Dear Friend,

In this issue we hear about the Student Ambassadors and a new computer club, both examples of how our students are assuming responsibility and exercising initiative. Previously, staff members were responsible for hosting visitors but the students have now enthusiastically and ably taken over. We hope that students and alumni will play an ever increasing role in all aspects of HELP and continue to create initiatives to share their knowledge and progress.

We also hear from our development staff, who, returning to the HELP Center after visiting high schools around Port-au-Prince in February, were struck by the stark contrast between the noisy and chaotic schools, where students manage to learn despite the conditions, and the tranquility and structure at HELP. When I read that, I was struck by the fact that all of the resources at the Center, from the accomplished teachers, to the tables and chairs, exist only because of your support, past and present. Thank you for creating the conditions for success, for our students and for Haiti.

Conor

Rainn Wilson & Holiday Reinhorn Visit HELP

Rainn Wilson and Holiday Reinhorn meeting with the Student Ambassadors

On March 31, we welcomed artists and philanthropists Rainn Wilson and Holiday Reinhorn to the HELP Center. They have been in working in Haiti for several years through the Mona Foundation and its LIDE project where Jenny-Flore Charles (Education '17), and Ginel Dorleon (Computer Science '14) have interned. Shortly after the visit, Wilson tweeted his 4 million followers, calling HELP "The future of Haiti!" You can help HELP catch up to Rainn by following his advice below.

HELP,
You were mentioned in a Tweet!

RainnWilson
@rainnwilson

Met the incredible team @ uhelp.net in Haiti. Follow @uHELPnet-AMAZING PLACE. The future of Haiti!

02:17 AM - 31 Mar 15

← Reply to @rainnwilson   ⟲ Retweet   ★ Favorite

HELP Me Code:Students Teaching Students

HELP Me Code is a club open to all HELP students interested in computer programming. ESL Instructor Laura Dardignac sat down with co-founder Auguste Jacquet (Business '16) and two club students, Adler Barreau, (Industrial Engineering '19) and Jean Marcelin Beaubrun (Computer Science '18) to find out more about this student initiative.

Students at the HELP computer lab

Laura: How did the club come about? Why was it invented?

Auguste: We felt that every student should have a basic knowledge on programming because most fields these days require it. We decided that because we have the knowledge, we could share that with people who are interested.

Laura: Who teaches the programming?

Auguste: Computer science students do the teaching because not only do they have the materials, they also have the experience from university.

Laura: How often do you meet?

Auguste: We meet every Sunday, from 4-6pm. We set up the club like a workshop, especially since everyone is on a different pace. However, everyone is making progress.

Laura: Have students developed their own programs?

Auguste: Not yet. So far we've organized workshops on hardware, operating systems like IOS, Android and Aduino and programs such as Java.

Laura: Adler and Jean Marcelin, What have you learned so far being a part of the club?

Adler: One of the biggest things I've learned has been how to optimize my research when I'm doing a project. I now have the general knowledge on computer software and hardware, and programming languages.

Jean Marcelin: Like Adler, I've learned so much about programming language and general ideas on software and hardware. I've also learned about specific programs such as Java.

Laura What would you say sparked your interest in computers and technology?

Adler: When I was younger I wondered how airplanes or cars worked. I've always been fascinated with motors and as I got older I wanted to learn more about programming and hardware.

Jean Marcelin: For me, a calculator was the catalyst. When I was younger, I could not understand how you could type a number on a calculator and get results. As I got older, I realized it was a type of programming in calculators that yielded those results.

Laura: How is what you are learning is useful to you?

Adler: My biggest dream since I was a kid was to create electronics or programs everyone could use. This club gives me the knowledge I need to create those programs and provide society something everyone can use.

Jean Marcelin: As a computer science major, this club gives me the language and information I will encounter later in my degree program. By that point, I will be well versed in the computer world and have an advantage my classmates will not.

Laura: What is your favorite thing about the club?

Auguste: I love that I'm doing something I like and I'm not even a Computer Science major. Everyone who participates in HELP Me Code is there because they want to be. They are passionate about programming and there's a willingness to learn more. I also think that programming is an art. You are taking a physical object and using algorithms to bring it to life.

Adler: I love the fact that we are from different majors and yet we have the same vision for the club; that makes the experience so much more enriching. We are constantly exchanging ideas!

Jean Marcelin: I agree with Adler. Additionally, I like coding because it's both logical and creative. It allows me to create a new program that didn't exist in the past.

Laura: How do you see the future of the club?

Auguste: I hope that the club continues to grow, and that enough students learn about programming so that when we founders graduate, students like Adler and Marcelin can take over and make it even better than it is today.

Introducing HELP's Student Ambassadors

We are pleased to announce our inaugural class of HELP Student Ambassadors. Selected in January from a pool of 12 candidates, the Ambassadors are responsible for giving visitors a tour of the HELP center. They have already welcomed Rainn Wilson, Holiday Reinhorn, HELP development staff, and scores of visitors from the Haitian Timoun Foundation.

English Program Manager Hananie Albert, who helped select the Ambassadors said, "These are some of the most engaged, passionate and articulate students who demonstrate HELP's five pillars on a daily bases: Respect, Rigor, Courage, Sacrifice and Service"

Congratulations to Leonardo Virgo Charles, Adeline Desir, Jean Kensle Figaro, Gerdy Ithamar Pierre-Louis, Nikenson Romage, and Stéphanie Rubin!

Development Team Visits Haiti

In February Development Manager Joan Kelly and Grants Officer Niamh Bohan visited HELP in Haiti. It was Joan's first ever trip to Haiti and Niamh's third, but the first in her new role. Here is what they saw:

Niamh and Joan with HELP staff and students together with SAKALA staff at SAKALA

On the afternoon of February 1st we walked off the plane in Port-au-Prince and were greeted by the familiar sounds of the "troubadour" band at the airport. Stepping through the gates of the HELP Center the next morning we were struck by how being there is so much richer and more dynamic than what we read and write about HELP. The vibrancy, focus, and optimism that permeates every inch of the Center is hard to convey. Everyone, from the drivers to the directors, seems wholly committed to HELP's mission.

After a traditional breakfast of coffee & cassava in the courtyard with the staff, our official orientation began with a tour given by a few of the newly minted HELP Student Ambassadors (see sidebar). The Ambassadors gave an overview of the Center and all the HELP programs while sharing their own stories. Adeline (Agronomy '16) told us about her service project tutoring "restaveks" (child domestic servants) whose schooling is often inconsistent, and Gerdy (Law '18) spoke about the rigors of her law program, where, the other Ambassadors were quick to point out, she is the top female student.

From there our week was filled with student activities, meetings with department heads and dinners with staff and students. We had first-hand experience of nearly every facet of HELP, sitting in on English classes, visiting a Citizenship & Leadership service project site, and tagging along on a morning of recruiting in Port-au-Prince.

HIGHLIGHTS:

 Niamh – For me, there were two highlights of the trip (aside from the Patriots winning the Super Bowl the first night!) On the first day I started asking each person, "What is your favorite thing about HELP?" Sitting with students, their initial reaction was a sigh and an eye roll. But then someone said they liked the dorms – living with their classmates and always learning, and from there we were off, interrupting each other, adding more and more favorite things and only 20 minutes later did we exhaust the topic of favorite things about HELP. Here is a sample of the results of my "poll".

 "My favorite thing about HELP is…

 …seeing the students take charge on a recruiting trip, the way they handle the staff at the high schools with poise and confidence and how enthusiastically they promote HELP and our mission."

…once a student graduates, they no longer need assistance, from HELP or any other aid organization; we can cross the entire family off the list of people who need help, forever."

…the second family I have here."

…we only do one thing, and everyone is dedicated to making sure we do that one thing well."

…we come in as individuals but together we are great." My other highlight was our morning with the recruiting team. It was eye opening to see the schools our students come from. Classrooms are often grouped together under a corrugated tin roof and separated by partial walls of flimsy plywood so the sounds from one classroom float easily into the next. If you're not near the front of the class you are as likely to hear someone else's lesson or students chatting at the back of another classroom as you are your own teacher. I hadn't fully appreciated the dedication and work required to keep up, never mind excel, in this environment. There is no reason a student who graduates with straight-As should be denied a university education and I hope one day we will have the funds to accept all 200 of our applicants who have already beaten the odds and proven their potential. Returning to the HELP Center, the difference was stark; students were studying in the spacious courtyard, an English teacher gave a poetry lesson and advisors met with students heading into exam week. It's hard not to learn in this environment.

Joan – Without a doubt, the students are my highlight of the trip and our program. I was happy to see them in so many different scenarios, from having dinner with the Student Ambassadors at the Hotel Oloffson where Nikenson Romage (Business '19) tried bacon for the first time ("It's good, I guess, but not what I expected"), to attending an English class where students sang Sara Bareilles' "Brave" and discussed what lyrics like, "Say what you want to say, and let the words fall out, honestly I want to see you be brave" mean to them.

In addition to balancing university classes, HELP classes and extra-curricular activities like internships and the Ambassadors program I was impressed with how eager students are to give back. Not only through the KOREM initiative (donating 15% of their salary for nine years after they graduate), but also through service projects like Sakala, co-founded by a former HELP student as an afterschool program for kids in his violence plagued neighborhood of Cité Soleil. We visited Sakala with HELP students who tutor there. "I'm from this neighborhood so I know how important it is for these kids to have a place like this to come to," Peterson Jean (Computer Science '16) told us. "It makes me so proud that HELP contributes to this library and that I can tutor students here."

Visiting Haiti and HELP puts our work in perspective. These students are doing everything they can to build a brighter future for Haiti, and I'm eager to do everything I can to help them achieve that goal. Thanks to the Haiti staff for organizing such an engaging week!