to complement their current initiatives. During the summer and fall of 2007, BUILD worked out the operational details of these additions and updated BUILD documents to formally codify them into the structure of the program. BUILD leadership also updated its mission statement and began investigating the possibilities for reducing its dependence on Bridges to Community, the NGO with which BUILD currently works. This strategic shift toward greater operational independence is intended to: 1) reduce the total cost of the BUILD program, thus making it more accessible to students; 2) provide BUILD more flexibility to engage in constructive partnerships with interested communities in Latin America. The current pilot project in Guatemala is the first exploration of new potential partner communities for future BUILD projects.

## Meet The Members

### Nicaragua

**Diego Villalobos** ('09), *Anthropology*  
Group Leader

**Katie Bond** ('10), *Biology*

**John Hoopes** ('10), *Biology*

**Denisha McKenzie** ('09), *Psychology*

**Katherine Selden** ('10), *Anthropology*

**Scott Mathews** ('08), *Economics*  
Group Leader

**Lucia Flores** ('10), *Anthropology*

**Namibia Lebron-Torres** ('11), *Undeclared*

**Aliza Sandberg** ('09), *Civil Engineering*

**Chase Webber** ('09), *Chemistry*

### Guatemala

**Michael Niconchuk** ('11), *Undeclared*  
Trip Leader

**Toby Bonthron** ('09), *Economics*  
Trip Leader

**Katy Simon** ('11), *Undeclared*

**Krista Morris** ('11), *Undeclared*

**Tomas Valdes** ('11), *Undeclared*

**Kathryn Taylor** ('11), *Undeclared*  
Trip Leader

**Chloe Rousseau** ('11), *Undeclared*

**Ekaterina Titova** ('11), *Economics*

**Jessica Madding** ('11), *Undeclared*

**Marcus Cheek** ('11), *Undeclared*