

静岡文化芸術大学でのハビタット・フォー・ヒューマニティ：過去、現在、将来

SUAC Habitat for Humanity: Past, Present and Future

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本稿では、静岡文化芸術大学におけるハビタット・フォー・ヒューマニティ（以下SUACハビ）について報告するものである。非営利団体ハビタット・フォー・ヒューマニティとSUACハビの設立背景と使命、およびSUACハビの目的と主な活動について報告する。また、最近もしくは現在進行中のプロジェクトに関する具体的な調査と、将来的に計画している活動の一部を紹介する。

This paper is a report on the Habitat for Humanity circle at Shizuoka University of Art and Culture (SUAC). This report will outline the background and mission of both the nonprofit organization Habitat for Humanity and the SUAC Habitat for Humanity circle. It will also delineate the objectives and primary activities of the circle. The report will conclude with a survey of recent and current projects as well as some of the activities the Habitat for Humanity circle at SUAC is planning to undertake in the future.

Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry and narrow-mindedness.

- Mark Twain

Even in the midst of our seemingly irreversibly globalizing world it sometimes seems teachers of English in Japan have to try to drag often reluctant students kicking and screaming into the brave new world of English as a global language. Recently, much hand-wringing has been done here in Japan over reports showing the numbers of Japanese studying abroad continuing to decline after peaking some years ago. Surveys have also shown that younger Japanese "salarymen" are overwhelmingly unwilling to work abroad. In this context, globally-minded university volunteer groups can play a valuable role in encouraging young Japanese to break out of a sometimes insular and short-term mindset. By promoting a global viewpoint, developing an awareness of poverty and other issues and, most importantly, making annual trips overseas to interact with and work side by side with people in developing countries this is exactly what the Habitat for Humanity circle here at SUAC strives to do.

In this paper I will briefly explain the history and mission of both the nonprofit organization Habitat for Humanity and SUAC Habitat for Humanity. I will also discuss the primary functions and activities of the circle. Finally I will report on recent projects and future plans undertaken by the group as we strive to make it an ever more vital and productive organization.

Habitat for Humanity

Habitat for Humanity is a "nonprofit, housing organization building simple, decent, affordable housing in partnership with people in need." Habitat is active in over 80 countries and has built over 400,000 homes for more than 2 million people around the world since its founding in Atlanta, Georgia in the United States in 1976. Habitat describes itself as being a "Christian housing ministry" however it is not considered evangelical; meaning that Habitat does not proselytize or try to convert anyone to Christianity.

The Habitat for Humanity mission is to "build, rehabilitate and repair simple, decent, affordable homes in sustainable communities with support from homeowner families, volunteers, donors and partner organizations." Homes are built using volunteer labor and sold at no profit. "Volunteer labor" refers to both local, in-country volunteers as well as groups like SUAC Habitat which typically come from outside the local area. An important part of the Habitat for Humanity philosophy is that homes are not given away, they are sold to homeowners, who are referred to as "home partners." Homeowners are called "home partners" because they are seen as "partners" in the process of building their own home. They are expected to invest their own labor, or "sweat equity," into the building of their new Habitat house and, often, the houses of others. Homes are not built for home partners but with them.

SUAC Habitat for Humanity

The SUAC Habitat for Humanity circle (hereinafter "SUAC Habitat") was the brainchild of Mary Hughes, at the time an Assistant Professor in the Department of International Culture. Ms. Hughes' wanted to offer opportunities to motivated and energetic SUAC students to improve their English skills and do volunteer work overseas and established SUAC Habitat in 2004. It quickly became popular.

While SUAC Habitat does not have an official mission statement, the implicit goals of the circle are to provide opportunities for students to learn more about housing and poverty issues in the world, to promote cross-cultural communication and understanding, to develop compassion for those less fortunate, to develop leadership skills and, last, but certainly not least, to improve English communication skills.

The SUAC Habitat circle is open to all SUAC students. Despite hopes that the circle would attract roughly equal numbers of students from different faculties, from its inception, it has been peopled overwhelmingly by female students from the Department of International Culture. There have typically been both few male circle members and few members from the Faculty of Design. Participation in the circle is of course voluntary and it appears that students in the Department of International Culture have a high level of interest in global issues and cultures and overseas travel, issues which naturally encourage an interest in circles such as SUAC Habitat. Nonetheless, a more diverse group of SUAC Habitat members, representative of the SUAC student community as a whole, would be ideal.

SUAC Habitat for Humanity Activities

The four functions of SUAC Habitat are to fundraise, advocate, educate and build. In practice, the first three of these functions are often carried out at the same time. Fund raising activities take place all year long and include periodic flea markets, street fund raising, operating stalls at the annual school festival, holding special events at local restaurants and cafes and setting out collection boxes at area shops and restaurants. Advocacy and education usually go hand in hand with fundraising as, at most of the aforementioned fundraising events, SUAC Habitat staff are on hand to explain the

group's activities, hand out pamphlets, show videos of our experiences and share photos and booklets students created of their activities. The goals of advocacy and education are to promote the overall Habitat mission, encourage support and teach people about the Habitat for Humanity organization. The fundraising goal is closely tied to the build function which is the highlight of our year. Most of the funds raised from our various activities are used to support our build which is our annual overseas volunteer trip, known in Habitat parlance as a "Global Village" trip. These trips require months of planning and a years worth of fund-raising to become a reality. For scheduling reasons SUAC Habitat Global Village build trips always take place during the spring vacation. The Global Village trip is the highlight of the SUAC Habitat circle year and will be explained in more detail in the next part of this paper.

Habitat for Humanity's Global Village

SUAC Habitat members are some of the 700 or so volunteers who are dispatched from Japan on Habitat for Humanity Global Village trips each year. SUAC Habitat has made all of its annual trips to date to Southeast Asian countries due to a combination of need, convenience, ease of scheduling and financial considerations.

Personal safety for a group of predominantly female Japanese young adults is an ever-present concern considering that anywhere we go will likely have a higher crime rate than Japan. Even so, the diligent preparation and cultural awareness of SUAC Habitat members has helped to ensure that no serious problems or incidents have occurred on any of the SUAC Habitat trips to date. SUAC Habitat's good safety record should also be attributed in part to the professionalism and competence of Habitat staff who coordinate our entire itinerary in the local country.

Of course, this coordination with local Habitat staff begins long before we land in our destination country. We communicate with them about schedule, budget, housing and recreational activities months before our departure date. This communication is conducted entirely in English and is handled by SUAC Habitat members with only very occasional assistance. This experience gives students valuable opportunities to improve their English while also learning cross-cultural communication skills and how to negotiate and reach consensus in the coordination a large-scale

overseas project.

Global Village Trips

Global Village trips provide everyone concerned with opportunities for long-term interaction with people from other parts of the world. A typical Global Village trip begins in earnest when SUAC Habitat members arrive in our destination country and are met at the airport by the local coordinator who has arranged our schedule, lodging, transportation and work-site. The local coordinator essentially serves as guide, translator and fixer during our stay. Upon arrival at the final destination an orientation meeting is held in which the coordinator will explain the work context and background of the home partner or partners. Introductions to the local Habitat staff (drivers, volunteer interpreters, assistants etc.) will be made and any questions from SUAC Habitat members fielded. These meetings are very useful for us to understand the context in which we will be working and to develop an understanding of the circumstances of the local home partner. The SUAC Habitat circle also has their own meeting in the evening after work every day which consists of two or three members sharing their impressions so far and anything interesting, confusing or troubling they have experienced. These meetings are useful as a forum for members to communicate openly and share concerns or difficulties they may be having.

A typical Global Village trip consists of a week or ten days spent working on a building site broken up by two days of rest and recreation (R & R). The itinerary for the R & R days is decided beforehand through discussions between the local coordinator and the SUAC Habitat leader and usually consists of a visit to a local cultural center, tourist or historical site. Often we will be accompanied by local university students serving as volunteer guides wanting to meet people from overseas and practice their English. R & R days are always useful in allowing SUAC Habitat members to see more of the country, learn about the local history and culture and communicate with the coordinator and local volunteers in a more casual environment than at the build site. At the end of our stay there is always a closing ceremony at the build site in which we present the home-partners with gifts such as a sen-bazuru (thousand origami cranes) for best wishes on a happy future in their new home and a book containing messages from all the SUAC Habitat members. After the

ceremony at the build site there is also a farewell ceremony at a local restaurant or hotel in which everyone concerned with the project participates. The local coordinator, home partner and SUAC Habitat leader make speeches and present a cultural performance. These events are invariably emotional but fun-filled events with much laughter and tears and provide enduring memories for the SUAC Habitat members.

While home-stays with local families may seem like a natural way to get the most valuable experience during a Global Village trip this has not been possible to date. Repeated inquiries with local coordinators about the possibility of arranging home-stays has proven that they are unrealistic. SUAC Habitat usually sends 15-20 people on our Global Village trips and the burden of finding that many local families willing to host guests from overseas is daunting. Local coordinators have also suggested that the size of local homes, lack of amenities and sanitary conditions often conspire to make them unsuitable for SUAC Habitat members. Instead, we have found that staying two or three to a room in an inexpensive or moderately priced hotel has proven to be the best form of accommodation.

The initial overseas trip successfully took SUAC Habitat to the Philippines in Spring vacation of 2005. The following year saw SUAC Habitat visit Papua New Guinea which was found to be a challenging location in terms of safety, infrastructure and organization. Students documented their experiences in Papua New Guinea in an informative and interesting journal consisting of a collection of daily reports and photos of the build site. Later years saw SUAC Habitat make return trips to the Philippines, Thailand and Malaysia.

Recent Global Village Projects

In March 2010 SUAC Habitat traveled to Udon Thani in Northern Thailand. Twenty-two students and one adult chaperone spent ten days in Udon Thani building a single family home for a Thai family. This type of Global Village build experience, working closely with one family to help build a single-family home, is one of the two main types of building that take place on the Global Village trips. The other type of building involves working on a larger, often neighborhood-wide, building site in which a block of homes or even an entire neighborhood are being constructed.

Even though Thailand is not an English speaking country per se the local Thai coordinating staff and some of the construction workers at the build site were reasonably fluent in English. SUAC Habitat members are often shy and nervous when arriving at a build site for the first time as the local construction workers can look intimidating at first glance. On a Habitat Global Village trip however, there really is no time for hesitation because after introductions are made at the build site we all quickly get to work. The build site foreman typically asks for three people to help with one task, five to help with another and three or four for yet another. Students are quickly split up into their respective jobs and left to rely on the local construction worker to supervise them. SUAC Habitat members do unskilled labor on the build site such as shoveling dirt, digging trenches for plumbing, carrying equipment, painting, bricklaying, making bricks and laying concrete floors. This can be quite a shock for any student not used to physical labor. It is important for all students to take frequent breaks and ensure that they are drinking enough water as they are working in tropical heat and humidity. One of the benefits of working on a single family home as was the case in Udon Thani, Thailand is that it is possible to get to know the home partner family quite well. This give SUAC Habitat members an enlightening window into the lives of the home partner family with all their concerns and hopes and dreams for the future. With more than twenty people working on only one house, it is possible to complete a significant part of the house during a short time in country. It is rewarding for all SUAC Habitat members when a build site that is often only a dirt lot when they arrive is often ready for the home partners to move in with concrete walls, windows, concrete floors and a toilet when they leave.

With SUAC Habitat members working side by side with local people, nervousness quickly fades and connections begin to be made despite the language barrier. Even so, there is no doubt that not having a common language is clearly a barrier and connections are rarely as deep or long-lasting as they would be if everyone was able to communicate more extensively using English. Experience suggests that, in a non English-speaking country like Thailand, SUAC Habitat members tend to rely more on their adult chaperone as an interpreter necessarily limiting the breadth and depth of their communication with local people.

In March of 2011 SUAC Habitat took a trip to the Philippines to work in the city of Calauan in the province of Laguna which is about two hours south of Manila. Unlike Thailand, the Philippines is ostensibly an English-speaking country which promised to make the experience much different from the 2010 trip to Thailand. In addition to the linguistic differences from Thailand, in the Philippines SUAC Habitat worked not on a single family home but on an extensive building site. This was part of a government supported public-private partnership to voluntarily relocate residents from unsanitary, lower-income parts of Manila to a new, purpose-built community in Calauan, Laguna. In the Philippines SUAC Habitat members were able to communicate with local laborers and staff in English quite well from the very first day. This helped build rapport and allowed work to proceed more efficiently which made for a very pleasant build site environment. Working on a large build site rather than a single-family home also allowed for a greater variety of job tasks. While not being able to feel the sense of accomplishment as when completing one single-family house or getting to know one home partner family as well as in Thailand, SUAC Habitat members were able to meet many home partners and do a greater variety of job tasks in the Philippines. SUAC Habitat members who participated in both the 2010 Thailand and 2011 Philippines Global Village trips reflected on both experiences and found many positives in both while agreeing that it was much easier in the Philippines to communicate with people in English.

In March of 2012 SUAC Habitat set a new precedent by taking a joint Global Village trip with the Habitat for Humanity circle at Meiji Gakuin University (MGU) in Tokyo. This trip took the group to Siem Reap, Cambodia. This trip also marked the first time that SUAC Habitat traveled without an adult escort. Organizing this trip was a considerable challenge as it required coordination between SUAC Habitat and MGU Habitat as well as coordination with the Cambodian coordinator. Another challenge proved to be the meshing of the somewhat different philosophies and Global Village goals of SUAC Habitat and MGU Habitat. An example was the issue of making a donation of used work clothes and leftover foodstuffs at the end of the stay in Cambodia with some members opposed believing it violated the philosophy of the Habitat for Humanity organization. Eventually, a compromise was agreed upon but issues such as this indicate what kind of conflicts can occur

even between seemingly similar organizations of like-minded people. Ultimately, SUAC Habitat members reported that the overall experience of both traveling without an adult escort and with the Habitat circle from another university was an overwhelmingly positive one. It is hoped that joint Global Village trips can be undertaken in the future.

Current and Future Projects

SUAC Habitat fundraising activities are ongoing and planning for a 2013 Global Village trip is already underway. Also, in July of 2011 SUAC Habitat was rewarded for its efforts over the years by becoming recognized as an official campus chapter by Habitat for Humanity Japan. This is a significant accomplishment that all former and current SUAC Habitat members should be proud of. At present, there are only seven campus chapters in all of Japan and this gives SUAC Habitat more influence with Habitat for Humanity Japan both in selecting our Global Village location and other Habitat activities. It also allows SUAC Habitat to have a voice in suggesting policies and the future activities of Habitat for Humanity Japan.

SUAC Habitat temporarily suspended overseas activities and became actively involved in volunteer relief efforts for the Tohoku area immediately after the devastating earthquake and tsunami in March 2011. SUAC Habitat has

sent representatives to various parts of Tohoku during every vacation since the disaster. During summer vacation 2011 a SUAC Habitat member participated in an all-Japan Habitat volunteer relief effort in Ofunato and Rikuzentakada cities. SUAC Habitat members continue to travel to Tohoku both on official Habitat for Humanity Japan trips and unofficially with other Japanese university Habitat groups to provide volunteer aid and support in the rebuilding efforts. Many SUAC Habitat members have expressed an interest in volunteering in Tohoku as part of an official Habitat volunteer group but have been unable to do so due to minimum age restrictions and other strict regulations set by Habitat for Humanity Japan.

Another exciting development for SUAC Habitat is that two active members are currently studying overseas and have already created links with the Habitat for Humanity chapter at The University of Findlay in the United States. They have shared their experiences and the mission of their circle and have been engaged in a dialogue with their peers at The University of Findlay with the goal of possibly doing some joint activities in the future. It is also expected that the sharing of information can improve our fundraising, advocacy and education efforts. These activities indicate that SUAC Habitat is as vital as ever and is expanding both its vision and reach as we move to an inexorably more globalized world.



SUAC Habitat members present a sen-bazuru to the home partner.
Udon Thani, Thailand March 2010



SUAC Habitat members at the build site. Caluan, Laguna, Philippines
March 2011



SUAC Habitat members with MGU (Meiji Gakuin University) Habitat members
Siem Reap, Cambodia March 2012

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