A Salvadorian Success

TAM students educate factory workers.

MANY TEXTILES ARE MADE ABROAD and imported to the United States; few factories in third-world countries actually produce their own apparel lines. But for one factory in El Salvador, this is changing thanks to graduate students Laura McAndrews and Stephanie Link. With the help of Jung Ha-Brookshire, assistant professor of Textile and Apparel Management (TAM), the women spent six weeks in Central America educating factory employees in apparel product development.

“I selected them because of their experiences and expertise in apparel product development,” Ha-Brookshire explains. “Stephanie is very good at pattern making and Laura used to be a product developer at the Gap and other companies.”

McAndrews and Link partnered with the Salvadorian company TexOps, which is working to create its own brand of yoga apparel named “Wear It To Heart” (W.I.T.H.) that will be marketed in the United States. McAndrews and Link collaborated with TexOps managers and showed factory workers how to design patterns for the W.I.T.H. line as well as develop guidelines for fitting procedures.

“We helped teach factory workers how to make their own patterns and designs,” McAndrews continues. “This will go a long way in helping them become more independent and profitable.”

“Sharing our knowledge with the world is one of the key functions that the University must play,” Ha-Brookshire says. “TAM is known for global business aspects of the textile and apparel industry, and our reputation made this possible; graduate students’ direct experiences with businesses enhance their learning and teaching abilities. This was a win-win project for both the Salvadorian factory and TAM.”

“This trip gave me an opportunity to experience a different perspective of the apparel industry,” Link says. “I learned so much about the processes of mass production and gained incredibly valuable hands-on experience and knowledge.”

McAndrews and Link say they hope to return to El Salvador in the future if the W.I.T.H. yoga line finds success. “Working with TexOps helped me learn how to verbalize what I already knew,” McAndrews says. “I also gained a great deal of industry knowledge that will serve me well in the future.”

Ha-Brookshire has big goals for the future, too. “El Salvador as a country sees TAM as an important career and educational discipline,” she says. “I am hoping to be able to provide more knowledge and experience to El Salvador so the textile and apparel industry in El Salvador could continue to advance and become a major player in the global marketplace.”