Service takes the spotlight on MBA trip to Argentina

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It started out modestly, as a way to offer volunteer opportunities to students during one of their international trips, but in the last three years, public service has grown to become a focal point of the annual MBA Global Leadership trip to Argentina.



MBA students spent a day planting vegetable gardens at an orphanage in Buenos Aires as part of this year's Global Leadership trip to Argentina.

“There’s a real desire on the part of students to give something back and contribute positively to the places they visit,” says Stephen Estrada, director of professional education, who helps coordinate the program. “With the Global Leadership trip to

Buenos Aires, we saw an opportunity to take Tulane’s model of public service and expand it internationally.”

The Argentina trip is part of the MBA course Global Leadership III, taught by Visiting Assistant Professor of Management Eduardo Guzman and focused on the business environment of Latin America. While this year’s trip included a two-day academic program on doing business in Latin America, the highlights of the trip were a day of public service at a local orphanage and a service learning project that matched MBA students with four nongovernmental organizations in Argentina. In keeping with Tulane’s model of service learning, the consulting project was designed to enable students to use knowledge and skills learned in the classroom to help solve real-world problems.

The project kicked off in August when MBA student teams were matched with one of the four organizations: EMA, which works to improve quality of life for people with multiple sclerosis; Fundación Leon, which promotes social justice; Los Naranjos, which mentors and supports at-risk youth by teaching them the craft of pottery; and Fundación Claritas, which offers educational programs for employees and administrators of NGOs.



MBA students with representatives of Fundación Leon, one of four NGOs in Argentina that students worked with as part of this year's MBA Service Learning Project.

Working with translators, the students met and interacted with the clients through a series of video conferences and developed consulting reports tailored to meet the specific needs of each organization. Some clients sought marketing assistance or

advice on a business plan; others were interested in financial analysis or managerial recommendations.

During November’s trip to Argentina, the students presented their reports to the clients in person, highlighting their findings and answering any questions the clients might have had.

“The thing I’ll remember the most is seeing how excited they were about our report and presentation,” says Reid Pennebaker (MBA ’13), whose team developed ideas to generate additional revenues for Fundación Claritas. “That moment when you see your work will impact someone in a positive way is something you can’t recreate.”

While time constraints and language barriers made the project one of the more difficult ones he’s worked on as an MBA student, Pennebaker says it was also one of the more rewarding.

“All of us wished we’d had more time to interact with the clients and hone in even better on our suggestions, but at the end of the day the client was very happy and we were very happy. Overall, it was a wonderful experience.”