

Inside JVC

News, reflections, and insights from the Jesuit Volunteer Corps

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Bridging the Gap between JVC and Civil Engineering



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During spring semester of my senior year at UP, my professors and classmates would ask that question that was all too known, *What are you doing after graduation?* When the answer, I'm applying to JVC came out of my mouth, I got puzzled looks. *So, you spent four years doing engineering and you're not looking for an engineering*

job? Of course, their doubt made me question why I was choosing to go a different path and I felt like the odd one out. I began hearing about my classmates who already found jobs or got into grad school, sometimes feeling a little jealous that I was choosing to not go that route. When I got my placement at the Margaret Donnelly O'Connor Education Center, I was very excited to work with kids, but I still had that wonder in the back of my mind, *how was I going to use my engineering?*

I started at my placement with a vague idea of starting a Lego Club. I had come across a few websites that had challenges for children who wanted to build and send in their pictures to the website. In August, I got a better idea of what my supervisor wanted to see from the potential club so I came up with a proposal. A couple of weeks in I secured \$200 from a donor in order to purchase Legos and a set plan. The Lego Club is every other week and provides an opportunity for the kids to learn about a fundamental part of engineering and then to apply what they learned through building. The club was originally started to have a maximum of 10 students per session, but has grown to 25 students per session, mostly first through fourth graders, but some fifth and sixth graders like to participate. The purpose of the club is to get the students interested in engineering by giving them an opportunity to complete a task using the materials given. It also allows them to be creative and work on teamwork, which is always a challenge because some groups end

in tears. I did not realize how challenging it would be to take what I have learned and make it understandable for kids as young as first grade. I have used the three little pigs as examples for building houses and what materials are strong enough. It is always very cool to see what creations the kids come up with; they are always so detailed in whatever they build. I have also seen a lot of growth in the kids that participate, some started with hating the idea of coming to Lego club, but every time they participate they build some of the coolest creations. The kid's ability to work in groups has also improved and they are now able to communicate their ideas to the other kids. Some of things we have learned about have included bridges, skyscrapers and dams. This club has also helped me realize that while it is fun to share my passion for engineering with them, that it is more fun to help them use their creativity and work together.

