Through Journeyman International, Cal Poly Architecture Students Have a Chance to Change the World Before They Even Graduate

By Matt Lauer

In Guadalajara, Mexico, a home is being erected for orphaned and abandoned teens. A Cal Poly student, working through Journeyman International, designed the building, which will soon be a home for young men and women who have nowhere else to go but the streets.

Run by two Cal Poly alums, Journeyman International connects architecture students to non-governmental organizations with plans to construct schools, clinics, and other vital infrastructure in developing countries. The students—in work that doubles as their senior project or other classroom credit—provide research, schematics and final designs, and project logistics for buildings that will be constructed by the NGOs.

The nonprofit is “Learn by Doing” in action: an opportunity for Cal Poly’s building professionals to gain real-world experience and make a positive difference for people living in some of the world’s poorest countries.

“Students who have never been outside of the United States have the opportunity to see new ways of doing things, to step out of their comfort zones and see the world from a different perspective,” says Journeyman International founder Daniel Wiens (second from left), pictured with several students. “It’s an opportunity to see the world through the eyes of others and be part of something bigger than themselves.”

Since its creation in 2009 as part of founder Daniel Wiens’ senior project, Journeyman International has managed half a dozen design projects. It pleases such nations as Mexico, Zambia, Ghana, Cameroon, Ethiopia and Haiti. Projects have included orphanages, schools, and a safehouse for children escaping human trafficking.

“A joint force of Cal Poly students and the NGO can create something very powerful,” says Wiens (B.S., Construction Management, 2010). “We’re tethering an untapped labor force with the desire to create a real, lasting impact in the world. The key is bridging the gap between these two forces.”

As his own senior project was wrapping up, Wiens filed paperwork to create a nonprofit organization. Journeyman International was born. For his senior project in 2009, he partnered with an architecture student and selected a project through Global Outreach Mission to build a clinic in Ghana. He helped to design the building, hired local crews, and constructed the clinic.

Anna Nagasugi, a fifth-year architecture student set to graduate this spring, has spent the last year designing a secondary school in Akatsi, Ghana, through Journeyman and an organization called Disaster Volunteers of Ghana (DIVOG). Her design would impact the residents there.

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“My senior project was wrapping up, and I was looking for a new challenge,” says Nagasugi (B.S., Architecture, 2011). “I was interested in the idea of a student nonprofit organization that could help provide design services for NGOs. I really wanted to get more hands-on experience, so this project was just perfect for me.”

“I chose this project because I wanted to spend my year working on a design that would actually be put to use,” says Nagasugi (B.S., Architecture, 2011). “It’s been an unbelievable opportunity for me to apply the knowledge I’ve gained at Cal Poly as a real project.”

“During the academic year, our students provide cultural and site research, design mock-ups for review by in-country partners, budgeting, scheduling and much more depending on the project circumstance. Once the final design is complete, the students and J.I. act as advisors to the construction process while the partnering organization, and community, construct the facility.”

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For more information on Journeyman International, visit http://www.journeymaninternational.org.