

## The Mayatan Difference



### History

In 1991, three mothers in the rural Honduran town of Copán Ruinas wanted their children to learn English and receive educations that would let them excel in tourism and other professions. Copán Ruinas is the site of UNESCO World Heritage Mayan ruins, which bring international visitors to this town of 8000. At the time, the closest bilingual school was over three hours away in San Pedro Sula. The mothers began classes with one teacher and nine students in a single room in downtown Copán; they later moved to a ramshackle building in the shadow of a major Mayan archaeological site. Their goal was to equip students with the ability to transform their community and country, and they had the vision to see that this future depended upon educating children from all social backgrounds.

After its founding, the school added classes each year, following the pioneer class up until 9th grade. It took on its first foreign, English-speaking volunteer in 1992 and hired more staff and volunteers as it expanded. It also offered scholarships based on financial need, academic performance, and family commitment.

In 2002, at the urging of then-director Frank Hopkins, the Mayatan Foundation applied for non-profit status in Honduras and was accepted in 2003. Under Mr. Hopkins' direction, the school moved to its present location to accommodate increased class sizes and grades PK-9. In 2009-10, Mayatan enrolled its first high school class, fulfilling a long-term dream. The year 2011 marks Mayatan's twentieth anniversary. Our first students are now entering the workforce or completing university programs in Central America, North America, and Europe.

### Mission and Population Served

Mayatan Foundation and Bilingual School are dedicated to providing a diverse population of students, from pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade, with the best bilingual education

possible, thereby giving them the tools to become active, responsible, and informed participants in their local, national, and global communities.

We serve 300 Honduran children in grades PK-12 (ages 4 to 18) from our community of 8,000 and neighboring towns. Our students come from all economic backgrounds, from the wealthy to the poor; from those who live in town to those who live in aldeas. 45% of these students receive financial aid and a path out of poverty. 7% are fully Maya Ch'orti, and most are of mixed European and indigenous ancestry. The gender makeup is 50% female and 50% male.

### **Governance and Leadership**

Mayatan Bilingual School is overseen by the Mayatan Foundation, a Honduran non-profit with a board that meets formally once a year and committees that meet regularly throughout the year. Foundation board members join by invitation and are elected internally to positions within the board.

The school's operations and the foundation's board are managed by people with longstanding commitments to its work: founding mothers, such as our rector Nora Arita, staff with years of experience, and former teachers and directors.

Mayatan is affiliated with U.S. 501(c)3 non-profit Hope for Tomorrow, Inc. All donations to Mayatan from the United States are tax-deductible when they go through Hope for Tomorrow.



### **Sponsorship and Support**

We have succeeded over 20 years thanks to the support of generous local and international sponsors. Many businesses in and around Copan Ruinas have contributed scholarships to the school as employee benefits. We also depend upon individuals and groups from around the world to help sponsor scholarships.

Scholarships range from half tuition to complete tuition, fees, books, transportation, meals, and uniforms. Mayatan commits to funding all scholarships regardless of sponsorship, but it actively seeks sponsors to fulfill its obligations. Sponsors are usually individuals or groups of individuals from North America and Europe who discover the school after visiting Copán Ruinas. Our ability to continue and expand our scholarship program depends upon our success in continuing to find sponsors like you.

Our scholarship students include those like the four Maya Chorti children from La Pintada, a small village across from the Mayan ruins in town. These children come from mud homes with few resources and may be the first in their family to be literate in any language. They make many sacrifices just to make the hour-plus trip to school, leaving and returning in the dark to candlelit homes. Other sponsored scholarship students include boys like Danilo, who rooms in town during the week because his aldea is so remote, or Henry, who lives right here in town. Both high school students excel despite tough circumstances and obligations to work outside of school.

Sponsors may choose to support a student at any level, generally ranging from half-tuition to complete tuition, fees, and other costs of attending school. Sponsors develop personal relationships with students that we hope will continue for many years. They receive report cards, exchange letters, and get updates throughout the year from their student. It is a rewarding way to track a child's growth.

## Employees and Volunteers

Mayatan provides a top-quality education in English and Spanish through the use of a permanent Honduran staff and full-time native-English speaking volunteers from abroad. These teachers often wear a variety of different hats to help the school run smoothly.

We currently have 23 full-time foreign English-speaking volunteers who commit a minimum of one year and receive a modest living stipend, housing, and health insurance.



## The Mayatan Difference

Today, Honduras has many bilingual schools, particularly in urban areas. Most Honduran bilingual schools are for-profit, do not offer financial aid of any sort, and educate only the elite. The Honduran public education system is limited by underfunded, overcrowded schools. The World Bank reports average student to teacher ratios of 33:1, but actual rates are frequently much higher.<sup>1</sup> In Copán, school days are broken into shorter shifts of 5 hours to accommodate demand. Only 25% of Hondurans have educations beyond 6th grade, which is the last year of compulsory

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<sup>1</sup>The World Bank. *Data: Honduras*. Retrieved April 27, 2011, from The World Bank: <http://data.worldbank.org/country/honduras>

education.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, in recent years, public school teachers have been on strike for more than half the school year.<sup>3</sup>

Mayatan offers Honduras a different model of high-quality education in English and Spanish. It is a locally-founded, women-founded, non-profit bilingual school in a small town. (Honduran NGOs are frequently founded by outsiders, which may affect their feasibility.) The school has no religious affiliation. Mayatan provides small classes (6-20 students), and is expanding its new high school. Our scholarship program makes a life-changing education accessible to students from all social backgrounds.

Our different mission helps us to attract native English-speaking volunteers who deliver high-level English skills. Other bilingual schools with native English-speaking staff must charge higher fees and cannot offer scholarships due to salary demands. Our volunteers' minimum commitments of one year or more help Mayatan to avoid the short-term, revolving door effect that some volunteer-run schools experience. Our social diversity is part of the high-level of service we offer all students: our full-pay students help to bring resources to students from less affluent backgrounds, while our scholarship students help to make our campus diverse.

In addition to foreign volunteers, Mayatan attracts a high-level of international help with funding, project planning, and guidance while remaining staunchly dedicated to its community-based roots. As a result, the school attracts Honduran staff members who have stayed on since the early days. The local community strongly supports the school, including our local business sponsors, by sending increasing numbers of students here, thus helping to continue our long-term success.

Mayatan Bilingual School enjoys and offers our students many benefits and resources thanks to its large community of supporters. We have an ever-expanding donated library of books in English and Spanish, we enjoy campus-wide WiFi access and a classroom full of donated computers that can be checked out like library books, we have musical instruments, and we offer a range of special classes and activities. We have also recently hired our first special education teacher, making us the first school in our part of the country with such a resource.

One clear result of the Mayatan difference is the success of our school and its students. In recent years, Mayatan graduates have gone on to university programs in Honduras, throughout Central America, and in North America and Europe. In fact, 81.8% of all Mayatan graduates and over 65% of scholarship students have gone on to university. In 2011, Mayatan was the first school with a wide scholarship base to be accepted into the Association of Bilingual Schools of Honduras (ABSH).

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<sup>2</sup> USAID. *Honduras Country Assistance Strategy: Fiscal Years 2009-2013*.

<sup>3</sup> Sólo 90 días de clase impartieron en 2010. (2010, December 4). *La Prensa*. Retrived April 27, 2011 from <http://www.laprensa.hn/>.



## To Make a Donation

Visit our website to read individual profiles of students seeking sponsors. You can also make a donation online. To make a tax-deductible donation via mail, send a letter with your name and email address along with a check to:

HOPE FOR TOMORROW, Inc.  
6278 15th Road North  
Arlington, VA 22205

Contact:  
c/o Melissa Bowman Moore  
HopeTomorrow@comcast.net

Include MAYATAN in the memo line of your check. In your letter, please indicate the specific purpose of your gift (a student's name or a project), if desired, along with any comments you would like to pass along.

## Contact Mayatan

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