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# Overview

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The Carnegie Mellon University Panama Brigade offers the opportunity for students to apply their education in solving real world problems while enabling underdeveloped communities to achieve their goals. A team of students of diverse backgrounds will participate in extensive planning and development throughout the academic year on a given project and collaborate with the community to implement their work during trips to the region. We believe that our brigade will enrich the lives of the community members and those of the students as well by bridging cultures and encouraging global citizenship. We hope that this endeavor will lead to the personal and professional development of all students involved.

The Brigade has been created with the aspiration to become a significant part of the Carnegie Mellon community, and send groups of students to Central and South America on frequent service trips to develop and implement 2 – 4 year projects. For the Panama Brigade, an exploratory trip during our Spring Break of 2009 helped us lay the groundwork and define future goals for our project to develop sustainable Agritourism--a style of vacation that takes place on a farm and encourages tourists to participate in farm activities--on the Trapiche farm while also creating an Agritourism cooperative in the rural region of El Cope.

Our goals include implementing a Business Plan and timeline to start agritourism on the farm; developing and implementing a Marketing Plan for the cooperative; connecting with the local tourism industry; monitoring progress to ensure sustainability; and ultimately generating a new source of income for the farm and the community. (*see Project Details*).

The eagerness of the Granja Trapiche community coupled with its optimal location of the farm and the motivation of all stakeholders – our partners in Panama and our team – indicate great potential for the project. Through consistent communication, a developed system of monitoring progress and frequent trips to the region, we aim to ensure the sustainability of the project.

The CMU Panama Brigade consists of a group of students from diverse academic and cultural backgrounds and each brings a different perspective to the project. With the support of Carnegie Mellon staff and faculty, Global Business Brigades liaisons, and our partner organization Patronato de Nutrición (Trustees of Nutrition), we have a strong team of advisors to support our endeavors and ensure the success of the students involved; the community in Panama; and the program as a whole.

# Why Panama?

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## Key Facts

Panama is located in Central America, bordering both the Caribbean Sea and the North Pacific Ocean, between Colombia and Costa Rica.



Population	3,309,679 (July 2008 est.)
Size	78,200 sq km; Slightly smaller than South Carolina
Minimum wage	\$285 per month
Percentage of children in poverty	50%
Population below poverty line	37%
Household income or consumption by percentage share	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Lowest 10%: 0.7%</li><li>• Highest 10%: 43% (2003)</li></ul>

## Development Challenges

Panama's skyscrapers, vibrant banking and finance sector, and major ports give the impression of a country well able to meet the needs of its citizens. However, serious underdevelopment and security issues threaten Panama's democratic institutions and political stability. With poverty levels high (37%) and deep-rooted, the economic and social well-being of many Panamanians, particularly those in the lower middle class, will worsen without sustained economic growth, equitable economic and social opportunities, and sustainable development.

Panama's key development challenges include:

- i. fighting systemic corruption;
- ii. modernizing the judicial system to foster the rule of law and equitable access to justice;
- iii. consolidating its democracy;
- iv. maintaining the smooth administration of the economically vital Panama Canal and conserving the watershed that feeds it;
- v. fostering the enabling environment necessary to increase trade and rural competitiveness while redressing widespread income inequality.

## **Our Role in Panama**

Our project focuses on “fostering the enabling environment necessary to increase rural competitiveness while redressing widespread income inequality”. We hope to do this by developing agritourism on a farm in Panama (see Project Details), with a long term vision to create a sustainable business model that can be implemented in other farms throughout the region.

Agritourism is a style of vacation that takes place on a farm and encourages tourists to participate and learn about farm activities<sup>1</sup>. This form of tourism creates a supplemental source of income for farmers and leads to development of the surrounding community – both directly and indirectly. This includes employment opportunities, better infrastructure and cultural links to visitors of the country. In addition, agritourism engages visitors and the community in environmental conservation and awareness.

During our 2009 Spring Break trip to Panama, a diverse and multidisciplinary team of 11 students visited and implemented the first steps to creating an agritourism cooperative. We brought the entire community together and ran workshops on operations, finance, and marketing to help get them in the mindset of accommodating tourists. We created and began the implementation of a business plan as well as a pricing scheme for the farmers to use, based on what activities and accommodations their respective locations each had to offer. Most importantly, we developed a great relationship and equipped the community with the proper knowledge and marketing tools to benefit from the influx of tourists.

Realizing how much the community depends on us in these early stages, we are excited to return to Panama during our spring break in 2010. One of our main roles this time will be to develop connections to the tourist industry and surrounding regions. The next goal is to fully develop and implement a system to accommodate tourists from their arrival in Panama through their departure. Further, teaching the community what we have learned and reinforcing the business principles is also essential.

We believe agritourism is an ideal way to encourage rural competitiveness and wealth creation while allowing farmers to continue their way of life. With our multi – disciplinary team and access to a variety of faculty advisors, we are confident of being able to develop a business model for the region within the next 1 – 2 years, and ensure the implementation of our recommendations through frequent trips to the region.

# Project Details

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## Granja Trapiche Agritourism

### Community Background

The Granja Trapiche Farm is one of the many tourist attractions that serve as a primary source of income in the community of Barrigón, about half an hour from Penonomé, in the province of Coclé in Panama. Farmer and Entrepreneur, Alejandro Rodriguez has been cultivating and farming the land he was granted by a non-profit land trust organization, Patronato de Nutrición, along with his family as a subsistence farm. Now, Alejandro and his family seek to upstart an Agritourism business that will ultimately provide an additional source of income for the family.

Cases such as the Granja Trapiche are abundant in the community of Barrigón where many local families intend to start or further develop the tourist site they have personally constructed. Some of these community members stretch from AGLAC, a tour guide organization, to Las Yayas, an eco-touristic lodge, to Loma Bonita, an educational facility that holds nationally treasured creatures. These family sponsored tourist attractions are potential elements that can be interweaved to construct a more wholesome community.

All of these potential tourism attractions' close location to national park Omar makes them a perfect candidate to promote ecotourism and agritourism. If the Barrigón community can be promoted and developed further into an educational tourist attraction with our help, it can become one of the most promising experiences that will allow one to get to know Panama.

### Partner Organization

The farm is one of the sustainable farms supported by the Panamanian organization Patronato de Nutrición (Trustees of Nutrition), a non-profit land trust that combats poverty and hunger by promoting sustainable agriculture. The Patronato's vision is "to organize and train subsistence farmers in organizations, credit unions of producers, capable of producing with efficiency in a sustainable method, the food that may guarantee a proper daily intake to their families, with surplus in the production to achieve income that may allow them to improve their quality of life." The organization currently has around 300 farms in operation in Panama.

Typically, Patronato de Nutrición purchases land in rural Panama, and enlists 3 - 4 families in the community to farm and develop the land. Each farm is administered by a member of the organization, who guides the families on agricultural production techniques and best practices. Patronato de Nutrición aims to make the farming family self sufficient and also have the opportunity to generate income so that they can take complete ownership of the land.

As mentioned above, the Rodriguez farm has become self sustainable, and is now looking to incorporate additional revenue-generating aspects into farming; in particular, agritourism.

Patronato de Nutrición does not have the business expertise to guide the family to setup agritourism, and are looking to collaborate with Carnegie Mellon students to develop a model that can be implemented on the Rodriguez farm, as well as on other Patronato farms in Panama.

## **Objectives**

Our main objective is to conceive and implement a sustainable agritourism industry at Granja Trapiche by empowering farmers to manage businesses through education and collaboration, establishing connections to other tourist industries and mentoring the farmers to setup the infrastructure required to promote tourism. We hope to return to the same area for a period of 2 – 3 years, to complete our short term and long term goals for the project.

### ***Short Term (1 years)***

- Develop a Business Plan that is accepted by all stakeholders
- Develop a clear outline for financial sustainability
- Establish infrastructure and resource requirements that would need to be fulfilled
- Connect with the local tourism industry
- Create a system to monitor progress and collect feedback

### ***Long Term (2-3 years)***

- Establish the infrastructure to host guests and promote agritourism on the farm
- Create a marketing plan and marketing materials; including an online presence and local publicity
- Provide more job opportunities for the local community
- Maintain a constant influx of tourists
- Collaborate with farmers to maintain productivity
- Develop new project ideas to expand the activities and scope of the farm as a center of agritourism
- Mitigate potential eco-system risks
- Monitor the market for opportunities to expand

## **Timeline**

### ***End of August – March 5<sup>th</sup>***

Prior to spring break, we will:

- i. Finalize trip logistics
- ii. Fundraise for trip and program costs
- iii. Develop an initial Marketing Plan
- iv. Research the tourism industry in Panama and select possible partners
- v. Develop a model for financial sustainability based on existing agritourism farms

We aim to complete these tasks through collaboration and communication with the farmers and the partner organization (Patronato de Nutrición) facilitated by Global Business Brigade liaisons in Panama.

### ***March 6<sup>th</sup> – March 13<sup>th</sup>***

During Spring Break, we will:

- i. Survey the community and surrounding areas for partners in the tourist industry
- ii. Finalize and implement the local aspect of our marketing plan
- iii. Develop a system to monitor progress
- iv. Establish stakeholder commitments and expectations
- v. Reinforce the operations, finance, and marketing concepts covered in the workshops
- vi. Determine if there is a need for another visit
- vii. Finalize a plan of action for the next phase of the project

### ***Post March 13<sup>th</sup>***

After Spring Break, we will:

- i. Implement the online and United States portions of the Marketing plan
- ii. Refine and finalize a model for financial sustainability relevant to the farm and the community
- iii. Maintain communication and monitor progress
- iv. Document findings and generate reports
- v. Establish year to year metrics for success for our team
- vi. Establish long term partnerships with sponsors

## **Sustainability**

### **Project Sustainability**

- Develop a system to monitor progress and collect feedback remotely: This will provide us with a framework for evaluation and allow us to keep a check on the timeline, foresee and mitigate problems facing the project and plan future trips efficiently.
- Implement bi – weekly visits by a representative of our partner organization in Panama to get first – hand reports
- Visit the same region at least once a year for the next 2 – 4 years (or as required)
- Document all project processes, research, deliverables and lessons learned

### **Brigade Sustainability**

- Recruit and mentor underclassmen to develop future leadership
- Roll – over funds left over for future projects
- Collect and archive all project materials and documentation to ensure institutional memory

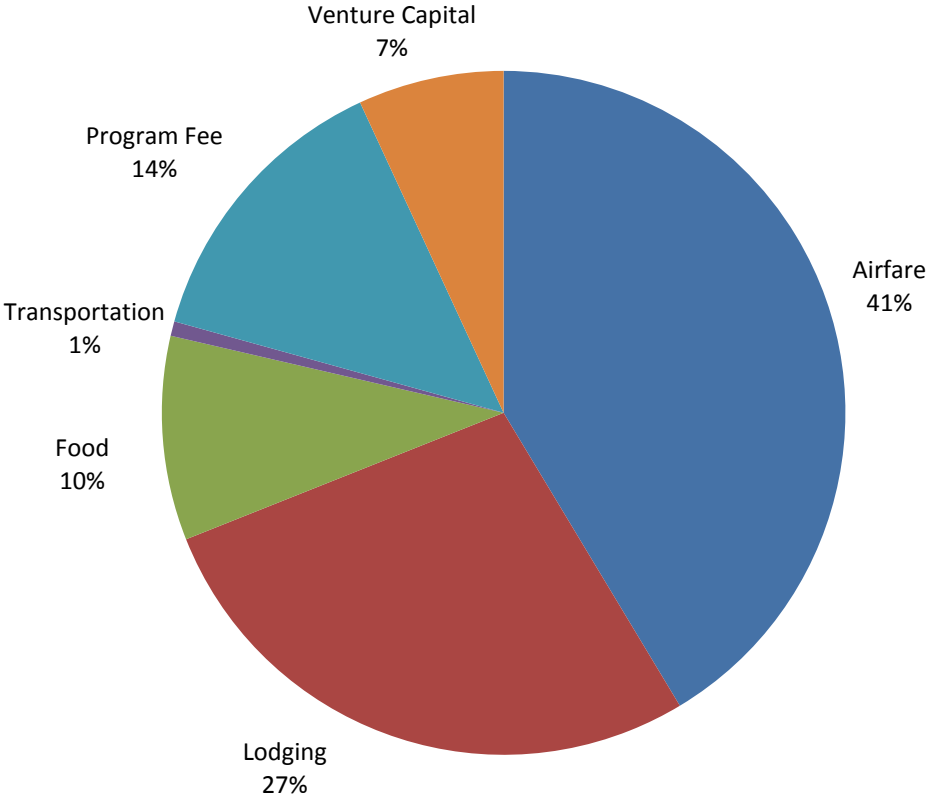
# Budget

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Global Business Brigades has a base in Panama, with the infrastructure in place to support all program logistics. Our trip planned for the Spring Break of 2010 is meant to continue the ventures we began with our 2009 exploratory trip and as such, does not require funding for setting up the infrastructure for the project. We will be investing \$1,200 to progress the groundwork for development. Future trips may require more capital to be raised in order to support the project activities in Panama and expedite development.

## Budget Details

Expense	Cost per person	Total Cost
Airfare	\$600.00	\$7,200.00
Lodging	\$400.00	\$4,800.00
Food	\$140.00	\$1,680.00
Transportation	\$10.00	\$120.00
Program Fee - Infrastructure & Coordinator	\$200.00	\$2,400.00
Venture Capital	\$100.00	\$1,200.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$1,450</b>	<b>\$17,400</b>



# Organizations Involved

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## **Global Business Brigades**

Global Business Brigades (GBB) is a socially conscious network of volunteers that bring business skills and a passion for change to developing communities around the world. GBB is currently focused in Central America, in some of the poorest communities in the western hemisphere. The secular organization empowers college students with the material, know-how, and support to assess and deliver sustainable micro-enterprise solutions to impoverished villages.

This is the first year a Global Business Brigade has been formed at Carnegie Mellon. To expedite the formation of the group and ensure a successful trip in the Spring of 2009, the Brigade has been formed under the umbrella of existing CMU organizations with an interest in the mission of Global Business Brigades. The composition of the Brigade is very diverse, and we hope to grow - in numbers and diversity - in the years to come. Following standards set by Brigades at other universities, we hope to send larger groups on future trips and create a greater impact in the region.

## **Students in Free Enterprise (SIFE)**

SIFE is a global non-profit organization active in more than 40 countries. SIFE is funded by financial contributions from corporations, entrepreneurs, foundations, government agencies, and individuals. Working in partnership with business and higher education, SIFE establishes student teams on university campuses. These teams are led by faculty advisors and are challenged to develop community outreach projects that reach SIFE's six educational topics: Market Economics, Success Skills, Entrepreneurship, Financial Literacy, Business Ethics and Program Sustainability.

The Carnegie Mellon chapter of SIFE is one of the most successful service and business organizations on campus. With over 120 members and 11 projects, CMU SIFE has created a great impact on the CMU community and taken their activities abroad to Nicaragua, Qatar, Korea, India and Peru. CMU SIFE has been recognized for its excellence by consistently winning the regional SIFE competition and finishing second runner up in their division at the national level. This year, with the Panama Brigade project, the DC Kitchen project and the UNICEF Tap project, SIFE aspires to take its involvement in the local and global community to new heights.

## **University of Illinois - Chicago Global Architecture Brigade**

The Global Architecture Brigade from the University of Illinois – Chicago has been involved in this project since January 2009. Don Alejandro’s farm had no place to house tourists so the University of Illinois – Chicago brigade developed blueprints for a cabin during their visit in January. They also visited the community recently in late June to build the cabin along with Don Alejandro’s family. The cabin is now complete so tourists are welcome to stay overnight at the farm.

Their partnership has been crucial to the success of this project as they have not only developed the infrastructure necessary for a successful agritourism business but their initial trip also allowed us to gather information on the community. This first hand knowledge helped us understand the community and make better use of our trip in March.

## **Washington University in St. Louis Global Business Brigade**

The Global Business Brigade from Washington University in St. Louis (WashU) joined our brigade on our trip in March. They brought to the group a fresh perspective on international development and business. The WashU brigade plans to visit the community in January to lay the groundwork for our marketing plan. Teaming up with another business brigade has allowed for more frequent visits to the community which has helped create a closer relationship with the community members.

# Our Team

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**Aanchal Raj:** *Junior, Electrical and Computer Engineering*

**Asha Rose Thomas:** *Freshman, Business Administration*

**Carol Annie Choe:** *Junior, Business Administration*

**Francisco Uribe:** *Masters, Computer Science Engineering*

**Hanny Kamal:** *Junior, Economics & Human – Computer Interaction*

**James Chun Tien Tsi:** *Freshman, Electrical and Computer Engineering*

**Jennifer Martinez:** *Sophomore, Civil Engineering*

**Krithika Viswanathan:** *Junior, Business Administration*

**Oshamimi Mayaki:** *Freshman, Economics*

**Pralav Bhansali:** *Freshman, Decision Sciences & Business Administration*

**Rajit Kumar:** *Senior, Electrical and Computer Engineering & Economics*

**Yong-Gyun Choi:** *Sophomore, Global Politics*

# Contact

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