



# The Mosaic

University Honors Program  
Georgia Southern University  
Special Edition

## Honors Alternative Spring Break: Honduras

This spring, ten Georgia Southern University students participated in the Honors Alternative Spring Break to Honduras, an opportunity that intertwined a cultural immersion experience with service to a local community.

The philosophy of the University Honors Program rests on four foundations, one of which challenges students to develop a global perspective. In this spirit, the Honduras experience was created through a partnership between the University Honors Program and the Office of Admissions to prepare students to become global citizens, foster international understanding and increase the number of Central American students studying at Georgia Southern University.

“The Honors Alternative Spring Break to Honduras enabled me to go on my first venture outside of the United States. The unforgettable children of Copprome and the outstanding hospitality of the Honduran families have helped me to set a new standard for myself – one that makes use of the impact I can have on the world,” said Maricel Williams, a sophomore honors Pre-Nursing major.



During their week abroad, honors students coordinated a series of projects at Copprome, an orphanage located in the town of El Progreso. The orphanage houses seventy Honduran children who have been abandoned, sexually or emotionally abused, or have lost their parents to the AIDS virus.

In the months leading up to their departure, the students meticulously planned activities to meet the needs of the children at Copprome. Recalling a lecture from Dr. Darin Van Tassell’s Introduction to International Studies course, David Robeck, a sophomore honors International Studies major, encouraged the group to focus their projects on universal facets of every culture – art, music, sport and food.



Examples of the resulting activities included a lesson on playing the recorder, an exercise which allowed the children to paint their aspirations and dreams on canvases, and organized games of ultimate frisbee and soccer. Since the trip coincided with Semana Santa, the week leading up to Easter, students introduced the children to the Easter Bunny and the American tradition of the Easter Egg Hunt using items donated by the University Store, Department of University Housing, Office of Admissions and Center for Student Leadership and Civic Engagement.

In addition to giving their time to the children, the students made a group donation of durable goods such as cookware, plates and utensils to Copprome’s spartan kitchen.

“Working with the children of Copprome opened my eyes to a whole new world. Although I felt that I was able to impact the lives of the youth we worked with, I believe that the biggest impact made was by the children on myself. They taught me so much about life – I could not have asked for a more rewarding experience,” said Heather Jo Harralson, a junior honors Exercise Science major.



At the orphanage, the honors students were joined by local high school students who assisted with the projects and served as translators. Many of the Honduran students expressed significant interest in attending Georgia Southern University, one of whom was Gustavo Rodriguez who was presented with an official invitation to join the University Honors Program along with a corresponding scholarship. Rodriguez had interviewed for the award by phone several weeks prior to the trip.

In preparation for the experience, the honors students met regularly with international Georgia Southern students from Honduras to learn about Central American history, economics, culture and politics. One Honduran student, freshman Pre-Business major Fares Lagos, was selected to participate in the trip as a cultural liaison. "I was honored to have the privilege of introducing the American students to my home country," said Lagos. Lagos, along with his parents Javier and Susie, was key in helping the group make local arrangements and navigate the Honduran countryside.



One evening, the Lagos family arranged a dinner featuring local cuisine hosted by prominent Honduran attorney Jorge Garcia Martinez, son of a member of the Honduran Supreme Court of Justice. At the event, Garcia expressed his gratitude for the contributions the Georgia Southern students had made to the children of his country.



As a result of the Lagos's efforts and additional Honduran relationships cultivated by Ron Jones, international recruitment manager in the Office of Admissions, the honors students were able to delve beneath the surface and experience true Honduran culture during their stay. Jones worked with several Georgia Southern Honduran connections to arrange a series of cultural events over the course of the week. Lydia and Billy Coplan, parents of freshman Art major Stephanie Coplan, provided a tour of a local banana plantation. Public Administration graduate student Jennifer Tarrab's parents, Ana and Victor, traveled from their home in the capital of Tegucigalpa to host a barbeque. Lastly, Georgia Southern Business

Administration alumna Cecilia Midence welcomed the students to Telamar, a resort located in the beach community of Tela where she currently is employed.

"I have traveled to many different places over the years, but the Honors Alternative Spring Break was a completely different experience. Instead of seeing the glossed over 'touristic' view of a country, I was given the opportunity to immerse myself in the culture and societal problems of Honduras," said George Barnhill, a sophomore honors History and Anthropology major.



One of the many cultural highlights was an excursion to Copán Ruinas, the jewel of the Mayan kingdom in Honduras. The ruins, which date back to 1000BC, were declared a UNESCO world heritage site in 1980.

In the fall, the honors students will host a photography exhibition intended to capture the people, places and landscape of Honduras as a way to share their experience with the entire university community. At the event, the students will sell the fruits of one of their projects at the orphanage – greeting cards adorned with artwork created by Coprome's children. Proceeds will help fund desperately needed mattresses, blankets and pillows. The fall semester will coincide with honors Biology sophomore Jessica Sparrow's efforts to launch a chapter of Students Helping Honduras on the Georgia Southern campus.



"The Honors Alternative Spring Break to Honduras was a motivating, inspiring and humbling experience. Not only did I gain a new perspective on the social and cultural aspects of the Honduran people, but I was humbled to realize what I had taken for granted as a United States citizen. This experience through the University Honors Program has broadened my mind and furthered my sense of civic responsibility to the interconnected global community," said Angela Williams, a junior honors Biology and Spanish major.

The Honduras trip was made possible, in part, through generous donations by Statesboro resident Evelyn Mabry, who worked with Linda Griffin, a director of major gifts in University Advancement, and from Dr. Fred Richter, founding director of the University Honors Program.



The Honors Alternative Spring Break: Honduras was the second trip offered by the University Honors Program in a series designed to allow students to develop a global perspective and foster an ethic of civic responsibility. The 2007 program took place in Miami, where honors students worked with two non-profit organizations which provide services to Cuban and Haitian refugees – the International Rescue Committee and Church World Service.

Additional thoughts shared by honors students as they reflected on their Honduran experience:

“The Honors Alternative Spring Break to Honduras was truly life changing. It allowed me to familiarize myself with a culture that is very different from my own. My initial apprehensions about the language barrier were soon dispelled by the beauty of the country and the overwhelming hospitality of the Honduran people. The children at Copprome were so incredibly full of love. Working with them made me realize how much I could help others who may be less fortunate.”

- Rachel Anderson, a sophomore honors Anthropology major



“Being in the University Honors Program has provided me with countless intellectual and international opportunities. Visiting Honduras on the Honors Alternative Spring Break, I was privileged to work at an orphanage which impacted me profoundly as I saw the abysmal conditions the children lived in daily. With this experience, I hope to continue to assist the orphanage by creating a chapter of Students Helping Honduras on our campus.”

- Jessica Sparrow, a sophomore honors Biology major

“Being part of the University Honors Program has provided me with many opportunities for growth. While participating in the Honors Alternative Spring Break to Honduras, I feel I was able to make a difference in the lives of these children at Copprome and get a new perspective on life, which would not have been possible without my participation in the program.”

- Ava Conger, a sophomore honors English major



“The Honors Alternative Spring Break to Honduras provided me with an excellent opportunity for service, experiential learning and fun. The combination of these three things made the trip an extraordinary experience in which I was challenged and Grew. We gave the children we worked with at the orphanage the affection they needed and returned with a greater understanding of the world.”

- David Robeck, a sophomore honors International Studies major

“After a childhood trapped in suburbia, being given the opportunity to travel to Honduras to help underprivileged children has been both exciting and eye-opening. Because of the University Honors Program I was able to embark on an adventure encompassing both intellectual and cultural spectra. After this experience, I feel enlightened to the conditions of Central America.”

- Brad Wilbur, a sophomore honors Biology major

