

Collin Burks

Soccer Without Borders in Granada, Nicaragua

For the next year, I will be volunteering for Soccer Without Borders in Granada, Nicaragua. Soccer Without Borders is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that operates youth development programs in Nicaragua, El Salvador, Uganda, and the United States. The organization's overall mission is to use soccer to enable youth to grow and succeed to their fullest potential. In Granada, the organization's specific mission is to provide a safe space for young girls, who historically have been very neglected in Nicaraguan society, to play soccer, develop friendships, set and reach their goals, and have mentors and role models whom they can look up to. Since the program's founding in 2007, Soccer Without Borders in Nicaragua has progressed to year-round operation that serves hundreds of girls in the town of Granada. Each year, the organization continues to expand its reach in the community by offering new programs and adding more staff and volunteers.

My main role in Granada will be as a Team Leader in charge of a group of 15-20 girls. The responsibilities of this position include planning and implementing soccer practices, team-building activities, workshops and special events, mentoring girls one-on-one, building relationships with the parents and families of the girls, and recruiting new participants. I see the main purposes of my position as acting as a role model to the young girls, helping the girls develop friendships, instilling confidence and hope in the girls, and preparing them to be leaders in their community. I also hope to add a health education component to the program, in which I envision running interactive education sessions for both the girls and their mothers on health topics that they choose. These topics could range anywhere from nutrition to how to access health services in the town, depending on the particular needs of the community; I will work together with the community to develop the sessions that will be most helpful to them.

My anthropology classes, my past volunteer experience on the U.S.-Mexico border, and my thesis on Latino migrants have all solidified my interest in working and engaging with Latinos and Latin American culture for the rest of my life. After next year, I hope to attend medical school and become a physician to serve Latino communities, particularly Latino children, in the United States. Many of the skills and knowledge that I will learn and develop by volunteering with Soccer Without Borders should prove to be extremely helpful for my future career, including working with children, engaging with Latin American culture, teaching health education, mentoring, and strengthening my Spanish.