

COVID-19 PUTS CGC PROJECTS ON HOLD

By Denise Elson Tucker '89

Part of the mission of Southwest Baptist University is to prepare students to be servant leaders in a global society. But, as the world began to shut down because of the COVID-19 pandemic, SBU's [Center for Global Connections](#) had to keep its mission project teams home as the campus transitioned to remote learning for the remainder of the semester.



"I believe one of the strengths of this university is the personal relationships that are formed between students and faculty/staff, and an online education is much less personal and relational," said Diana Gallamore '91, director of the Center for Global Connections and Travel Stewardship. "I was disappointed in knowing that the spiritual growth and education students could gain would now be altered due to the inability to participate in a crosscultural learning experience. I recognize the need to keep our students safe, and agree with the decision made, but disappointment cannot be avoided."

The CGC had four mission projects planned during Spring Break, but a few days before those teams were to depart, the University had to make the decision to cancel those trips in order to ensure the teams' health and safety as conditions surrounding COVID-19 were changing rapidly worldwide.

The CGC faced additional challenges of communicating with students who were no longer on campus, reaching airlines to inquire about cancellations and dealing with the disappointment of paying for costs "that were expended on a mission that was not completed," Gallamore said.

About a week after the Spring Break trips were canceled, the 10 summer projects also were called off.

"Since the students were so far along in the process of preparing for their summer mission, a decision was made to continue their mission education training online to complete their educational instruction, although this greatly affected their learning and experience since they could no longer participate in the actual mission," Gallamore said.

Kelly Rehm, assistant director of the CGC, said that the Spring and Summer teams continued to meet by Zoom and students still will receive academic and [Community, Life & Worship](#) credit for their missions.

"I've been very encouraged to see many student missionaries planning to use their refunds and airline credits for a future mission trip," said Rehm, who noted a positive that came from the cancellation of the Colorado mission project originally planned for August.

"This setback resulted in a new expanded year-round outdoor ministry club, 'Wild at Heart,'" Rehm said. "Thus far, the student interest has been tremendous. This new endeavor for the CGC comes after years of outdoor ministry in Russia and Spain, as well as many weekends hiking and camping in Arkansas."

The Wild at Heart team will travel to sites in Arkansas, Oklahoma, Michigan and Colorado, where they will camp, hike, share their testimony and the Gospel on this physically demanding trip. Locally, the Polk County Team transitioned the Good News Club ministry to email and mail for the children at Bolivar Schools.

Although their immediate plans did not come to completion, Gallamore said that's out of the CGC's hands.

"God is in control," Gallamore said. "He always has been and always will be. We can make the best plans and have great goals, but ultimately, the service and ministry that we work to provide for our SBU students is for His glory. He still calls each of us to share that good news with others, regardless of where we are – in our homes, with our family during a quarantine, in our schools, on our campuses and among the nations. We have a story to share that can change others' lives and that isn't determined by our location."

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