

Making a Difference With Engineers Without Borders

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[INTRO]

Engineers Without Borders you say? I've heard about them through e-mail and such, but I have the vaguest idea of who they are and what they do. I'm swamped with assignments and projects - why would I have time to help out? And besides, how would it benefit my engineering education? All I want to do is just graduate!

Well, read on folks. This article will tell you everything you need to know about Engineers Without Borders (EWB) and, most importantly, how it can benefit you in enhancing your education here at SFU.

So What is EWB?

Engineers Without Borders (EWB) is a growing charitable organization dedicated to international development. Consisting mostly of volunteers from the Canadian engineering profession - students, professionals and companies, EWB has sent over sixty young engineers to work on thirty projects in twenty countries over the past three years. Closer to home, almost four thousand members across the country strive to make Canada the most development-friendly and sustainable country in the world.

Our goal is to ensure that people in developing communities have access to the technology they need to improve their lives. To do so, EWB works with partners overseas to build capacity in the rural technical sector in areas such as water and sanitation, food production and processing, and energy.

Founded in January 2000 by two engineering grads from the University of Waterloo, EWB has grown tremendously, establishing over twenty university-based chapters across Canada. We believe that technology could drive extraordinary changes in

the lives the poorest people in the world, and that there must be an opportunity for engineers to play a role in international development.

Now Canada's fastest-growing development organization, EWB has been featured in over 100 media pieces including Time, McLean's, the Globe and Mail, the Discovery Channel, the Toronto Star, the National Post, and the CBC. With a dozen thoughtful projects, and an advisory board of leading experts in development, organizational strategies, business and NGOs, EWB is well on its way to building the world class professional development organization that will have lasting and meaningful impact in developing communities around the world.

SFU has an EWB Chapter?

Yep. The SFU Chapter of EWB brings together engineering students who are united in their desire to make a difference in other people's lives, and is made up of energetic and innovative university students who believe that they have a social responsibility to use their skills and knowledge to improve the lives of other people.

SFU joined the long list of other Canadian universities by establishing a chapter in 2002. Since then, the chapter has participated in many activities, and continues to grow in size and increase the scope of their projects. Our chapter continually looks for ways in which we can apply our skills and volunteer our time towards helping our community. Chapter members in the past have helped assemble Christmas hampers for refugee families, volunteered at a local Habitat for Humanity construction site, and participated in a Red Cross fundraising concert for Southern Africa. Early this year, the founder and president of our chapter, Eric Hennessey, developed a data logger for the Light Up The World Foundation. This project won awards at several competitions such as the Western Engineering Competition and the Canadian Engineering Competition. In addition, he recently spent a summer in Nepal working first-hand on this project. As he is retiring by the end of this year (ok, not exactly retiring, just graduating), we are currently looking for execs for various positions, so this is your chance!

EWB-SFU most recently won the bid to be one of five Canadian universities participating in the National Scala Program. We are committed to and are excited about

participating in this important project, and are currently planning many fundraisers and events in support of Scala.

Scala? Is That Related to Fish?

Not exactly. The Scala program is a computer literacy teaching initiative that seeks to improve the livelihood of underprivileged Filipinos by teaching them marketable skills in information technology (IT). The Scala program was initiated in the summer of 2002 with the establishment of the first IT training center in Lingayen, Philippines. Throughout the next year, Scala will be expanded to include eight to ten new ICT training facilities throughout the Philippines. These facilities are being created in partnership with the Department of Social Welfare and Development of the Filipino government and will ultimately be able to serve over 1,500 beneficiaries per year.

In addition to their overseas objectives, all Scala chapter committees are committed to establishing IT and computer literacy training programs within their home communities. These initiatives have similar objectives to the overseas component of the Scala project, but on a smaller scale and with an impact that will be felt closer to home.

Although the Philippines has had some success in economic growth, the benefits of this growth have not materialized for a significant portion of the population. EWB's ultimate goal in Scala is the establishment of self-reliant IT training facilities that will reduce these social inequalities. In order to ensure this self-reliance, the Scala project teaches some of its students to fill the teaching role once the EWB presence is withdrawn. This helps to create not only sustainability, but also a sense of local ownership over the project.

Since its inception, the Scala program has been the recipient of many prestigious awards, including the Global Knowledge Partnership Youth Award 2003 and a grant through the prestigious IDRC's Pan Asia Program. These awards have been given mostly in recognition of Scala's innovative and thoughtful methods, along with its strong results.

The SFU chapter's participation in the Scala project is through a joint partnership with UBC (yes, despite our differences, we are working hand in hand to make the world a better place). We are working together to send students to the Philippines in the upcoming summer to implement the expansion of the Scala program. SFU's involvement

will consist of sending one to two students overseas over the summer, along with suitable funds and computer equipment being raised to carry out the project. Our ultimate goal is to raise \$30 000 between the three BC universities as well as 75 computers to be shipped to the IT centres in the Philippines.

In addition to the direct cooperation between SFU and UBC, 3 of BC's universities have joined together for the purposes of corporate fundraising. It is our hope that this venture between the UVic, UBC, and SFU will contribute significantly to the cost of the Scala project.

Along with joint corporate fundraising, EWB-SFU has many independent fundraising projects planned. These include benefit concerts, sponsored pub nights, food sales at campus events, and local donor contacts both within and outside of university. Through these projects, we will raise the funds necessary to successfully carry out our role in the Scala project.

EWB-SFU, like all other Scala teams, is committed to helping those in need both at home and abroad. Our local initiatives include the implementation of IT teaching programs in local community centers, and an IT teaching drop-in center in downtown Vancouver that is being run jointly with UBC. Through these venues, we hope to reduce the disparity in access to IT skills between social strata, thus helping to reduce the enormous economic disparity that currently exists in Canadian society.

And if you're wondering why the project is called Scala, scala means 'steps' or 'stairs' in Greek and in Italian.

Now Talk About Me

There are various channels in which you can get involved. The easiest way is to simply make a donation. This may be a time donation, a monetary donation, or a computer donation. You may also get involved by supporting our fundraising events. We will be hosting many food and beverage related events, so if you hear our name, come and grab a pizza or bzzr, and you will have helped us out, as simple as that!

If you would like to become more involved, you've made the right choice! Enhance your university experience and education by becoming a volunteer, or even a

leader in any of our fundraising projects. We encourage motivated and enthusiastic individuals to spearhead any of our planned events. We also need many people to help teach basic computer skills to disadvantaged people in Vancouver. You may also become a member of our Scala subcommittees, including IT Education, Fundraising, Computer Resource, and Communications. If you can't decide, you may become a general Scala volunteer to get a feel for all aspects of our project.

And just in case you are not in engineering and are reading this, we welcome you too! Most of our projects do not require any engineering skills; you just need to have the heart and time to help out. If you have extensive volunteering experience, or have no experience at all and are looking for some, come find us and see what we can do for you. We have a vast array of activities that you may participate in, including general volunteering and fundraising work, fundraising and project planning, IT teaching, computer assembly, and various communication functions such as website development, poster design, and article writing. And if you have an international or local development project in mind but do not have the support or resources to implement it, you are welcome to contact us to help launch and execute your project!

Feel interested in making a monetary donation? Have an old computer lying around that you don't want? Want to join EWB? Feel free to contact the SFU Scala Communications Director, Tommy Chiu at tchiub@sfu.ca. If you are interested in hearing more about EWB and the Scala Program, take a look at the national EWB website, www.ewb.ca, or the Scala website, scala.ewb.ca. To receive updates and news about EWB-SFU, subscribe to our open mail list: ewb-sfu@sfu.ca.