Location: Siem Reap (SR), Cambodia

Duration: 3 months (June 2011 – August 2011)

Organization: EGBOK Mission (EM)

Mission Statement: EGBOK (Everything’s Gonna Be OK) Mission is an international non-profit organization empowering young adults with the educational and vocational training needed to support themselves as hospitality professionals.

EGBOK Mission Description:

Established in 2007, EGBOK Mission is a Chicago-based international non-profit that focuses on offering alternative education models, primarily through hospitality vocational training, to underprivileged young adults in developing nations. Currently, their main project is the Cambodia’s Hope Project (CHP), with goals to expand to other countries with similar growth potentials in the tourism industry. EGBOK Mission decided to choose Cambodia because the government only recently opened up the country to tourism in 1999 and many hotels import labor from the Philippines or Europe. There are many Cambodians who are unemployed and the culture is prone to optimism and enthusiasm, perfect for working in the hospitality industry. EGBOK Mission saw their program as a way to connect employer demand with employee supply. Within CHP, EGBOK Mission has a three-pronged approach to alleviating poverty through hospitality:

- **Step 1:** Establish partnerships with legitimate orphanages and rural school districts. Offer an introductory 3-month hospitality course (based off of the first year Cornell School Hospitality Administration curriculum) to roughly 25 students between the ages of 16-23. (Age limit imposed because of vocational training school application requirements.)
• **Step 2:** Gauge the interests of the students in the introductory hospitality course to pursue further hospitality training through two French NGO-run hospitality vocational schools in Siem Reap, Cambodia: L’École du Tourisme du Paul DuBrule (PD) and Sala Baï Hotel and Restaurant School (SB). Aid interested students in the application process (involves tutoring and interview preparation).

• **Step 3:** Relocate and support students accepted into either PD or SB, offer weekly tutoring classes, and provide job search and housing support for one year post-graduation.

Currently, EGBOK Mission has seven partner sites and offers assistance to over 150 students.

• The four orphanages around Phnom Penh are:
  
  o Palm Tree Foundation Orphanage (PTF);
  
  o Future Light Orphanage (FLO);
  
  o Assistance to Poor Children Agency (APCA); and
  
  o Children’s Orphanage Samrong (Samrong).

• The three organizations around Siem Reap are:
  
  o Self-Help Community Center (SHCC);
  
  o Life & Hope Association (LHA) is the umbrella organization for the following two organizations:
    
    ▪ Program Advancing Girls’ Education (PAGE); and
    
    ▪ Angkor Thom Junior High School (ATJH).

**Responsibilities:**

During the summer of 2011, I spent three months in Siem Reap, Cambodia with EGBOK Mission as their finance/logistics intern. My responsibilities included:
• Consolidating and managing the financial operations for seven satellite sites and nine volunteers and staff members throughout Cambodia;

• Preparing monthly accounting reports of the Cambodia’s Hope Project for the Board of Directors;

• Holding weekly tutoring classes in English, French and personal finance for all students in vocational training schools;

• Developing and instituting a three-part math curriculum to be taught in EGBOK Mission classes; and

• Aiding in the job search process for the ten EGBOK Mission students graduating from hospitality vocational schools in Siem Reap.

**Experience Reflection:**

Of my responsibilities, the ones that gave me the least difficulty were the second and third. Given that EGBOK Mission is based in Chicago, all accounting reports followed GAAP accounting. I was able to utilize the processes and tools I learned in my accounting classes at Cornell. Holding weekly tutoring classes for the students already in PD or SB was more fun than a “responsibility”. Through these classes, I was able to get to know the students and establish ties with them. I am fluent in English and French, so it was easy to teach basic grammar to the students and provide additional conversational practice. Knowing what to teach in personal finance classes was not difficult either, as I have had to balance my own accounts since the start of college. Effectively translating the concept of personal saving, however, to students who have no experience of having extra income was difficult.

Organizing and keeping track of the financial operations of EGBOK Mission was a daunting task. Given that credit card usage is almost impossible in Cambodia, everything is cash-
based. Volunteers are entrusted with EGBOK Mission cash to pay for expenses relating to volunteer living, student living and class supplies. In order to organize all of this and stay on top of daily expenditures, I analyzed all expenses starting from EGBOK Mission’s inception and separated them into five main categories: Other (Admin); Class; School; Student and Volunteer. The Class, School and Student expense categories corresponded to the three steps of the EGBOK Mission approach, respectively. Because oftentimes volunteers would have ten or twenty receipts per day, I also made forms and booklets to keep track of the specifics of each expense. Finally, to facilitate easy management of the master budget spreadsheet, I programmed a macro that allows all volunteers to enter their daily expenditures onto a spreadsheet stored on cloud storage systems (both DropBox or GoogleDocs). When needed, an administrator can separate the expenditures by either volunteer or category within seconds. This also had positive spillover effects for my monthly accounting responsibilities, shortening what was originally a weeklong task into only a two-day task.

In addition to my accounting and finance/logistics responsibilities, I was also in charge of developing and implementing a math curriculum. The Cambodian public school system by and large fails to teach students the importance of critical thinking. In fact, government teachers often refuse to teach students the material that will be on the national year-end exams unless the students pay the teachers a bribe. For a country where the median absolute income (not counting for PPP) is around $0.50 to $1.00 per day, a weekly or monthly bribe can be impossible. As such, EGBOK Mission students from the rural school districts or orphanages who hope to apply to the vocational training schools need additional tutoring in critical thinking and math skills. I developed a three-part math curriculum to coincide with EGBOK Mission’s three-pronged process. The first part, to be taught in the EGBOK Mission 3-month classes, focused on basic arithmetic skills and introduced fractions and decimals. The second part targets the students
applying to vocational training schools and offers word problems to build up not only their critical thinking skills, but also vocabulary. These word problems also mirror, in format, the math problems that appear on the application for the vocational schools. Finally, the last part is geared for the students currently in vocational training schools, focusing on the importance of personal budgeting and delving further into percentages and decimals. It also provides an introduction into hotel finance should students wish to learn managerial skills within the hospitality industry. This taught me great deal on how to present foreign information in an easy manner.

My favorite responsibility, however, was aiding in the job search process for the ten students graduating from vocational school. EGBOK Mission pledges to support students for one year post-graduation in terms of housing and job search. This was, however, the first batch of graduating students and it was the first time EGBOK Mission had to search and match students to appropriate job openings. We established that, given the immense amount of training EGBOK Mission students received, EGBOK Mission would focus only on four- and five-star hotels and resorts in Siem Reap. Students, throughout their vocational training, had held internships or “les stages” at three different hotels in Siem Reap (this was organized by their vocational schools). To determine fit, EGBOK Mission volunteers asked for student input on which hotels they were interested in working for. Finally, EGBOK Mission volunteers arranged for meetings between either the General Managers or Human Resources Managers of various hotels and the students. We made CV packets for all of the students and helped them apply for national identification cards.

Through this process, I got to know the students outside of class. Their personalities were so positive and it was great becoming good enough friends with the students that they would call volunteers on a Saturday afternoon asking if we wanted to go with them to the riverside and play.
badminton or volleyball or go to “Khmer dancing” classes. I also had some of my lowest moments in Cambodia, however, doing this task, dealing with management who looked down on orphans and underprivileged young adults.

While searching for a receptionist job for one of my female students, a HR Manager of a well-established hotel in Siem Reap, upon looking at her picture and learning that she was an orphan, told me to take her CV packet to Poi Pet, a city on the Cambodia/Thailand border. Poi Pet is infamous for having many casino/resorts with little law enforcement, making it a prominent location for inappropriate conduct. One can often find many girls who are trafficked there. The fact that the HR Manager looked at the picture of my female student, stated, "Oh, she's pretty," and told me to go to Poi Pet was one of the most shocking and personal affronts I had encountered in Cambodia. Ultimately, though, I remembered that I was representing the NGO and was able to civilly decline the HR Manager's "recommendation" and leave the meeting with a straight and professional face. This was only one of a few times anyone mentioned an inappropriate suggestion such as that, and overall, most Siem Reap based GMs and hotels were very helpful. However, this is an example of the many cultural differences that I had to overcome and/or accept.

**Key Takeaways:**

Through my experiences, I grew a lot personally and professionally and was able to identify what I want to do post-graduation. As an AEM and IARD double major, it has often been difficult determining whether I want to work in the public or private sector. The summers after my freshman and sophomore year, I worked in the private sector at a small hedge fund and then Goldman Sachs, respectively. Prior to my international experience, I had glamorized non-profit work to an extent. While there is great progress that is made in terms of poverty alleviation through NGOs, it is a long and hard process. Things often move much slower in developing
nations than they do in the US. What may be acceptable business practices in the US may not be in other countries, and vice versa. Things that Americans view as "racist" or "sexist" may just be part of the local culture and it is difficult to accept those. I have a lot of respect for those who dedicate their lives to NGO work internationally, but I believe that I will be able to effect more change if I work in the private sector, if only because there is less bureaucratic red-tape to cut through, and in a country with guaranteed free speech. (In Cambodia, it is illegal to criticize the government and receiving official recognition of an NGO involves many bribes.) Ideas and projects can move faster in the private sector, which suits the pace at which I do work.