



Global  
Skills  
Opportunity



UNIVERSITY  
of Prince Edward  
ISLAND

# GSO GLOBAL SKILLS OPPORTUNITY SUCCESS

# 2020- 2025



**UPEI OFFICE OF  
STUDY ABROAD  
&  
INTERNATIONAL  
PARTNERSHIPS**

Prepared by  
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\* All photos in this booklet have been provided by UPEI students abroad

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

	LETTER FROM THE OSAIP	2
	GSO GRANT OVERVIEW	3
	GSO SUCCESS AT UPEI	4
	MAYMESTER SUCCESS STORIES	5
	SEMESTER ABROAD SUCCESS STORIES	15
SUMMER ABROAD SUCCESS STORIES	23	
GLOBAL BRIGADES SUCCESS STORIES	25	
FUTURE OUTLOOK	36	
CONTACT INFORMATION	37	

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# LETTER FROM THE OFFICE OF STUDY ABROAD & INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS



**SHERILYN ACORN**

Manager, International Liaison Officer

UPEI students studying abroad numbers would not be at the level they are today without the GSO funding. This incredible program has allowed us to send more students abroad than initially anticipated.

Living in a remote location such as Prince Edward Island, the GSO program funding has afforded many of our students the ability to participate in international experiences that they may not otherwise have had an opportunity to take part in.

The main objective of the GSO program is to empower students, especially under-represented students, with the ability to learn in another country while building the skills and connections to help them enter the workforce at a later date. These international experiences help students become more culturally aware and adaptable, while also contributing to other skills such as communication and problem-solving. Students become more independent when abroad alone but also learn how to work as a team when abroad as part of our Maymester faculty led cohort programs - which have proven to be a huge success thanks to the GSO funding.



**DR. KRISTIN DOMIKE**

Program Officer

**155**

UPEI Students Who Received GSO Funding

**\$428K**

Total funding to support students, May 2022 - Mar 2025



# GLOBAL SKILLS OPPORTUNITY (GSO) GRANT OVERVIEW

## VISION

UPEI was awarded \$534,968.76 in funding to support student mobility, in addition to a \$50,000.00 innovation budget to support improvements to student safety and mobility.

## MISSION

The GSO program aims to empower post-secondary institutions to increase the participation of young Canadians—especially underrepresented students—in international learning opportunities both at home and abroad.

Global Skills Opportunity is funded by Employment and Social Development Canada, administered jointly by Colleges and Institutes Canada and Universities Canada. Projects are implemented by participating colleges and universities across the country.



# GSO SUCCESS AT UPEI

## INITIAL GOAL VS CURRENT NUMBERS

***Our initial goal was to fund 99 students to go abroad over three years. The breakdown was as follows:***

Indigenous students: 10  
Students with disabilities: 10  
Low-income students: 40  
Other students: 39

**TOTAL STUDENTS ANTICIPATED: 99**

***Our actual numbers are as follows:***

Indigenous students: 8  
Students with disabilities: 38  
Low-income students: 48  
Other students: 61

**TOTAL STUDENTS: 155**

Our numbers are 57% higher than we originally anticipated. We have spent over \$428,000 on student outbound mobility through funding provided by the GSO grant. These funds help offset the cost associated with studying abroad and especially the high airfare costs due to our remote location.

# MAYMESTERS



## UPEI MAYMESTER FACULTY-LED COURSES

UPEI Maymester courses are faculty-led programs taught by UPEI faculty members. These courses are often taught in May, though they may take place during other times of the year. Maymester courses typically have part of the course taking place on the UPEI campus, and then part of the course taking place in another country as part of the learning experience. Recent Maymester courses took students abroad to the following countries: New Zealand, Spain, Costa Rica, and Italy. While abroad, students were able to experience learnings that truly enhanced the course material. Amazing opportunities for the students and faculty!

✓ **58**

Total Maymester students receiving GSO funding

✓ **4**

Total Maymester Programs with students receiving GSO funding

✓ **8**

Total number of Indigenous students receiving funding

✓ **15**

Total number of students with accessibility needs receiving funding

✓ **11**

Total low-income students who received GSO funding

✓ **24**

Other students who received GSO funding

# MAYMESTER SUCCESS STORIES

**1** UPEI students experienced a cultural exchange in New Zealand through a Maymester initiative in May/June 2024.



Indigenous Students Funded

**8**



Total Students in Course

**10**



# NEW ZEALAND SUCCESS STORY

Ten UPEI students learned about the distinctions and commonalities among Indigenous peoples worldwide by comparing their language and knowledge with that of the Māori people during the Maymester course, “Global Indigenous Language and Cultural Ways of Knowing,” which took place at UPEI and in New Zealand from May 6 to June 13.

The students were all from the UPEI Faculty of Indigenous Knowledge, Education, Research, and Applied Studies (IKERAS), including Dr. Judy Clark, UPEI Elder in Residence. They were accompanied by Professor Erin Reid, then Interim Dean, Faculty of Indigenous Knowledge, Education, Research, and Applied Studies (IKERAS); Sherilyn Acorn, Manager of Study Abroad and International Programs; and Doris Googoo, IKERAS Senior Lecturer, and Dr. Corinne Chappell, Advisor to the Vice President Academic Research on Indigenous Affairs, who co-taught the course. The students began the academic section of the course at UPEI and then travelled to Auckland, New Zealand, for the experiential learning aspect. Following their time in New Zealand, the group completed the course at UPEI in mid-June.

Reflecting on the course, Elder Clark said, “The New Zealand Māori experience was amazing for me. I could see the similarities and the importance of the language, ancestors, culture, treaties, geography, and history between the Māori people and the First Nations of Canada. It was an experience that I will always treasure and the pride I carry with my own Mi'kmaq Nation.”

In Auckland, the students participated in two days of cultural exchange and experiential learning, led by Māori tutor Kururangi Johnston, from the Auckland University of Technology. In the Māori language, Auckland is called Tāmaki or Tāmaki-makau-rau, meaning “Tāmaki with a hundred lovers” in reference to the desirability of its fertile land at the hub of waterways in all directions. Nearly 10 per cent of the population living in Tāmaki are Māori (Tangata Whenua—People of the Land).



The UPEI students were then invited into the nearby Ngāti Whātua Ōrākei Marae community where they learned from Dane Tumahai, seventh-generation Ngāti Whātua Ōrākei, and a direct descendant of the Māori Chief, Apihai Te Kawau who gifted land to establish the city of Auckland.

They also travelled to Wellington to learn about empowering Rangatahi (youth) and current strategies being implemented to enrich communities at the Tuia Trust, led by Maxine Graham who has extensive experience in the national and local government, and Maugarongo Tito. The Tuia Trust program supports young Māori people, empowering them to give back to their community. While in Wellington, the students learned more about the Māori and Crown relationships during a private tour of Parliament, and a subsequent welcome meeting with the High Commission of Canada.

The students' final days in New Zealand were spent in Christchurch, called Ōtautahi in Māori, where they learned about Māori policy and treaty relationships. They heard and learned from students and community members, concluding the visit with a unique Waka paddling experience on the Avon River, and a Poroporoaki (farewell) with the hosts.

“The opportunity for students to experience Aotearoa and Māori culture on personal and professional levels provided exceptional experiential learning,” said Professor Reid. “Exposure to real-world scenarios contributed to the growth in practical skills, autonomy, and responsibility. Students embraced this fantastic endeavour with vigour and can attest to the program’s valuable learning.”

Each evening, the students, faculty, and staff participated in activities to enhance their learnings and share their cultures. Some of these included a sharing circle, a full moon ceremony, exchange of knowledge bundles with elders, beach walks, and various craft activities, including shell crafts, talking sticks, beadwork and video making. Throughout the course, students were encouraged to keep journals of their thoughts and experiences as a way to reflect on their learnings.

“Our experience in Aotearoa (New Zealand) was truly wonderful!” said Félix Mino-zoongde’e Larocque, a member of the Algonquins of Ontario and a UPEI Class of 2024 graduate. “Our numerous conversations and encounters with Māori spokespeople, elders, leaders, and youth were rich and meaningful. Being immersed in Māori culture enabled us to realize that our Māori cousins share many similar cultural values and worldviews with Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island (North America). Some of our shared goals are to uplift our peoples, promote language revitalization, teach our ways of knowing, and to show the beauty of our cultures and traditions to others. I would like to say migwech, merci, kia ora, wela’lin (all meaning thank you) to everyone who made this international experience the success it was!”

The course was organized by the UPEI Office of Study Abroad and International Partnerships, in collaboration with the federal Global Skills Opportunities Program, the Florence Simmons Scholarship, and the UPEI IKERAS faculty. The students were fully funded by the Global Skills Opportunities Program, which supports mobility projects that empower Canadian students, especially those who are underrepresented, to take advantage of international learning experiences and to develop skills such as problem-solving, adaptability, resilience, and intercultural competency.

# MAYMESTER SUCCESS STORIES

**2** UPEI students studied abroad to learn about sustainable economic development in Spain through a Maymester initiative in May 2024.



Low-income or  
Accessibility Needs  
Funded

**3**



Total Students funded  
in Course

**10**



## SPAIN SUCCESS STORY

A group of 11 UPEI students studied at the University of Burgos in northern Spain, delving into understanding how heritage can be a key resource in promoting sustainable economic development in rural areas. The students are accompanied by Dr. Melissa James, director of undergraduate programs, UPEI Faculty of Business, and Sherilyn Acorn, manager of the Study and Stay and exchange programs, Office of Study Abroad and International Collaboration.

“This is an incredible opportunity for students to see the history and culture of and learn about sustainable practice in northern Spain,” said James.

The students were welcomed by Verónica Calderón, vice-chancellor of the University of Burgos. She graciously received the students, emphasizing her university’s commitment to promoting student mobility and cultural exchange and highlighting the importance of international collaboration in the academic field. While speaking with the students, Calderón recommended that, while learning and studying in Burgos, they seek to understand how heritage can be used to generate economic opportunities in rural environments, in addition to participating in an enriching experience that combines academic learning with immersion in the rich cultural, linguistic, and natural heritage of Burgos and the surrounding province.

While in Spain, the students are participating in training sessions led by faculty at the University of Burgos. The program includes a series of cultural visits to places such as La Catedral, Atapuerca, Las Huelgas, and the Hospital del Ray. They will also be walking some of the final stages of the Camino de Santiago Trail.

Bianca Boutilier, a third-year business student, said she is grateful to have the opportunity to take part in an educational experience like this. “Learning about the heritage, culture, and sustainable business practices of this beautiful region in Spain has truly broadened my perspective as a business student. Thank you to the Global Skills Opportunity program for the funding to make this possible and the University of Burgos for hosting us and for providing us with this inspiring, once-in-a-lifetime learning opportunity.”

# MAYMESTER SUCCESS STORIES

**3** UPEI Students travelled to Costa Rica in 2023 to learn about sustainable business practices in tourism.



Low-income or Accessibility Needs Funded

**11**



Total Students funded in Course

**20**



# COSTA RICA SUCCESS STORY

Twenty UPEI business students spent 12 days in Costa Rica in May, learning about various sustainable tourism development practices and business models, through a Maymester program developed by the University's Faculty of Business and its Office of Study Abroad and International Partnerships.

Known as an outdoor enthusiast's paradise, Costa Rica provided the students with opportunities to learn how sustainable tourism businesses and organizations began and how they demonstrate a commitment to sustainability and best environmental practices as the centre of their operations. Led by Dr. Melissa James, associate professor of business, and Sherilyn Acorn, Study Abroad manager at UPEI, the students learned about local environmental initiatives in San Jose and toured a chocolate factory, a local campus, and an environmental park. While in Manuel Antonio National Park, they visited a sustainable organic coffee operation and a bee farm, and learned about other rural development initiatives. They also experienced the biodiversity of the Monteverde Cloud Forest Biological Reserve and learned about tree planting and conservation in the area. The entire experience was planned in collaboration with Costa Rica Global Learning Programs.

When they returned to PEI, the students, under the guidance of Dr. James, developed and presented strategies and recommendations to the Prince Edward Island tourism industry, which connected their learning and experience in Costa Rica to the local level.

Reflecting on her time in Costa Rica, student Allison Weatherbie said, "I returned home inspired to further educate myself and others on sustainable practices that may be implemented on Prince Edward Island." Through Universities Canada offering the Global Skills Opportunities (GSO), the Office of Study Abroad provided domestic students with funding for this experience. This funding has increased the overall number of students who have been able to participate in UPEI's international exchange programs.

# MAYMESTER SUCCESS STORIES

**4** UPEI students studied abroad in Italy to study the history of Western Medicine.



Low-income or Accessibility Needs Funded

**10**



Total Students funded in Course

**18**



## ITALY SUCCESS STORY

Dr. James Moran, UPEI history professor, and Dr. Christian Lacroix, UPEI biology professor, partnered with the University's Office of Study Abroad and International Partnerships to take 19 students to Italy from May 19–29, 2023, through the Maymester program. This short-term excursion was a faculty-led multidisciplinary experience that provided students with the opportunity to study the history of western medicine.

Under the guidance of Drs. Moran and Lacroix, the students went to Padua and Bologna, Italy, to view historic collections at medical universities, where they gained an appreciation of the foundations that shaped modern western medicine. Many of the roots of medical knowledge and practices originated in Europe, and institutions in Padua and Bologna, and Montpellier, France, dominated the practice of medicine in the later Middle Ages and Renaissance periods. The early days of formal anatomy teaching and hands-on dissections and operations were pioneered as innovative methods at those institutions.

Students learned about the historical contexts within which the practice of western medicine emerged; why the medical innovations of the Renaissance period were controversial at the time that they were being made; how this field evolved over time; and current institutional practices of collecting, identifying, classifying, and preserving specimens and artifacts related to the history of medicine.

Study Abroad opportunities, such as this one, are rich learning experiences that increase students' understanding of cultures and languages, as well as their global perspective.

Reflecting on his time in Italy, student Dylan MacDougall said, "This experience has already enriched and widened my cultural perspective."

Thanks to Universities Canada and Global Skills Opportunities (GSO), the Office of Study Abroad was able to offer domestic students funding for this experience. This funding has increased the overall number of students who have been able to participate in UPEI's international exchange programs.

# STUDENT EXCHANGE SUCCESS STORIES

## SEMESTER, YEAR OR SUMMER EXCHANGES

UPEI Office of Study Abroad & International Partnerships is pleased to present the following details about students who have spent 1-2 semesters abroad.



**43**

Total students receiving GSO funding

**11**

Total number of students with accessibility needs receiving funding

**15**

Total low-income students who received GSO funding

**17**

Other students who received GSO funding



# SEMESTER ABROAD SUCCESS STORIES

**1** Peter, an Anthropology & Sociology student studied in Brussels, Belgium.



"I had the opportunity to study at the University UCLouvain Saint-Louis Bruxelles in Brussels, Belgium. Truly there are so many highlights that it's hard to choose just a few! During the welcome/orientation week that was put on by the host university, I was able to meet other exchange students from all around the world and it was great since for most of us, it was our first time in Brussels and we didn't know anyone. The program had really great language and culture integration courses and activities like a city tour, trying famous Belgian foods, and even a Belgian waffle workshop!

Brussels is right in the heart of Europe, and I remember being shocked that I could travel to France in 30 minutes, or that Amsterdam was just a bus ride away. The biggest highlight though would be the people I met. I remember being super nervous at first, showing up to a country where I didn't know anyone but I'm so glad I did because it gave me the opportunity to meet the best people who I would spend my entire study abroad experience with, travelling through Europe together, and now we've become friends for life.

Once I had the experience of studying and living in another country, I was able to show myself how doable it actually is and from this, I definitely want to look into doing an internship or graduate degree abroad, or maybe even eventually end up having a career abroad as well. I'm really glad I chose to study abroad because it's really rounded out my education. Experiencing different cultures, learning in different environments, and learning different languages, it's a huge part of the experience—proving to yourself what you can do with abilities to adapt, learn, connect and be "uncomfortable". "

# SEMESTER ABROAD SUCCESS STORIES

## 2 Adele, a Biology student, studied in both Barbados and North Carolina



"Studying abroad was one of my best life experiences. I developed personally, acquired new experiences, and learned new skills. Studying abroad allowed me to meet new people, try new things, and discover new places. This experience has motivated me to keep exploring different places and cultures.

Studying abroad has encouraged me to be more outgoing, open-minded, and optimistic. The lessons I learned made me more resilient, more optimistic about future opportunities, and eager to explore new experiences.

What I love most about Barbados is, by far, the sunshine and the culture. Barbados' lifestyle is referred to as "Caribbean Time." Timekeeping and stress are non-existent. My days were spent lounging on the beach, watching the sunset, and studying in coffee shops. The culture is very relaxed, easygoing, and has good vibes. Everybody is so nice and happy to lend you a hand. I also really liked that the island is small and easy to navigate, much like PEI. Something that surprised me about Barbados was how popular free-range chickens were! Throughout the semester, we had chickens and birds in our apartment looking for food. They were so cute. My favourite highlights were visiting the markets, learning to surf, boating, and snorkelling with turtles.

The thing that I enjoyed most about my time in the United States was the variety of people that the university attracted. Having a student population of over 10,000 and a large international community, I developed many relationships with people from around the world. Much like in the movies, this campus was huge and centred on football games. There were many sorority and fraternity houses, and the campus offered numerous activities. There was a cinema, swimming pool, multiple restaurants, a large gym, a performance theatre, and others. Western Carolina University offers a variety of courses to choose from and a small student-to-staff ratio. None of my classes had more than 30 students. I completed a 75-mile camp and bike excursion after taking a 'bikepacking' course."

# SEMESTER ABROAD SUCCESS STORIES

## 3 Kathleen, a Psychology and Religious Studies student studied in Finland



“The main highlights of my time abroad were, without a doubt, the people I met, the travel opportunities, and the newfound cultural appreciation. The connections made from studying abroad are some like I have never had before, and I am so happy to have made the memories I did with said people.

These experiences, specifically at JYU, have given me a great deal of confidence—in myself and my capabilities. Considering I am only finishing my second year of studies, it is reassuring to imagine that I can study abroad for another semester (or two) if I would like to! It has also allowed me to indulge in the idea of someday having a job that may require international travel, and to be excited rather than intimidated about this.

To anyone considering participating in a UPEI study abroad opportunity, I can't say enough good things about it. The support you receive from the Office of Study Abroad at UPEI makes the entire process that much easier, and you can tell they love seeing their students succeed and take part in experiences like this. If considering, I would do plenty of research about your potential place of study and ask as many questions as you can to both sides to feel more comfortable! Looking at the to-do list for the application may feel overwhelming, but I suggest starting as early as possible and again, reaching out to the office if you need any help. Once you start checking things off, you wouldn't believe how simple the process really is!

On top of making meaningful connections with other students while you are studying abroad, there is also so much self-discovery and self-reflection that comes with this experience. Studying abroad allows you to explore new cultures, languages, and academic opportunities. It can be an incredibly rewarding and transformative experience that offers numerous personal and professional benefits.”

# SEMESTER ABROAD SUCCESS STORIES

**4** Carter, a UPEI Chemistry student, studied in Brussels, Belgium



“Travelling has always been an interest of mine, and when I found UPEI had a study abroad program, I was ecstatic! I spent a semester studying abroad in Brussels, Belgium, outside my comfort zone, taking social studies, ethics, and French courses to improve my speaking skills. It was really interesting to take courses in subjects I’ve never studied before! I spent my weekends travelling (my favourite trips included Switzerland and Barcelona) and met so many new friends. I’ll never forget how much fun I had with them.”



# SEMESTER ABROAD SUCCESS STORY

**5** Alexa, a Biology Major with Minor in Psychology studied in Malta



"Studying abroad for a semester in Malta provided me with valuable experiences and taught me important lessons that will benefit my personal and professional life. By pushing myself out of my comfort zone, I met students from many European countries and was fortunate enough to travel to nine countries while abroad, all while experiencing a new culture and educational system. I would recommend all students to take advantage of this incredible opportunity through UPEI as "The World is a book, and those who do not travel read only a page" (S. Augustinus)."

**6** Marc, a UPEI Business Administration Major with a Specialization in International Business studied in Belgium



"I studied at Université Saint-Louis in Brussels, Belgium, for a semester. During my time there, I got a firsthand look at how the European Parliament and European Union operate and tours of their buildings in the city. I became friends with other students from Mexico, Korea, Poland and more, who I am still communicating with today! Studying Abroad made me more confident and independent, allowing me to see more of the world and experience unfamiliar cultures in person. My favourite moment was travelling to the city of Dinant and seeing the skyline from the top of the citadel!"

# SEMESTER ABROAD SUCCESS STORY

# 7

Brandon, a Sociology Major, spent a semester studying abroad in Japan



"I studied abroad in Japan as a UPEI student. My study abroad experience in Japan was life-changing. It expanded my horizons, fostering a deep appreciation for cultural diversity. Beyond academics, it's about personal growth and adapting to a new societal environment. A favourite experience was exploring the Fushimi Inari Shrine in Kyoto with a childhood friend. Witnessing cherry blossoms at Shinjuku Gyoen National Garden was equally remarkable. I encourage other students to seize this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Embrace the moment and explore the resources available through UPEI's international programs office. The experience will shape your future in unexpected and profound ways."

# 8

Rowan, a Biology Major, spent a semester abroad studying in Spain



"I recently returned from my study abroad experience to Cordoba, Spain. Studying abroad has provided me the opportunity to learn more about the world, other cultures, and most importantly, about myself. I discovered many new interests and ideas for my future that I never would have if it wasn't for my time abroad. My global experience has changed my life for the better and allowed me to appreciate the beauty of the world far more than before. I am extremely grateful for the GSO funding as I was able to travel to so many more destinations and participate in amazing activities while paying for my studies. I will never forget this experience and I hope other students will have the opportunity to participate in a global exchange similar to mine."

# SEMESTER ABROAD SUCCESS STORY

**9** Lilly, a Kinesiology Major, spent a semester studying abroad in Belgium



It's one of the best opportunities I've ever done, and one of the best experiences I've ever done. I would never have been able to afford it or have this opportunity without the GSO funding. I met so many international friends and travelled to so many new countries. It definitely broadened my perspective on what life has to hold, and how much of the world that's out there that I'd want to see. It changed my plans for the future. I have so many more places I want to see and place I want to live. It also gave me the confidence to travel more. I loved experiencing adventure on my own.

**10** John, a Biology Major, spent a semester studying abroad at our partner school in Malta.



Studying abroad in Malta was an experience I will carry for the rest of my life, and helped define who I am today. By partaking in the study abroad program I was able to gain new perspectives on the other parts of the world. The knowledge I gained in the 5 months while abroad was more relevant than my entire university experience attended at home in PEI. After returning home, I strongly believe that every student should be allowed and encouraged to participate in this program. Without the GSO funding, this experience would not have been possible for me, along with the majority of other students. If this funding is made available again, students like me would have the opportunity to change their lives and open their minds.

# SUMMER ABROAD SUCCESS STORIES

## SUMMER PROGRAM

UPEI students participated in summer programs in France, Japan, Finland, Costa Rica, and Crete



*Milo studied in France and was visited by sister Kathleen after her semester abroad in Finland.*

**8**

Total students receiving GSO funding for a summer program

**2**

Total number of students with accessibility needs receiving funding

**3**

Total low-income students who received GSO funding

**3**

Other students who received GSO funding



# SUMMER ABROAD SUCCESS STORY

**1** Makayla, a UPEI Business Major, completed a course on AI in Business in France



“I went to Rennes Business School in France for two weeks to complete two courses in AI Business where I learned coding and applied it to business concepts. We also spent a lot of time walking around the city and viewing the architecture. The buildings are truly beautiful and it’s so easy to get around. It’s truly been an unforgettable trip.”

**2** Lauryn, a UPEI pre-Vet Major, completed a course in Costa Rica, working with dolphins and dogs



“I believe that studying with Loop Abroad will allow me to show that I am open-minded, have strong teamwork skills and dedication, and that I am flexible and adaptable. This international experience has allowed me to gain once-in-a-lifetime experience for my future dream job of becoming a veterinarian. I believe that the experience from this trip will greatly help with my application to vet school.”

# GLOBAL BRIGADES



## UPEI MEDICAL BRIGADE & ENGINEERING BRIGADE



**48**

Total Global Brigades students receiving GSO funding



**4**

Total Global Brigades Programs with students receiving GSO funding



**10**

Total number of students with accessibility needs receiving funding



**21**

Total low-income students who received GSO funding



**17**

Other students who received GSO funding

Global Brigades at UPEI offers students hands-on, volunteer experience relevant to their future career path. The student-led club is affiliated with the Global Brigades Organization, an international movement of students and professionals working alongside local communities and staff to implement sustainable solutions to health and economic disparities. Global Brigades employs a holistic model approach to help address various health and economic problems on a large scale. As a student involved with Global Brigades, you will learn about Global Brigades' core concepts, including sustainable development, Global Brigade foundations, ethical volunteering and the culture in Global Brigade partner countries. UPEI has a Medical Brigade Chapter and an Engineering Brigade Chapter.

# GLOBAL BRIGADES SUCCESS STORIES

**1** UPEI Global Medical Brigades travelled to Ghana in 2024 where they volunteered public health clinics and mobile medical clinics



Total Students Funded

**7**



Total Student Volunteers

**26**



# GHANA SUCCESS STORY

The UPEI Global Brigades Medical Chapter recently returned from a successful trip to Ghana where they volunteered their service to public health projects and mobile medical clinics in underserved communities from May 25 to June 4, 2024.

Twenty-eight UPEI students took part in the Global Medical Brigades this year. Faculty advisor Inge Dorsey supported the students throughout the planning and organizing phase, and clinical nursing instructor Kerie Murphy accompanied them to Ghana. The students shared their volunteering experiences abroad during a public presentation held June 17 in the UPEI Faculty of Sustainable Design Engineering building.

After returning from Ghana, third-year kinesiology student Brooke Smith said, “This experience was completely new to me. Growing up in a small province, I had never had the opportunity to truly immerse myself in a culture that wasn’t my own. Until I had this experience, I was never truly able to comprehend the healthcare disparities that would take place in different communities around the world. It was extremely eye-opening.”

Much effort went into preparing for this trip abroad over the past year. Bi-weekly meetings held during the school year included preparation for fundraisers, education about the program, vital signs training, and packing donation items, as well as visa and vaccination preparation. The students raised over \$39,000 in donations and sponsorships, and collected a wide variety of donated items, many which were used to create personal and oral hygiene packets. The donated glasses and sunglasses brought from PEI were used for patients by an optometrist in Ghana.

Over four clinic days in the communities of Asaafa and Immuna, the UPEI Global Brigade volunteers helped local physicians, dentists, optometrists, and pharmacists provide accessible health-care services to 1,000 people. Community members were also given the opportunity to register for Ghana’s national health insurance during the clinic days, providing them access to health-care for many years to come. Volunteers had the opportunity to participate in an additional public health project over three days, during which two biodigesters (biological waste treatment and management systems) were successfully constructed for two families in the community of Suprudo, with the help of local artisans.

# GHANA SUCCESS STORY, CONT.

Carter Wynne, a chemistry student who graduated in May, was the UPEI Medical Brigades chapter president this past year. He said that he was grateful for this experience.

"UPEI Medical Brigades has brought together the most phenomenal people in the UPEI community together to work towards a common goal: empowering communities to reach their own health, sanitation, and economic goals. Since the club was founded by Reilly Sullivan in 2021, dozens and dozens of students have made an impact on Global Brigades' partner communities, while becoming better leaders and global citizens. I wouldn't be the person I am today if I never found Global Brigades, and I am forever thankful for it."

Sidney Fall, a third-year nursing student, said, "My experience with Global Brigades in Ghana was profoundly enriching, filled with moments of inspiration and deep introspection. Participating in this initiative was invaluable for my growth as an individual as well as a global citizen."

Her words were echoed by the Global Medical Brigade volunteers. The trip to Ghana was an emotional and impactful experience, one the student volunteers said they will never forget. They are grateful for all those who made this experience possible, including the Global Brigades coordinators, staff, and healthcare professionals in Ghana, as well as their sponsors, families, friends, and the UPEI community who supported the endeavour along the way. In turn, these supporters are proud of the work performed by this hardworking UPEI Global Medical Brigades group.



# GLOBAL BRIGADES SUCCESS STORIES

**2** UPEI Engineering Brigades travelled to Honduras in 2024 where they designed a water system for a rural community.



Total Students  
Funded

**11**



Total Student  
Volunteers

**21**



# HONDURAS SUCCESS STORY

In February 2024, the UPEI Engineering Brigades Club traveled to Honduras where they designed a water system for the rural community of La Brea.

The 22-member student team worked alongside Honduran engineers and the Global Brigades staff on the project. This trip marked the second-ever successful UPEI Global Engineering Brigade service trip. They were accompanied by Dr. Libby Osgood, associate professor, Faculty of Sustainable Design Engineering, and Sherilyn Acorn, manager, UPEI Office of Study Abroad and International Partnerships.

The UPEI Engineering Brigade group began their time in La Brea by meeting with community leaders to determine the main issues surrounding the community's existing water system, said Maddy Cronin, president of the UPEI Engineering Brigades Club. While La Brea did have a water system, it did not consistently provide enough water to the community year-round, which is a problem as the population continues to grow.

The students split into three groups to gather data, map, and survey La Brea. Each group gathered information about household water use and family size, and then used GPS to record locations of the community's roads and all of its homes, taking measurements of where the water system piping would go. The data was compiled into a computer program where the water system was designed and pipe size and material were determined. The students created a budget and presented the design to the community on their final day in La Brea. After the students completed their presentation, children from the community performed a series of dances as a thank you.

The next step is for La Brea's water council to agree to implement the design and develop a funding plan. From there, a brigade can be organized to assist in the fundraising and building of the water system. Many of the volunteers from UPEI are eager to return and assist the community in building the water system, said Cronin.

Bridget Patterson, a final-year engineering student who participated in this year's brigade, commented on the experience and the impact it can have on the community: "Witnessing first-hand the passion that echoes within the small community of La Brea was a truly transformative experience. I am optimistic that with teamwork and dedication, a clean water system will be implemented and hopefully make positive changes for the members of the community."

The Global Engineering Brigades is an international organization that partners with university students to provide valuable assistance in under-resourced communities struggling with dysfunctional or non-existent water systems. The UPEI chapter of Global Engineering looks forward to future years of service abroad, working with community leaders, engineers, and technicians to develop water systems.

# GLOBAL BRIGADES SUCCESS STORIES

**3** UPEI Global Medical Brigades students travelled to Guatemala in 2023 where they volunteered in mobile medical clinics.



Total Students Funded

**19**



Total Student Volunteers

**32**





# GUATEMALA SUCCESS STORY

Guatemala 2023 saw 32 UPEI students, 1 faculty member and 1 staff member travel to provide mobile medical clinic service to two remote villages, Sajcap, and Sacala, St. Martin province, Guatemala. There were undergraduate students from first to fifth year, from four different faculties (Science, Arts, Nursing, and Business) who worked beside local health professionals and Global Brigades staff to provide 650+ outpatient health services (general practice consultation, gynecology, dental, vision screening and care, pharmacy and public health education) to community members during three clinic days.

The students worked long days including commuting up to three hours a day to provide medical care to the citizens of these villages. The conditions were basic, the rules were many, the freedoms were limited, the beds were lumpy and the showers were cold. No one complained! They rose early, ate what was provided, and many sang their way to and from the village. They asked questions when they didn't know or understand; they worked collaboratively and cooperatively to complete every task at hand and they supported one another in this adventure.

They laughed, sometimes cried, hugged and expressed appreciation for the support, learning and opportunity they had. They were all proud to say they came from UPEI to be part of this experience, to learn together, provide support and genuinely connect with other humans in a place very different from where they usually live, work and learn. Many students described their experience as transformative - realizing the many common needs and experiences of humans, despite the disparate conditions experienced.

# GUATEMALA SUCCESS STORY, CONT.

Many of the students worked on fundraisers for months to support the expenses of providing the medical clinics and their own travel and accommodations. They were self-motivated and both provided and followed leadership of their peers to make this whole project and experience a success.

The opportunity for the students to access the support (logistical and financial) facilitated by UPEI Study Abroad staff and the GSO funding allowed the students to have a safe, well-planned and executed international learning experience while providing service in a sustainable development model to people in a developing nation. Many of the students who participated in the Global Brigades program identified as coming from low-income backgrounds. There were several students on the trip who had never left Canada and one student who had never flown on an airplane before. **Without the GSO support, most of the students would not have been able to commit to this program.**



UPEI student Olivia shared the following about her experience:

“My time in Guatemala, along with the months of preparation prior, is an experience I will be forever grateful for. I learned so much about myself, a variety of healthcare professions, and what it means to be a leader. I had the opportunity to meet some of the most kind and welcoming people in the community of Sajcap in Guatemala, who, like everyone else, deserve equal access to healthcare. This global-scale issue may not be solved by one single brigade, but this experience showed me just how much of an impact I can have on an individual’s life and well-being, and I will never forget that. My vision has never been clearer, and I can not wait to get back to work with Global Brigades again.”

# GLOBAL BRIGADES SUCCESS STORIES

**4** UPEI Engineering Brigades travelled to Honduras in 2023 where they worked on engineering designs for rural community projects.



Total Students Funded

**11**



Total Student Volunteers

**17**



# HONDURAS '23 SUCCESS STORY

Through the course, the engineering students worked in two teams to complete a civil engineering surveying project for a water system in rural Honduras. They worked under the supervision of a Honduran professional engineer to measure the altitude and materials needed to run a water pipe through a village to ~50 houses. They completed the analyses to calculate the appropriate diameter of pipe at each section, overall material cost for the town, and presented their results in a public community meeting. The students had the text translated to Spanish, not a language any of the students spoke before the experience, and practiced until they could each deliver the presentation in the community's first language. The engineer was on site to answer additional questions. With the report, the community has an official way to begin finding funding to implement the pipeline. This was a real-world, authentic experience that provided students with hands-on engineering experience to implement what they learned in second-year theory-based courses, interacting with Honduran people in a rural community, and examining issues of social justice, ethics, and inequity.

Additionally, students worked in gender balanced, multi-year teams, which is the only multi-year experience available in their engineering curriculum. The students also built 6 eco-stoves with Honduran masons to provide 6 households in a different community with a smoke-free, efficient way to cook for their families. The students turned dirt and rocks into concrete, built the stoves, then waited 10 days and had an intercultural experience with the families to see how corn tortillas are made. This provided them with an opportunity to see the social impact of engineering, one of the graduate attributes required from the Canadian Engineering Accreditation Board (CEAB).

This was only possible because of GSO, and the only way it could be improved is to extend the opportunity to international students as well. It was an incredible opportunity for developing interpersonal communication, team communication, public speaking, implementing engineering theory in a real-world experience, and developing a concrete understanding of global inequity and social justice topics. Having the GSO funding encouraged more students to participate in the course, increasing outbound mobility. The students who attended have expressed a desire to participate in more international programs, directly as a result of this experience.

# FUTURE OUTLOOK

## FUTURE PLAN

We are hopeful that the Global Skills Opportunity Pilot becomes a long term program, so we can continue to bless the lives of UPEI students in supporting their education experiences abroad.

## HOW CAN YOU HELP?

You can help by supporting the renewal of this amazing program and by advocating on behalf of our university and universities/colleges across the country. Without this program, many students from UPEI would not be able to afford the experience. Please help us turn this Pilot program into a permanent program.



# UPEI OFFICE OF STUDY ABROAD & INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

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