

Fresh from a four-month stint as an exchange student in Hong Kong, I was still trying to get over the fact that I was now back at home in Manila, Philippines - thousands of miles away from all the incredible people I had met abroad who were now too, back in their countries all over the globe. It was four months that passed just a little too fast and I felt like I was jerked awake from one amazing dream. When I heard about the Global Enterprise Experience, I immediately signed up, ready to open myself up again to people who are just like me – all itching to see new faces, to hear new ideas, to face new challenges, and to experience different cultures in a radically new way.

The last three weeks did not disappoint. Teamed with two girls, Sara and Sarita, from Medellin, Colombia, two boys, Ber and Brian, from San Diego, California, my friend, Ian, who I see everyday in class, and Elisapeci, from Wellington, New Zealand, our one hundred plus e-mails over Google Groups and Writeboard, as well as our Skype sessions, united our team quickly together. The shared excitement and enthusiasm, easily readable between the many lines of text exchanged over the Internet, was truly contagious and I wanted to devote all my time to coming up with a great idea for the project. The four countries represented by Team 47's members are all corn-producing nations and we agreed to work on a project that would use the waste materials from corn production, a process we were all familiar with, to create a product that would involve rural communities in our own locales, that could be easily produced and replicated in other countries, and that can be sold in the international market.

Week 1 was dedicated to brainstorming and researching. Links to interesting articles were posted and traded and ideas were pitched back and forth between the team members. At this point, we had a healthy, inbox-filling, online discussion going on via e-mail and everyone was still on board. Sarita chanced upon the idea of creating plastic cups from the husks and leaves of corn and found that it can be feasibly done. It was a very promising idea and we all jumped on board. What I found particularly interesting however, was how, given the same end product, we all had different ideas of the value chain process for the corn cups. The Colombians wanted to focus only on the corporate and production aspects of the project. The Americans were more concerned with how exactly the corn waste materials would be turned into cups and who and where these crops would be sourced. We, Filipinos, along with our New Zealander team mate, were concerned about the socio-economic aspects, asking questions like "What can we fund using the money earned from these cups?" and "Who would benefit in the long run?" During my Skype conversation with Sarita, it irked me that she was satisfied with the rural communities just getting the cash earned from selling the raw materials and/or producing the cups and not specifying how exactly these communities could benefit, like through infrastructure or education programs. We also differed on whose perspective we were going to take moving forward with the project: a private corporation's view or from the perspective of the communities involved? The conversation raised many issues and brought up more questions than answers. At one point, I thought the whole exercise was pointless as we could not agree on anything. Sarita and I posted our Skype conversation on our Google group. Succeeding correspondences among the team members didn't help much to provide a clearer framework to outline what exactly it was we were going to propose. While indeed we all loved the idea of creating corn cups, it was all that we could agree upon for a long time.

Succeeding days would see the Americans go on spring break, Ian and I take our final exams, and the Colombians get caught up in projects at school. For some days, it seemed that the initial excitement had finally waned off but as Week 3 approached, almost everyone but Ian and Sara got back to inbox-flooding as crunch time approached. With the deadline fast looming, we divided the work, each according to his strengths, and decided to take the view of the private corporation. To make the project socially conscious, job creation in developing countries served as an impetus to locating production there. Large-scale coffee chains that already support local community projects were targeted as the main consumers. In less than three days, we got our act together, individually working on our parts despite sickness, death in the family, and finals week among other things, and finally finished our six-page proposal.

My Geebiz experience did not run as smoothly as I thought it would but it has taught me a lot about the real world. The Pacific Ocean or 5, 11, or 15-hour time differences were not the biggest obstacle for my team but rather it was cultural differences. With our diverse backgrounds and takes on the problem at hand, we found it very hard to come to a consensus but through proper and effective communication, some debate and persuasion, we set aside our differences and worked our butts off at the end to come up with something, I believe, is truly promising. It has only been three weeks since I met Sarita, Brian, Ber, and Elisapeci (the other two members of the team disappeared midway through the project) but we have decided to keep our Google group up and to add each other up on Facebook. Even if we did not agree with each other all the time, and even if at some points during the exercise, we each wanted to just quit and give up, at the end of the day, the Geebiz experience has brought us together to experience the richness in diversity, and I guess it can be said, adversity, and that for me, is the most important thing. From just a bunch of college seniors and juniors living our own lives miles apart, not knowing that the others existed, we have become friends and truly students of the world.