The Vision

After a brief visit to the rural mountains of Guatemala in the summer of 2014, my wife and I were drawn to the beautiful people and culture of this developing nation. Having been educators in western Pennsylvania for over 10 years at that point, we were called upon to facilitate a week-long “Physics Camp” at a new school that was established by missionaries with the goal to raise up local youth who could serve in a newly constructed hospital. Shortly thereafter we began the process of pursuing a longer term commitment to return and serve the community we had grown to love. The pieces all came together in rapid succession in the beginning weeks of the 2014-15 school year in our stateside jobs as I applied to take a sabbatical for the following year and we made numerous preparations to move our family of 6 children to Guatemala. Coinciding exactly with that timing was the news that I had been awarded a substantial service-learning grant to work with students on a few initiatives to address the lack of physical activity in the community. One of the ideas proposed in the grant was the installation of a disc golf course in the community, including a practice course at the local middle school, and a handful of clinics to train participants in the rules and mechanics of the sport. The project was successfully completed in late May of 2015, only a few weeks before my family packed up and moved to Guatemala. After so much dreaming, planning, and hard work, it was very difficult to leave behind that disc golf course without having the opportunity to enjoy it and see its impact on the community firsthand.

The following school year in Guatemala was a tremendous adventure! Yet, having come off a furiously busy year of executing the grant project in Pennsylvania, I was longing for opportunities to play the sport in Guatemala. Unfortunately, no matter how much my mind tried to concoct a plan to bring disc golf to that rural village, I couldn’t overcome the problems of secure land and funding for a course. Fast forward a few years, and my family and I found ourselves in a completely different setting in the country of Guatemala. We started serving at an international school in the city of Quetzaltenango.

The Inter-American School is nestled on a hillside at the outskirts of the country’s second most populous city. It is a private, Christian school for pre-kindergarten through 12th grade in the United States’ educational system. The school enrollment is approximately 230 students, and is growing. While the majority of the students are from wealthy families, the school aspires to bless and minister to the needs of the surrounding communities. Due to its ample portions of undeveloped land, as well as fenced-in perimeter that is patrolled by guards 24/7, the school seemed to be a suitable location for Guatemala’s first disc golf course. Additionally, being at a school would provide opportunities for the educational component of promoting disc golf through physical education classes and after-
school programs for both teachers and students. The final component, funding, was still a question mark at this point, but I was determined to pursue the project and see how that piece might come about.

The Planning

Planning the disc golf course was a challenging proposition! While I had executed similar projects in the past, I discovered that the logistics in a foreign country are much more convoluted. The first step was to evaluate the financial feasibility of creating a course in Guatemala. Given that the Inter-American School was willing to host the course on their property, the biggest cost would be for baskets. My first thought was that I would be willing to pay out-of-pocket for shipping costs if I could convince a basket manufacturer to donate the baskets outright. I reached out to several companies and received some positive responses, but not any firm commitments. Fortunately, in one of those conversations someone at the DGA directed me toward the Marco Polo Grant program through the PDGA. As I investigated it, it was inspiring to see how the program had funded many new courses throughout the world, but none yet in Guatemala. I felt that I would have a legitimate chance at receiving a grant if I could submit a good proposal. With a maximum grant value of $3,000, I also had a guideline for my overall budget. Things were starting to look more and more possible, yet there were still a number of questions left unanswered: How many holes would fit on the school campus, and what layout would be best? How much would shipping cost and would it be by land, ship, or air? Or, could the equipment be manufactured in Guatemala, and if so, at what cost? Who would do the installation work? How could the course best be introduced to the community?

I began the task of trying to map out a reasonable course using the PDGA's recommendations for course design. Given that the course would not be heavily populated at any given time, and taking into account some of the tighter spaces near boundaries and buildings, I decided that a few instances of “crossed fairways” would be acceptable, if needed. I also conceded that shorter holes would generally be okay since the majority of participants would be young and inexperienced. Finally, I took into account possible future redesigns as the school acquires more property for expansion of the campus. A few preliminary layouts indicated that a maximum of 12 holes could fit on the campus’ nine acres. I play tested the holes using a midrange disk and putter for a few weeks, tweaking it in big ways and small, until I arrived at a satisfying design.

In the meantime, I looked into manufacturing the baskets locally and discovered that, while labor was cheap, the materials were prohibitively expensive. Furthermore, I got a response from Prodigy Disc Golf, headed by Will Schusterick, who was eager to partner with me on the project. He
offered me a very generous price for 12 baskets and 100 discs, so I began to pursue shipping options. My first contact was the president of the Parent-Teacher Association at the school. She was able to put me in touch with a few parents of the school who had done significant work on imports in the past. I was looking at paying for transport by land through Mexico, applying for a shipping grant through USAID, and having the equipment imported by boat from Miami, Florida. Eventually, I decided to contract the boat service. In the meantime, I applied for and received the funding for the Marco Polo Grant. It was time to set everything in motion!

The Execution

The PDGA disbursed the grant funds on June 12, 2019. At that point in time I was back in Pennsylvania for a summer break, so it was difficult to manage the project in Guatemala. However, I made the purchase order through Will Schusterick at Prodigy Disc Golf by August 2 and also configured the international shipper, who would do the importation. The 12 permanent installation T3 baskets from Prodigy, plus 100 discs and domestic shipping totalled $2100. The international shipper estimated $934.72 for shipping and importation fees. For some reason there was a long holdup on the domestic side of things. It took until August 16 for the shipment to arrive at the international shipping warehouse in Miami, Florida. Unfortunately, it also arrived in very poor condition. From there it was sent on a boat to Guatemala and arrived in Guatemala City by September 4. Another piece of bad news was that the importation fees were much higher than estimated, bringing the total international shipping and importation cost to $1244.46. The final leg of the trip was to get the equipment from Guatemala City to the city of Quetzaltenango. At that point in time I was back in Guatemala, and very overwhelmed from starting a new school year! I was able to contract a local shipper to do it for about $70, and the baskets providentially arrived at the campus of the Inter-American School on the afternoon of my birthday, October 2! Most would consider it cursed to have to unload a box truck of heavy equipment on their birthday, but to me it was a gift. My spirits were only dampened by the realization that in all of the shipping legs, two center poles, one anchor pipe, and nearly half of the installation hardware had been lost!

![Figure 3: The Damaged Shipment That Arrived at the International Shipping Warehouse](image-url)
sent extras to the state-side home of one of the school teachers, and she brought it back to Guatemala after a weekend trip home.

While I began the process of replacing the lost items, I had also been coordinating the work on campus that would be needed to install the course. All students in grades 6 through 12 at the school were slated to be doing service projects on September 4, October 2, and November 6. The majority were transported to various sites in the surrounding communities, but a group of about a dozen 6th graders had chosen to stay on campus to work on the disc golf course. Not a single one had ever used a shovel, pick axe, post-hole digger, or wheelbarrow in their life! I started out by staking the locations of the tee pads and baskets, and demonstrating how to use the tools. Afterward, I sent them on to the campus to get to work! They were very eager to impress me with their production. On the first day they were able to dig three holes and carve out one tee pad that was on a hillside. On the second day they finished another tee pad and two holes. Over the course of the next two weeks I decided to accelerate the work by digging more holes and installing the anchor pipes with concrete on the weekends. The majority of the concrete was already available in the school’s storage shed and I only had to buy a few more bags at a cost of about $30. By the time the November work day arrived the main work remaining was the assembly and installation of the baskets. Again, there was a steep learning curve for these students who had never used hand tools before, but they were able to assemble all of the baskets for which we had all of the components. The remaining baskets were put together as the parts arrived. I anticipated that the students would carry the assembled baskets to each of the holes on that work day, but I overestimated their rate of productivity! Instead, I personally installed each of the baskets one Saturday morning after I carefully crimped shut all of the chain “S” hooks. In place of padlocks on the anchors I chose to use bolts with multiple nuts. It sounds less secure, but the reasoning was that a padlock is easy work for bolt cutters, which are ubiquitous in this country, while a bolt would actually take a bit of time for someone to disassemble if they were trying to steal a basket.
Figure 6: The First Three Holes Dug by Students

Figure 7: A Selection of Tee Pads Prepared by Students
By this time it was nearing Thanksgiving and my original timeline proposal for the project was blown up! At the school there was an unexpected turnover of physical education teachers, which would have made it difficult to roll out the new course in those classes even if it was ready on schedule. Clearly, a number of complicating factors, like shipping delays and missing materials, also slowed things down. Furthermore, my wife had to leave with my youngest child to fly back to the United States for a major surgery, leaving me with my remaining five kids to finish the last three weeks of the school semester before Christmas break. Needless to say, I didn’t make any more progress in that time, except for the occasional after-school play-through of the course with a few of my kids. As we wrapped up the last day before Christmas break I packed up my kids and we made our way to the airport. For the next three weeks in Pennsylvania and New York things were much too busy to be worrying about the disc golf course in Guatemala! The rest of the project would have to wait until we returned in the first week of January, 2020.

![Image](image1.jpg)

![Image](image2.jpg)

![Image](image3.jpg)

**Figure 8:** Some of My Kids and I Taking Our First Crack at the Course

Next on the docket are signage, introducing the course through physical education courses with a new physical education teacher, and planning a grand opening event!...stay tuned!