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Landscapes of Compassion: A Guatemalan Experience

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Abstract
ABSTRACT

LANDSCAPES OF COMPASSION: A GUATEMALAN EXPERIENCE

MAY 2011

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If landscape architecture can intertwine with the practice of social justice, how should academic training provide an atmosphere where this correlation is developed? In a professional degree program, such as

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landscape architecture, there are a plethora of skills among students that can be utilized not only in their future careers, but during their academic experience. By learning the tools while implementing them, there is a profound educational opportunity to be taken advantage of. An even greater opportunity can be capitalized if the tools are implemented in a context where the deliverables make positive impacts on impoverished communities.

The goal of this thesis is to demonstrate how a landscape architect can contribute to humanitarian efforts; and the opportunity for this contribution should begin within the walls of academia. To support this argument, the author reviews literature and clarifies the vision and targets of this style of learning. The most convincing part of this thesis was the implementation of a graduate level class, LA 591g: Applied Field Studies in Guatemala, where eight students, a professional, and a professor combined their scholastic, professional, and life experiences in a community service learning atmosphere. Their work led to the start-up of AbonOrgánico, a non-for-profit company located in Guatemala City whose mission is: To supply necessary jobs to at-risk youth from impoverished communities within Guatemala City by taking organic waste from the Central Market in Guatemala City and producing high-quality compost. Students participated in a 9-day spring break trip to Guatemala City, 11 journal entries, 2 questionnaires, 5 group reflection meetings, a 145-slide department-wide presentation, and a 12-chapter manual including a site design, construction details, operational guidelines, and a business plan. In the pages of the thesis, the reader will see how this class set out to make a difference with the tools they had, and they did, but the most profound difference was made by this community on them.

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