



From left, Courtney Doran, Robbie Reese, Garrett Gravesen and Kevin Scott in one of their Atlanta “offices,” The Lodge coffeehouse in Buckhead.

ANDREW DAVIS TUCKER

Leading by example

UGA alumni create a study abroad program with emphasis on service and leadership

by Kelly Simmons

While there the students, nearly all from UGA, swam (protected by cages) with great white sharks off the coast of Cape Town, toured Kirstenbosch Botanical Garden and Victoria Falls, and went on safari in Kruger National Park. But they also visited schoolhouses and orphanages and spent time in the slums of the cosmopolitan city, living side-by-side with typical South African families and watching their daily struggle to survive.

The adventure draws in the students, Gravesen explains. The focus on service and leadership transforms their lives.

“This is our generation’s way to see the world,” he says.

The Global L.E.A.D. program, as it’s called, is designed to offer students more than a traditional study abroad program, which many students take advantage of during their time in college. A small number—about two percent, Gravesen says—do service learning work in foreign countries during their time at UGA.

“We don’t want to reach that two percent,” he says. “We want to find a way to reach normal students who would backpack through Europe or would go to Spain, France or Italy.”

UGA Provost Arnett Mace says Global L.E.A.D. offers students something that they may not get through other study abroad programs at UGA—an opportunity to learn from leaders in those countries where they travel.

“It provides another venue for our students,” he says. “And a very different format.”

L.E.A.D. stands for Leadership, Education, Adventure and Diplomacy and during the six-week trip, students spend one week focusing on each. During morning classes, speakers often are brought in to talk to the students about their experience. In

“I thought it was amazing that although these kids have close to nothing, they are still so joyful and full of life.”

—Jordan Drake

Cape Town, the L.E.A.D. students heard from former Kennesaw State University President Betty Siegel, who heads the Oxford Conclave on Global Ethics, designed to renew higher education’s commitment to the development of ethical leadership; and former UGA Athletic Director Vince Dooley and wife Barbara, who became friends of Gravesen through UGA HERO(s). They also met and talked with Ahmed Kathrada, a cellmate of former South African president Nelson Mandela, when both were imprisoned for advocating civil rights and opposing apartheid in the 1960s.

At one point during education week, the students were sent to live with host families in their shacks in the slums of the city. They were each given a dollar a day on which to live—a typical amount for the poor in Cape Town.

What the students saw surprised them. Despite their lack of wealth the people were happy.

“Our host mother’s name was Rosa, and she kept telling us “as long as I’m alive I’ll have hope,” UGA student Joanna Harbin recalls.

“It re-inspired me to stay focused (on helping others),” Harbin says. “There is an opportunity to make a difference in people’s lives every day.”

Student Jordan Drake posted this entry on the group’s blog for that day:

“I thought it was amazing that although these kids have close to nothing, they are still so joyful and full of life. Our (host) mother walked us around to other



AMANDA ABBOTT

UGA senior Maureen Scott, center, claps and sings during a name game with children at a South African school.

houses of her relatives and friends. We would walk in and see another group of LEAD students singing or dancing with the people. It was very apparent to me how much these people valued friends and family and are content with what they have. One may say ignorance is bliss, but I think these people really know what life is all about. This experience will likely be one that many of us take the most away from."

That's the feedback the Global L.E.A.D. organizers are looking for.

"If they have these experiences, they can't help but leave there different people than they were before," Scott says. "It doesn't just change their minds but transforms their hearts."

Gravesen and Scott each made a name for himself at UGA. Gravesen was elected student body president his sophomore year and later was the May 2003 commencement speaker. Scott made the December 2007 commencement address.

Gravesen along with fellow

student Ryan Gembala in 2003 founded UGA HERO(s) (Hearts Everywhere Reaching Out) as a philanthropic organization on campus to raise money to provide quality of life programs for children affected by HIV and AIDS.

A few years later, Scott, as executive director of UGA HERO(s), took the program to a new level, increasing membership from 700 members to 1,500 and raising \$306,000—four times more than the group raised the previous year.

Meanwhile, Gravesen and Gembala, who graduated in 2003, went on to found H.E.R.O. for Children Inc., a non-profit organization based in Atlanta that provides mentoring and life skills programs to children with HIV/AIDS. Gravesen has since given up his staff position in the organization but still sits on its board of directors, which also includes UGA head football coach Mark Richt and Dooley.

In 2007, Gravesen was named one of the nation's 10 Outstanding Young People by the U.S. Jaycees. Previous honorees were John F. Kennedy and Bill Clinton. He was later selected as one of the world's 10 most outstanding young people and traveled to New Delhi to receive that honor.

It is Gravesen's passion for adventure and travel and his commitment to public service that led him to create Global L.E.A.D.

In 2008, he connected with Robbie Reese, who had been working at the Lane Company, to co-found Global L.E.A.D. The two of them then brought on board Scott, who had been working on former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee's presidential campaign, and Courtney Doran, who had been teaching school in the Marshall Islands through a Harvard University program. They worked together to plan the program and line

up potential advisors and investors.

When Gravesen and Scott traveled to Sao Paulo, Brazil, in 2008 to speak to more than 1,100 students at an international youth conference, they took the opportunity to find out what the students were looking for in an international program.

Gravesen also went to Harvard Business School to meet with Associate Dean David Thomas to discuss his idea. Thomas helped him work through the leadership model that would form the basis of the program.

They sought and got UGA approval for their study abroad

GET MORE

For more information on Global L.E.A.D., go to www.globalleadprogram.org

For information on UGA study abroad, go to www.uga.edu/oie/studyabroad.htm

program, which means students can earn course credit for the experience.

When they looked for a first site, Cape Town seemed a logical choice. It was a relatively safe and cosmopolitan place that would be attractive to students, they reasoned, but might not be the first they would think of visiting.

"It's really about getting them out of their comfort zones," Scott says.

Since the trip, Assistant Professor Sandra Whitney has been reading through term papers and journals submitted by Global L.E.A.D. participants. Some show such growth and insight that "I have been moved to tears," Whitney says.

The students "got it," she says. They understand that doing service projects and reaching out to the people in South Africa on their terms is what is needed—it's not a problem that can be solved with money.

"You have to see what people perceive their needs to be," says

"We're talking about totally shifting the way our generation sees the world."

—Garrett Gravesen

Whitney, who accompanies students to Tanzania on service-learning projects during the summer. "You can't just go in and give each kid a Nintendo."

Though they claim success with their first trip, Gravesen and Scott admit pulling together the program hasn't been easy. Gravesen took out a \$70,000 personal loan to cover start-up costs, which include traveling to recruit students and generate private financial support for the program. Each of the staff agreed to take a minimal salary—their total annual company payroll is just \$36,000.

However, their sights are high. They hope to broaden the horizon next year by showcasing their documentary of the Global L.E.A.D. program at colleges and universities across the U.S. They plan to take student groups to four countries next year: Brazil, Panama and Greece, as well as back to South Africa.

They manage by living at home with their parents and using local coffee shops—with free wireless Internet—as office space.

"I left a paying job for this," Scott jokes, without regret.

They're already beginning to see the payoff from the first trip. After their return to the U.S., several students in their group this summer began planning a service-learning project for Athens.

"How hypocritical if you just talk about it and don't do it," Gravesen says. "We're talking about totally shifting the way our generation sees the world." **GM**



AMANDA ABBOTT

Senior Danielle Crawford, front, and other UGA students have a sack race with students from an after school program funded by the Amy Biehl Foundation Trust, an organization that works to develop and empower youth and discourage violence in Cape Town.

"It doesn't just change their minds but transforms their hearts."
—Kevin Scott