

Dear Class of 1978,

It has been a few weeks since I returned home from Bolivia, and the experience has just begun to settle in. Though the trip has ended, the work continues, and I am constantly excited by the great opportunities and challenges this project has given me. I am writing now to thank you once again for your continued support. I have said it before, and I will say it again, the A Tu Lado project would not be possible without the Class of 1978 Foundation.

Almost two years ago, my older brother a friend of ours, and I envisioned bringing together the knowledge, experience, and passion of groups around the world to develop emergency medical systems (EMS) in the areas that need them most. We gave this idea the name A Tu Lado, which means "by your side." The idea was intriguing, invigorating, and exceedingly optimistic. How could three undergraduates spread across America with little to no real world experience develop models of emergency medicine for developing countries? The answer is with a lot of time, work, and the help and resources of countless organizations and groups such as yourselves. With this network of support, the A Tu Lado idea became a reality.



In the summer of 2011 I traveled to Caracas, Venezuela thanks to the financial support of the Class of 1978. After making key relationships with groups such as Venemergencia, and the student firefighters of the Universidad Simón Bolívar (USB), we were able to outline a model of standardized emergency medical curriculum for the region. This curriculum combined our knowledge of the American model of emergency medicine, the on the ground experience of Venemergencia's paramedics, and the institutional principles of the Universidad Simón Bolívar. Our plan was divided into a preparatory "pre diploma" course, and a full length EMT course during the regular school year. During our stay in Caracas we were able to coordinate and lead a pre diploma course, which included topics ranging from anatomy, to rapid extrication, for the paramedics of Venemergencia. These courses have continued since that time, and the Universidad Simón Bolívar will begin Caracas' first institutionally accredited EMT (emergency medical technician) course of its kind this fall.

Another aspect of our EMS model was the training of local first responders. To start this effort we looked to the slum community of Los Erasos. It was there that we taught and organized more than 60 community members to respond to local emergencies. These students, called brigade members, now work with Venemergencia to bring individuals the care they need, no matter who they are, or where they reside.

We had a great deal of success in Venezuela, and the news of our project caught the attention of Mano a Mano Bolivia. Mano a Mano is a large nonprofit organization that assists in the sustainable development of Bolivia through rural clinics, water resources, educational initiatives, and construction projects. Mano a Mano reached out to us at A Tu Lado, by that time a federally recognized 501.c3 nonprofit with 8 members and an intern at Macalester College, to assist in their emergency air transport project Mano a Mano Apoyo Aereo in Cochabamba Bolivia. This group of pilots uses refurbished planes to provide transport to the victims of medical emergencies in rural areas all across Bolivia. These transports were carried out by a single pilot, who would use old military maps to locate potential landing areas, place the patient in a cot in the back of the plane, and then return to metropolitan hospitals with the patient. Mano a Mano asked us to assist them in training airborne paramedics that could serve to stabilize and sustain these patients during transport.



I, and the rest of A Tu Lado, jumped at this opportunity. The chance to explore a new country and take part in the development of a new system that could really save lives was thrilling. Though my mind was full with visions of piloting twin propeller planes around the jungles of Bolivia, I knew there would be a lot of paperwork and logistics as well.

The first step in this project was developing a run report, which would be used to document each flight Mano a Mano took, and could serve as the start of a patient records system. I knew this would be important because, as an organization, it is imperative to show progress with actual data. If the A Tu Lado vision is to succeed, we must have data showing the status of the area's healthcare before, and after our services are offered. In the United

States we have a very complicated and often inefficient system of health records, but in Bolivia they had no system at all. It was not uncommon for pilots and doctors to transport and care for a patient without even knowing their last name. The development of this run report was and is an ongoing process, putting together the best of our ideas, and those of the Bolivians on the ground. I am happy to report that these reports are being used every day on rescue transports. We are also beginning to incorporate this data into a computerized record system with OpenMRS software.

As in Venezuela, the core of our project was building and presenting a standardized curriculum that integrated the expertise of many groups. Through countless emails and late night Skype conversations, we assembled a group of advisors and guest lecturers ranging from rural nurses, Mano a Mano pilots, local firefighters, gynecological doctors, and narcotraffic police officers. Even the dean of medicine at the country's top rated medical school was involved in the planning and instruction of the course. These professionals were not only advisors to the project, but most were also students in the course.

We were happy to have such a knowledgeable group of students in the course for multiple reasons. First, this was a test run of a new comprehensive EMT curriculum, and student feedback was invaluable to the improvement of the course. We finished each day with a 15 minute debrief that allowed students to say what had gone well, and what aspects of the class needed improvement.



Secondly, having such knowledgeable students made teaching the course very interactive. While the A Tu Lado staff and I led the course, we could constantly call on students to present their expertise and experience. It was a collaborative and lively atmosphere each day. Nurses, for example led sections on biosecurity and personal protective equipment, while the police officers provided a section on improvised transport that included live smoke grenades and a massive pit of mud and debris to navigate. Lastly, experienced students are key to our future success, because a goal of the course was to find leaders among the students that could become lead instructors and coordinators in future courses.

Though anatomy and basic physiology was included in the course, the students were able to grasp these topics quickly, giving us time for what I find to be the most important and useful aspect of EMT courses—practice. Each day's class ended with a practical session based on the topics of the day's lectures. These practical were based off real cases encountered on Mano a Mano Apoyo Aereo transport assignments, and ranged from snake bites to mass casualty incidents. Our final day of class before exams concluded with a triage scenario where students, community members, and the A Tu Lado staff were able to put on moulage, and small student teams were forced to make rapid treatment decisions and move critical patients into live planes.

The path was not always a straight one though, and several challenges arose. One difficulty was melding the Bolivian standards, and lifestyle with what we expected and hoped from our students. Our Bolivian instructors were very strict in their conviction that no absences would be allowed if students wished to graduate, but nearly a quarter of the class had plans to take part in a large firefighter's convention that interfered with the course, and the odd student was always being called away to attend to an emergency of their respective variety. Though some of these absences were in the end deemed inexcusable, we were able to compromise, and provide extensive remedial class time for students who missed. This meant a lot more time teaching, and a lot less time sleeping.

In total this course included 40 hours of instruction time, and 21 students graduated the course by passing both written and practical examinations on our final day. Our partners and us plan to scale this introductory, three-week course to a complete semester-long program in early 2013 at the Universidad Mayor De San Simon, and this course will

utilize the leaders from this introductory course. The Universidad Mayor De San Simon is currently making space, and finding students for what will be the second institutionally accredited EMT course A Tu Lado has sparked in South America. Also, many graduates of the course have volunteered their time to fly alongside Mano a Mano pilots on their rescue missions, serving the purpose that we set out to achieve.

I will always remember this trip as one full of adventure, friendship, and personal growth. Working and living in Bolivia gave me a great appreciation for what is possible when we work together. I said that when A Tu Lado was just an idea my partners and I were exceedingly optimistic, and I believe this as only been augmented. I am wide-eyed and hopeful for what lies ahead. Thanks to your support I have had a set of incredible experiences. I participated in an international firefighter's competition, dodged pickpockets in a crowded market, and I did pilot that twin propeller plane through the jungle.



Thank you,

Seth Forsgren

Please contact me with any questions, and visit us at www.atulado.net for more information.