

Cya Later, Rwanda!

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This summer offered me so many opportunities to learn and grow, many of which I did not foresee. My time in Rwanda taught me patience, communication skills, gave me design intuition, self-confidence as a technician, and bettered my leadership. Many of these areas of growth came as a result of my learning goals. I set out to immerse myself in the culture, learn technical skills, and figure out what it means to work in the developing world as a Biomedical Engineer. These were the easy things to do and learn in the end- everything else was the real learning and where I overcame challenges.

One of the big questions I had in my second month in Rwanda was about what it means to be effective as an “aid worker” or what effective aid is. One thing is

certain to me: giving money alone is not a solution. It is far more effective to train people and have them better their economy than to throw money at a problem. I saw how empowering it was for people to learn a trade or go to college and how inefficient it was for the hospital to be given money for new equipment when all they really needed was a small spare part. I also realize that my ability to change the state of equipment in the hospital was minimal, but sharing ideas with Rwandans was where I could have an impact on them and they could have an impact on me. However, even if my time spent in the hospital did not amount to much for the BMET department, I still learned what it takes to initiate any change at all. My work required me to build relationships, ask questions, and be patient in order to make any movement in my work. It was a long road, but the end product was certainly worth it. Seeing the joy and relief on doctors faces when we returned functional devices made me feel like I had done some good and that the time spent to get there was worthwhile. These skills and lessons will follow me through the rest of my life.

The end of my summer in Rwanda has left me with a lot to think about moving forward. Within this next semester I want to create an EWH chapter at Tulane and share my experience with my fellow students. I hope that this will open the door for others who are interested in engineering in the developing world to have their first experiences with it. I also hope that the chapter will help me find more opportunities like my experience in Rwanda. For instance, I am currently looking into a similar trip to Nepal in December with EWH. EWH also encourages design projects for the developing world which could turn into my senior design project. I am also interested in continuing to look into what can be done to increase access to spare parts in the developing world. I am not sure what that looks like yet, but I will continue to ask questions to try to figure it out. Moving forward is a bit blurry, but that also leaves me with a lot of room to figure out exactly what I want to do with my newfound knowledge and curiosity.

Engineering World Health was a great organization to intern with. The application was easy to find and complete for starters and the Summer Institute was a very rewarding experience. I would encourage interested applicants to apply early and put a lot of thought into their short answer responses as they rely heavily on those to make decisions. I would also encourage applicants to be open to going to different locations for the Summer Institute since you have a better chance of being chosen if you apply that way.