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UMBC Global Medical Brigades serves Panamanian communities

The chapter's first ever medical and public health brigade helped over 140 patients

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In the early morning of March 22, a charter bus full of exhausted UMBC students pulled into the campus stadium lot. As they sifted through shared luggage to find their belongings, students shared hugs and heartfelt goodbyes with people who were relative strangers just a week earlier.

Over spring break, UMBC's chapter of Global Medical Brigades (GMB) went to Panama for its first ever brigade. The goal of the trip, which was two years in the making, was to provide medical care to communities in need in Darien, Panama.

GMB also combined the medical brigade with a public health brigade. During the trip, the group built one latrine for a local household. This new latrine will reduce groundwater pollution, decrease the frequency of water-borne illnesses, and provide organic fertilizer for local agriculture. UMBC GMB is the first chapter ever to finish a latrine in three days while doing a combined medical and public health brigade.

The trip, which spanned seven days, consisted of two days of travel, one day of unpacking and clinic preparation, three days of clinic duty and latrine construction, and a visit to a native Panamanian community for a cultural presentation.

Although some group members had met at meetings and fundraisers throughout the year, most people in the 45-person group were completely unfamiliar with each other prior to the trip.

As the week progressed, however, GMB became like a large family. Caroline Taylor and Jae Yang, affectionately referred to as "Mom and Dad" by many members of GMB, are founding members and the group's Vice President and President, respectively.

Yang, a junior Emergency Health Services major, said, "I'm most proud of how willing everyone was to work with each other and to make everyone have a great time. We worked a clinic for three days and did both projects, and there weren't any cliques. People were very open with making friends."



GMB is run by a group of dedicated students who strive to exemplify UMBC's core tenets of sustainability, diversity, and social responsibility, which is why it comes as a surprise that the group receives very little support from UMBC.

Taylor, a junior studying Public Health, Health Administration and Public Policy, and minoring in Sociology, said, "I think that financially sponsoring this club would be a great investment for UMBC. It makes sense that UMBC loves ideas of sustainability and development, and that's what our club values. We got to represent ourselves in a community that needs help and support. Since our students were able to do this without help shows that our students value those too."

Over three days, UMBC students were able to help treat about 140 patients, who were given medicines that were either donated or purchased with funds raised through bake sales and other fundraisers.

The group was also able to build a compost latrine for a family of five, which will not only impact that family, but will also reduce the amount of pollution and risk of some communicable diseases in the community.

To learn more about UMBC Global Medical Brigades and how you can get involved, visit [facebook.com/GlobalMedicalBrigadesUmbc](https://www.facebook.com/GlobalMedicalBrigadesUmbc). UMBC GMB was able to accomplish something incredible, proving health care and helping the people in Panama, while at the same time forming long lasting friendships within the club.