

ENGINEERS WITHOUT FRONTIERS USA (EWF-USA) REACHES OUT TO THE WORLD



Dan Bonner

Raymond Offenheiser

Ithaca's out-of-the-way location proves no obstacle to the genesis of globally minded groups. At Cornell, an organization that endeavors to reach out to and better the entire world recently formed. Cornell is the national headquarters of Engineers Without Frontiers USA (EWF-USA), a nonprofit service

organization that seeks to solve technology-based problems worldwide. On September 17–20, 2003, EWF-USA held its first national conference, "Bridging the Divide," on campus. The conference's discourse centered on the theme of interdisciplinary and participatory action in the global community. Guest speakers and EWF-USA leaders also talked about the evolution of the organization and its goals for the future.

"Bridging the Divide" was an opportunity for members from EWF-USA chapters to meet one another and discuss the role of engineers in today's global society. From 30 universities, 150 people convened at Cornell to participate. Conference participants included students, faculty, and practicing engineers. "Bridging the Divide" offered participants a variety of panel discussions, workshops, and lectures, some of which facilitated conversation about project planning, fundraising, and public relations for EWF-USA. Keynote speaker, Raymond Offenheiser, president of Oxfam America, was one of the highlights of the conference. He commended the activities of EWF-USA and emphasized the importance of the organization: "I want to offer each of you and EWF, institutionally, much encouragement to stay the course, build your institution, recruit more students to your global and inclusive vision, and bring engineers into the mainstream of these debates that have largely been hijacked by economists and policy specialists."

EWF-USA is an offshoot of Engineers Without Borders Canada (EWB-ISF). EWF-USA receives support from Cornell's College of Engineering, the Center for Religion, Ethics, and Social Policy, and the Einaudi Center for International Studies. The organization

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A conference workshop

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believes that engineers can work with communities to find long-term solutions to technology-based problems. Its members seek to create partnerships that foster cultural, educational, and technical exchange with developing communities. By establishing locally sustainable remedies to problems such as water conservation and limited energy, EWF-USA endeavors to improve the quality of life of people throughout the world.

Regina Clewlow (B.S. '01, M.E. '02) is executive director of EWF-USA. She was key in creating the organization and planning "Bridging the Divide." As an undergraduate computer science major at Cornell, Clewlow participated in many student organizations. After receiving her B.S. degree, she stayed at the university to complete a master of engineering degree. Clewlow became interested in the idea of EWF-USA through the influence of Krishna S. Athreya, the director of Engineering Minority and Women's Programs. The two founded EWF-USA in 2001; today, the organization has about 400 members at universities throughout the U.S. While the majority of EWF-USA's members are engineering students, membership is open to people of all ages and vocations.

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Regina Clewlow '01, '02,
co-founder of EWF-USA

During the summer of 2003, EWF-USA sent student members to South Africa and Bosnia to educate local populations about water conservation techniques and information technology practices. Students who undertake these partnerships employ much more than their technical know-how, they develop solutions that are sustainable and practical for the culture of the community.

EWF-USA also engages in projects closer to home. The Cornell chapter developed a civil engineering course in which students manipulated technology to make the resources of the Tompkins County Public Library accessible to low-vision patrons.

According to Clewlow, "Bridging the Divide" was a success: "The most important goal of the conference was to develop an open dialogue amongst our members; we definitely achieved that." The conference's success mirrors that of the organization: through its partnerships at home and abroad, EWF-USA is realizing its overall goal of employing lasting solutions to technology-based problems. From its home base at Cornell, EWF-USA is setting the precedent for engineers to take charge in shaping the future of the global community.

For more information:

<http://www.ewf-usa.org>

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