

From Classroom to Community: Donor Giving Provides Impactful Student Experiences

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Justin and Leslie Haskell and their family visit with families they supported in Trujillo, Peru. Experiences like these helped reinforce the Haskell's belief in the power of entrepreneurship to strengthen families and create opportunity across generations.

The first time Justin and Leslie Haskell joined a SEED trip through the Jon M. Huntsman School of Business to the Dominican Republic, they expected to observe a meaningful student experience. What they found instead was something far more transformative — for the students, for the entrepreneurs they served, and for their own family.

Justin, founder of Maxium Senior Benefits, and Leslie, who studied international business, immediately connected with SEED's mission of empowering entrepreneurs in developing communities.

In homes and small communities across the Dominican Republic, Utah State University students sat side by side with aspiring entrepreneurs working to build better lives for their families. Some sold homemade treats from their kitchens. Others raised animals or managed small neighborhood businesses. What they often lacked were resources, mentorship, and business training — the very skills SEED students were learning in the classroom at Utah State.

Through the Small Enterprise Education and Development (SEED) program, students apply those lessons in real-world settings, teaching entrepreneurial principles, mentoring business owners, and helping individuals develop sustainable paths out of poverty. The experience is immersive, deeply personal, and often life-changing for everyone involved. For the Haskell's, watching those interactions unfold left a lasting impression.

"I loved seeing how much the students cared about assisting these entrepreneurs and improving their lives," Justin said. "You could feel the connection forming immediately. The students realized they weren't just learning business principles; they were using those skills to truly help people."

During one visit, students worked with a woman trying to sell popsicles and ice cream from her home. Together, they discussed budgeting, pricing, and marketing strategies. On another trip, they helped a woman who bred and sold puppies better understand expenses, profits, and long-term planning.

The effects were sometimes small at first, but the potential impact was enormous.

"We saw how much people learned from even one visit," Leslie said. "When families can improve their businesses, they can better support their children and create opportunities they may never have had before. You start to realize this doesn't just change one life — it can change generations."

That belief inspired the creation of the Justin & Leslie Haskell Family SEED Endowment, designed to provide lasting assistance to future Utah State students participating in the program. But for the Haskells, the focus has never been on recognition. Instead, they hope the spotlight remains on the students, faculty leaders, and communities that make the program possible.

"We really want the attention on the students and on the people who built this program," Leslie said. "Faculty advisors Mike Glauser and Andy Thunell are doing something truly special. We simply want to give more students access to this experience and continue the work for years to come."

Founded within the Jon M. Huntsman School of Business, SEED gives students the opportunity to live abroad for a semester while working directly with entrepreneurs in developing regions around the world. Students from a variety of disciplines teach business development skills, mentor small business owners, and help communities create sustainable economic opportunities.

The experiential learning component is what makes the program so powerful.

Students quickly discover that solving real-world challenges requires more than theories and textbooks. It requires empathy, adaptability, collaboration, and the ability to listen.

For Leslie, the program's impact is also deeply personal. Growing up in Peru, she experienced firsthand how support from others could alter the trajectory of a life.

"I came from a middle-to-low-income family, and I received scholarships that changed my future completely," Leslie said. "Now, being able to assist students who will go on to help others feels incredibly meaningful. If we continue that chain of service, we really can improve lives."

The Haskells believe SEED not only equips students with professional skills but also encourages them to become more outward-focused, which they feel is especially important for young people navigating today's challenges.

"When you help other people, it changes you," Leslie said. "Students learn that life is not only about themselves. They gain confidence, perspective, and purpose. They begin to see how their talents can bless others."

That perspective is exactly what SEED hopes students carry with them long after graduation.

For some participants, the experience sparks a passion for entrepreneurship. For others, it shapes careers in international business, nonprofit leadership, community development, or service.

Many return home with a broader understanding of the world — and their ability to create meaningful change within it.

"As an entrepreneur, I see the value of creating opportunities that allow people to provide for themselves and their families," Justin said. "SEED helps students understand that business can be a force for good. They leave inspired to build, to serve, and to lift others along the way."

Through the Haskells' endowment, future Aggies will continue to gain those transformative experiences, learning both how to succeed professionally and how to use their education to improve lives around the world.

"This program has the potential to impact thousands of people for generations," Justin said. "That's what excites us most."

Programs like SEED provide Utah State students with experiential learning opportunities that broaden their perspectives, strengthen their leadership skills, and empower them to create meaningful change in communities around the world. Your support helps students access life-changing internships and hands-on experiences that shape not only their education but also the lives they will impact for years to come. Create Your Aggie Impact by giving to student programs and opportunities that inspire learning through service, leadership, and global engagement.