Dear Supporters at the Barger Leadership Institute,

On behalf of the University of Michigan’s Solar Spring Break team, I would like to thank you for the BLI Small Grant that helped our group successfully complete an alternative spring break project on the reservation of the La Jolla Band of Luiseno Indians near San Diego, California. During our weeklong stay, eleven University of Michigan students partnered with the non-profit GRID Alternatives to install a total of forty-five solar panels on three different family homes on the reservation. At our debriefing session some of the words used to describe the week were “transformative,” “humbling,” “enriching,” “challenging,” and “empowering.” We agreed that the hands-on learning experiences we had on alternative spring break were exceptional opportunities to learn not only technical skills, but also to develop personally.

Our team experienced growth in three main areas:

1. Collaboration- It was important for our team to learn to work with cultural differences on the reservation and to be respectful that we were working in someone else’s home. To view the project as a cooperative effort between homeowner and students was pivotal in forming relationships with the community. Skills learned from collaborating with the nonprofit were also important lessons for future ventures.

2. Leadership- There was ample opportunity for all team members to act as leader throughout different portions of the trip. It helped all team members learn about what their strengths are and in what situations to implement them. We all grew when we were able to realize that part of being a leader means knowing when to act and when to uplift and support others who may have a different skillset. The nonprofit that we worked with helped empower us to be leaders in solar panel installation, but also empower community members to get involved as well.

3. Humility- During our stay on the reservation we were guests and had to act accordingly. Through efforts to reach out to the community we were able to form meaningful relationships. We were humbled by the strength, knowledge, and genuine nature of the Native Americans with whom we worked.

We appreciated the opportunity to grow as students by tackling the complex social problems related to the environment and low-income communities. We realize that our efforts would not have been made possible without the support of the Barger Leadership Institute, and for that we are sincerely grateful. We are always willing to come in and speak more to the faculty and students at the University of Michigan about our experiences and the ways that we believe they have enriched our education. You may find more pictures of our experience at: http://www.flickr.com/photos/gridalternatives/sets/72157642564246643/page2/

Sincerely,

Emily Gleichert, BLI fellow
And the University of Michigan’s Solar Spring Break Team