

Making an Impact: Wharton EMBA Students Share Highlights of Global Consulting Practicum Trip to Botswana

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In her first year in Wharton's EMBA Program, Sarah Sullivan, a program analyst at the National Endowment for the Arts in Washington, DC, heard about the social impact projects in Wharton's Global Consulting Practicum (GCP). They sounded like a good fit with her growing interest in social enterprises in developing countries, but she wanted to finish her core courses before signing up.

So after completing her first year courses as well as an independent study over the summer for a small beeswax producing company in Cameroon, she and five EMBA classmates signed up for the GCP. The course typically pairs teams of Wharton full-time and executive MBA students and faculty with teams from partner universities in countries such as China, India, Peru, and Israel to consult with a client company interested in entering or expanding its position in the U.S. market. However, their social impact project was a bit unique in that it involved working with a partnership between the University of Pennsylvania, government of Botswana, and the University of Botswana to build capacity in Botswana in response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

Having recently returned from a visit to Botswana for the GCP project, we asked Sullivan and her teammate William "Willy" McColgan to share some of the highlights of their trip with us. Here's what Sullivan had to say:

"Since we left at the end of December, everything was still closed for the holidays in Botswana so we spent the first four days in South Africa and went on safari. It was a great opportunity to get to know my classmates even better and build a stronger foundation for our group.

When we went to Gaborone, Botswana, we first met the University of Botswana business students who were working with us on the project to hammer out our goals and what we would be doing for our client. We then met with a lot of people in Gaborone – doctors, people from the Center for Disease Control, the Ministry of Health, and a few business leaders and citizens. We even got a tour of the capital and a neighboring village, which was a chance to see more of the country and get a better feel for the culture.

We were blown away by how developed Botswana is compared to many other African countries. Yet despite their development and healthcare infrastructure, it has the highest prevalence of HIV with 25% of the population infected. There is not enough capacity in terms of beds, space, medicine, and number of hours with doctors and staff. Seeing that was really hard. And it made coordinating the work really challenging because you could spend hours on this fascinating project.

While there, we did identify a lot of issues that the partnership is facing. We'll now conduct more research on the partnership and what needs to be done to sustain its funding with a long-term strategy. Our goal is to have specific recommendations in place by May.

This experience has confirmed my interest in doing business development and strategic planning for social enterprises in developing countries in the future. It also made me realize what an incredible opportunity I've had at Wharton that I wouldn't have had otherwise. I've travelled to new places, met a lot of great people, seen other organizations in different environments, and gotten a world view of society. This was a capstone experience for me!"

McColgan agrees that the GCP trip was a wonderful experience. Here's what he said about the project: "When I first heard about the GCP's social impact projects, I thought that no matter what else I do in the EMBA program, this is something I would look back on years from now and say it was really worthwhile and made an impact.

Once we arrived in Botswana, we headed straight over the border into South Africa for a safari to get adjusted to the time difference and prepare for the week ahead. What I remember the most from those days was getting stuck in the mud as it started to get dark and imagining all the things moving around you as well as a toga party on the game reserve on New Year's Eve.

When we got to Botswana, we spent a lot of time planning and discussing our project and meeting with hospital staff, government representatives, and our University of Botswana counterparts. Later in the week, we went on the medical wards and met with residents from Penn's Medical School as well as a Penn School of Nursing faculty member doing

research on sabbatical. The University of Pennsylvania has certainly made an impact in Botswana. Hopefully our Wharton EMBA GCP team can help this continue.

This will definitely be a highlight of my time at Wharton. And I certainly strengthened my relationships with my classmates during that time, which is lasting. We'll always have Africa!"