

INTEGRATING FAITH AND LEARNING

BY KRISTIN TODD STIRES



**"EACH ONE OF
US SHOULD USE
WHATEVER
GIFT HE HAS
RECEIVED TO
SERVE OTHERS,
FAITHFULLY
ADMINISTERING
GOD'S GRACE
IN ITS VARIOUS
FORMS."
- 1 PETER 4:10**

Through a literal interpretation, Baylor Accounting students, along with faculty and supporters, brought this verse to life by traveling to Kampala, Uganda, for the department's second annual mission trip.

Jason MacGregor, assistant professor of Accounting, served as a faculty advisor on the trip, which is a collaborative effort among the Baylor Accounting Department, Uganda Christian University (UCU), Baylor Missions, and Compassion International, a nonprofit organization that provides holistic child development for children living in poverty in 25 third-world countries.

"I think this mission trip coming from the business school raises a question: Does faith matter to business students?" MacGregor said. "Within the university setting, the school is focused on business, finances, etc. And our students are going to grapple with that. How can they live out their faith and integrate business skills in a meaningful way?"

The mission trip, which is student-led with faculty support, was established in 2009 and is made possible by alumni and corporate donations—Ernst & Young, KPMG, Deloitte, PricewaterhouseCoopers, and ConocoPhillips were among the companies providing financial and training support for this year's trip.

John Rogers, Baylor Accounting alumnus and senior manager, assurance services for Ernst & Young, helped with the inception and coordination of the mission trip.

"I really struggled with my decision to enter into the world of public accounting because I knew God was calling me to do something more," Rogers said. "This trip is important because it allows students to realize that they can actually contribute to God's kingdom by using their accounting skills. We don't have to quit our jobs and go to seminary to be useful to God. He can use us right where we are."

The Baylor group spent the majority of the trip working with UCU, which was established in 1997 as the first Christian university in Uganda. Its mission is parallel to Baylor's—placing an emphasis on the integration of faith and learning. Baylor students hosted various events at UCU and developed relationships with students in Compassion's Leadership Development Program (LDP), which consists of graduates of Compassion's Child Sponsorship Program who are now provided a university education at UCU.



UGANDA



Jane Baldwin, director of Graduate Accounting Programs, and David Hurtt, associate professor of Accounting, also served as faculty advisors on the trip. Hurtt said the Baylor and UCU student interaction was priceless.

"I think one of the most important parts of the trip was the cross-cultural exchange with the UCU students; the students were fully integrated within our team," Hurtt said.

Crystal Feldbush, a senior Accounting major, described the trip as a mutual learning experience for the Baylor and UCU students.

"I decided to go on the trip because I thought it would be a wonderful opportunity to use my business knowledge to glorify God and serve the people of Africa—little did I know how much of a blessing they would be to me and the things I would learn from them," Feldbush said.

Baylor students hosted a four-day oil and gas conference at UCU, which featured a slew of international speakers and experts from Tullow Oil, Uganda's Ministry of Energy, Ernst & Young, and Deloitte.

Ethics and fraud seminars were also held with guest speakers and student-led discussions. Baylor students helped UCU students with presentation skills throughout a UCU student case competition that was judged by Baylor graduate students and faculty.

"The things we take for granted at Baylor, or even in the states, such as presentation skills, writing resumes or interviewing skills, is knowledge so beneficial to the students in Uganda, and they can't wait to learn more," Feldbush said.

Baylor and UCU students worked in teams to help local, small business owners establish sustainable business frameworks through consulting, strategy and budgeting help.

"After discussions with the business owners, we were able to give them some practical implementations to further the success of the business," Feldbush said. "To corporate America, it may seem like basic knowledge, but to the business owner in Africa, our advice was like a treasured gem."

With half of Uganda's population living below the international poverty line, sustainable business operations prove extremely important to the alleviation of poverty. The students on next year's mission trip will be able to evaluate and monitor the progress of businesses that received consultations.

"Last year, we bought a sewing machine for some women who are in poverty," MacGregor said. "We met with them again this year, and saw how their business was doing and how they are taking our advice on the strategies that we offered. That is a real impact."



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For the second consecutive year, the Baylor group held a pastors conference and distributed 300 Bibles provided by a donor. They also worked with members of the Pastors Discipleship Network, a new program created by Compassion International.

"Specifically, we worked with wives of pastors in the Discipleship Network to train them with the skills needed to establish businesses and distribute inventory online to support the churches," MacGregor said.

Students also organized two sports camps and visited and played with children in Compassion's program.

"I thoroughly enjoyed visiting the Compassion site and playing with the sponsored children," Feldbush said. "What an eye-opening experience and a fun time—the kids overflow with love and radiate joy."

MacGregor said he hopes to continue to find and create opportunities to leverage accounting students' business skills through the mission trip. He would also like to expand outreach by establishing an alumni mission trip.

"This generation has more freedom to go out and change the world as opposed to 10 years ago, 20 years ago, etc.," MacGregor said. "The desire to help others has always been there, but I feel like there's more of an increased awareness now. We are trying to create a mindset of business as a mission through use of support organizations, like Compassion."

Melissa Riehl, donor services director at Compassion International, agreed Baylor's partnership with Compassion is significant.

"As a Baylor alum and former faculty member, it's a dream come true to be working in partnership with Baylor," Riehl said. "We were ultimately connected by another alum and Compassion supporter who also believed that Compassion could offer students an opportunity to both learn about global poverty and actively take part in the solution."

By continuing the annual trip, the group is establishing an infrastructure that will benefit the people of Uganda for years to come.

"Change takes more than our two-week trip," Hurtt said. "It's an ongoing process."

Baylor accounting students will also continue to benefit from the experience—transforming from students into business professionals with a global outlook.

"The trip alters your perspective on certain things," Feldbush said. "The accounting students are given the opportunity to learn, grow, and be exposed to an entirely different culture they wouldn't have experienced otherwise."

If you are interested in being part of the team for the 2011 trip, contact Jason MacGregor at jason_macgregor@baylor.edu. Learn more about Compassion International's Leadership Development Program by contacting Melissa Riehl at mriehl@us.ci.org.

