

TET CHAGE! AN INVESTIGATION OF THE HAITIAN EDUCATION AND LEADERSHIP  
PROGRAM IN THE HIGHER EDUCATION LANDSCAPE IN HAITI

By

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **TET CHAGE! AN INVESTIGATION OF THE HAITIAN EDUCATION AND LEADERSHIP PROGRAM IN THE HIGHER EDUCATION LANDSCAPE IN HAITI**

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Despite the large quantity of information regarding deficiencies within the Haitian education system, there is limited knowledge regarding the educational interventions that have been successful in Haiti. Further, there is even less information known on specific programs and the approaches used to respond to educational challenges in the country. This case study of the Haitian Education and Leadership Program (HELP), a higher-education centered organization in Haiti provides insight on the perceived challenges within the Haitian higher education system and it illuminates the various strategies that HELP employs to support the academic and future success of the university students in its program.

Two research questions guided the study that investigated key stakeholders perceptions of challenges within the Haitian higher education system and inquired how various components of HELP supported the academic and future success of HELP scholars. HELP students, alumni, and staff, along with two non-HELP higher education stakeholders in Haiti were interviewed for this study. The framework for this research study incorporates the concepts of “university access” and “university persistence.” The conceptual framework drew from two World Bank background reports written by Rowan-Kenyon, Savitz-Romer, and Swan (2010) and Savitz-Romer, Rowan-Kenyon, Weilundemo, and Swan (2010) who provided a guide for evaluating and creating effective interventions for successful participation, persistence, and retention in tertiary (higher) education. The findings from this study provide insight on the range of challenges that students experience within the Haitian higher education system. HELP

participant's reflections on their experiences within the university system included those that could be categorized as barriers to university access and barriers to university persistence. They also described the impact of the January 12, 2010 Haiti earthquake on their education as well as institutional practices and behaviors that impacted their university experiences. This study also included study participants' perceptions of what is going well within the higher education landscape in Haiti. Overall, HELP study participants emphasized the role of HELP in responding to and alleviating barriers that could have proved to be detrimental to the university access, persistence, and graduation and future success of HELP scholars.

In addition to discussing their perceptions of the Haitian higher education system, HELP participants also shared their perspectives on HELP's approach. HELP students and alumni shared their thoughts on the various components of HELP they experienced, and HELP staff discussed how they believed their role supported the success of HELP scholars and alumni. Considering the findings of this study, HELP strategies reveal that that a multi-prong approach that incorporates academic and counseling support, co-curricular and extra-curricular initiatives, enrichment courses, and a comprehensive scholarship award offers the opportunity for the most ideal university experience in an international setting like Haiti.

This study concludes with implications for policy and practice for various entities within the education sector in Haiti. The findings and discussion from this study also indicate that an expansion of the terms "university access" and "university persistence" is warranted to include experiences in settings like Haiti, which has implications for theory. This study also offers suggestions for future research on higher education in Haiti, which may prove beneficial for determining interventions to be utilized in other low-income/developing countries.

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This work is dedicated to the original village that raised me: My mother Joslaine (Fequiere) Vital, my father Louis Roosevelt Vital and my brother Marc Renel Vital. Your wisdom, guidance, support and unwavering love has sustained me throughout this journey.  
Bondye te beni m avek nou. Mwen di nou mesi avek tout ke m.

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L’Union Fait La Force  
In Union there is Strength  
Motto on Haiti’s Flag

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

*“The level of education of the overall population of a particular country...determine[s] that country’s ability to share in world development...to benefit from the advancement of knowledge and to make progress itself while contributing to the education of others.” (Easterly, 2002, p 72)*

The aforementioned statement by Federico Mayor, former Secretary General of UNESCO (the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), underscores the importance of addressing higher education worldwide, especially in Haiti. In recent years, there has been a bigger demand for higher education (UNESCO, 2003) along with an understanding that education increases equity and development in societies (Baker, 2007). Responding to the higher education needs in Haiti will contribute to the development of the nation and to Haiti becoming a more active member of the global economic and knowledge community (Belyakov et al., 2009; UNESCO, 1998). Responding to higher education challenges in Haiti has been a *tet chage*, in other words, a complex issue with multiple factors that need to be considered in order to address the problem. Less than one percent of the Haitian population attends a university in Haiti (Vatav, 2012). Of the remaining less than one percent who study in Haiti, only 50% of those students eventually earn a university degree; and 84% of these university graduates leave Haiti post graduation (Jadotte, 2012; Ratha & Shaw, 2007). This is brain drain and Haiti has the highest rate of brain drain, per capita, than any other country in the world (Clinton, 2012). It is critical that Haiti addresses issues within its higher education system so that its graduates can help address the various development challenges (health, education, poverty, etc.) in the country as well.

The purpose of this study was to learn key stakeholder’s perceptions of higher education challenges in Haiti and to investigate the strategies that the Haitian Education and Leadership

Program (HELP) employs to support the university students affiliated with the organization. HELP has identified various interventions that have proven to be critical for university students to successfully enter and graduate from a university in Haiti. The comprehensive range of services that the organization provides can be loosely grouped into two categories; those that eliminate barriers for university access and those that enhance university persistence. HELP also provides opportunities for students to develop skills in order to be successful after they graduate and enter the workforce. Although HELP operates independently from universities and the Ministry of Education, it is a higher education-centered organization that provides services that are often found within more developed higher education systems. Thus, for the purposes of this study, I view HELP as a non-governmental organization that functions like the student affairs branch found in university systems in other countries, including the Caribbean.

This was a qualitative case study in which I utilized a multi-method approach including semi-structured interviews and document analysis. My study focused on the perceptions that study participants had on the higher education challenges in Haiti and it included an analysis of HELP's strategies for responding to those challenges. I reviewed literature on access and persistence to develop a conceptual framework for understanding the role of HELP in the higher education landscape in Haiti. My goal for this study was to learn if HELP could be used as a sustainable model for responding to issues of access and persistence within the Haitian higher education system on a national scale.

### **The Case for Higher Education in Haiti**

I chose to research higher education in Haiti because it lacked the gains experienced by countries that have strong post-secondary systems and a great amount of highly educated individuals (Barro & Lee, 2001; Barro & Sala-i-Martin, 2003; Hanushek & Kimco, 2000).

Higher education is an important factor for consideration in low-income countries like Haiti because resolving the challenges within the Haitian higher education system is critical for responding to the country's development needs. Akinyemi and Ofem (2012) insisted that the "importance of higher education in the development of any society cannot be overemphasized" (p. 87), and Kimenyi (2011) asserted that higher education is crucial to the development of today's societies. Given the low number of university enrollment, and the high rate of brain drain (84%), Haiti is not benefiting from the gains that can be achieved by having an educated populace there. The benefits of higher education in developing countries like Haiti includes greater opportunity for interaction in the global knowledge and economic communities, high skill development in critical markets in the country, as well as the necessary training across the labor force such as teachers and professors, engineers and other scientists, and doctors and other medical professionals. These and other individuals can provide the expertise necessary to address the myriad challenges in Haiti including political instability, under-resourced education system, and weak infrastructure, to name a few. However, in order for this to occur, more individuals need to attend and graduate from universities in Haiti.

Heller (2001) and Brennan and Teichler (2008) predicted that higher education would face challenges related to affordability, access, and accountability. The Institute for Higher Education Policy (2009) defined university access as students being able to enter and be in a course of study at a college or university. Titus (2004) asserted that graduation rates indicate how successful colleges and universities are supporting the matriculation and persistence of its students. Although Haiti has a state university system and numerous private institutions, many students experience challenges such as quota systems, financial need, and physical distance that create barriers to enrollment. This has resulted in a disproportionate number of Haiti's most

needy students, less than one percent, being unable to access higher education despite their academic readiness (Vatav, 2012). The experiences of Haitian students attempting to enter university and complete a higher education degree in the country, demonstrates a system that is not accessible to all. The university attendance rate in Haiti implies a higher education environment that does not appear to provide great opportunity for access to all individuals in Haiti who would like to pursue a university degree. The benefits of higher education in developing countries like Haiti, juxtaposed with the number of challenges within the Haitian higher education system, warranted research, which is why I conducted this study.

Investigating the strategies that HELP uses for responding to issues within the Haitian higher education system provided a framework for potentially addressing these issues on a national level. This investigation was necessary as Brennan and Naidoo (2008) summarized, “participation in higher education is important because of its implications for an individual’s life chances in the long term” (p. 293). Addressing these challenges is imperative because it is crucial for educated people in Haiti to help contribute to developing the country’s capacity to respond effectively to its numerous challenges. Johnstone et al. (1998) reinforced this notion by describing higher education as an agent of change that promotes national growth, provides skills, and an educated population necessary for sustainable development. Given the historical and contemporary challenges in Haiti, I believe that a study on a potentially successful higher education intervention in the country was necessary, as a means for highlighting one method that can help to address the range of development needs there.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Higher education is both a public and a private good that improves the lives of both the individual receiving the education and the greater society in which he or she lives. Individuals

with an advanced education experience higher wages and an “enhanced life of the mind” (Task Force on Higher Education, 2000, p. 37). Further, these individuals are able to contribute to their societies in greater ways that produce stronger communities socially while influencing the development of the local economy. Countries benefit with better governance, a stronger infrastructure, and an economy much more competitive in the world market (Task Force on Higher Education, 2000). Despite the benefit of higher education for self and society as evidenced by research, many higher education systems in developing countries experience issues of university access and persistence, as is the case in Haiti.

The challenge for students in developing countries is daunting. The Task Force on Higher Education (2000) highlighted that although developing countries comprise 80% of the world’s population, just a fraction of their students receive “high-quality” higher education (p. 91). Many talented students who are prepared for the rigor of post-secondary education experience difficulty affording a post-secondary degree. While costs such as “tuition fees, room and board, books and materials, and income” are incurred by students in both developed and developing countries, students in lower income countries also have to contend with the lack of a financial aid structure, lower income levels, and limited access to technology (Task Force on Higher Education, 2000, p. 41). Among other things, a successful higher education system promotes research and produces researchers who can prove to be beneficial to their countries. Researchers are important because they help to fill gaps in knowledge and they can help to bring their research results to practice for society.

### **Background of the Problem**

The educational reality for students in developing countries like Haiti is important to know, because it also highlights the educational environments experienced by students in those

locations. At all stages of education, students in Haiti are faced with an environment that the World Bank has categorized as below international standards for effective learning (Salmi, 2000). Haiti's educational statistics are dire (Prou, 2009) and describe the stark realities of the education system there. As a result of the primary and secondary educational experience, the pipeline towards higher education is minimal. Most students who complete secondary education do not attend a university in Haiti, with only 40,000 enrolled during the 2002-2003 academic year (Wolff, 2008). Students who attempt to pursue a higher education face issues of university access and persistence. On the surface, some of the issues that Haitian students experience, such as barriers to university "access" and "persistence" is similar to the experiences of students in other countries. However, in Haiti, barriers to university access include lack of financial aid, housing, a meal plan, computer and practice labs, and libraries. Barriers to university persistence in Haiti include a lack of consistent faculty and testing, physical spaces for learning, and degree expectations that cannot easily met.

Understanding the experiences of university students and graduates provides a lens for viewing the realities that university students and graduates have to face when determining if remaining in their home country outweighs the opportunities that may come from living abroad. Further, once earning a degree, graduates have to navigate the challenges of finding a job in the country that matches their educational preparation, skills, abilities, and a salary consistent for a fair quality of life. This is a question that Haitian university graduates have to answer, and it is one that HELP responds to in its work with its scholars.

The aforementioned issues are all factors that impact the Haitian higher education system and influence the experiences of university students and their livelihood after graduation. Nurse and Jones (2009) contended that governments should address the need for improved working

conditions, improved work opportunities related to university degrees, a competitive salary and work environment, as well as other incentives in order for university graduates to remain or return to their home country. HELP works to fill the gaps that the government does not have the capacity to fill; the organization removes the barriers to access to a university, decreases the challenges that impact persistence within the university system, and creates mechanisms to ensure graduation, which results in 90% of HELP scholars remaining in Haiti after earning their degree. Resolving the challenges within the Haitian higher education system is critical for responding to the development needs in Haiti. HELP is one of very few organizations in Haiti that are addressing higher education needs in the country in a comprehensive and purposeful way.

### **Gaps in the Literature**

There is a limited amount of literature highlighting successful and tangible methods for tackling issues of access and persistence in higher education in developing countries. Given the numerous challenges faced in Haiti, and in developing countries worldwide, it is essential that a programmatic effort for addressing access and persistence within its higher education system be developed. There are a number of studies that conceptualize issues of access and persistence in higher education in both developed and developing countries (Belyakov et al., 2009; Duru-Bellat, Kieffer, & Reimer, 2008; Le & Miller, 2005). While the scholarship on access and persistence provides an abundance of information on these issues, there is limited data on specific programs or practical experiences that systematically address these problems in developing countries in a comprehensive way. This study fills the gap in this area. Specifically, this qualitative study provides insight into why HELP works in easing higher education challenges in Haiti. HELP's approach may prove to be a model for addressing issues of access

and persistence within the Haitian higher education system on a national scale.

### **Purpose of the Study and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was to learn what the higher education challenges were in Haiti and to learn about how HELP addresses the university challenges the HELP scholars experience in the country. The HELP statistics<sup>1</sup> below reveals the following:

Table 1.1

#### *HELP Statistics*

	Haiti	HELP
University Graduation Rate	40%	84%
Employment Rate	50%	98%
Average Annual Salary	\$810 USD	\$15,000 USD
Graduates Working in Country	16%	90%

I conducted a month-long case study of HELP to examine the strategies that HELP employs that distinguish the organization within the higher education landscape in Haiti. The purpose of this study was to:

- How do key stakeholders perceive the challenges of access and persistence within the higher education system in Haiti?
- How do Haitian Education and Leadership Program’s strategies support the academic and future success of its scholars?

My study sought to answer the following questions:

1. How do key stakeholders perceive the challenges of access and persistence within the higher education system in Haiti?
2. How do Haitian Education and Leadership Program’s strategies support the academic and future success of its scholars?

---

<sup>1</sup> Haitian Education and Leadership Program (“Our Story-Results” n.d.)

HELP was selected as a research location because of the uniqueness of the organization within the higher education context in Haiti (Yin, 2003; Stake, 2005). The information from my study fills the gap in the literature on programmatic interventions and strategies that strive to effectively support higher education and university students in developing countries like Haiti. Further, this study helped to contextualize the process by which higher education is approached in Haiti, and it provides insight on how issues of access and persistence within the Haitian higher education system are addressed by HELP (Glesne, 2011).

This study is not an in-depth assessment of the Haitian higher education system, per se. Rather, it described the experiences of HELP students, who are a subset of the university student population in Haiti. It included their perceptions of the Haitian higher education system and how HELP responded to their needs and addressed the challenges they face in their pursuit of a university degree in Haiti. I acknowledge that there are many nuances regarding higher education in Haiti and student experiences broadly that may be left out of this study. However, the intent of this study was to illuminate the benefits of higher education attainment in society and to provide one example of an organization responding to higher education challenges and student needs in a low-income setting.

### **Definition of Terms**

This section defines key terms that are used throughout this study.

#### **Non-Governmental Organization (NGO)**

According to the United Nations Rule of Law, “a non-governmental organization is a not-for-profit group, principally independent from government, which is organized on a local, national or international level to address issues in support of the public good. Task-oriented and made up of people with a common interest, NGOs perform a variety of services and

humanitarian functions...some are organized around specific issues, such as human rights” (n.d., p. 1).

### **Low-Income Country**

Low-income countries are defined by the World Bank as “those with a Gross National Income per capita of \$1,045 or less in U.S. dollars in 2013” (n.d., p. 1). For the purposes of this study, the terms “low-income” and “developing” country/countries are used interchangeably.

### **Development**

There are a number of definitions for the term development as it relates to a country. There are also a number critiques that problematizes the notion of development that serve as counterpoints to the positive good that many believe can occur from development. For the purposes of this study, the term development is used as the positive and sustainable improvement to the social and economic conditions in low-income countries that leads to improved standards of living and quality of life its population (World Bank, n.d.)

### **Developing Country**

The World Bank groups countries by economies, of which low and middle income economies are labeled as developing. The World Bank notes, “the term *developing* used to denote all low- and middle-income countries in this context does not imply that all economies in the group are experiencing similar levels of development or that other economies have reached a preferred or final stage of development” (n.d., p. 1). For the purposes of this study, the terms “developing” and “low-income” country/countries are used interchangeably.

### **Higher Education**

Higher education refers to formal learning that occurs after secondary education. Higher education is often referred to as tertiary education in educational systems outside of the United

States and encompasses formal and technical education. For the purposes of this study, higher education refers to learning that results in university graduation and degree acquisition.

### **University**

Post-secondary education in Haiti consists of public and private universities, and vocational training. For the purposes of this study, university/universities refer to the Haiti-based institutions that HELP study participants attend, have attended, or work within due to their role as HELP staff. The two non-HELP participants refer to the Haiti-based universities from their perspectives as a researcher of the Haitian higher education system and as a staff member at the Ministry of Education in Haiti.

### **University Access**

For the purposes of this study, access refers to the opportunity to attend an institution of higher education free from barriers related to academic under-preparedness, financial hardship, or other personal or institutional factors that prevent a student from entering and pursuing a university degree (Swail, 2000).

### **University Persistence**

In this study, persistence refers to a student continuing in higher education with the result of graduation and earning a degree (Arnold, 1999).

### **Academic Success**

For the purposes of this study, academic success refers to the achievement of grades sufficient for continued university matriculation, the fulfillment of all degree requirements, degree attainment, and graduation.

### **Student Success**

There are many definitions of student success that are used in U.S. based contexts for

higher education. I use the following definition by Kuh (2013) as it encompasses some of what the university student participants in this study referred to while explaining their higher education and HELP experiences in Haiti. Student success, therefore, can encompass, “academic achievement, engagement in educationally purposeful activities, satisfaction, acquisition of desired knowledge, skills and competencies, persistence, attainment of educational objectives, and post university performance” (slide 4).

### **Organization of the Study**

This study is organized into the following five remaining chapters: Review of the Literature, Methodology, Context, Findings, and Discussion and Conclusion. Chapter 1 provides the background of the study. Chapter 2 provides an overview of the literature on the benefits of higher education, the influence of foreign aid on higher education systems, higher education for development, the role of non-governmental organizations in higher education, and my conceptual framework. Chapter 3 focuses on my methodology. It provides the details regarding my research design, research site, participants and their selection, data collection sources and analysis, and my researcher identity. Chapter 4 provides a context for higher education in Haiti and an overview of the Haitian Education and Leadership Program. Chapter 5 is devoted to my findings. Chapter 6 includes my discussion, implications, recommendations for further research, and my conclusion.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

For many years, the scholarship on education in developing countries had indicated that investing in education was more beneficial on the primary and secondary school level. More specifically, international donor organizations, the World Bank in particular, did not fund higher education systems at the same rate as lower levels of education as a matter of policy (World Bank, 1994). As a result, many low-income countries did not prioritize the growth and development of their higher education systems, which resulted in many being underdeveloped today. Presently, there is an abundance of scholarship on the benefits of higher education to both the individual and society (Boarini & Strauss, 2010; Bloom, Hartley, & Rosovsky, 2007), and the importance and need for higher education in developing countries like Haiti (Bloom & Rosovsky, 2007; Kapur & Crowley, 2008). However, as Kapur and Crowley (2008) noted, there is a lack of data on almost all aspects of higher education in developing countries, and further, “the role of higher education, in both theoretical and policy terms lacks adequate empirical knowledge of what is happening *within* universities and to the students who spend a considerable part of their prime years in these institutions” (p. 4). This research study addresses the aforementioned gap in the literature by highlighting the experiences of a group of university students in Haiti and providing insight on one intervention that aims to respond to challenges within the Haitian higher education system.

For this section, I review the literature on higher education and the benefits of higher education to emphasize the need and advantages of a well-developed higher education system in developing countries. Next, I provide an overview of higher education in developing countries, including the challenges experienced by various stakeholders within higher education systems.

This is followed by a discussion regarding the impact of external influences on higher education decision-making in low-income countries to provide a lens for understanding the state of higher education in Haiti today. I include an overview of donor agencies, the Millennium Development Goals, and non-governmental organizations to highlight their influence in educational environments in low-income countries. Literature on the role of higher education in development is provided to discuss how higher education systems can help to address various development needs in a country. The chapter concludes with the conceptual framework guiding this study.

### **What is Higher Education?**

I studied Haitian higher education because of my belief in the importance and value of higher education to the individual and society, and because I believe that the Haitian higher education system can have place in responding to the myriad of development needs in Haiti. Thus, it is important to understand what higher education is and the purpose and benefits of higher education. UNESCO (2003) described higher education as including all categories of study, research, and training provided by educational organizations that are accepted as higher education institutions by knowledgeable entities, in any given state or country. According to Hartsmar, Aksit, and Moraeus (2008), the three main goals of higher education are teaching (providing advanced knowledge, skills, and abilities), research (generating, synthesizing, and applying knowledge) and service (to institutions, professions, and society) (p. 3). Rhoads and Torres (2006) noted that universities influence economic development and scientific and technological innovation in societies (p.164). Somers (2006) found that higher education meets the needs of three categories of stakeholders: students who want access to higher education, employers who expect graduates who are appropriately skilled for the market, and countries that want to stimulate development by the presence of institutions of higher education. These

descriptions provide a general understanding of what one expects when they consider pursuing a higher education degree.

Students choose to pursue higher education for a variety reasons including financial security, quality of life, the pursuit of knowledge, and life-long learning. Those with economic, social, and cultural resources have greater privilege and access to higher education (Clancy & Goastellec, 2007). Students who are able to attend an institution of higher education receive training and are prepared to work in professional settings and perform in entrepreneurial, managerial, and technical positions (Birdsall, 1996). However, many students in developing countries face barriers (financial, academic preparation, availability, etc.) that impact their access to and persistence within a university system and the benefits they can receive with earning a university degree. In the case of Haiti, these issues are exacerbated due to the lack of adequate funding and resources within the Haitian higher education system. Given what higher education is, as described above, it is important to understand the benefits received by increased educational attainment.

### **Benefits of Higher Education**

Educational attainment is a benefit to both the individual and to society (Akinyemi & Ofem, 2012; Harper, Patton & Wooden 2009; Kezar, Chambers & Burkhardt, 2005; Lewis & Hearn, 2003). Lowell and Findlay (2001) asserted, “the level and distribution of educational attainment has a strong impact on social outcomes, such as child mortality, fertility, education of children, and income distribution” (p. 1). Altbach (2000) noted that the positive outcomes of higher education attainment include “increased opportunity for social mobility and income levels” (p. 2). Ozsoy (2008) found that the various functions of higher education led to goals related to income growth, expanded range of choices, and increased relevant skills. These

benefits described highlight that having increased education benefits the individual and the family unit as well.

Increased knowledge and training support appropriate decisions related to health and wellness, greater access to various educational options, and a higher likelihood of obtaining more technical jobs as well as opportunities for promotion. Not only does the individual have the potential for a greater income, there are also relevant skills and informed decision making that come with increased knowledge. There is an increase in factors related to health: better nutrition and diet, greater healthcare and hygiene, and a decrease in diseases (Carlson et al., 2011), which are important in developing countries that have limited access to healthcare and healthcare professionals. Further, individuals see an increase in wages for every year they attend school, along with gains in critical thinking, skills development, employment readiness and socialization, and life-long learning (Tight, 1989). Education, therefore, can be viewed as “a leveler reducing societal inequalities and enabling larger numbers of a population to share in the growth process” (Carlson et al., 2011, p. 10). Higher education is important for social equity, mobility, and integration (Brennan & Teichler, 2008), resulting in individual participation benefiting the larger society (Institute for Higher Education Policy, 2009). Further, increased higher education has been found to alleviate poverty in developing countries (World Bank, 1994).

The benefits of higher education institutions to society are just as great. Institutions support their communities through consultancy, research, and advocacy (Tight, 1989). Higher education institutions in Haiti can share the responsibility of supporting the communities in which they are situated. Their research agendas can hone in on local needs and highlight local solutions or gaps in knowledge, skills, or technologies. Consultancy work can help to increase the productivity and effectiveness of local organizations, institutions, and ministries in

responding to community and national needs. Institutions can rely on the expertise of its faculty and administrators by advocating for resources and interventions necessary for change and growth. Institutions can also offer advisory services and university-sponsored programs for the local community (Birdsall, 1996).

Buchmann and Hannum (2001) discussed that the increase in education results in a greater relationship with external societies. In its 2001 report on the Caribbean and Latin America, UNESCO stressed that education is critical for the future development of the region. It went on to state that low levels of higher education attainment in the region “have resulted in levels of educational attainment insufficient to promote and sustain high-wage economies” (p. 12). Higher education institutions play a critical role in economic development and help to support the goal of countries to remain competitive in the global knowledge community. This is important because in the international environment, competition is far greater based on the use of knowledge than on labor and natural resources (Carlson et al., 2011). In the case of Haiti, historically, agriculture has been its greatest source of investment and economy. Higher education raises the amount of productivity of developing countries, fosters the creation of new technologies, and sustains local capacity to adapt new knowledge (Birdsall, 1996, p. 411). There is no question that the 2010 earthquake in Haiti would not have been as devastating if the infrastructure in Haiti was stronger, if local technologies existed for a more rapid and effective rescue attempt, and if there were more medical facilities and personnel to treat the injured. Given this assessment, it is essential that countries and higher education leaders designate a considerable amount of time and resources to ensure that its educational sector meets the needs of its population.

Increases in educational attainment also result in a society that is more concerned with the environment and that determines ways to become more environmentally friendly. This is significant in the case of Haiti, where many hurricanes and tropical storms result in unnecessary, and sometimes fatal mudslides, as a result of deforestation by individuals using wood for fuel (Dolisca, McDaniel, Teeter, & Jolly, 2007). According to Birdsall (1996), higher education institutions also “encourage indigenous self- expression, conserve and adapt local traditions and values” (Birdsall, 1996, p. 411). Patel (2003) noted that higher education is an important tool for those with higher aspirations in a society. Those that are part of the university system, both students and educators, “keep alive the values of freedom and are the greatest source of change” (Patel, 2003, p. 139). Given Haiti’s tumultuous political history, institutions of higher education can play a role in reshaping the definition and value of leadership and citizenship in the country to develop new leaders for a different society for its future.

### **Higher Education in Developing Countries**

The Task force on Higher Education (2000) described a stark situation in which they stated “higher education in developing countries is severely disadvantaged by its poor baseline” (p. 94). Given the nature of developing countries, it is understood that their systems of higher education are often reflective of the societies in which they are situated: poor infrastructure, limited resources, and economically challenged. Hayward (2008) described a situation in which institutions of higher education in developing countries are often competing for funding against multiple priorities and needs that are critical to the country: healthcare, roads, clean water, electricity, safety and security, among other needs. Primary and secondary education is often the greater focus in low-income countries (Hayward, 2008) as the basic education they provide is viewed as sufficient for the immediate needs of their population, while higher education was

thought of as a luxury of the elite (Kapur & Crowley, 2008). One of the current challenges for developing countries is the increased demand for higher education (Holloway, 2014). On the one hand, the demand reflects a recognition of the personal benefits of higher education attainment. On the other hand, many institutions and systems do not have the capability to effectively absorb, teach, and provide services to the influx of students. Not only will developing countries have to respond to the pressing needs of their countries, but they will also have to contend with determining how to expand (Varghese, 2011) along with addressing the challenges students experience within the higher education systems.

One of the challenges of higher education in developing countries is the juxtaposition of high demand for higher education, as a result of an increase in the college-age population (The Task Force on Higher Education, 2000), with the limited capacity to provide higher education to this population (Johnstone & Marcucci, 2010). The student population has grown from approximately 68 million in 1991 (Kapur & Crowley, 2008), to 132 million in 2004 (UNESCO 2006) and Moe and Blodget (2000) estimated that the number will reach 150 million by 2025. Several factors can be attributed to the massification of higher education including the influence of globalization on higher education systems worldwide and the access to knowledge and information it provides to low-income countries in particular. Due to the development of new technologies and even social media, students are even more connected than ever before (Mallinson & Krull, 2013). Additionally, the English language has a bigger role internationally, resulting in students wanting courses offered on the subject at their local institutions. Further, with the greater understanding of the benefits of higher education and the better quality of life it provides, a greater number of individuals want to attend. Because of the increased global connectivity of countries and economies, students recognize and are demanding higher education

and insist on curriculums and degrees that will prepare them to work in the global marketplace (Fountain & Fountain, 2013). These factors have caused a strain in higher education systems as they face pressure from their constituents to meet their needs and wants.

According to Kapur and Crowley (2008) countries are responding to the pressure of the increased demand by expanding their universities into “mega universities” that have found 200,000 students enrolled in individual universities in Mexico and Buenos Aires and 700, 000 students in Calcutta (p. 16). However, not all universities can keep up with this pace. Kapur and Crowley (2008) noted that it has been estimated that as of 2010, approximately 100 million qualified students will not be able to find space for themselves in universities world-wide. In addition to the demand for greater access to higher education from its populations, countries recognize that stronger higher education systems allow their nations to have a greater presence in the global knowledge community (Holloway, 2014). Further, there is an increase in the number of jobs that require an advanced education (Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2009). In order to become more competitive internationally, higher education systems in developing countries are looking for international partnerships and networks that will allow them to strengthen their systems (Obamba, 2013).

Altbach, Reisberg, and Rumbley (2009) have critiqued the globalized nature of higher education and emphasized the inequities of the influence of “northern, and largely English-speaking paradigms for producing knowledge and setting ...scholarly agendas” (p. 32). Further, they note that elite universities from developed countries “hold a disproportionate influence over the development of international standards for scholarship models for managing institutions, and approaches to teaching and learning” (Altbach, Reisberg, and Rumbley, 2009, p. 32). This phenomenon has resulted in higher education systems in low-income countries attempting to

compete with their more affluent counterparts, which many have found difficult. Teferra (2008) noted, when discussing African universities, many found their systems in their current deprived state as a result of international policies that devalued the developing role of higher education in low-income countries. These practices have resulted in underfunding of higher education in developing countries (Schultz, 1998) which has led to the poor systems that exist today.

Bloom and Rosovsky (2006) shared challenges that higher education systems face in developing countries. First, advances in science occur rapidly and technology is ever changing. Due to a limited presence on a global scale, developing countries not only play a limited role in constructing knowledge in science and technology, they are often left out of the environment completely. Countries with limited higher education systems produce a smaller amount of higher education graduates in these areas, leaving developing countries further behind in the fields of science and technology. Second, faculty members in developing countries often have to work multiple jobs because the salaries they are supposed to receive from their higher education positions are insufficient, inconsistent, or nonexistent. Faculty members in certain locations also face threats related to academic freedom and repercussions based on their research and writings or lectures in the classroom (Altbach, 2001). Finally, developing countries, such as Haiti, have problems related to brain drain. For example, Haiti has an 85% brain drain rate, meaning that the talent and education of these graduates leave the country. As McCord, Simon, and Weil (2013) noted when discussing rebuilding higher education in Myanmar, the dearth in university educated individuals in developing countries results in deficiencies in the various disciplines and industries they represent, including a limitation in the amount of faculty available to teach the next generation of university students who could in turn make significant contributions to their societies.

Rena (2010) asserted that in order to provide higher education to all members of its population, countries will have to confront the “social inequalities deeply rooted in history, culture and economic structure that influence an individual’s ability to compete” (p. 305). Higher education systems in many developing countries are underdeveloped and their students have to contend with the myriad of challenges. Unfortunately, students attempting to pursue post-secondary degrees in developing countries often face barriers to access. The location of universities can prove to be a barrier for students, particularly in places where there are poor public transportation systems. Other barriers to access are financial. The Task Force on Higher Education (2000) explained that often students are prepared and talented enough to enter an institution of higher education but are unable to gain access because “the costs of education exceed their means” (p. 41). Due to the poor functioning of their countries, students are unable to secure loans, or perhaps financial aid programs do not exist, and therefore funds are unavailable for them to finance their education.

Many students in developing countries are also academically underprepared for higher education due to the quality of their primary and secondary institutions. Further compounding this issue is that institutions of higher education in these locations often do not offer remedial or other bridge programs or courses resulting in students falling behind even further and some eventually choosing to depart the institution all together (The Task Force On Higher Education, 2000). Finally, due to cultural norms, women can be discouraged from attending a university or if allowed to enter, are forced to “study subjects that conform to their traditional roles, rather than courses that will maximize their opportunities in the labor market” (The Task Force on Higher Education, p. 24).

If students are fortunate enough to be accepted and are able to enter a university, they also face challenges that impact their ability to persist and successfully complete. One challenge students experience in higher education in developing countries is the teaching and learning methods that focus on rote learning and lectures. This style limits a student's ability to foster critical thinking skills and instead requires students to rely on their abilities to memorize and later regurgitate large quantities of information with little demonstration of a true understanding of the material (Task Force on Higher Education, 2000). Other challenges students face include over-crowded classrooms, inconsistent presence of faculty, limited resources (desks, chairs, etc.), insufficient supplies (books, learning materials, etc.) and academic standards beyond their preparation and expectations (Johnstone & Marcucci, 2010; The Task Force on Higher Education, 2000).

Often, the physical spaces for learning are outdated, dilapidated, and lack basic resources such as sufficient numbers of desks, modern laboratories, and updated libraries. Many institutions lack educational technologies or computers, which lead to students being left out of the global knowledge community. These factors have a significant impact on teaching and impede student learning. Bloom and Rosovsky (2006) explained that even when finances are set aside for the construction of new facilities, funds for the operation and maintenance of these spaces have not been allocated. Finally, many systems require students to select their area of study, or major, early in their academic career and leave little room, if any, for them to make changes. Students are then faced with remaining in a discipline that they may no longer be interested in or may be unable to perform academically in order to be successful in the subject (The Task Force on Higher Education, 2000), which can lead to frustration and an early departure by the student.

The aforementioned experiences are detrimental to students' future success. As UNESCO (2015) noted, obtaining higher levels of education leads to better living conditions, better jobs, and social development. Further, Kapur and Crowley (2008) stressed that higher education obtainment is critical for individuals because they assume the positions (accountants, doctors, engineers, and lawyers) that are crucial factors for development. Additionally, teachers and scholars are necessary in order to maintain a successful and thriving higher education system because these individuals teach students/future leaders and conduct research that can inform higher education policy and practices. There is a great understanding of the benefits of higher education. However, as this section described, many higher education systems in developing countries are challenged by years of neglect and underfunding. The following section describes some of the factors that have resulted in the current state of higher education system in low-income countries.

### **External Influences in Higher Education**

The previous section highlighted higher education in developing countries. It included the challenges that higher education systems face as well as the barriers that students and faculty members experience while navigating higher education institutions in their countries. This section highlights external influences in higher education in developing countries. More specifically, it discusses how donor agencies, the Millennium Development Goals, and non-governmental organizations have supported and hindered the development of higher education systems in low-income countries and how their policies and practices have shaped the higher education systems that exist in developing countries today.

The United States' occupation of Haiti from 1915-1934 had a great influence on the Haitian education sector. Specifically, U.S. policies determined the support of "agricultural

training over liberal arts education” and gave more money to technical school than to universities (Luzincourt & Gulbrandson, 2010, p. 7). In 2000, the United States amended its policies regarding foreign aid to the Haitian government relating to “free and fair” elections, which resulted in Haiti’s loss of millions of dollars in aid including cuts in the Ministry of Education (Erickson, 2004, p. 291). This decision had a residual affect and negatively impacted resources for the Haitian higher education system. Recent literature has reinforced the importance of responding to higher education needs in developing countries, and in its 2000 report, the World Bank conceded that some of its policy approaches in its past were “narrow and misleading” (Task Force on Higher Education, p. 10). Altbach (2008) noted that the majority of growth in higher education could be attributed to developing countries. Given this growth, higher education should be viewed as a necessary and critical investment by governments and external agencies for the benefit of the economy and in the development of societies in low-income countries.

### **Donor Agencies**

A component of the difficulties facing higher education systems in low-income countries can be traced to the influence of foreign aid agencies. Buchmann and Hannum (2001) noted that developing countries’ reliance on foreign aid for their educational systems have limited their ability to make their own decisions in this area. Abukari and Corner (2010) explained that developing countries face challenges to their higher education system as a result of global education trends. These challenges are compounded by the need for developing countries to respond to guidelines set forth by donor agencies to address development issues that do not necessarily include addressing higher education needs (Abukari & Corner, 2010).

Historically, investment in higher education in developing countries has been ignored by foreign aid agencies. They primarily focused their funding on primary and secondary education

and the agricultural sector, providing little attention to post-secondary education. Jones and Coleman (2005) shared that only 4.2% of the World Bank's total lending to developing countries between 1961 and 1998 was earmarked for education, and by the 1980's, for primary education. According to Kapur and Crowley (2008), the World Bank's decision overlooked the value of higher education in its role in "building domestic capabilities" (p. 14) and "increasing the supply of human capital" (p. 45). These facts provide a context for understanding the challenges within the higher education systems in low-income countries. Many of these locations have experienced challenges in regards to having the capacity to make critical changes to their education systems. This has resulted in their reliance on international organizations to support and fund their educational systems, at times at the expense of their own autonomy in deciding what systems warranted the most attention.

A 2000 report commissioned by the World Bank outlined that during the 1980's, the view of investment in higher education was that it "brought meager returns compared to investment in primary and secondary schools and that higher education magnifies income inequality" (Task Force on Higher Education, p.10). This, and similar views, have contributed to the underfunding of the post-secondary sector in developing countries. Collins and Rhoads (2009) succinctly explained the World Bank's influence on higher education systems in developing countries:

Given a history of failing to adequately support higher education, what is clear to us is that the Bank has played a key role in helping to produce the sorry state of affairs that many universities in the developing world now face. The fact is that for many years the Bank followed policies that under-valued the role of higher education in economic development, only later to declare that universities are critical to a nation's participation in the global knowledge economy (p.192).

Collins and Rhoads' (2009) depiction of earlier World Bank practices regarding funding in developing countries provided insight on the challenges experienced there. The years of

undervaluing higher education in locations like Haiti has likely played a role in the number of challenges within the Haitian higher education system today.

Ellerman, Denning, and Hanna (2001) discussed the challenge of having dual roles in development assistance agencies; one challenge is the “knowledge management and learning of the members of the organization,” and the second challenge is “fostering learning and knowledge-based transformation in the developing countries” (p. 171). Given the important function these agencies have in fostering an effective learning environment in developing countries, it is clear that their policies regarding what they choose to fund or not to fund has an influence on the decision-making of governments on the receiving end of their financial allocations. Psacharopoulos et al. (1986) noted that the widely held interpretation of the World Bank policy regarding higher education was that it emphasized investment in primary and secondary education, and it discouraged government spending on post-secondary education because of its low rate of social return. A 1994 World Bank report argued that higher education should not be considered a priority in strategies addressing development issues in lesser income countries. Its rationale was that “the social rates of return in investments in primary and secondary education usually exceed the rates of return on higher education” (Birdall, 1996, p. 3). Historically, Haiti relied on a large amount of foreign aid (Erickson, 2004), which resulted in a great dependence on foreign agencies and governments to support its development and economic growth (Conway, 1997; Fass, 1990).

This section highlighted the reliance of developing countries on foreign aid and the influence of foreign donor agencies on the educational practices in developing countries. This review demonstrates that due to its dependence on organizations outside of its country, governments in low-income countries had little opportunity to develop the capacity to address

the educational challenges within their system. These practices have had a significant impact on higher education systems that were underfunded and underdeveloped, a situation that continues to impact the educational experiences of university students today. The Millennium Development Goals (United Nations, n.d.,) international development goals established by members of the United Nations in 2000, included one goal that hoped to achieve primary education for all children worldwide by 2015. This goal highlighted the importance of education to all nations globally, but by excluding education beyond the primary level, this particular goal failed to account for the benefits of higher education in development in low-income countries.

### **Millennium Development Goals**

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were developed by members of the United Nations in 2000 to address eight international development issues related to poverty, health, gender, the environment, and education (United Nations, n.d.). It was the aim of this group to achieve significant progress, if not complete success, on these goals by 2015. In addition to determining these goals, the United Nations developed specific objectives, tasks, and due dates for accomplishing the goals. Funding for the initiatives to address the various tasks responding to each goal was provided by multiple international funding agencies. The MDGs have been successful in many areas. However, there have been critiques on the goals, including those related to the exclusion of higher education as a goal given the role it plays in development in low-income countries.

Because the goals were developed at the United Nations summit and they were to address international development, many believed that it was a misstep that higher education was not included. Holloway (2014) noted that the literature that existed at the time of the development of the eight goals included the critical role that higher education plays in development. Bloom and

Rosovsky (2006) found it surprising that higher education was not mentioned in the MDGs because of the “intrinsic benefit of higher education in enabling many people to have a fuller life” ( p. 457). Others (Koehn, 2013; McGrath, 2010; Obamba 2013) viewed higher education as crucial to development and questioned why it was overlooked when the MDGs were developed. Given the aforementioned discussion on the role, purpose, and benefits of higher education, the fact that it was not included as an MDG, or that it was not a component of a goal related to education (with sub categories of primary, secondary, vocational and higher/tertiary education), underscores the fact that higher education was not positioned as an essential level of education to achieve for all countries worldwide. Koehn (2013) summarized the exclusion of higher education in the MDGs by asserting that achieving each of the eight MDGs would be easier for countries that had a strong and productive higher education system.

The MDGs shaped, in a way, the priorities of foreign donor and other international agencies who worked to address the MDGs in countries worldwide. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are organizations that play a major role in educational environments in developing countries. Many of them receive funding from the same organizations that support the MDGs financially and in practice, and some of these NGOs function based on the concerns that the MDGs hope to address. As a result, how education is addressed in many low-income countries is not necessarily based on the espoused needs and wants of a given government or ministry of education, but instead on the agendas of respective NGOs who work to fill gaps that local governments do not have the capacity to do. The following section discussed the role of NGOs in education in developing countries.

## **Non-Governmental Organizations**

A non-governmental organization (NGO) is an organization that is not established by, affiliated with, or controlled by any governmental organization (Hartsmar, Aksit, & Moraeus, 2008). NGOs address a variety of needs in any given setting, including responding to issues related to health, poverty, and education, often with the most underprivileged and vulnerable members of society. NGOs operate in the social, political, and economic environment of the countries in which they are situated (Landim, 1996). The work of NGOs is categorized as “small scale, flexible, dynamic, adaptive, local, efficient and innovative” (Sequeira, Modesto & Maddox, 2007, p. 44). Because of the varying levels of capacity in developing countries, NGOs may work at the national, regional, or local level (Hartsmar, Aksit, & Moraeus, 2008). Further, the large, bureaucratic, and inflexible nature of government (Scott & Davis, 2007) prevents them from being able to experiment with new education approaches (Sequeira, Modesto, & Maddox, 2007). This provides NGOs the opportunity to address unmet educational needs in countries that ministries cannot fulfill, and closing gaps between the capacity of governments and the needs of society (Ulberg, 2009). Due to the nature of their work and the level of their expertise, NGOs can develop innovative initiatives, as well as contribute to conversations related to education policies and practice in their host countries.

Education is considered an important component of development work, and it is a common theme to many stakeholders: governments, ministries of education aid agencies, and NGOs (Baker, 2007). In evaluating the role of NGOs in their education sector, the Confederation of Indian Industry (n.d.) found that in general, NGOs provide a critical role in supplementing, complementing, and in some cases, substituting, education systems. Many NGOs in developing countries establish and run schools, provide scholarships for individual student, and offer basic

level education to many children who would otherwise go without schooling. In some locations, there are no formal schools to provide education to local families and in other cases, the schools are not equipped to provide a satisfactory level of education and the NGOs work to supplement the curriculum, resources, and training of teachers and administrators. In other instances, international NGOs have moved away from directly implementing initiatives and instead they partner with local NGOs that are doing the same or similar work and fund their organizations instead (Harrison, 2007). Ulberg (2009) urged that NGOs should go beyond the individual and community level, and become part of education sector reform and be incorporated as policy-partners and advisors. NGOs play a significant role in the Haitian education sector as well (Wood, 2007). Much of the primary and secondary education in the country is offered by entities other than the Ministry of Education.

**Ministries of education.** There are those who are critical of the role of NGOs in developing countries, and in particular their impact to local governments and ministries. Contributing to the critiques are the competing thoughts on what the role of NGOs should be: either providing aid as a donor or as an organization that addresses development needs by going beyond providing aid and purposefully addressing the root causes of poverty (McCloskey, 2012). Those who are critical of NGOs find the efforts of these organization counter to the capacity building support needed by local governments and ministries of education in developing countries. More specifically, overtime, some NGOs have conducted their work in certain countries not in concert with the local government and have not paid any heed to the policies already set in place (Clayton, 1998). There are many problems with this practice, namely that an outside agency is asserting itself into the educational environment of a country and is essentially usurping the legitimate power of the local government or ministry.

Often, NGOs come into an environment to provide services to a society that are currently missing or because a local government does not have the capacity to do so themselves. However, by working parallel to governments and ministries, instead of alongside with them in the spirit of cooperation, NGOs create a spirit of distrust and competition leaving local officials feeling that they are being replaced (Batley, 2006). Miwa (2003) argued that the lack of communication between NGOs and local governments has resulted in a duplication of services. When discussing the role of NGOs in basic education in Ethiopia, Guinea, Malawi, and Mali, Miller-Grandvaux, Welmond, and Joy (2002) learned from their research that government officials believed that *they* were responsible for taking the lead in their country's education sector and that if NGO's acted as if the local government was not present, the programs and objectives of the ministry of education were compromised. This type of relationship, or lack thereof, exacerbates the tenuous hold the ministries of education have on their education system and further delays their ability to grow and develop such that they do not have to rely so heavily on external agencies.

Despite the critiques regarding NGOs, they do provide much needed aid and resources to developing countries. They also support efforts related to higher education systems in countries where they are underdeveloped. Non-governmental Organizations and Higher Education (n.d.) asserted that NGOs could help developing countries by supporting efforts related to providing access to higher education. NGOs do fill the gaps between higher education systems and higher education needs of a population in a variety of ways including offering scholarships, enrichment courses, and professional development opportunities for faculty and administrators. In its 2009 communiqué, UNESCO stressed that efforts towards improving access to higher education for students in developing countries must continue. Further, students must be supported in a way that promotes their successful participation and completion of a degree (UNESCO, 2009). Although

there is an abundance of information regarding NGOs in educational environments in low-income countries and the positive role they play there, there is limited information or empirical research on the role of NGOs in higher education systems in developing countries specifically, which is a major gap in the literature on this topic.

**Haiti.** There are a number of non-governmental and private organizations in Haiti that have provided aid and resources to the country for decades. However, it has been difficult to determine the precise number, or even a reasonable estimate of NGOs working there. Ramachandran and Walz (2012) estimated that there is anywhere from 343 to 20,000 NGOs in Haiti. Luzincourt and Gulbrandson (2010) estimated that there were 10,000 NGOs in Haiti following the 2010 earthquake, which led to the country being referred to as a Republic of NGOs (Kristoff & Panarelli, 2010). The International Monetary Fund (2008) indicated that over 100 NGOs are involved in the education sector in Haiti, while a study by Zanotti (2010) estimated that approximately 85% of the national education is run by NGOs and other private organizations. These varying statistics underscore the complexities of managing the Haitian education system, which in turn makes it difficult to assess the scope of educational challenges and interventions required in Haiti. Further, given the number of NGO's in Haiti, and the estimate of 85% of education being led by private entities, one can question how much oversight the Ministry truly has over its own system.

Zanotti (2010) argued that the presence of NGOs in Haiti resulted in a dependency relationship that impaired the government's capacity for "institution building" and has "compounded...problems of government accountability" (p. 756). Luzincourt and Gulbrandson (2010) critiqued the amount aid to Haiti via NGOs because in their view, it contributed to a weak governmental institution. Given the state of Haiti's educational system and the government's

inability to fully provide education to all school age children, much of the international aid earmarked for education has gone directly to NGOs. There is a perception that NGOs in Haiti are more efficient, can provide a better quality of education, and are less corrupt than the government, resulting in NGOs being funded directly, rather than the Ministry or individual schools receiving the financial aid (Degnbol-Martinussen, 1999). Despite their reservations about NGOs, Luzincourt and Gulbrandson (2010) conceded that NGOs play a critical role in ensuring that vital needs such as health, employment, and education are addressed. The Haitian Education and Leadership Program (HELP) is an example of an NGO that is addressing challenges and gaps within the Haitian higher education system.

### **Higher Education and Development**

The previous section of this review noted the role of international organizations in undervaluing and underfunding higher education systems in the past. This resulted in higher education systems in low-income countries being underdeveloped and university students having to navigate the challenges within them today. Many institutions of higher education in developing countries are not capable of fulfilling their potential for stimulating the development and growth of their local communities. They have the potential to produce educated citizens and new leaders, and to develop and disseminate research that results in new policies that inform more effective practice. This section discusses the role of higher education in contributing to the development.

Higher education plays a significant role in the development of lesser-income countries (Kimenyi, 2011; Ryan & Heim, 1997; Walshok, 1997) and contributes to higher-level skills and competencies necessary for their involvement in the global knowledge community (Akinyemi & Ofem, 2012). Initially, foreign aid agencies determined that post-secondary education was not as

necessary for social gains as primary and secondary education. However, in the last decade, the World Bank, among other entities, has seen the importance of higher education in influencing the economic growth in developing countries (Zaglul & Sherrard, 2006). Higher education has come to be viewed as an important factor for addressing the myriad of needs in developing countries.

Kimenyi (2011) indicated that the world economies have become more sophisticated and that due to the global nature and interconnectedness of the countries world-wide, higher levels of education has become necessary for growth. It will be difficult for many countries to foster development without increasing the number of its citizens earning a university degree. Kimenyi (2011) stressed that universities play a vital role in “generating new knowledge,” which will, in turn, support new forms of production and technology (p. 23). Lehmann, Christensen, and Johnson (2006) believed that institutions of higher education are a great source for fostering development because they are connectors between research and practice. King and Palmer (2006) and Kimenyi (2011) noted that higher education fosters new skills, which can be used toward increasing the nation’s capacity for teaching and learning, governance, and technology. Bloom, Hartley, and Rosovsky (2006) highlighted the private good of earning a university degree, which includes increased knowledge, better employment, and economic growth.

USAID has partnered with six higher education associations to create an intervention program named Higher Education for Development. According to USAID, Higher Education for Development coordinates the efforts of higher education institutions to address development challenges worldwide (“Higher Education for Development” n.d.). This multi-partnered approach has the capabilities to “bring forth innovative courses, new degree programs, advanced teaching methodology, improved access to education, and the engagement of thought leaders at local, regional and national levels” (Higher Education for Development, n.d.). The innovative

Higher Education for Development partnership has demonstrated that there are many positive gains in development when supported by higher education. Further, university graduates help to foster these gains in their respective societies, resulting in prosperity and political and economic stability (Daniel, Kanwar, & Uvali-Trumbi, 2009). Based on positive gains explained, the higher education system in Haiti could play a vital role in the development of the country.

When discussing results from his study on secondary and higher education in India, Tilak (2007) found that higher education plays a critical role in development, poverty reduction, human development, and economic growth there. When discussing higher education and development in Africa, Okolie (2003) critiqued that development policies and programs that have been shaped by “knowledge and knowledge production” that have been primarily EuroAmerican (p. 235). Okolie (2003) contended that these practices have excluded the knowledge, ways of knowing, and the lived experiences of those communities that have been targeted for development. Okolie (2003) stressed that local individuals can benefit from the development that occurs in their locations in a more meaningful way if they “participate in the generation of knowledges that inform those policies and practices” (p. 236). This last point is crucial for low-income countries that are inundated by foreign-actors who are there long-term, providing services that local governments do not have the capacity to provide.

Utilizing, developing, and strengthening indigenous knowledge and capacity is important as it encompasses local customs, traditions, and values. This is critical because as the world becomes increasingly globally connected, it is can be easy for lesser-developed countries to leverage aspects of their cultural identity in order to compete for inclusion, opportunities for participation, and international funding with others. Okolie (2003) argues that higher education scholars and development experts should re-examine their work and consider the role higher

education can play in “centering the local people’s lived experiences, knowledges of their world, and their conception of social transformation” (p. 236). I take this argument a step further by emphasizing that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) also need to consider their role and mission related to development of higher education in low-income countries. Given their large presence and influence in developing countries, NGOs can make a difference in the higher education sector and how learning and knowledge production occurs.

### **Summary**

This literature review provided an overview of higher education and the benefits received from obtaining a higher degree. This information was provided to highlight the benefits of higher education to both the individual and to society. Followed was an overview of higher education in developing countries. This was included not only to provide a description of the experiences of various stakeholders in higher education systems, but also to magnify the benefits that students and societies in low-income countries miss out on due to their underdeveloped higher education systems. The current state of higher education systems in developing countries did not occur overnight. Both local and external influences have contributed to the matter, and the review on the role of external influences provided a description of this experience. Finally, the role of higher education in development was discussed to convey the role that higher education can play, which is critical given the myriad of needs in developing countries. By strengthening ones higher education system, low-income countries can graduate future leaders and produce research to inform policy and practice that will, in turn, support the development and growth of their country.

## **Conceptual Framework**

The challenges that university students experience within the Haitian higher education system are influenced by personal (e.g., financial, opportunity) and institutional (e.g., location of universities, policies, and practice) factors that they have limited ability to control. While some students are left navigating the system alone, others benefit from programs sponsored by non-governmental organizations that fill the gap that universities cannot by providing students with the opportunity to have a successful university experience. These organizations often offer scholarships that cover the cost of tuition and school supplies, while others have a more comprehensive approach that incorporates various interventions that eliminate barriers that university students' experience. A framework that encompasses higher education experiences in developing countries, as well as interventions that exist to address challenges within them, is instrumental to this study. Thus, I use the concepts of university "access" and "persistence" to examine the higher education challenges in Haiti and to understand the role of the Haitian Education Leadership Program (HELP) in the higher education landscape, the country, and in the lives of university students there.

There is an abundance of information on university access and persistence in a U. S. context. Scholars have examined how socioeconomic status (Walpole, 2003), gender (Peter & Horn, 2005), and race/ethnicity (Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009) affect access and persistence for individual students. The following section highlights the various federal policies and institutional level programs in the United States that strive to address issues of university access and persistence there.

## **Understanding University Access and Persistence in the United States**

The two decades following World War II expanded educational opportunities for many who were not able to attend postsecondary education prior to the war (Astin & Oseguera, 2004). It was during this time that federal financial aid was introduced for individuals to pursue a postsecondary degree (Astin & Oseguera, 2004). For example, TRIO programs including Student Success Services and Pell grants were established to provide practical (e.g., retention services) and financial support. During this time, Astin and Oseguera (2004) noted outreach programs provided a welcoming environment on university and college campuses resulting from the greater influx of underrepresented groups. Additionally, McCowan (2007) explained that interventions such as affirmative action were necessary in higher education for remedying historical practices and current inequities in previous stages of the education system. The creation of legislation, the increases in financial aid that supported low-income students, and the development of outreach programs that recruited students of color were all factors that contributed to a greater sense of equity and accessibility to higher education and an increase in persistence for marginalized student groups in higher education in the United States (Swail, Redd, & Perna, 2003).

After signing the Higher Education Act of 1965, President Johnson stated “We need to do more . . . to extend the opportunity for higher education more broadly among lower and middle-income families” (Swail, Redd, & Perna, 2003, p. 12). That statement highlighted the fact that students were experiencing barriers while trying to access higher education, which contemporary scholarship reveals still exist today (Gonzalez, Stoner, & Jovel, 2003; Peter & Horn, 2005; Walpole, 2003). According to Swail et al. (2003) federally funded programs were developed with the understanding that there was a federal responsibility to widen access to higher

education. Federal programs include those related to financial aid (e.g., GI Bill, Pell Grants, and subsidized loans) and college preparation (e.g., TRIO programs). Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) explained that students are more likely to persist based on the frequency and quality of their interactions with fellow students and with their professors. Students who are engaged in their campus life, both socially and academically, also experience an increase in their higher education persistence (Bailey & Alfonso, 2005; Kuh, et al., 2006,). Summers (2003) found that students who have been recognized as more likely to drop out have a greater rate of persistence if they receive academic advising. Brower (1992) explained that student persistence is linked with a student's experience with their college and university environment.

This overview highlights that student success in higher education includes both interventions to eliminate barriers to university access and mechanisms for fostering student persistence. A holistic approach is necessary to support student success, which leads to university graduation and degree attainment. U.S. programs and policies provide a useful framework for understanding the factors and initiatives that are important for university access and persistence in general. However, they fall short of the needs of students within developing countries because often, those locations (such as Haiti) do not have policies or programs that are critical for university access, persistence, and graduation. The following section highlights the educational experience in Haiti and underscores the challenges that students face in their pursuit of higher education there.

### **Understanding University Access and Persistence in Haiti**

Despite the abundance of scholarship on issues of university access and persistence, there is limited information on these experiences in developing countries and how these factors can be addressed in tangible ways there. Much of the scholarship found describing higher education

challenges in developing countries utilize concepts and themes from U.S. scholars based on work conducted on U.S. students. There are few examples of how to mirror the work done in the United States in developing countries. Further, the terms “access” and “persistence” are not common to the higher education terminology in Haiti. Although those perspectives can be useful for understanding higher education challenges broadly, it is limiting when attempting to apply them to the higher education conditions in Haiti. One must question, “access to what kind of higher education experience?” and “persistence in what kind of higher education system?”

Unpacking the primary and secondary school experiences for children in Haiti is essential for understanding issues of access to higher education for all students there. The Haitian Constitution stipulates that basic education is offered for free to every Haitian citizen, however, the public schools do not have the financial capacity to provide resources necessary for a quality education (Salmi, 2000). This has resulted in 75% of basic education and 82% of secondary education students attending private schools (Salmi, 2000). Given Haiti’s high rate of poverty, the cost of private education has shut out many children from education (Justesen & Verner, 2007) and have left families also declining public schools due to their poor quality. Further, although the Ministry of Education does not require preschool attendance for children to enter elementary school, a number of schools require it as a condition for enrollment (Suzuta, 2011). As a result, many students are considered overage, older than traditional age, when they begin the first grade, eventually leading to only 22% of children completing elementary school (Suzuta, 2011). Suzuta (2011) explained that by the time students reach their last year of their secondary school, eight in 10 graduate. Consequently, less than 1% of the Haitian population, approximately 40,000 yearly, enrolls in higher education in Haiti. Examining the educational

barriers students experience will be important for understanding issues of access experienced by students hoping to enter a university in Haiti.

Students, who are able to successfully enter a university, continue to face forces that affect their ability to persist to graduation. Universities in Haiti rely heavily on student tuition to operate. However, fees collected are not enough to sufficiently provide a fully staffed institution resulting in many part-time faculty members who teach in numerous institutions (INURED, 2010). This phenomenon results in limited availability for student and faculty interactions.

Another major barrier to persistence is the fact that students must complete a research thesis in order to graduate despite a university system that does not offer research courses, equipment, or support (INURED, 2010). Students who do not receive guidance with their thesis projects are left with no other options for earning their degree. Finally, Suzuta (2011) explained that student life conditions related to “transportation, insecurity, housing, limited infrastructure and equipment including libraries” create a difficult environment for students to learn (p. 16). All of these factors have led to only “64 students per institutions obtaining a degree each year” (Suzta, 2001, p. 17), which is a major indicator of persistence challenges in the Haitian higher education system.

This section provided a brief overview of some of the educational challenges experienced by students in Haiti. These factors have contributed to barriers students face when attempting to access higher education in Haiti. Various national and institutional factors have also created barriers that impede persistence and successful university completion there as well. In order to understand the higher education landscape in Haiti, it is important to view the phenomenon through a framework that takes into account the higher education environment in developing countries, including the experiences of students and the various interventions that exist there.

## **Framework**

There are a variety of theories that could be used to understand the benefits of obtaining a higher education and for understanding student experiences in higher education systems. For example, human capital theory assumes that formal education is necessary to improve the production capacity of a population and that providing formal education is an investment in human capital (Olaniyan & Okemakinde, 2008). Although this theory speaks to the benefits of higher education to society, it does not address the experiences of individuals who cannot access formal education or, in the case of Haiti, the limited capacity of the government to invest in the formal education for a large section of its population.

Another seminal framework is the theory of student involvement. In its simplest terms, “student involvement refers to the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience” (Astin, 1984, p. 297). This theory is helpful for understanding the outcomes students experience by being active participants in their learning process. However, it does not consider the experiences of students who are in academic settings that impede the learning process, nor does it include the role of educators or other entities in the lives of students.

The aforementioned theories are limiting because they do not fully describe the higher education environment in Haiti, coupled with the innovative practices of non-governmental organizations. Therefore, I applied a conceptual framework that encompasses both the needs of university students and the functions of non-governmental organizations that address gaps in capacity in higher education systems within developing countries. The conceptual framework draws from two World Bank background reports written by Rowan-Kenyon, Savitz-Romer, and Swan (2010) and Savitz-Romer, Rowan-Kenyon, Weilundemo, and Swan (2010) who provided a

guide for evaluating and creating effective interventions for successful participation, persistence, and retention in tertiary education. The authors of these reports acknowledge the limitations of their studies, specifically their challenge of collecting primary data on global interventions and programs addressing issues of university access and persistence. However, their work is the most comprehensive to date and best fits the nature of this study. The two background reports provide a framework for understanding how university access and persistence is addressed on a global scale, including initiatives and interventions by organizations like HELP. Their reports are important as they provide an opportunity to apply a construct to this study that reflects the realities of higher education systems in developing countries, like Haiti. This conceptual framework allows me to examine the contributions of HELP to Haitian students within the higher education landscape in Haiti.

**Access.** Savits-Romer et al. (2010) conducted a study in which they mapped policies and practices worldwide related to outreach and bridges between primary, secondary, and tertiary institutions. For their study, bridge programs referred to programs that were geared toward students who completed secondary education. The purpose of their study was to identify efforts that have successfully increased access, and therefore participation, in higher education globally. Their goal was to identify strategies that could be used as a framework for policy and for practitioners in their work with students, helping them overcome barriers related to university access and completion (Savits-Romer et al., 2010). The parameters of their study included policies and practices that encompassed the following:

- Population targeted is currently underrepresented in tertiary education;
- Intent is to widen access to tertiary education through a formal intervention;
- More than a monetary intervention; or

- Focus population includes first year university students (p 3).

The scope of their study allows for understanding the role of non-governmental organizations in the higher education landscape in Haiti, as well as their work with university students in the country.

Savits-Romer et al. (2010) provided six suggestions for policy to increase access to higher education. For the purposes of this study, I focused on one that fits the scope of work that organizations perform in educational environments, “create linked program” (p. 32). Creating linked programs discussed linking scholarships to multi-tiered and comprehensive programs by which students receive support for the multiple barriers they face when pursuing higher education (Savits-Romer, et al., 2010). This suggestion implies that there are unique challenges that exist in higher education worldwide and that interventions need to be able to encompass the complexities that are unique to a particular context. Although this suggestion was directed toward policy makers, bridge outreach programs could also use it. Drawing upon this policy suggestion allows for an examination of HELP’s approach in its support of HELP scholars and for responding to student needs related to university access.

Savits-Romer et al. (2010) also provided six suggestions for improving practice related to increasing access to higher education for students. One suggestion, “include academic and social supports in programming” (p. 34) can be addressed by organizations, while the remaining five were specific to universities and governing bodies. Academic and social support in programming discussed the need for interventions that do not just target academic skills, but also address other areas that could serve as challenges or barriers for students. More specifically, programs should foster development related to the social, personal, or cultural adjustments that students need to make in order to succeed in higher education (Savits-Romer et al., 2010). This suggestion

contends that there are multiple variables embedded in student success and that organizations, such as HELP, will need to consider these factors when developing programs that strive to support student access and success in higher education.

**Persistence.** Rowan-Kenyon et al. (2010) created a report that provided a “meta-analysis of the global practices related to persistence and retention in higher education” (p. 2). They focused their research on policies and practices in universities, within government systems, and on programs that target student retention (Rowan-Kenyon et al, 2010). Their goal for this report was to provide a framework for policy makers and practitioners to draw from when developing strategies and interventions for increasing student persistence and completion in higher education worldwide. Rowan-Kenyon, et al. (2010) provided 11 recommendations for policy makers, universities, and organizations to increase university persistence. The following four are most appropriately aligned with the functions and capabilities of organizations: “focus on access *and* success,” “develop holistic support mechanisms,” “include emotional support services in prevention programming,” and “seek avenues for collaborative partnerships that extend the capacity of any one program” (Rowan-Kenyon et al, 2010, p. 37).

Focusing on access and success emphasizes the need to focus on university student success from the point of access and throughout their degree program to ensure successful departure (Rowan-Kenyon et al, 2010). By doing so, an organization can ensure that students are receiving the support they require in order to persist and attain that goal. Developing holistic support mechanisms and including emotional support services refers to creating programs that couple financial support with academic, personal, and emotional support services (Rowan-Kenyon et al, 2010). This multi-pronged intervention can help to alleviate any hardships students may experience as they transition into the university and for responding to stress or other critical

needs that may arise. By addressing the financial, academic, social, and emotional needs of students, organizations can work to eliminate potential barriers for persistence as they learn how to navigate the structures within the institution (Rowan-Kenyon et al, 2010).

The final suggestion is collaborative partnerships. Partnership with other organizations, universities, foundations, government agencies, corporate partners, and individuals from the community is beneficial for providing programs that holistically support students throughout their university experience, which can in turn lead to graduation ((Rowan-Kenyon et al, 2010). A coalition of individuals and entities can leverage their expertise and clout so that each partner can effectively contribute to a series of interventions crafted to eliminate barriers for university persistence. This partnership allows for knowledge sharing and a more efficient process for supporting students. These aforementioned suggestions contend that eliminating barriers to university persistence is a difficult task and the organizations such as HELP will have to consider the various components necessary for successful student programs.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODS**

This chapter provides an overview of my case study of the Higher Education and Leadership Program (HELP). I describe the qualitative approach and design of my research. My study focused on how key stakeholders perceive challenges of access and persistence within the Haitian higher education system and how the Haitian Education and Leadership Program (HELP) supports the academic and future success of university students in Haiti. I begin by discussing my positionality as a Haitian-American scholar conducting research in Haiti; how my researcher identity may have influenced my interactions with research participants, and how I interpreted the data I collected. Next, I review the research design and the methods of data analysis. Finally, I conclude this chapter with the limitations of this study.

#### **Researcher Identity**

As I considered undertaking this research study in Haiti, it was important that I reflect on any bias I would bring to this research project (Maxwell, 2005). My mother and father were born and raised in Port-au-Prince and Jérémie, Haiti, respectively. I am first-generation American. I grew up in the Northeast region of the United States, in a close-knit Haitian community. My upbringing included attending a Haitian church (where the sermons were preached in Haitian Creole and French), being a member of a Haitian/Haitian-American youth group, and being taught how to speak *Kreyol Ayisyen* (Haitian Creole). Given how strongly I am connected to my ethnic heritage, it was critical that I analyze how my positionality may influence my research process. Being aware of potential bias was particularly important to me because I identify as Haitian-American, and, because of the nature of my upbringing, I feel a connection to my

ancestral country. Reason (1988) provided insight on incorporating identity and experiences in one's research, and discussed critical subjectivity as:

A quality of awareness in which we do not suppress our primary experience; nor do we allow ourselves to be swept away and overwhelmed by it; rather we raise it to consciousness and use it as part of the inquiry process (p. 12).

By using a qualitative approach, I attempted to interpret meaning from the statements and views of the research participants (Creswell, 2009). Because of my ethnic connection to my participants, I knew that it would be important for me to reflect on my own self-concept and the lens from which I would be conducting and analyzing my Haiti-based study.

My 2012 evaluation of HELP, in my role as a consultant for the International Association of Student Affairs and Services, and my 2013 research study of HELP, have deepened my reflections as a Haitian-American who conducts research in Haiti. Given my dual identities (Haitian and American) there were several instances during my research visit when participants questioned my motivation for conducting research in Haiti and asked me if I thought they would automatically accept me because I was Haitian. My decision to label myself as Haitian was also questioned because I was born and raised in the United States. There were a number of nuances that arose during my research process. For example, the university students I lived with and the house woman who worked there, wanted me to prove that I had an authentic Haitian upbringing. They would often ask me questions or make comments related to food and cooking, home maintenance, language ability, and aspects of Haitian culture and history to test, I believe, the extent of my Haitian-ness. One particular experience during my time in Haiti, in which this testing stood out, is as follows:

After my arrival, I attended a house meeting where I was asked to introduce myself and discuss my purpose for being there. I shared my life story and how I was led to conduct

research in Haiti. I ended my introduction by confidently explaining in Haitian Creole that I identified as Haitian-American and that I was excited to be in Haiti with fellow Haitians. I felt proud that I was able to counter the stereotype that children of Haitian parents born outside of Haiti are not taught how to speak Creole. I arrogantly waited to hear the students congratulate me on my language proficiency. Instead, a student asked, “You were born in America, right?” “Yes, I was” I replied. The student then asked, “So what makes you Haitian?”

I was quickly and properly put in my place by that question. While I was able to navigate the discomfort of having to respond to the inquiry in front of 20 silent students, I was reminded of my “insider” and “outsider” positionalities while in Haiti.

My time in Haiti was the first time that I truly reflected on what it meant for me to claim membership in a culture of a country where I did not grow up. Since then, I have questioned, is language proficiency, food and music familiarity, familial history, or personal interest enough to know and understand or even assume membership in a culture? I have been reflecting on the question of identity and how mine has informed my research since that time. I was fortunate to have that encounter on the second day of my research trip in Haiti. From that day forward, I strived to be cognizant of my role as a researcher responsible for collecting and analyzing the data about a group that I felt familiar with and had a connection to (Merriam, 2009) but who may not feel the same way about me.

Prior to the start of my research project in Haiti, I reflected on the fact that I was a scholar who was born, raised, and academically trained in the United States. I was concerned about being labeled an “other” or being viewed as an “outsider” by Haitians in Haiti. I was extremely anxious about revealing a subconscious bias, favoring my American self over my Haitian self. Smith (1999) discussed that the “western culture constantly reaffirms the west’s view of itself as the center of legitimate knowledge” (p. 66). I contemplated whether power dynamics might arise between participants (those being studied) and me (the American researcher) during my

interviews or if tension would arise in my research process. To combat any preconceptions I may have brought to my work in Haiti, I attempted to bracket the deficit narratives that I was inundated with throughout my life that overwhelmingly describe Haiti and Haitian education from a negative viewpoint, by focusing on the first-hand knowledge of educational experiences in Haiti from the study participants. I continuously checked myself on how I was thinking about education in Haiti by listening, instead of introducing what I read prior to the study, into my interviews. I also checked myself on why and how I was asking the questions of my participants and the tone I used when doing so. My goal was to view their responses and experiences as authentic and valid. I attempted to make sense of what I was learning from their Haitian perspective, and to limit as much as possible, juxtaposing my US perspective in my meaning making and interpretation of the data (Creswell, 2009).

Mills, Bonner, and Francis (2006) explained, “constructivism emphasizes the subjective interrelationship between the researcher and participant...that researchers, in their ‘humanness,’ are as part of the research endeavor rather than the objective observers” (p. 26). I tried to approach the research from a social constructivist’s perspective. The goal of my research was to “rely as much as possible on the participants’ views of the situation being studied” (Creswell, 2009, p. 8). In order to accomplish this goal, I conducted semi-structured interviews that included many open-ended questions. Nunkoosing (2005) stressed that using interviews as an approach to data collection invites research participants to think and talk about their “needs, wants, expectations, experiences, and understandings” (p. 699). I also kept notes on the interactions I had with the HELP students I lived with and the HELP students and staff that I encountered at the HELP center. This allowed me to reflect on my interactions with them, as

well as on how the participants appeared to make meaning of their experiences at HELP, at home, and at their universities.

As a constructivist researcher, I was interested in the context in which my participants were situated and how their backgrounds, histories, culture, and personal experiences informed their perspectives on their current lived experiences (Charmaz, 1996). I found myself in the narratives of the HELP students and alumni because, although in a different context, I too, was a high-achieving, high school student that benefited from college access and bridge programs that supported my transition and success as an undergraduate student. I recognize that my educational journey has led, in part, to my current role as a higher education scholar who researches issues of university access and persistence for low-income students. As an educator with a sociology background, I attempted to see and understand the world and comprehend how our individual contexts influence how we live and shape our lives.

### **Research Design**

I utilized a qualitative methodology in order to answer the study's two research questions:

1. How do key stakeholders perceive the challenges of access and persistence within the higher education system in Haiti?
2. How do Haitian Education and Leadership Program's strategies support the academic and future success of its scholars?

### **Case Study Approach**

Stake (2005) emphasized that a non-governmental organization (NGO) may be a case. As HELP is an NGO and identifies as such in Haiti, I used an instrumental case study approach for this study to ensure that I was learning about its various components while also situating the

organization in the larger context of higher education in Haiti (Maxwell, 2005; Stake, 2005). Yin (2003) provided five different applications of case studies in research, including one application, which is used to “describe an intervention and the real-life context in which it occurred” (p. 15). This study of HELP provided a detailed description of HELP and the strategies that the organization utilizes to respond to challenges that university students experience within the higher education system in Haiti. Flyvbjerg (2006) noted that the advantage of a case study is that it can “close in on real-life situations” (p. 235). My case study was the perfect methodological approach for understanding the context of higher education in Haiti from the perspectives of those who are experiencing it. By conducting an instrumental case study, which is underpinned by constructivism (Appleton, 2002), I was able to provide both thick descriptions and to learn the perceptions that HELP scholars and staff have regarding HELP’s approach to supporting university students in Haiti (Stake, 2005).

### **Research Site and Location**

For this study on higher education in Haiti, I selected a single organization (a single case) as my site, HELP. A lot of the scholarship written about Haitian education discusses the historical and contemporary issues and challenges there. I selected HELP because I wanted to provide a counter narrative to the often-negative educational research and focus on the positive and potential successful solutions to responding to education needs in the country. HELP was selected as a research site because it is one of few organizations in Haiti that is responding to challenges within the Haitian higher education system in a comprehensive way.

HELP is a non-governmental organization located in Port-au-Prince, the capital of Haiti. HELP was founded in 1997, and its aim is to provide scholarships to talented young Haitians who do not have the financial means to access higher education studies. Initially supporting one,

then two university students, HELP presently supports approximately 130 students a year who are in various levels of study (first through fifth year). HELP has more than 30 alumni who have access to the Career and Alumni Services Manager and resources of the organization.

Students who receive a HELP scholarship receive the following resources: classes at an internationally accredited university in Haiti, textbooks and supplies, living stipends, housing in a HELP residence, academic advising and counseling, career services including internship opportunities, and study abroad opportunities in the United States (“How We Work,” n.d.). Scholars also attend three HELP courses: 2-years in computer literacy, 4-years of English as a Second Language (ESL), and 4-years of leadership courses. The leadership courses use HELP’s five pillars of respect, rigor, courage, sacrifice, and service and incorporate a social change model (“How We Work,” n.d.). HELP scholars are also required to participate in extra-curricular activities that include a speaker series, field trips, and retreats (“How We Work,” n.d.). Additional information and more detail about the various components of HELP are included in Chapter 4; Country and Organization Context.

HELP has staff in both Haiti and New York. The staff members in Haiti work directly with the program participants and strive to create and maintain relationships with universities and the Ministry of Education. They also attempt to develop connections with companies in Haiti and academic programs outside of Haiti for the purposes of generating internships and educational enrichment opportunities for its students. The staff in New York primarily works on development and fundraising for the organization.

### **Sampling**

As I began my case study research project focused on HELP, I met with a cross section of HELP constituents. According to Maxwell (2005), “selecting those...individuals that can provide

you with the information that you need in order to answer your research questions is the most important consideration in qualitative decisions” (p. 88). Thus, the participants for this study included HELP students (14), HELP staff (15) and HELP alumni (3)<sup>2</sup>. I also met with two individuals outside of HELP, both of which had unique expertise and perspectives on the higher education challenges and needs in the country. Specifically, I met with an individual who works for the Ministry of Education and the Associate Director for the Interuniversity Institute for Research and Development (INURED) in Haiti. According to its website, INURED’s mission is to “contribute to the development of high-level research and scientific training in Haiti with the aim of improving the educational, socio-economic and political condition of Haiti's people” (“Our Mission”, n.d.). I purposely selected HELP as my organization site and the particular number and type of participants (HELP students, alumni, staff, those outside of HELP) because I felt that they could best help me understand the problem (challenges in the Haitian higher education system) I was investigating in Haiti and help me to answer my research questions (Creswell, 2009).

During the 2012-2013 academic year, I contacted the Founder and Executive Director of HELP to explore if the organization could serve as the site and focus of my dissertation study. After receiving approval from HELP, I submitted an application to the Michigan State University Institutional Review Board. I was granted an exempt status (see Appendix A), which provided me with approval to conduct my study. Next, I drafted an email, written in English and French, to solicit participants for my study (see Appendix B and C). I sent this letter to the Associate Director of HELP to forward on to HELP students, alumni, and staff. The email included information about my study, participant requirements, my expected arrival and duration in Haiti,

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<sup>2</sup> Two of the HELP staff members interviewed are also HELP Alumni, they are not reflected in the number of HELP alumni interviewed

and incentives for each participant. Potential participants were given the option of pre-scheduling their interview or confirming an appointment with me after I arrived to Haiti. The letter also directed interested parties to email me directly if they wanted to join the research study. The purpose for the e-mail coming from me was to avoid any pressure or expectation from the organization's leadership.

After reviewing my solicitation letter, the HELP Associate Director requested that I remove the incentive. HELP wanted students, in particular, to choose to participate in my study because they believed the research to be important, as opposed to joining only because they wanted to receive the potential incentive (being entered into a drawing to receive a \$50 Amazon.com gift card). I agreed to remove the language regarding incentives from my email. The day before my arrival to Haiti during the summer of 2013, the Associate Director of HELP sent an email written in Haitian Creole (see Appendix J) to HELP students, staff, and alumni formally introducing me and explaining my purpose for being at HELP. The Career Services and Alumni Manger indicated that she forwarded that same email again to HELP alumni.

Because of my limited access to other higher education stakeholders in Haiti, I waited until I arrived to Haiti to attempt to schedule interviews with individuals outside of HELP. Once in Haiti, I sent an email to the Director of INURED providing a brief explanation of my study, and requesting an opportunity to visit the office and interview him or another individual knowledgeable about their work. I received a response within minutes that invited me to INURED the next day. HELP offered me a driver to get to and from INURED. I, along with a HELP student interested in my research study, visited INURED for a few hours the very next day. While there, I interviewed the Associate Director of INURED, as well as an employee, whom I learned during the interview was also an alumnus of HELP. I also reviewed the reports

on the research they had conducted in Haiti that were on display. After interviewing one of the HELP advisors, Olivier Montout, I mentioned my interest in interviewing someone from the Ministry of Education. Mr. Montout shared that he was a former classmate of a staff member at the Ministry and offered to set up an interview on my behalf. I was able to meet with the individual a few days later at a café near the Ministry, and Mr. Mountout drove me there. Additionally, the Haiti Country Director attempted to connect me with other higher education officials in Haiti (university leaders or faculty) but his attempts proved to be unsuccessful because many individuals he knew were out of the country during the time of my study.

### **Data Collection**

Yin (2003) indicated that a case study approach is useful for understanding an organization and related phenomenon, particularly when “how” or “why” questions are being explored. Thus, my goal was to obtain a holistic view of HELP to better understand how its strategies were supporting university students in Haiti and why their methods appeared to be successful (Yin, 2003). I was given permission by HELP’s Haiti Country Director to use the data I collected during my 2012 consultancy visit to HELP for my 2013 research study. That data included my extensive field notes from my week-long consultancy visit, as well as documents (110 pages) that HELP provided to the consultancy team prior to our visit:

- HELP’s organizational chart
- Student handbook
- Monthly reports
- 1-page summary of student needs
- Advisors guide
- Information management system guide

- Application for admission form
- Registration for academic scholarship form

The aforementioned documents, as well as the HELP website ([www.uhelp.net](http://www.uhelp.net)) provided me with background information about the organization, which helped me to better understand their practices and informed the questions that I asked of participants (Patton, 1990).

Glesne (2011) described the benefits of semi-structured interviews and asserted that this approach is “directed to understanding phenomena in their fullest possible complexity” (p. 134). During my study, I conducted semi-structured, in-person interviews with participants, which were recorded with a digital voice recorder. This form of interview allowed me to ask questions related to specific pre-determined topics, while providing the flexibility for further questions to be developed and evolve based on new ideas revealed in their responses. Given the nature of my study, learning study participants perceptions on higher education in Haiti and HELP strategies, my data collection included the constant comparative method (Boeije, 2002; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Boeijie (2002) explained this process further,

Comparison within a single interview represents an attempt to interpret the parts of the interview in the context of the entire story as it has been told to us by the interviewee. Comparison between interviews within the same group [is used] to further develop the conceptualization of the subject...this means searching for indicators and characteristics for each concept in order to define that concept. Comparison of interviews from different groups [is when] interviews from two different groups are compared with regard to the experience of a specific phenomenon...[the aim] is to complete the picture already obtained and to enrich the information on the first group (p. 395-399).

By comparing responses across interviews with the HELP participants, I was able to develop an idea of what the major themes of the study were, how I would categorize my data, and possible codes to connect all that I collected (Boeije, 2002). I followed the constant comparative method by keeping track of new ideas, themes, and categories in a notebook that I

brought to each interview. I asked the research participants to define unfamiliar words or terms spoken during the interview in order for me to understand them and the context in which they were spoken. I kept a running log in my notebook of the words and terms, and utilized them in subsequent interviews, when appropriate, to better convey the questions and themes that I wanted the participant to understand and from which for me to obtain deeper and richer information (Charmaz, 1996; Corbin and Strauss, 1990).

Initial interviews with HELP constituents included questions (see Appendix D) centered on HELP's results, which addressed the Haitian brain drain. However, soon after the first few interviews, additional themes emerged and the questions were broadened to include HELP's strategies that appeared to address university access and persistence. By constantly comparing participant's responses, I was able to create these new categories and eventually, sub themes within each category. My data collection included reviewing the responses from my initial HELP participant interview, then responses between like HELP groups (student to student, alumni to alumni, staff to staff), and finally across these three groups, to confirm that the themes that emerged and categories I created were consistent. By constantly reviewing my data, I was able to introduce additional questions and ideas in subsequent interviews. Soon, responses became similar, themes were shared consistently across groups, and no new information emerged, which indicated to me that I had reached saturation (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Saumure & Given, 2008).

### **Language and Translation**

Participant interviews were conducted in English and Haitian Creole with the HELP constituents and non-HELP participants. Many of the HELP students and alumni began their interviews in English but as the questioning progresses and their responses became more detailed, they switched to responding to questions in Haitian Creole. I am a heritage speaker of

Haitian Creole, which means I speak it because my parents do. My parents did not teach me how to read and write in Haitian Creole because they were never taught how to do this themselves. The written standard became official in 1979, after my parents immigrated to the United States. As a result, there were a few instances when I was unable to describe certain terms in Haitian Creole to the participants. Conversely, there were times when participants could not understand my questions due to my heavy American accent or mispronunciations of words. When this occurred, I showed the participant the question that was written in French so that they could understand what I was asking of them. I worked to improve my language capacity through many informal conversations with the HELP students I lived with at *Ducombe*, one of the HELP residences, and with staff members while I was at the HELP Center. Even still, I do not speak, read, or write French, and so therefore my questions were translated into French for me. Although I have a rudimentary understanding of French because Haitian Creole is loosely derived from it, I had to rely on my translated questions to move some of the conversations along. At times, my research was conducted in three languages (English, French, and Haitian Creole), with Haitian Creole serving as the connector.

The major HELP documents that were used as background information for this study had already been translated from French to English in preparation to my 2012 consultancy visit to HELP. The organization's website is written in English. Transcriptions of the interviews, field notes, and self-reflections were conducted at the conclusion of the research study. Interviews that included Haitian Creole and French were first transcribed and then translated into English. Two native Haitian Creole speakers, who also speak French, assisted with this process. All of the transcriptions were saved as individual Microsoft Word documents and the files were labeled using the title or the initials of the interviewee.

## **Interview Sites and Consent**

My interviews were held in a variety of locations to ensure comfort and convenience for my participants. As previously mentioned, my interview with the Ministry of Education Director, Paul Simon, occurred at a cafe located a short distance from the Ministry. The interview with the Associate Director of INURED occurred at the INURED office. All other interviews were conducted at the HELP Center (in the conference room, a staff office, the computer lab, or outside in the courtyard) or at *Ducombe*. The location of the interviews within the HELP center and residence was dependent on availability of space. All participants signed a consent form (see Appendix E, F, G, H) agreeing to participate in my research study. The consent form described my research and the parameters of my study. Participants also completed a participant information sheet (see Appendix I) and were asked to select a pseudonym. Those who did not were assigned one. Each participant gave me permission to record his or her interview. One HELP participant, HELP Advisor Olivier Montout, asked for a copy his interview. I agreed and transferred the digital recording of his interview to his laptop.

## **Data Analysis**

My role during the interview was as a learner (Glesne, 2011) and my goal as the researcher was to make meaning of what the participants shared during their interviews. Charmaz (1996) explained that interpretive analysis relies on knowledge from the inside and that it “attempts to describe, explain, and understand the lived experiences of a group of people” (p. 30). Prior to the interviews, I developed a set of questions, which drove the initial data collected. As my interview schedule progressed, follow up questions were added to reflect new themes and ideas that emerged during initial interviews (Creswell, 2009). The themes that emerged from this study through constant comparative analysis emerged organically. As participants spoke about

their experiences, I attempted to make sense of them by grouping them into categories that seemed to fit what participants were describing such as “access” and “persistence.” As the interviews progressed, however, I realized that their experiences of barriers to university access and persistence were not similar to those experienced in the U.S.; instead they described a situation that seemed to be unique to Haiti.

### **Coding Scheme**

Gibbs (2007) explained that coding is “how you define what the data you are analyzing are about” (p. 38). For this study, I found it useful to code each transcription by hand; coding line by line allowed me to be immersed in my data (Creswell, 2009). Initially, my coding scheme was based on the two research questions for this study and I coded into these two large chunks (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). Hand coding my transcriptions allowed me to become more intimate with my data and provided a level of ease for going back and forth from one transcription to another. As the researcher, my coding “*is analysis, is deep reflection about and interpretation of the data’s meanings*” (Miles et al., 2014, p. 72). As I studied my data during my second round of coding, my coding was more inductive and more themes and sub themes emerged (Miles, et al., 2014), for example: including types of barriers to access and persistence and the different types of HELP strategies. This coding scheme allowed for a deeper analysis of the data I collected and helped with better analyzing my coded material (Charmaz, 1996).

After first grouping my data into two classifications based on my two research focuses, Higher Education in Haiti and HELP; I then created four broad categories based on my research questions and what I was learning from the study participants. Research question one categories were: “challenges,” and “what is going well.” Research question two categories were: “HELP strategies” and “post HELP.” My goal was to make the data I collected more manageable to

analyze in order for me to make sense of all the information that I was collecting. By taking a step back to view data, I was able to see patterns across the data that were grouped within these four broad categories (Charmaz, 1996).

In my next round of coding, I dug even deeper into the data to make the broad categories smaller by coding the various themes that emerged from my interviews and arranging them into hierarchies and subcategories (Charmaz, 1996; Creswell, 2009). My subthemes related to research question one described multiple challenges and multiple successes within the Haitian higher education system. Sub themes related to research question two represented the various components that HELP employs that participants described as being supportive of students and the different thoughts that participants conveyed regarding life post HELP. I continued to review and refine my codes until they most accurately represented the perceptions conveyed by study participants and the nuances of their experiences both at HELP and within the Haitian higher education system. After I finalized the coding of my data, I began the process of interpreting the themes and experiences of the study participants to include in my chapter on findings.

### **Trustworthiness and Validity**

Given my positionality as a Haitian-American scholar of higher education now studying the Haitian higher education system, I recognized that credibility could be an issue. I also recognized that my trustworthiness could be questioned, given my familiarity with HELP due to my prior experience as a consultant who evaluated the range of services and programs of the organization. Prior to each interview and when coding my data, I asked myself a series of reflective questions to ensure that I was not “seeing what I wanted to see” but instead was being as objective as possible when determining and defining the themes that emerged (Glesne, 2011). These questions were as follows: “Why am I asking this question?” “Why is this particular

response standing out to me?” and “Why has this information resonated with me?” I wanted to ensure that my findings were based on the realities of HELP and that they were truly reflective of the participants’ views, as opposed to any subconscious need for me to find a “shining” example of what is going well in Haiti to counter the current pervasive deficit narratives about the country. This was important to me to ensure that I did not demonstrate any bias or pose any threats to the validity of my conclusions by only selecting data that stood out to me as the researcher (Maxwell, 2005), as a Haitian-American.

I used two methods of validity testing to rule out validity threats. The first test was respondent validation. According to Maxwell (2005), respondent validation is “systematically soliciting feedback about your data and conclusions from the people you are studying” (p. 111). As I progressed through my interview schedule, I would share the responses from previous participants regarding a particular question or theme to learn their thoughts and perceptions of the current interview participant. Their feedback helped me with the internal conclusions that I was beginning to draw as my project progressed. It also helped me to learn that I was not misinterpreting what I gleaned from previous interviews, particularly in ones that were conducted in multiple languages.

The second test was triangulation. This study utilized multiple data sources: interviews and interactions with HELP students, alumni, and staff, and two non-HELP individuals; HELP documents and information from the HELP website; and my field notes. Grandy (2010) noted that in qualitative case studies “triangulation is a common means through which researchers increase the trustworthiness of their representation of the case” (p. 1). The data or evidence collected revealed consensus from participants both regarding the challenges within the Haitian higher education system and the HELP strategies that participants believed supported their

success (Maxwell, 2005). Member checking also helped to ensure that what I understood I learned from the interviews was in fact what the participant intended to convey. Cho and Trent (2006) described this process, “member checking occurs throughout the inquiry, and is a process in which collected data is ‘played back’ to the informant to check for perceived accuracy and reactions” (p. 322). Lastly, I consulted with a peer who is familiar with conducting qualitative case studies. We discussed my data, coding scheme, and themes that emerged. This feedback loop provided outside and objective suggestions that allowed me to refine my findings and strengthen my conclusions.

### **Limitations of the Study**

As is consistent with all research studies, limitations exist for this study as well (Maxwell, 2005). First, the study was conducted during the busiest month of the year for the HELP organization. Staff spent time rewriting organizational handbooks and preparing for the close of the academic year. They were busy planning the HELP graduation, which I was able to attend. Simultaneously, they were in a period of staff transition, in which two staff members were ending their contracts and two new members were beginning. HELP was also nearing the end of their recruitment season and they were transitioning into their extensive orientation phase, which I describe in Chapter 4: Country and Organization Context. There were many daily visits from prospective new students and their parents dropping off HELP applications and wanting to speak with HELP staff. HELP staff spent time interviewing new staff as well as hosting visitors, in person and virtually via Skype.

It was also a busy time for students. Those who were attending the state university were in the midst of their examination period and their time was spent studying and memorizing material. Because of the ongoing staff and student commitments, it was difficult at times to

schedule interviews and the length of many interviews were shortened due to participants' multiple competing priorities. The lack of access to higher education officials in Haiti was also a limitation. Their perspectives could have provided an alternative or an explanation to the challenges within the higher education system that were discussed by study participants.

Another limitation of the study was language. Language often became a barrier while conducting interviews. Some of the participants did not speak English, which led to a Haitian Creole only interview; which was at times difficult for me since I do not speak it on a daily basis. Some participants could not understand my Haitian Creole in light of my American accent, mispronunciation of words and terms, or due to malapropism (mistakenly using a word in Haitian Creole in place of a similar-sounding word) on my part. French was also a barrier for me when participants said words and terms that did not have a Haitian Creole equivalent. Language and a lack of English translations of data also influenced and became a limitation of this study. I cannot read or write French; therefore I was unable to use any source material from Haiti, the Ministry of Education, or other relevant resources that were written in French that could have been useful to this study. The lack of ample statistical data on education, and more importantly to this study, higher education statistics in Haiti, was a limitation.

Finally, another limitation is related to the conceptual framework of this study. The conceptual framework used for this study was limiting because it did not encompass the type of barriers to university access and persistence that study participants experienced at their universities in Haiti (for example lack of financial aid, housing, meal plans, computer labs, libraries, high faculty absenteeism), which is vastly different than the type of barriers experienced in U.S. contexts. I would have preferred to use a framework that was developed from or situated in a low-income country educational experience. There are other theories that

could have spoken to income; for example, economic theory, human capital, post-colonial theory, that would have helped to frame higher education in Haiti. However, none of these seemed to fit the nature of this study. Specifically, using a conceptual framework that incorporated “access” and “persistence” allowed me to analyze the experiences of the participants and to organize findings from a higher education lens. Despite these limitations, this study contains rich data on the experiences of study participants within the higher education environment in Haiti. It provides an alternative approach for responding to higher education challenges when in locations like Haiti.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **COUNTRY AND ORGANIZATION CONTEXT**

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a context for higher education in Haiti and an overview of the Haitian Education and Leadership Program (HELP). This chapter will provide a brief history of Haiti and the state of education in the country, including higher education. Next, the chapter will provide an overview of HELP, including the various components of the program. I provide this context chapter in order to emphasize the role of HELP in addressing higher education challenges in Haiti, which will be further detailed in the findings included in Chapter 5: Findings.

#### **Haiti**

Haiti, a Caribbean nation, has a population of approximately nine million people. It occupies the western portion of Hispaniola, the island it shares with the Dominican Republic. Haiti is a former colony and became the first Black republic to declare its independence, in 1804, after a successful slave revolt against France. Once one of the wealthiest colonies in the Caribbean (Fick, 1990), Haiti is now noted as being the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere. Further, in addition to its economic challenges, Haiti has had to contend with a series of natural disasters, including the devastating January 12, 2010 earthquake that demolished most of its capital city, Port-au-Prince. It is estimated that approximately 300,000 individuals, including many teachers and students, lost their lives as a result of the earthquake. Under the leadership of its most recent presidents, changes have been made to improve the educator sector, in particular primary and secondary education with the support of international funding organizations. There has also been an emphasis in improving higher education in the country. Initiatives have included university partnerships with other countries Haiti Libre, 2011a), the

building of University Roi Henry Christophe which was built and paid for by the Dominican Republic (Haiti Libre, 2011b), the establishment of an Inter-University Consortium for the Rebuilding of Haiti's education system that is comprised of 18 Haitian and Canadian universities (Haiti Libre, 2012), increased scholarships offered by host countries to Haitian students to attend institutions abroad (Haiti Libre, 2014a) and the opening of a new center for education quality, which will address higher education as well in 2014 (Haiti Libre, 2014b).

### **Brief History of Haiti**

Approximately half a million slaves fought Haiti's war for independence. Haiti defeated France on May 18, 1803 and General Dessalines declared Haiti an independent nation on January 1, 1804 (McPherson, 2013). Haiti is the first post-colonial Black nation in the world ("CIA," n.d.) and the second independent republic in the Americas, only behind the United States (Baur, 1970). At the time of Haiti's independence, Haiti was considered the richest colony of the French empire (Pierre-Louis, 2011). During Haiti's 211 years of independence, the country has been marked by political instability, violence, poverty, and a series of natural disasters due to both man made decisions and acts of god, including a devastating earthquake in 2010 (Carlson et al., 2011). Haiti's government has experienced a series of dictatorships, a United States occupation from 1915 to 1933, coup d'états', and its first democratic election for president in 1991, which later resulted in his exile (Pierre-Louis, 2011).

After successfully earning its independence, Haiti was shunned by the international community and was not formally recognized as a republic by other countries (Wesley, 1917). France did not acknowledge Haiti as a free republic, one French minister writing, "Negro people in arms, occupying a country it has soiled by the most criminal of acts is a horrible spectacle for all white nations" (Nicholls, 1996, p. 36). France did not recognize Haiti until 1833, after Haiti

agreed to pay reparations to its former colonizer. Haiti's shutout from the international community resulted in a major blow to its economy, an underfunded infrastructure, and a poorly resourced education system (Clement, 1979). According to "About Haiti" (n.d.), "to recognize Haiti as a country was to recognize the right of slaves to revolt, and this was obviously anathema to the colonial powers, all of which feared others would follow the Haitian example" (para 3). The United States, still active in its slave trade at the time of Haiti's revolution, had a relationship with France, which later resulted in the Louisiana Purchase (Matthewson, 1995). Although there was some debate in wealthier circles in the U.S. on whether or not the country should recognize Haiti ("Independence in Haiti," 1852), the United States did not recognize Haiti until 1862.

Loomba (1998) helps us to comprehend how the legacy of colonization influences the policies and practices of certain regions and peoples in contemporary times. Lighter skinned "mulattos" made up the top percentages of the Haitian population. Their color gave them status and they were the most educated, affluent, and powerful class in Haiti, a distinction that lasted well into the first Duvalier presidency (Dupuy, 2014). Jean-Bertrand Aristide became the first democratically elected president of Haiti in 1991. President Aristide, a former Roman Catholic Priest, introduced social and economic reforms in Haiti, which threatened the power and interests of the ruling class. He lost his presidency later in 1991 after a military coup in 1991, returned to his role from 1994-1996, and again from 2001-2004, this final presidential administration ending in a coup d'état (Dupuy, 2005). Aristide returned to Haiti in 2011 after a seven-year exile.

During his tenure as president, Aristide believed that many of the challenges in Haiti could be traced to France demanding to be paid for the slaves it lost in the Haitian revolt, and threatening re-invasion. In response to France's demands, Haiti took out international loans to

repay 60 million dollars, which took from 1825 until 1947 to pay off. According to Pierre-Louis (2011), Haiti borrowed money externally and internally, and it used its revenue from taxes and debts to pay off its “debt,” essentially paying France back for its freedom (Jarvis, 2010). Since then, Haiti has the distinction of being the least-developed country in the Americas and one of the poorest countries in the world (“CIA” n.d.). The country has high rates of poverty and unemployment and low rates of educational attainment and access to quality food and health care.

Luzincourt and Gulbrandson (2010) asserted, “the colonial system from which Haiti emerged has had a profound and lasting impact on Haitian education” (p. 1). After the overthrow, many educators of French origin returned to France (Pierre-Louis, 2011). This history can be traced to current “linguistic systems of exclusion,” in which French is the primary working language and language of instruction (Luzincourt & Gulbrandson, 2010, p. 6). Haiti’s developmental needs are great and were exacerbated by the 2010 earthquake. Haiti’s education system, already among the lowest worldwide in terms of school enrollment and literacy, was severely impacted (Carlson et al., 2011; Erickson, 2004). The majority of universities were damaged, and hundreds of faculty and thousands of students perished as a result. Further, the Interuniversity Institute for Research and Development (INURED) (2010), reports that a large portion of university graduates perished in the quake and an approximately 40% of Haitian public officials went missing (Carlson et al., 2011). Despite some progress, Haiti’s education system is sorely deficient in almost every way. Limited resources, insufficient learning facilities, dated curriculum, inadequately trained teachers, and the instructional language barrier have created a situation in which students are educationally disadvantaged before they show up in the classroom.

## **Primary and Secondary Education in Haiti**

According to its 1805 constitution, Haiti was the first country in the Western Hemisphere to promote universal education and according to its constitution today, every child born in Haiti is entitled to nine free years of education, books and other materials (Vallas & Pankovits, n.d.). Primary and secondary schools in Haiti can be grouped into three categories; for-profit schools operated by private entrepreneurs, non-profit schools run by religious organizations, and public schools that are funded by the national and local government (Vallas & Pankovits, n.d.). Because the vast numbers of primary and secondary institutions are privately run and funded, children are often taught by a curriculum that is not controlled or regulated by a standard set by the Ministry of Education (Doucet & Marcelin, 2011; Vallas & Pankovits, n.d.).

Despite the historical legacy and contemporary rights of the Haitian constitution, the current state of the education system in Haiti is indicative of the many challenges to all aspects of society in Haiti: education, health, infrastructure, politics and leadership. For all stages of educational experiences, students are faced with a learning environment that the World Bank categorizes as below international standards for effective learning (Salmi, 2000). Given the extreme poverty in the country, students are disadvantaged prior to attending kindergarten. A vast number of students are in class levels lower than their ages indicate they should be. Salmi (2000) noted that “only 38 out of 1000 students who enter their first year of primary school complete secondary school and half of them are ‘over-age’ students” (p. 171). Doucet and Marcelin (2011) explained most children did not have access to public education prior to the devastating 2010 earthquake. This was due in part to the required school fees that were too high for families to absorb.

**Language.** Language has also served as a barrier to access to education for children in Haiti. Although Haiti became an independent country in 1804, Haitian Creole did not become an official language of Haiti until 1987, 183 years later (Schieffelin and Doucet, 1994). Today, both *Kreyol Ayisyen* (Haitian Creole) and French are recognized as Haiti's official languages by the Haitian constitution. Although Haitian Creole is one of the national languages of Haiti, and is spoken by all, its use as a language of instruction is controversial (Doucet & Marcelin, 2011). French is spoken by a small percentage, an estimated 5%, of the Haitian population and it is the primary academic and working language in Haiti (Dejean, 2010). Low (as cited in Hebblethwaite, 2011) described the French versus Haitian Creole imbalance in Haiti as an apartheid through language. The use of French disadvantages those who do not have the privilege of receiving a formal education. The continued and persistent use of French has resulted in a language barrier between the poor and the elite (Gibson, 2011), which can be traced back to Haiti's colonial ties to France (Hebblethwaite, 2012; Loomba, 1998).

The persistent use of French has links to Haiti's colonial history as well as to the elite in Haiti whose separation from the masses is reinforced by this linguistic demarcation. Students and their families resist attempts to decrease French language skills because of the belief that their social status will decrease with diminished French skills (Trouillot-Levy, 2010). Educators and families have also strengthened the practice of primarily using French due to their negative views of Haitian Creole as a mechanism for teaching and learning. Many in Haiti perceive Haitian Creole as a primitive and an inferior language (Hebblewaite, 2011) and they have a perception that Haitian Creole is not necessarily worthy of being used in the classroom (Gibson, 2011). Okrent (2013) found that some in Haiti believe that the French language provides Haitian citizens access to a global language, which Haitian Creole denies them. Laguerre (as cited in

Daniel, 2013) noted that French remains a symbolic language for Haitians and that many do not want to leave this language behind. Parents of school-age children are also complicit in maintaining the status quo. They believe French to be a far superior language. Many of them prefer that their students learn in French, despite the great difficulty their children experience in the classroom.

DeJean (2006) as cited in Hebblethwaite (2012) found that despite French being the language of instruction in Haiti's schools systems, approximately 80% of teachers in the country do not have a good grasp on the language, resulting in a small percentage of students completing their education. According to Bentolila (1987), teachers, particularly those in rural Haiti, primarily only used French while teaching in the classroom and they had "enormous difficulty in mastering [French] so as to engage in a true pedagogical dialogue with his students" (p. 80). Hebblethwaite (2012) further noted the use of French has a correlation with the high rates of illiteracy and consequently, poverty in Haiti. It easy to comprehend why students have difficulty learning the language given the difficulty that teachers experienced with their own mastery of French,

DeGraffe and Ruggles (2014) describe an educational challenge in Haiti whereby students are required, and struggle, to learn, read, and write in French, a language they do not speak, as opposed to in Haitian Creole, a language that is native to all Haitians. Although the roots of Haitian Creole can be traced to French, the languages are distinct enough to be considered two different languages. In other words, being fluent in Haitian Creole does mean that one is also fluent in French. Students are taught and learn through rote memorization (Hebblethwaite, 2012), which has resulted in students memorizing letters and sounds in French without truly understanding the meaning of the words they are repeating in the classroom

(DeGraffe & Ruggles, 2013). This phenomenon has led to low levels of literacy and reading comprehension in French. If students do not have adequate reading skills, they will then also lack the skills necessary to enhance their vocabulary and reading comprehension. Hebblethwaite (2012) further noted that students with poor reading skills “cannot interpret texts, make inferences, draw conclusions, and discover new information” (p. 275). Messaoud-Galusi and Miksik (2010) stressed poor reading skills “dramatically impacts the acquisition of other scholastic competencies, since in order to grasp a lesson or discussion on mathematics, it is necessary to be able to read correctly” (p. 30).

This language issue in Haiti is compounded by the fact that government-issued textbooks are written in French (Bracken, 2014). The issue is not that students are incapable understanding educational content in general; instead, it is that they do not understand French specifically. This is problematic because after basic education, most of the education in Haiti is in French and the national exam, required for university enrollment, is in French. If students begin their schooling with a shaky foundation in French, it is no question that their matriculation in primary and secondary education is challenged, as is their potential for accessing higher education.

**Reform.** There have been five main efforts in the last four decades that had the goal of responding to some of the challenges within the Haitian education system. The Bernard Reform (1978) was an attempt to modernize the Haitian education system and make it more efficient (Hadjadj, 2000) and the aim of the National Plan on Education and Training (1997) was to address failures within the Haitian education system and create appropriate interventions (Luzincourt & Gulbrandson, 2010). Hadjadj (2000) also noted that Haiti experienced 13 governments and 23 Ministers of Education between 1980 and 2000, which had weakened educational growth and progress during that time. The Support Program to Strengthen Quality

Education in Haiti (2003) was a three-year project to strengthen the educational quality and teacher training (Vallas & Pankovits, n.d.). The Presidential Commission for Education in Haiti (2008) provided recommendations for the national curriculum which included 100% enrollment of all school-age children and a free education to all, including textbooks and materials (Carlson et al., 2012). The most recent reform involved Haiti's president signing a framework with its technical and financial partners and several international organizations (the InterAmerican Development Bank, the World Bank, the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie, the World Food Programme, UNICEF, the European Union, and UNESCO) to develop and implement the Operational Plan for Education 2010-2015 ("Operational plan of education," 2011). This plan, in part, was to rebuild the education sector after the earthquake in 2010. Historically, Haiti has provided less than 10 % of its budget to education with just a fraction of it to higher education (Haiti Libre, 2011). As a result, very few students make it to the university level of their education. Soon after entering office, President Martelly announced changes to the education sector. He stressed the importance of vocational and professional schools (Haiti Libre 5/28/2011) and shared a new source of funding in which "incoming minutes and money transfers" would be charged a small fee, which will potentially raise millions of dollars for the education system (Haiti Libre 5/27/11).

Table 4.1 outlines educational statistics for Haiti for 2002-2003. As you can see, student enrollment from basic education to higher education decreases dramatically. Access to higher education is dependent on a successful secondary education. How countries respond to pressures and to the challenges within their educational system directly impact the transition of students from secondary to higher education (Belyakov et al., 2009).

Despite the aforementioned reforms, improvements to Haiti's primary and secondary education system have been negligible. This has caused a domino effect in which higher education enrollment in Haiti has been minimal (see Table 4.1). For the fortunate few who attend primary schools, statistics have demonstrated that an overwhelming majority will not attend secondary schools, and only a fraction, approximately 1%, will graduate from a university in Haiti (Jadotte, 2012; Ratha & Shaw, 2007).

Table 4.1

*Public/Private Student Enrollments in Haiti<sup>3</sup>*

	Public	Private	Total
Basic Education (Fondamental 1-2)	390,000	1,716,000	2,106,000
Lower Secondary (Fondamental 3)	87, 400	248,900	336,300
Upper Secondary (Secondaire)	55,400	181,800	237, 200
Higher Education	28,000	12,000	40,000

## Higher Education in Haiti

Haiti's first postsecondary institution was founded in 1815 (Dumay, 2010). Doucet and Marcelin (2011) described the Haitian public university system as elitist and stable between the late forties and the late seventies. They further explained that due to political and academic choices made by decision makers, the university system was not attuned to the development needs of the country. The State University of Haiti-Université d'Etat d'Haïti (UEH) remained the only university system in Haiti until the 1980s, at which time there was a great migration from rural areas to urban centers (INURED, 2010). Then the university system was not able to

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<sup>3</sup> Ministry for Education and Professional Formation (2007) education statistics as cited in Wolff (2008). These figures are estimated for 2006 figures but reflect 2002-2003 data.

accommodate the influx of individuals wanting to enroll, which resulted in a number of private universities, independent of the Ministry, providing the higher education that they sought.

Doucet and Marcelin (2011) described these private entities as having “no standards, no peer review, no certification, and no accreditation” (p. 273). Table 4.2 provides statistics on Haiti’s higher education system:

Table 4.2

*Higher Education Statistics in Haiti*<sup>4</sup>

	Amount	Note
Haiti Population	9,996,731	As of June 22, 2014
Student Enrollment	40,000	70% in public universities, 30% in private colleges in 2007
Graduation Rate	40%	
Brain Drain Rate	85%	Percentage of university graduates who live and work outside of the country
Public Universities	14	Including the State University of Haiti
Private Universities	145	10 offer accredited education, remaining 135 are unregulated
Number of Teachers	800	At the State University of Haiti in 2005

Presently, UEH is the largest institution of higher education in Haiti. Wolff (2009) explained that students and faculty elect the rectors, vice-rectors, and deans and as a result, the university leaders often choose to answer to them rather than the leadership from above. The State University oversees private institutions, which causes frictions between both entities because they compete against each other for students (Dumay, 2010). Of Haiti’s 145 higher-education institutions, only 10 of them are licensed to operate. The remaining majority are “bare-bones, storefront operations;” the Ministry designates three employees to accredit new institutions and review existing ones (Downie, 2012). Even though the Ministry of Education

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<sup>4</sup> Vallas, P. & Pankovits, T. ( n.d.)  
CIA The World Fact Book-Haiti  
Dumay (2010)  
Gosselin, R., & Pierre, J. (2007)  
Wolff (2008)

governs the universities and other institutions providing higher education in Haiti (Salmi, 2000), they have little control over institutions that are privately funded. Luzincourt and Gulbrandson (2010) noted that historically, the government has controlled the activities of students, which in the past has resulted in “mass demonstrations, university closings, and the destruction of buildings, school materials, and equipment” (p. 3). Another challenge for universities in Haiti is limited resources for teaching and learning (libraries, books, teaching materials, computers, and labs) and faculty who have inadequate training (Carlson et al., 2011).

The higher education system in Haiti does not have the capacity to support all of the talented students who hope to earn a degree there. Consequently, many of the students who receive primary and secondary education in Haiti choose to earn a university degree outside of the country, notably in Canada, the Dominican Republic, France, and the United States (INURED, 2010). This trend has resulted in approximately 85% of Haitians who are fortunate enough to receive a university degree, either in Haiti or outside of the country, choosing to live abroad (Clinton, 2012).

Doucet and Marcelin (2011) noted that when the 2010 earthquake occurred, the higher education system was already a “slow-moving disaster” (p. 273). Reshef (as cited in Ibanez, 2010) reported that 28 of Haiti's 32 major universities were completely destroyed and the four remaining universities were severely damaged after the 2010 earthquake. INURED (2010) noted that many of Haiti's skilled professionals were killed, and an unknown number of professors, professionals, and students left the country after the earthquake. Their departure has contributed to the high rate of brain drain of individuals who are critical to the development of the country. The 2010 earthquake exacerbated the higher education challenges in Haiti, according to Doucet and Marcelin (2011), “the course of higher education was completely destroyed” (p. 271). Due to

the loss of faculty and the higher education infrastructure, many students have pursued grants that will support their education outside of Haiti, and scholars have been lured away with fellowships to work in other countries (INURED 2010). The low numbers of students who attend university and the large numbers of university educated students who leave Haiti has resulted in a perpetual cycle of a broken educational system of underprepared students and an unqualified population of professionals to educate them. Simply put, "the nation has suffered an irreparable loss of... human capital...it cannot be overemphasized that higher education be a priority for Haiti's rebuilding strategy" (INURED p. 2).

### **Haitian Education and Leadership Program (HELP)**

This section is a compilation of HELP information gathered from my field notes and the documents received during my 2012 consultancy visit to the organization, responses from the interviews with HELP participants for this study, and the HELP website.

The Haitian Education and Leadership Program, or HELP, is an organization centered on higher education located in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. It is independent from the Ministry of Education and it is not a function of any university or other institution of higher education in Haiti. According to its mission, the aim of HELP is "to create, through merit- and needs-based university scholarships, a community of young professionals and leaders who promote a more just society in Haiti" ("HELP's mission," n.d., para 1). The HELP scholarship includes university tuition, a loan of books, access to a computer lab with Internet access, housing, a monthly stipend, three enrichment courses, as well as academic and counseling support ("Admissions," n.d., para 1).

HELP accomplishes its mission through the various components of its programs beginning with its recruitment, admission, and orientation of new students, with student advising,

three enrichment courses, its career and alumni services, and its Alumni Contribution Model. HELP values gender development and sustainable practices. It operationalizes these values by reserving 40% of each incoming class for female students and by having a staff that is comprised by a majority of women, who are also represented in leadership positions (“Values,” n.d., para 1). HELP’s sustainable practices include waste management includes composting and recycling organic waste and paper materials, recycling rain water, and various community engagement initiatives (“Values,” n.d., para 2).

HELP students are required to attend one of the universities recognized by the *Ministère de l’Education Nationale d’Haïti* (Ministry of Education) and affiliated with the *Agence universitaire de la Francophonie* (“AUF” Francophone University Association). The five universities that HELP students are enrolled in are: *Université d’Etat d’Haïti* (state university system), *Université Quisqueya* (private university), *Ecole Supérieure d’Infotronique d’Haïti* (information technology), *Centre de Techniques de Planification et d’Economie Appliquée* (planning and economy) and *Université Notre-Dame d’Haïti* (Catholic institution) (“Admissions,” n.d., para 1). Ministry of Education recognition and AUF affiliation for universities is critical for students who want to apply for programs outside of Haiti because it indicates that the institution is internationally accredited (“How we Work,” n.d., para 2).

### **Recruitment, Admission, Orientation**

HELP’s goal is to recruit high achieving students who demonstrate the most financial need (“Admissions,” n.d., para 2). In order to achieve this goal, HELP casts a wide net during its recruitment season. The admissions office utilizes several methods to reach students, particularly those furthest away from the capital. Based on the data collected, word-of-mouth by current HELP students has proven to be one of the successful strategies for recruiting new students.

HELP also relies on recommendations from secondary school teachers and principals who select their top students to submit HELP applications. Additionally, local pastors aid HELP with recruitment as well as spots on radio stations. Lastly, HELP also visits villages across Haiti to host information sessions regarding the program. In 2013, HELP students began to participate in the information sessions hosted in their home village.

HELP has two main criteria for admitting its scholars. First, the students must have straight A's. A rationale for this criterion is that students need to demonstrate that they have the potential to maintain the academic rigor of full-time university courses while at the same time meeting the all of the expectations of HELP (attending HELP courses and related activities). Second, students must come from families who cannot afford to pay the cost of sending their child to university. Given the cost of university attendance in Haiti is approximately \$500USD a semester ("Ways to Give," n.d., para 1), families who cannot afford this sum are likely unable to find any other means for supporting their child's higher education aspirations. As a part of the application process, potential new HELP scholars must write an essay that describes a Haitian problem and includes a local solution, which is a linkage to the HELP mission of developing professionals and leadership who promote a more just society in Haiti. Applications are then reviewed and students are selected to participate in the next phase of the application process, which includes an interview at the HELP office and successfully passing their national exams. The final phase of the initial application process is for students to be invited to attend orientation at HELP.

The new student orientation is held for approximately 6-8 weeks. The goal of orientation is to prepare students for their university entrance exams (required for entry to Haitian universities) and university work. Students are required to apply to two entrance exams to ensure

that they are accepted into at least one university. The orientation includes an academic component, called a *prefac*, which aims to support and increase students' academic level. Current HELP scholars, who serve as mentors to prospective new students during orientation, support the *prefac*. Also during orientation, students are exposed to the mission and philosophy of HELP. This process includes reviewing the student handbook, learning the five pillars of HELP (respect, sacrifice, courage, service, rigor), and the expectations for being a HELP scholar.

If invited to orientation, students live in one of the four residences that HELP rents in the capital. Living in one of the HELP residences during orientation introduces students to living in a mixed gender community of HELP scholars. Students also begin the acclimation process of living in Port-au-Prince, the capital of Haiti. For many of the students, it is their first time being away from their families and also their first time visiting and living in a city. At the conclusion of orientation, prospective HELP students attend a second interview. It is then that the recruitment and admission staff makes a decision regarding the admission to HELP for each student who completed the orientation process.

### **Academic Advising and Counseling**

HELP employs staff members who serve as Advisors to the HELP scholars ("How we Work," n.d., para 1). All of the advisors support the academic and non-academic needs of the students. Each HELP scholar receives an advisor and retains the same advisor through the completion of their university degree and the end of their HELP participation. One of the HELP advisors serves as the Thesis Advisor, whose specific role is to assist all graduating HELP students with successfully completing their university thesis requirement. Another HELP advisor serves as both the Career Services Manager and Alumni Coordinator.

Advisors are given a guide that outlines the roles and responsibilities of HELP advisors. The advisors begin their role with new students when reviewing prospective students' application files. During orientation, advisors serve as coordinators and support students through the process, including helping students identify two university programs for which they want to apply. After orientation, the advisors help to select which students will be offered admission to HELP. Advisors have a caseload of approximately 15-40 students, the precise number depending on their other HELP responsibilities. Their students may be enrolled in any of the 5 universities previously mentioned, each institution different from the other, including the different *facultes*, or schools, within the state university system. As a result, Advisors have to learn the expectations, norms, schedules, etc. of each of the universities that their students attend.

In their academic guidance role, the HELP advisors assist students in selecting their majors. This is done in conjunction with the students based on their academic capabilities and their field of study interest. Advisors also serve as a liaison between HELP and the students. The Advisors provide information to students regarding the expectations and procedures of HELP, and they also help them understand the rules and responsibilities as set forth by Universities. Advisors assist students with their academic needs: study skills and habits, understanding university faculty expectations, choosing academic courses, and determining solutions for additional needs that may arise. Advisors are also responsible for tracking student progress and determining interventions if complications or challenges occur.

In their non-academic roles, HELP advisors also assist students with their out-of-classroom needs. They help students with transitioning: from secondary school, to university, to living in Port-au-Prince, to living in community housing, to their general participation in HELP. They also support students with difficulties that may arise including family concerns, romantic

relations, emotional/mental/physical health problems, including appropriate referrals when necessary, and other personal needs that may arise. Advisors also respond to student disciplinary concerns at HELP. Addressing these concerns ensures that academic advisors respond to challenges that may be impacting the academic and social development and growth of HELP scholars.

### **Enrichment Courses**

In addition to providing full scholarships, housing, and academic support, HELP provides three mandatory enrichment courses (“How we Work,” n.d., para 1). These courses are a key component of what HELP offers to students. HELP’s scholars’ standout among other post-secondary graduates as a result of taking the English as a Second Language, Leadership, and Computer Science courses. HELP has found that both Haitian businesses and foreign organizations in Haiti are looking for the knowledge and soft skills that these enrichment courses provide.

**English as a second language (ESL).** The ESL department facilitates the English language acquisition of its students. Specifically, ESL supports the English reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills of HELP scholars. Students are in English classes two hours a week and have approximately one hour of homework. ESL also supports student’s English needs outside of the courses. For example ESL provides Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) preparation books for students who hope to participate in an academic experience or earn an advanced degree in the United States. Additionally, the ESL Manager supports students with applications for international study or opportunities that are written in English. In conjunction with the Career Services Manager, the ESL Manager assists students with writing

their cover letters and curriculum vitae's in English for academic and professional opportunities outside of the country.

**Leadership.** The leadership curriculum is taught using a social change model for leadership. Given HELP's mission of creating a more just Haitian society, students are required to take five years of the HELP leadership course. In their first two years, the course is taught in French and focuses on the "self," in other words the leadership potential that each HELP scholar possesses. The final three years of the course are taught in English and focus on the "other," in other words the HELP scholar's responsibility to his or her community and to the larger Haitian society. In conjunction with the leadership courses, students participate in service projects. In their first year, HELP students perform community service projects in and around HELP, including sustainability projects, waste management, and cleaning in the HELP center, on the HELP center grounds, and the sidewalks surrounding the HELP center. In subsequent years, HELP scholars provide service projects with local community organizations that address different needs in Haiti including class, gender, sexual identity, and education concerns, to name a few. HELP scholars also participate in various leadership activities include serving as a Chef du Centre d'Hébergement de HELP (CCHE), a Resident Assistant in one of the HELP residences, participating in hikes, and other low risk activities that help to foster the leadership development and growth of students.

**Computer science.** The Computer Science (CS) department is responsible for the running and maintenance of the computer systems at the HELP center. The department provides both staff and student training on how to utilize the computers in the staff offices and the HELP computer lab. It also serves as a help desk that troubleshoots problems that arise with the systems and software. The CS department provides three years of courses to the HELP scholars. During

these courses, students learn how to use computers (turning it off and on) as well as the various functions of the computer system. Students learn how to use software, such as Microsoft Office. They are taught how to create, save, and name documents, how to create and use formulas in Excel, how to develop a PowerPoint, and how to use Access. Students are also taught how to use the Internet for research. The future CS plan includes teaching how to type more proficiently. The CS department also offers internships to HELP scholars who are advanced students in their information technology studies at their university.

### **Career and Alumni Services**

HELP provides Career Services to its current scholars as well as services to its Alumni (“How we Work,” n.d., para 1). Career Services begins at orientation when prospective students are given a career test, which is based on a French/Canadian assessment. Once a student is a HELP scholar, the Career and Alumni Services Manager, Farah Paul, will provide them with other support. With a goal of HELP scholar employment in Haiti post university graduation, the Ms. Paul offers the following career guidance: workshops with guest speakers including HELP alumni, cover letter and curriculum vitae development, internship placement, job searching, mock interviews, and a “listening ear” for students who are in the decision making process. Although HELP does not and cannot guarantee employment, currently, 100% of HELP alumni who earn a baccalaureate degree and remain in Haiti are employed.

Alumni also receive assistance from HELP. They too receive cover letter and curriculum vitae support when hoping to pursue new employment opportunities. They are invited to workshops geared specifically for them to assist with their job search endeavors. HELP Alumni also support current HELP students by participating in workshops and discussing their jobs and perspective careers after completion of the program.

## **Alumni Contribution Model**

The Alumni Contribution Model (ACM) is a process by which HELP Alumni “pay forward” the support they received from HELP when they were scholars. It is a model by which alumni contribute to HELP based on their earning. Presently, HELP scholars who began the program in 2010, signed a contract committing to contributing 15% of their income to HELP for a period of 9 years. According to HELP statistics, HELP graduates make approximately \$15,000 U.S. dollars a year in Haiti, while the average national salary in Haiti is \$810 (“Results,” n.d.). According to the Associate Director of HELP, responsible for maintaining this alumni contribution program, the concept for the ACM began with HELP Alumni who started to contribute funds to the organization on their own. The ACM was developed to make the contribution toward the opportunity for future students a standard component of HELP. Students are introduced to the ACM during the recruitment process so that they are fully aware of this financial obligation of the program. It is discussed during orientation and it is reinforced again with parents and students prior to the signing of the ACM contract. The Associate Director of HELP had the following thought on the ACM “we don’t want this to be perceived by students as charity or *bagay blan* (white people stuff) you know, this is a program that is worthwhile, it’s providing something valuable to these students, the community, to Haiti by having a way that they can give back...it gives students a sense of if dignity.” (HELP Associate Director)

## **Participants Reflected in the Study**

The table below represents the participants reflected in this study and it includes their organization, title, and pseudonym and for students their university affiliation and academic major.

Table 4.3

*Participant Information*

<b>Organization</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>*University/Major</b>
HELP	Student	Olivia Jean	uniQ/Law
HELP	Student	Gregory Auguste	UEH/Agronomy
HELP	Student	Sherley Felix	uniQ/Law
HELP	Student	Marc Luc	uniQ/Agronomy
HELP	Student	Regine Nelson	uniQ/Education
HELP	Student	Stephan Calixte	ESIH/Information Technology
HELP	Student	Marie Claremont	ESIH/Management
HELP	Student	Winston Mondesir	uniQ/Agronomy
HELP	Alumni	Daniel Jacobs	ESIH/Computer
HELP	Alumni	Kesner Cesar	uniQ/Accounting
HELP	Alumni	Ernest Duncan	UEH/Medicine
HELP	Haiti Country Director	Haiti Country	
HELP	Associate Director	HELP Haiti CD	
HELP	Career and Alumni Services Manager	Farah Paul	
HELP	Academic Advisor	Olivier Mountout	
HELP	Thesis Advisor	Theodor Antoine	
HELP	ESL Program Manager	Myrtho Izikyel	
HELP	ESL/Leadership Course Instructor	Guy Andre	
HELP	Student Recruiter/Alumni	Margareth Mathieu	uniQ/Education
HELP	Student Services Manager/Alumni	Sara Samuel	uniQ/Law and Politics
HELP	Leadership Program Manager	Marie Belizaire	
HELP	Leadership Assistant	Nadia Hillaire	
HELP	Computer Science Assistant Manager	Viola Persine	
InterUniversity Institute for Research and Development (INURED)	Associate Director	INURED Associate Director	
Ministry of Education	Administrator	Paul Simon	

Table 4.4

*HELP Students/Alumni University Affiliation*

Nickname	Official Name	Type
uniQ	Université Quisqueya	Private University
UEH	Université d'Etat d'Haïti	State University
ESIH	Ecole Supérieure d'Infotronique d'Haïti	Information Technology

**Note:** Table 4.4 provides the official names for the universities listed in table 4.3

### **Summary of Haiti and Haitian Education and Leadership Program Context**

In this chapter, I elaborated on the educational experiences in Haiti. I provided a brief history of Haiti, which included details on its beginnings as an independent nation. I offered an explanation for the current state of Haiti's education by noting its colonial legacy and the ramifications of earning its freedom on the economic, and consequently, the educational system in the country. Discussing the historical background of Haiti provides a lens for understanding the complexities within the Haitian education system today. It provides insight on why some of the challenges for educational reform and progress continue to persist. Including an overview of the current state of education in Haiti, as well as the Haitian higher education system, provide a context for understanding the place of the Haitian Education and Leadership Program (HELP) within the higher education environment in the country.

My description of HELP provided a foundation for understanding the role of the organization in the lives of university students in Haiti. It included the various services that are offered and the strategies that the organization employs to support the academic success of the students in its program. The overview of HELP against the backdrop of the Haitian higher education systems underscores the stark contrast between these two organizations. I recognize that there can be several explanations for the different levels of success between the two. HELP

is a much smaller enterprise, which allows it to be nimble in its response to dynamic conditions. Haiti's educational system is a large and complex organization, which includes domestic, international, and historical influences.

The next chapter will include my findings from this study based on interviews with HELP students, alumni and staff, as well as two individuals outside of the organization who work in education and research in Haiti.

## CHAPTER 5

### FINDINGS

*All these big NGOs or the government all they're all worried about is grade school, which is awesome. You need to worry about grade school. But like you can't run a country with people that have only a high school education. –HELP Staff Member*

This quote supports my argument that higher education is important in low-income countries like Haiti. The previous chapter (Chapter 4) included an overview of the Haitian higher education system and the context for the Haitian Education and Leadership Program (HELP) in Haiti. In this chapter, I present findings from the study of HELP, a non-governmental organization that provides a range of services to university students in Haiti. For this chapter, findings, participant interviews are organized into two broad categories: “Perceptions of the Haitian higher education system,” and “HELP’s strategies for supporting the academic and future success of scholars.” The two thematic categories of Chapter 5 are taken from the overarching research questions, which are 1. How do key stakeholders perceive the challenges of access and persistence within the higher education system in Haiti? 2. How do Haitian Education and Leadership Program’s strategies support the academic and future success of its scholars?

The themes that emerged from the interviews related to the first research question are: the aftermath of the Haiti earthquake, barriers to access, barriers to persistence, leadership and governance, teaching style, and higher education successes in Haiti. The themes that emerged from the interviews related to the second research questions are: HELP enrichment courses, co-curricular experiences, life-long skills development, addressing barriers to access, addressing barriers to persistence, and post HELP support.

### **Perceptions of Challenges within the Haitian Higher Education System**

All participants in the study, 34, discussed their perception of the Haitian higher education system. HELP scholars and alumni discussed their perspectives as enrolled or former students in one of five universities located in Port-au-Prince. HELP staff discussed their perceptions of the Haitian higher education based on their interactions and support of HELP scholars who were enrolled in Haiti-based institutions of higher education. The HELP staff members had roles where they interacted frequently with administrators from the Ministry of Education or secondary school principals and teachers. The two non-HELP participants discussed their perceptions of the Haitian higher education based on their experiences researching the system and as a former secondary school teacher now working for the Ministry of Education. This thematic category, “perceptions of the Haitian higher education system” includes several subcategories. The rationale for these subcategories is to highlight the breadth and depth of participants’ thoughts on this topic.

#### **Challenge: Aftermath of the Haiti Earthquake**

During my 2012 consultancy visit, Haiti’s 2010 earthquake was still recent history for the staff and students of the Haitian Education and Leadership Program (HELP). During my 2013 study, I learned that the effects of the earthquake were still an issue that had to be contended with. The Interuniversity Institute for Research and Development (INURED) was one of the first entities to investigate the impact of the earthquake on the Haitian higher education system. The Associate Director expounds upon the procedure they used to do this:

So one of the things we did was through the post earthquake assessment rapid assessment of higher education in the Port-au-Prince area, the metropolitan area. As you may already know about 90% of institutions are in the Port-au-Prince area, so that covered much

ground. In regards to higher education I think that in the past...since the earthquake what I will say is that the earthquake for the first time unveiled the need to actually look at higher education (INURED Associate Director).

The earthquake was especially difficult on the multi-campus of the State University of Haiti- Université d'Etat d'Haïti (UEH), which has contributed to the irregular start and end times for semesters and the academic year. Because UEH sets the curriculum and schedule of student courses (instead of students selecting courses to fulfill their major of study), the institution required students to enroll in the courses that were missed due to the earthquake. For instance, UEH students took all of the course that were temporary offline during the 2010 academic year due to the earthquake at the same time as enrolling in courses that were in place for their current academic year. This experience persisted to 2012, during my consultancy visit to HELP and the effects of the earthquake were still felt during my 2013 research visit:

- “So I, for example, me for the semester I have to follow the thirteen courses and that take me all the days” (HELP Student Gregory Auguste)
- “And also the situation with the earthquake you know made the UEH very, very weak. We have 8 of them entities at UEH maybe two of them survived from the quake” (HELP Haiti Country Director).
- “I know that since the earthquake especially, they have issues with their libraries...almost all libraries were affected...so that’s tough” (HELP ESL Program Manager, Myrtho Izikyel).

The 2010 earthquake in Haiti was devastating. A countless number of faculty and students lost their lives in the earthquake and approximately 90% of all Haitian universities suffered some

damage (INURED, 2010). Given the state of Haiti prior to the earthquake, the process of Haiti's higher education system recovering from the earthquake will be long-term and costly.

### **Challenge: Barriers to University Access**

Although the cost of the tuition is relatively low in Haiti, by U.S. standards, the approximately \$500USD a semester for tuition ("Ways to Give" n.d., para 1) can be too much for families, considering the average annual salary in Haiti is \$810USD a year (HELP Haiti Country Director, "Our Story-Results" (n.d.). Even if families can manage to find funding to finance university degree obtainment, other access barriers include the costs or related expenses (books, transportation, meals, misc., etc.) and the location of universities. The majority of the universities in Haiti are centered in the capital. There is not a system of residence life within in the universities in the country. Students that do not have families or friends to stay with in Port-au-Prince have little to no option of attending a university there. Thus, another challenge to access is financing the university tuition and associated costs.

**Location of universities.** Given that that majority of Haiti's universities are in Port-au-Prince, and almost all of the internationally accredited universities are located in the capital, the lack of university housing can prove to be a major barrier to access for students living in *province*, areas outside of the capital. The following two HELP staff members provide insight on the hardships that students experience:

...yes low tuition, but it's still kind of restricted...you need to know someone because you have to live in PaP [Port-au-Prince] and you can't work for 5 years, so you have to be well off enough that you can't work for 5 years and like have a place to say, get fed and stuff. (HELP ESL/Leadership Course Instructor, Guy Andre)

I would say you know we've got to revamp UEH actually. Find a way to make it more sustainable and decentralize it those would be. Get it out of Port-au-Prince only because we've got to be, we got to increase access and when you're coming from *Cap Haitien* or *Port-de-Paix* or whatever, coming down to Port-au-Prince you don't have family or anyone here it's basically impossible. (HELP ESL Program Director Myrtho Izikyel).

**Lack of a financial aid system.** Due to the lack of a financial aid or education loan systems as offered in locations such as the United States, many families have to find alternate methods to fund their children's university education. Some families are fortunate to have family members from the Diaspora who can afford to pay the university tuition. For those who do not have this option, students and their families have to make a difficult sacrifice. A staff member and alumni of HELP describes the stark experiences of students who do not have the funds to fully finance their university attendance:

Entering a university is not just entering a university. Even if he is a State University student, coming from *province* (the country side), if he does not have a stable location to stay, stable like he knows in the morning that he will enter a place, it will not be easy for him. There are students who come from *province* they stay in university spaces to sleep, on a bench, on the benches of the university. They do that each day. They pretend, act like they are studying...there are some of them, they have bags...their blankets in them, they bathe, and their soap, their tooth brushes. Thus it is extremely difficult for a student to enter a university right now. To enter is one, to remain entered is one, and there is...every year this number is rising (HELP Student Recruiter/HELP Alumni Margareth Mathieu)

**Lack of opportunity.** Presently, the pipeline to university is minimal in Haiti and approximately 1% of the Haitian population attends an institution of higher education in the country (Wolff, 2008). Although obtaining an education is a high value in Haiti, there are limited opportunities for students who want to earn a baccalaureate degree. Sometimes, even after successful completion of primary and secondary school, and finding a way to pay for tuition, potential students still have to face institutional barriers to enrollment. A HELP staff member described the quota system at the state university in Haiti that serves as a barrier to access:

It [UEH] accepts people using entrance exam process. Which is like really equal. It's also brutal. Let's say they accept 100 people to a *faculte* (a school), ok, X amount of people will not come for a reason, let's say 10%, they don't actually fill those spaces. So if people fail out, they don't fill those spaces. They're theoretically spaces for people, but they don't fill it...more people can be going to the university but they're not. (HELP ESL/Leadership Course Instructor Guy Andre)

One HELP student described the lack of access to university as a form of brain drain. She stressed that when a student has the will, but not the opportunity, their lack of university access and subsequent underutilization of their intellect is like an internal Haitian brain drain:

For me, brain drain is not just for people who leave the country only. I think that when a person is in a place that he can't develop, even if he is in the country, but he doesn't, his heart wants...he doesn't find the opportunity, or he is doing something else that he does not want to do, he is just doing it because, he makes a way but, his brain is not utilized, that means that he is not being utilized the way that he should, that is also a problem. (HELP Student Olivia Jean)

Many of the students and alumni discussed not having the means to pay for a higher education and other related costs; challenges that most students in Haiti face. All HELP scholars were top students in their secondary schools, meaning that they had the will and the determination to succeed despite the odds. HELP strives to eliminate the barriers they face so that they have the opportunity to continue their education.

### **Challenge: Barriers to University Persistence**

Students who are fortunate to find some sort of funding to finance their university experiences (tuition, books, living, and related costs) also have to contend with barriers to their persistence within the Haitian higher education system. I found during my 2012 consultancy visit and my 2013 research study that, students often face faculty absenteeism, little testing of their knowledge, few resources, and institutional barriers like the required thesis requirement despite the lack of research courses offered.

**Faculty.** Many participants discussed their frustrations with their experiences with or perceptions of university faculty. Their thoughts on faculty challenges included faculty member's lack of appropriate certification and training, non-sufficient or non-existent faculty salary, and faculty absenteeism. Some participants put the blame of faculty challenges on the leadership of universities and governance of the Ministry of Education; while others believed that faculty apathy and poor habits contributed to the challenges. The following quote describes the challenges of having a decentralized higher education system, which results in the difficulty of monitoring faculty absenteeism:

It's with the universities because they have their own teachers, their own staff, so they have to manage their own staff. So sometimes these staff these people, this guy could be a consultant for someplace and he give 4 hours a day to present his classes. So if he has

work to do somewhere else he can decide to not teach today. (HELP Student Services Manager/HELP Alumni Sara Samuel)

Faculty absenteeism has an effect on the learning that students expect to receive from their university experience. This is a major issue for students given the limited resources in Haiti. If faculty members do not show up to teach, students are left to teach themselves for the day. However, given the lack of adequate libraries or computer labs, one questions how students are supposed to accomplish this goal:

It's still hard to make sure that learning, you know, that there is a positive and constructive learning environment for the students and in Haiti. I can, I, like... I can't help imagine that, like, I wonder what's going on in the classroom because the monitoring doesn't really happen and I think a lot of education is self-directed here. So because you know there are problems with teachers showing up on time and having a current and up to date practices. The students have to be responsible for their learning and making sure that they can still pass that test. (HELP Leadership Program Manager Marie Belizaire).

The following is an experience described by HELP's Haiti Country Director when attempting to recruit new students for HELP. His narrative highlights the issue of lack of monitoring on the day-to-day affairs within the Haitian education system. Based on his account, faculty absenteeism is not only an issue within the university system, but at secondary schools as well:

Last time I had the chance to recruit but this is the main activity at HELP. This is the activity that I really love to do, recruiting young people. I went to a *Lisse* in *Ti Arbonite*. I saw that the school started at 9am fortunately we arrive at 9am because I was with 4

HELP students to recruit there. We visit the school and we visit the program. Afterwards I left the school and promised them to come back in one hour because I have to collect application in the meantime. I went to another school not far, 30 kilometers, when I came back at 11am, one hour, one and a half hours after, the school already released the students. The students only spent one and a half hours in class. Normally they should spend five to six hours in class. That's a big problem, which means that the ministry does have not control, they don't pay the teachers on time, stuff like that. (HELP Haiti Country Director).

The aforementioned perspectives were a few of the many accounts of student's experiences and interactions with faculty. Missed classes resulted in students often not being tested and evaluated on the knowledge they should have gained in a given period. Rescheduled exams at times conflicted with other class times or commitments. Students then had to decide between taking the rescheduled test of a missed course and attending another course that is already scheduled. It is also not uncommon for students to show up to scheduled class meeting times multiple days in a row, waiting for their professor to show up to a class. For a few students, this could result in retaking a course if there is no grade on record for them to progress through their course of study.

I think there's an issue with the professors. So because like it's a state university, because it's so cheap, you can't retain professors that way. That can't be their only job. So you've got professors that are working full time for whatever governmental, non-governmental sector, whatever organization or company and then coming to class sometimes and then when they don't come then they can just decide whenever they want to make a new class a makeup period and so it's very disruptive to a schedule, there is very little planning as

far from my perspective. The same goes for Quisqueya (Haiti's private university) but most of the professors at Quisqueya have their jobs. And so what happens is there's not really accountability, they can, like I said, they can have the classes whenever they want. They can say, no we're actually going to, they can push back the exams. It's frequent that a professor doesn't show up to class...frequent that a professor doesn't show up to an exam. And then goes ok it's going to be tomorrow instead. And so for me, that's like, that's crazy (HELP ESL Program Manager Myrtho Izikyel).

The lack of sufficient faculty compensation is an ongoing issue within the Haitian education system and according to the following two quotes; they continue to be an issue in the higher education system as well. The HELP ESL/Leadership Course Instructor describes the following experiences within Haiti's state university system and its impact to student's time to degree completion:

But, like, the State University, UEH, it's renown for not paying their professors well enough. So, like, the professors often have other jobs, which they often put before the requirements of the university. Which means that sometimes professors will cancel class for a month and that is just like well, ok, so students that were, should have finished at five years, it took them seven because of things like this (HELP ESL/Leadership Course Instructor Guy Andre).

The Associate Director of INURED shared a similar narrative regarding faculty presence in the classroom. Perhaps the lack of sufficient and consistent faculty compensation contributes to faculty absenteeism, which would then be an issue for the Ministry of Education to address:

You know there's still an access issue. We don't have enough issue. There's still a quality issue. There's a standardized issue. You know and we don't pay faculty as well as

students aren't supported. Faculty aren't compensated in a way so that most of the faculty have to, you know they just kind of moon lighting as faculty. So you know, they have multiple jobs, they work as government officials. So you know, they're still, there's a ways to go. (INURED Associate Director)

These perspectives were few of the many accounts of students' experiences and interactions with faculty. Missed classes resulted in students often not being tested and evaluated on the knowledge they should have gained in a given period. Rescheduled exams at times conflicted with other class times or commitments. Students then must decide between taking the rescheduled test of a missed course and attending another course that is already scheduled. It is also not uncommon for students to show up to class for several days, waiting for their professor to show up to a class. For a few students, this can mean having to retake a course if there is not a grade on record for them to progress through their course of study.

**Resources.** Given Haiti's distinction of the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, its budget related to higher education is minimal. Resources are scarce and many aspects of the higher education system is severely underfunded or not funded at all.

Not to mention the state university system is severely underfunded. So the idea of it is really wonderful but it's, but it's affordable for basically any one. I think it's around *mil gourde* for the year. Which is not bad. So most people can scrounge together that money if need be. But what happens is, then they can't pay their professor. So their professors are kind of unstable in terms of presence and there's virtually no practical learning. So if you're engineering students there's no lab. Or no practicum's like things to actually test it out. (HELP ESL Program Director Myrtho Izikyel).

Students have to learn to overcome having limited to no resources available to them while pursuing their baccalaureate degree. As a result of these experiences, students are often left the most affected, which negatively impacts their ability to persist and to graduate within a reasonable amount of time.

And that universities, they don't offer things outside of, very like very, very basic requirements. They don't have computer labs, they don't have any basic research beyond the classroom...and the classes are often really big...like not enough desks....it's really, it's very, very minimal. (HELP ESL/Leadership Course Instructor Guy Andre)

As a result of their experiences, and personal and institutional challenges and barriers, students are often left the most affected. This negatively impacts their persistence and ability to graduate within a reasonable amount of time.

**Thesis requirement.** One of the requirements for university graduation is successfully completing and defending a thesis. The challenge for many students is that they have never taken a research course and they do not have the proper training for completing this requirement. As previously mentioned, 1% of the university population attends a university in Haiti and less than half of that amount graduates (Wolff, 2008). Often, students do complete their course work but drop out at the point of the thesis requirement. HELP's ESL manager describes the process by which students are assigned their thesis projects and lack of preparation they receive in order to be successful:

The other critique I have of it are these final projects, actually these final thesis. I don't think they are really... First of all, most of the times they are assigned so the student have no participation in choosing their topic. And I think that is a weakness, personally. And then they don't have much guidance as far as I can tell. So their professors will or their

team will assign them a topic and then they're just kind of...the students don't have much experience in research or methods. They don't have much experience properly citing sources or creating a bibliography. So for me you are getting kind of it seems like from an outsider's perspective it would seem like kind of poorly managed projects. And so then their academic value is (pause) it, they carry very little value because I don't from what I've seen the methods are not that great. Now again I want to say that my knowledge is pretty limited and then they have these, their thesis, their defense is crazy. You earn extra points if you thank God in your in your in your presentation. It's all about, like the, it's more about the presentation, not in the sense of the presentations of the facts, in the sense of how you are and what you say, that doesn't even have anything to do with your research that gets, that earns you credit. (HELP ESL Program Manager Myrtho Izikyel)

The issue of sufficient resources for higher education includes a lack of sufficient numbers of faculty members for the mandatory thesis requirement for university graduation. Although all students are required to complete this component of their baccalaureate degree, based on participant responses, it appeared that there were not enough faculty members to guide students to do so:

So the students are going into the systems and they are not finishing and most of them are not finishing them not because they are not passing their classes. Most of them are not finishing because they can't pass their thesis...because we don't have enough, we don't have enough full time faculty who can advise students. They can't get someone to guide them, to sponsor them, first of all, and then guide them...and if they have a sponsor the

sponsor may take one year, three years, five years, seven years to actually approve their thesis. (INURED Associate Director)

University students have a daunting, uphill battle when attempting to complete their thesis requirement. Many of them do not have research experiences and were not trained on how to conduct independent work in their major course of instructions. As a result, they are left floundering and unable to produce quality work, if at all:

What happens, you write your thesis, you submit your written thesis, and then you're invited to defend your thesis. My experience witnessing that is that most of the time they are assigned ridiculous projects that the...it's not focused enough. The research is too broad and like I said the methods aren't there and the like the base isn't there. The foundation isn't there. They begin working on projects like this. And so then you're getting kind of lower quality work and students just kind of drown in it. And so I find it to be a major waste of time. Students, I don't think they are actually learning anything from it. Because of this...they don't have proper *fomasyon*, training, they don't have proper instruction or guidance in order to complete this kind of research, and it's not part of the curriculum before. For example, when I was a freshman in college we had research papers already. Here they don't do that so much. It's come to class, listen to lectures, taking the test, reading readings and memorizing. (HELP ESL Program Director Myrtho Izikyel)

**International funding.** The Associate Director for INURED summarized many challenges countries, such as Haiti, face with international funding organizations. Many of these funding organizations have broad goals and expectations that do not appropriately or sufficiently address problems that are unique to individual locations.

And the problem is that if you are at all familiar with development money for education it's not going to higher education. The money for education is going to education for all and Education For All initiatives...you can't provide access where there is no infrastructure where there aren't enough certified teachers. So there's a problem with that. But the biggest problem with that, which is now global, it's informed by part of the Millennium Development Goals and supposed to be reached by 2015, which resulted in donors who focused on education, the vast majority of money goes to basic education. Primary, yes, mostly primary, a little bit of secondary. Our perspective is, the whole reason why we did the rapid assessment of higher education is ok, and how are you going to create access? What are you creating access for? In a country where less than you know I think that less than 30% of teachers are certified. So you create more schools, where you going to find the teachers? You basically going to have schools where more than 70% or 80% or more than 90% now of teachers are uncertified. So what are you giving people access to? Are you giving them access to quality education? Probably not. Who are the administrators? Why are we focused on you want to improve basic education if you don't improve higher education? You can't develop a development plan for nations you can't develop policies, laws, you know if you don't have politicians, government officials who have an appropriate education, who have a solid education...so that they know how to oversee government bureaucracies. So our perspective is...development projects have focused on helping us provide service but not really helping us develop.

(INURED Associate Director)

These perspectives underscore a major problem within the Haitian higher education system. Despite the economic hardships experienced by the vast majority of university-going

students, they are finding ways to persist to the final component of their university experience. However, approximately 50% of them are not graduating; for some, a likely reason being attributed to the thesis requirement. Given all of the financial needs of the Haitian higher education system, and the challenges of consistent faculty presence, as well as total numbers of faculty, and faculty salary, one can question if the addition of a research course with a thesis requirement can occur given the current state. It appears that putting such a structure in place may address at least one of the barriers related to persistence that students face, but not all.

### **Challenge: Leadership and Governance**

Another challenge discussed by participants was what they perceived to be a lack of sufficient leadership of universities and governance of the Ministry of Education. When reviewing the data, it appeared that all of the challenges discussed by participants can be traced back to the leadership and governance of the Haitian higher education system.

**Government oversight.** Given the small size of the Ministry, the lack of sufficient funding, and inadequate resources, some aspects of governance are neglected. The Career Services Manager for HELP, Farah Paul, spoke on the budget challenges impacting higher education, “There’s no budget for us, so how can you actually work? Make people work? When there is no money...*sa se yon tet chage*<sup>5</sup> [burdened head]!”

The Associate Director of INURED provided detail on the complexities the Ministry of Education faces attempting to manage an education system with limited financial resources:

So if we are going to do something in higher education, we need to know the state of higher education. And we don’t and people are still depending on one, two, three, or four or five reports on an education system that has over 170 higher institutions. You know,

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<sup>5</sup> It was this exclamation that led, in part, to the title of this study

and these reports are dated. These reports can't last forever, the composition changes you know periodically. We don't have a government institution that can even tell us, well how many of these higher education institutions exist. You know universities pop up daily. The government isn't tracking them so in order to do something the first thing we have to do is figure out well what is it that we need to do. (INURED Associate Director)

**Lack of technical experts.** A major concern for student learning is the limited number of specialists or experts who can teach on a particular topic. This is an issue that further challenges the experiences of students and their faculty within the university system. Specifically, due to the dearth of faculty with special expertise in the country, some are able to determine their role within the system:

There are professors in Haiti, you finally find a person who is the only specialist in a subject in Haiti, who demands a large salary, but you can't overly press him because he can choose not to, he is the only single professor who can do it. There are some who will volunteer their time, there are others who if you overly bother them, they will not do it. There are some who do volunteer because they believe that they need people, they want to train students...For higher education, this is a bad academic result, this really needs to change, because this is not good. (HELP Student Services Manager/HELP Alumni Sara Samuel)

Another outcome of the lack of homegrown experts and specialists are *estranged* or outsiders who pick up the slack. As a result, there are many individuals in the country who lead major organization or companies in Haiti, which some take issue with:

Why can't they show me how to do something? *Se tou jou blan kap vini, etrange kap vini pou montre w yon bagay* [it's always white people who come, strangers who come to

show you something]. *Ou konpran* [You get what I mean]? And I think there is a mistake in that because it's telling Haitians that Haitian culture is not good enough (HELP Leadership Assistant Nadia Hillaire).

In addition to the shortage of appropriately trained faculty, students also encounter extended time to degree completion. My 2012 consultancy trip to Haiti revealed that because of the dearth of faculty within the Haitian higher education system, many faculty members live outside of the country and only teach one course a year in Haiti. Many students extend their time in degree programs, as they need to enroll in required courses that are only taught by visiting faculty.

**Reporting structure.** Some of the challenges for progress and innovation in Haiti are related to the reporting structure for existing and potentially new institutions of which the Ministry of Education has oversight.

The situation is a bit complex based on...the law creating UEH. UEH has the main power, it's overseeing every aspect of public and private university. So based on this law if someone wants to create a private university you have to refer to UEH. You need to have advice from UEH. Based on this...But I know now the government is working on a new law because UEH cannot offer all programs. For example Quisqueya University is offering some programs that UEH can't offer. You know that's why I think they are trying to revise these this law. The UEH, the main person in charge in Haiti, UEH is a good school. But now, based on the global situation, with modernity we think that UEH has some limits. (HELP Haiti Country Director).

The UEH as the "main power" provides unique challenges within the Haitian higher education system. Another matter that complicates the system is the number of private institutions that are established. Often, these institutions refer to themselves as "universities" without being under the

purview of the Ministry of Education or the State University system, and not being accredited by any local or international accrediting body. These universities have contributed to perceived lack of value of the Haitian university degree. As a result, students are often left feeling like their degree is not good enough, even if they attend a legitimate, accredited university in Haiti. Further, local and international organizations often select potential employees with a non-Haitian academic experience over one who has a Haiti-only academic experience. The following was one student's thoughts on the value of a Haitian degree:

The first thing that I can say, because like I said before, our education does not have international value. We could get some recognition if there is a school that is affiliated with a school outside. That can give us an opportunity to continue with school. But for us to have an international value, that means more than just getting an education. If we are in Haiti only, you will always have in mind if you want a professional, international...do your master's another place, you will not want to do your master's here. If you have an opportunity, a person on your side, you go. Even us (Haitian) we don't give our education value. Because when someone returns here, he finishes studying something another place, even if us here we have a master's, the person who came from another place has just a license, they run and get that person with just a license from another place. That proves that even us, we do not give our education system confidence, we do not give it value (Olivia Jean).

The problems of private institutions and the perceptions of the value of the Haitian degree have not gone unnoticed by senior officials in education:

There is a lot of effort for students to get scholarships in the country. That means that right now in the country, there is a lot of demand. At the same time, the State University

in the country of Haiti almost cannot respond to the demand of all of the students who want to enter the university. Thus, this provides an opportunity for the private sector to enter the question of higher education not being good here in the country of Haiti. Thus, we come to learn a lot that [are] open[ing] and provide training in new higher education [institutions]. But there are many questions to pose as well because there are private schools in the country that are not good in Haiti that are new, different, what they provide is different from school to school. Students prefer to go to St. Domingue that has more of an infrastructure, scholars that give them training. The good thing about here, there is satisfaction because there are a lot of students who are asking, which means that there is a demand, but it is the quality, what is the quality? You know the question of education is dynamic, things are changing, every day, thus, that means we need people who are up to date from time to time. (Ministry of Education Administrator Paul Simon).

As a result of this phenomenon, students are often left feeling like their degree is not good enough, even if they attend a legitimate, accredited university in Haiti. Further, local and international organizations often select potential employees with a non-Haitian academic experience over those who have Haiti-only academic experiences.

### **Challenge: Teaching Style**

Another challenge that students experience are the teaching and learning methods. The students have learned by rote memorization. One staff member described students' capacity for learning using this method:

At the university level, it's different. Ok. They're still learning a lot. They're absolutely very intelligent, I don't have, personally I don't, I could never memorize what they memorize. So it's a really unique style of learning its quite incredible the capacity that

they have in their brains to contain all of that information. (HELP ESL Program Manager Myrtho Izikyel)

A HELP student questioned the appropriateness of the memorization method for effective learning and practical knowledge:

*Ayiti* (Haiti) is based on the...memorization, do you understand? Memorization and they give you a lot of courses. Education system makes good workers but I believe that it does not, that there is not enough practices...and they don't really educate you in order to innovate...to reason. It is a lot of memorization not enough practices and like no innovative solutions... (HELP Student Gregory Auguste)

The HELP Leadership Assistant questioned how memorization supports students thinking and knowledge acquisition. Specifically, she questioned the ability of students to think critically if all they are required to do is regurgitate knowledge rather than apply it:

I'll say my experience is that students are not being encouraged to think critically, right. And when they are asked to question things, sometimes it's on a superficial level. It might be questioning for the sake of questioning because I know I should be questioning. Haitian education system focuses a lot on memorization. Right, which is great if you know the whole constitution and you can tell me where every article comes from that's wonderful. But can you access information. Does that teach you information, to think critically about that information? And then spit it out in your own words? Your own understanding, does that make sense? (HELP Leadership Assistant Nadia Hillaire)

HELP's Haiti Country Director believed that there is some good to rote memorization. However, he questioned how students in certain disciplines are truly learning and how they are able to

apply what they learn if the only basis for assessment is the student's ability to repeat word for word what they learn from a lesson:

But I think it's in Haiti, you know in every single school, even at Quisqueya, which is a modern school in Haiti, this is normal, this is the way that Haitian learn from the primary school until university. This is a good thing but the problem, it is very important for people to see concretely what they are studying. It's very difficult for someone in chemistry class talk about acid, base and stuff like that you never do, that's my problem. (HELP Haiti Country Director).

HELP's Career Services Manager dug deeper and discussed the long-term impact of the teaching and learning style within the Haitian education system. More specifically, she questioned the quality of future employers that the university system graduates given the quality of education they were currently receiving:

It's a major issue because you teach the person how to read and write. You teach them how to make subtractions and multiplications and stuff and then what? How is that person going to become the professional that he is? ...Universities there's not a lot of them with good quality but how do you assess the work that they are doing? Same text books that been used 20 years ago are the same ones that are being used this year. The people who are teaching at the university they are not....they're just people who have time to teach. They are not educators most of them. They are just people in the field. Have an extra hour or couple of hours extra. They come in they give a class they go away. This is not really a lot of emphasis on the educational part of it. And the quality. I think that's what that that's what worries the potential employers. Quality of the education. It is very obvious that they are looking for that also. And they want their

candidate. Whoever it is applying for job they want them to be able to write a letter in English or to write in French. Good French. Since French is the second language that we speak. So you have expectations but how are you going to ensure the delivery of that? I don't think they do that. They don't do it. I'm not going to say I don't think. They don't. (HELP Career Services Manager Farah Paul)

During my time living in *Ducombe*, one of the HELP residences in Port-au-Prince, I witnessed many of the students I lived with using different techniques to memorize information. Some would repeat information while walking up and down the stairs, while others would walk back and forth along the hallway reciting text. Others would repeat information in a rhythmic pattern while sitting at one of the study tables in the house, some students studied on top of the roof of the house and I could hear their murmuring from a distance when I was on the porch. Although all of the students used a different approach, they had to utilize a great deal of skill to remember a lot of information.

### **Successes/What is Going Well**

Despite the numerous challenges that exist in the Haitian higher education system, some participants did discuss things that are going well. There are regional public institutions in country that are new to Haiti, approximately 6-8 years. They are located in the various *Departments* (provinces) outside of the capital. They have provided increased access to higher education for students who are unable to attend a university in Port-au-Prince.

You know there are people who talk about brain drain, but there are people who are coming back if you look back at the public universities, the regional universities most of the *recteurs* (presidents) are foreign educated Haitians so they are coming back. So there are things happening and they are coming with their networks you know and figuring out

ways to be creative and innovative so there are certain things that you know that's going well with this system but we still have a ways to go. (INURED Associate Director)

In addition to an emerging research body addressing higher education in Haiti, two higher education consortiums (housed at the University of Massachusetts- Boston and one located in Canada) developed after the earthquake in 2010 to respond to higher education challenges in the country.

Before the earthquake there may have been independent initiatives but after the earthquake you had the consortium the US based consortium that was started by UMass Boston, you have the Canadian consortium, which is headed by a network of Canadian faculty members. So now you have some energy and some focus on higher education that didn't exist so that you have now connectivity between different networks....energy toward how do we improve it how do we think about research how do we think about you know standardization so you have these conversations and some resources now have started towards higher education. So I think those things are going well. (INURED Associate Director)

Another success for Haiti is there is also a high demand for higher education and that Haiti is producing graduates. Further, there are a variety of degrees that students can select from. So, although resources are limited, students have a range of options in terms of fulfilling their academic interests.

I think for a poor country I think the higher education system in Haiti is good. For a poor country. Because we don't have a lot of finance resources but we made a lot of effort we have a lot of *facultes* in Haiti. We have medicine; medical *faculte* and we have

engineering *faculte*. We have a lot. So for a poor country I think the higher education is good (Olivia Jean).

The following HELP staff members viewed the expansion and creating of universities and other institutions as positive because they are responding to demand:

I think it's actually expanding too. There are a lot of universities that are not universities but there are things like ESIH [Ecole Supérieure d'Infotronique d'Haïti-Information Technology]), which I think is quite new, and actually I think they are...they're system is really good (HELP ESL/Leadership Instructor Guy Andre).

Finally, despite the challenges discussed regarding faculty absenteeism and training, students are learning a great deal and are performing well amongst their international counterparts.

But one thing is very important for me is the quality of classes you know of given by the teachers. Teaching, the quality of teaching is good. The reason I can verify that, and we experience that. We send our students for summer session at Dartmouth, for example, and our students, in spite of the limit in English, they did well. They got B, A as a result. Not only HELP students but all students coming from Haiti, when they go abroad, you know, they have very good, great performance. Yeah. (HELP Haiti Country Director)

Given my personal educational experiences while being raised by Haitian parents, the understanding of the value placed on education is one that I can attest to. Despite the low numbers of students who attend university in Haiti, there are higher rates of students attending primary and secondary education in the country. HELP's Leadership Assistant described how families and students perceive the obtainment of an education:

I think what's going well is that students really do value education. Now, they're going to go to school every day in their uniforms until they're with *Philo* and not necessarily

know what they're going to after because higher education is so limited. They're going to hope and pray that they get a scholarship somewhere. That a door opens for them to go abroad. But up until that point parents are taking their kids to school. Kids are holding each other's hands when they are going to school every single day. I see that every day. Higher education it's still really valued, they're showing up, they're taking their classes really seriously. Our students are really stressed out. They know that education is the key to...it is a great equalizer. They know that. (HELP Leadership Assistant Nadia Hillaire)

Although the successes described in this section are promising, the overwhelming number of challenges within the Haitian higher education overshadow them. HELP is one of very few entities addressing the higher education issues in Haiti by responding to the needs of university students in such a comprehensive way. The following section describes how HELP supports the academic and future success of its scholars.

### **HELP's Strategies for Supporting the Academic and Future Success of HELP Scholars**

HELP recruits students who have the highest academic marks and who have the most financial need. Often, these students are the first members of their families to go to school and leaving their families to attend a university is a hardship for all involved. The students are highly intellectual and possess an inner strength to succeed despite incredibly disadvantaged situations. Although all of the students possess the academic skills to succeed at a college, due to various circumstances, few would be able to obtain a post-secondary degree if it were not for the support offered by HELP. This section describes the various components of HELP. Further, it includes the perspectives of HELP students, alumni, and staff regarding how they believe HELP supports the HELP scholars to succeed.

## **Strategy: Enrichment Courses**

HELP offers three enrichment courses designed to provide HELP scholars with a well-rounded education that will set them up for success after earning their degrees. HELP scholars are enrolled in these courses concurrent with their university courses.

**Leadership.** HELP scholars take the HELP Leadership course all five years they are enrolled in university. The Leadership course follows a social change model and in addition to a weekly class, it includes on and off site community services projects and leadership activities.

The students were really resistant to my methods because they're interactive and it's not about shop and talk and it has to be... I mean always trying to pull in their participation and I feel like sometimes they feel it's not serious, it's not a serious approach...that I'm not teaching them and like I don't do a lot of testing. It's more like student led initiatives and requiring them to be productive in class and a lot of reflection. And I think that because there is not a wrong or right answer to write down on a paper that was a really difficult transition...But eventually they you know the students get it and they understand why I'm asking them to talk and asking them to participate and you know valuing their reflections and their input and they quickly learn, why, how it's an effective way to learn (HELP Leadership Program Manager Marie Belizaire).

Community service projects are a major component of the Leadership course. Giving back to one's community is not a new concept in Haiti, per se, however doing so as a function of a course is. Through the first year requirement of community service on the HELP center premises and the final four years of conducting service projects in the greater community (in

Port-au-Prince and outlying areas), the students have been able to put the leadership philosophies they learned into practice:

Through the service projects I think that students feel like, recognize that they have something to give back. I think our students start to understand that they have something to give back and we're giving them tools within a safe context of like 4 years and months to test those tools through setting up the service projects they are setting up seeing what works and what doesn't work and then just having the confidence to hopefully do something similar when they leave and then a lot of reflection about why it's important and I think I really do think that the transformation is happening and the students feel really empowered, really good, and have the tools and skills and knowledge of how to use their competencies to give back to their community. And are seeing the value in that so I hope that that is you know is setting own some roots in the community. (HELP Leadership Program Marie Belizaire)

**English as a second language.** HELP scholars take ESL courses for three years.

In addition to reading, writing, and speaking, students are provided test preparation for the TOEFL. Students also receive support on their resumes, cover letters, and applications that need to be written in English.

So we are helping the students by giving them more tools to be more successful in whatever professions they have. Now after the 2010 earthquake, January 12, I think that English has become even more important in the sense now you've got all of these other international actors, NGOs and we don't necessarily want to be encouraging to work for NGOs because it's not very sustainable but at the same time they need the tools to navigate those systems because they're work in private sector most likely they are going

to have some sort of interaction with these nongovernmental organizations. I think also because there's no higher ed programs in Haiti, very few, there are very few. So like post graduate work is what I'm trying, masters or PhD, just to kind of expand their options, that English is also important. (HELP ESL Program Manager Myrtho Izikyel)

**Computer science (CS).** Many students in Haiti do not have the technical experiences that many students take granted in higher developed countries. For instance, for many of the students, HELP is the first place that they encounter a computer. Although some students are tech savvy due to their experiences with cellular phones, many of them begin at a basic, intro level in the CS course.

I help the students troubleshoot. We do with them like, what is a computer, what is in a computer. This is something that you start small so that they can have abilities with it. In the beginning, here is how you create a file, how you create a folder, in the beginning how you name a file, for example how you copy this folder. We explain how someone functions with the machine. We give all of this in advance. After, we give them the ability how to use the Internet, what the Internet is like, what you can get from the Internet, why it is useful, here is what you can do with it. There are some who do not know how to send an email. We show them how to do an excel document, create a formula...then we show them access...(HELP Computer Science Assistant Manager Viola Persine).

HELP has chosen to include these three enrichment courses because the organization has identified them as gaps in student's learning in the university. Other than students who are enrolled in Haiti's IT institution, students would have to pay funds to learn how to speak English and use a computer, as these are not a part of the university curriculum or resources. Further,

leadership courses are almost unheard of in the traditional educational system in Haiti. By offering these courses, HELP hopes to set its scholars apart when it comes time for them to enter the workforce.

### **Strategy: Co-Curricular Experiences**

In addition to the three enrichment courses, HELP provides related opportunities for its scholars. These experiences are meant to complement the courses as well as provide students with “real world” experiences related to networking, internships, meeting professionals and leaders in different fields, and with academic experiences outside of the country. With all of these, HELP wants to ensure that they develop their scholars to be the brightest and most complete prospective employees on the job and/or academic market (as some students pursued advanced degrees after graduation).

**International experience.** HELP has been able to partner with a number of organizations, institutions, and initiatives that HELP scholars can benefit from. A current HELP student described his experiences both at an elite institution in the United States and with an international foundation:

I will go to Dartmouth on (later in the summer) and take courses. I will also participate as the WISE learner. WISE is the World Innovation Summit for Education. I am engaged in these programs since all this year and will work together in education issues and environment issue and working on projects I make part of the environment group. And ...will be the opportunity to meet all together from different backgrounds different countries and work like together on a project. (HELP Student Gregory Auguste)

**Internships.** HELP soon realized after it was founded that many of its students were not prepared to enter the professional workforce. Within the last few years, HELP hired a Career

Services Manager whose responsibilities include developing partnerships with local companies and securing internships for HELP scholars. HELP scholars are required have an internship experience their final 3 years at HELP, the first this is fulfilled by interning with one of the program managers in HELP.

It was wonderful I can say but as you know as I told you I was a student at computer school. When you were a student at computer school it not necessary to you to take a course from HELP in computer science but because in the school we get a lot of things, we make programming, you make a little of things, like network, like data base, like Microsoft, a lot of things, I was a teacher at HELP. I used to learn the new scholar how to manage a computer, how to work on a Microsoft Office, excel, word, PowerPoint and so on. (HELP Alumni Daniel Jacobs)

After their first year of holding an internship at HELP, and learning the soft and technical skills necessary to be an effective professional, students are then supported in finding an internship location outside of HELP:

Our first focus is to place the students. I want them to have this professional experience. It doesn't matter if it's Haitian field, a Haitian organization, or a foreign organization. I really look for the opportunities that can provide them with you know with an internship in their own field. So this year we've made a lot of progress regarding this specific aspect placing the student in the field that is of interest to him. (HELP Career Services Manager Farah Paul)

After a few years of working to perfect the HELP enrichment courses and to develop and

strengthen their Career Services Department, HELP has found that the market is seeking out HELP students as interns because they are found to be well trained and suitable for the jobs that employers need to fill:

Organizations in the community are coming to HELP to hire for internships because they recognize not only that they (HELP students) have the education through their professional degrees but also the leadership and have gone through a four year program on you know social development or development for social change and so the employers that are coming for us for the internships, and then for the employment, it's going to, is like it happens really, really quickly, and throughout their experience at HELP and so it integrates them into the community and into the jobs sector in Haiti right away (HELP Leadership Program Manager Marie Belizaire).

Many of the students interviewed discussed the value they found in what I have labeled as co-curricular experiences. Although these students expressed how these experiences impact their free time, they see the benefits internships and possessing interviews skills, and that these experiences will benefit their future career aspirations in the long run.

### **Strategy: Life-Long Skills Development**

HELP offers a variety of services and experiences that I have describes as “Life-long Skills.” Students have to go through many transitions when they become a HELP scholar, which is addressed through the HELP Orientation, which is a comprehensive, month-long introduction to HELP, Port-au-Prince, and University Life. They are helped with opening a bank account and are offered money savings and time management skills. Students go through workshops about living with others and new understanding of diversity given that the students they will live with

are from regions all over the country. Students are also taught the importance of giving back to their communities, networking, and public speaking.

**Networking.** HELP provides monthly workshops for students and invites local community members to attend and engage with the HELP scholars. One of the students describes how she has been able to maximize her meeting of new individuals. A HELP staff member discusses a tangible benefit of the networking that occurs at HELP.

I can say I made a lot of contacts and my relationship is growing every day. With other students in my leadership class. We always have some leaders and they come to explain us how is their life and how they become a leader and how they become useful for the country. And I think it's a good opportunity when I'm, when I meet leaders and talk with them and take some lesson from their speaking and from the speeches. (HELP Student Olivia Jean)

HELP's mission, in part, is to create a more just society in Haiti. One of the ways it aims to do that is to combat nepotism in Haiti by creating a class of scholars who are extremely talented and well suited for the job market, and who are exposed to the decision makers and hiring managers that can give their students a chance at proving themselves on the job despite not having the benefit of being tied into networks through personal or familial relationships. The following HELP staff member described this in greater detail:

There's a huge, huge amount of nepotism in Haiti. And a lot of people get jobs just through family and a lot of people, they are not qualified for. So like, I think that one thing that HELP is, actually kind of deal with in a way is that we bring in a lot of people that have a lot of the students go visit organizations and businesses and stuff and they actually think its building networks and connections for these people because the students

our students don't have the nepotism connections. And that's kind of a problem because that's how people get jobs (HELP ESL/Leadership Instructor Guy Andre).

**Community partnerships.** A byproduct of the relationships that have been cultivated by the Career Services Manager are the strong community partnerships that have been developed, resulting in a great deal of support and opportunities for HELP scholars.

It's like how bizarre is that that in Haiti this extremely impoverished country with under employment rate of like 90% is importing middle management and at the same time, we are exporting the educated Haitian, like that's just stupid. It just doesn't make any sense so I think what we are doing with the private sector is extremely important. The amazing thing...these institutions are actually, so eager to have students from HELP that they are actually donating. Epower is a donor, Digicel, Barbancourt, they have no incentive to donate to an NGO...no incentive, no tax breaks, so you know they really must believe in us to make that kind of investment (HELP Associate Director).

**Career workshops.** In addition to other functions, the Career Services Manager offers workshops for students (and also separately for alumni) so that they can be better prepared for the job market.

And just in terms of the applicants for them to have an idea or have the better idea of what they're capable of and how they can use that in their career. Because that's one of the things that can help you be successful in your path. You understand what I'm saying? So that's the first part and then while they are at HELP we give them, I give them workshops on how to build your CV, how to present yourself well in an interview, how to conduct an interview. What do you do when you are going to meet a potential employer? How do you start your looking for a job project? Your job searching project because a lot

of them see it as ‘oh I’m done and I just deposit my CV but they haven’t called me’ but they don’t know it’s a continuous process and it’s a project and so actually letting them know how it works really and then the reality and how it can work for them is what I’ve been doing in the past 3 years (HELP Career Services Manager Farah Paul).

**New perspectives.** As a result of all of their new experiences and relationships, HELP students have begun to see a shift in the way they think of themselves and in their role in Haiti. The following student discussed how education and the philosophy of HELP have influenced her thinking:

I believe that HELP mission is important, so you foreign people come in and give us I don’t know food, houses all these things but they forget to help us improve these factors that is education and particularly I come from a poor family and education change all the life of my family. Actually I have my sister that get her master degree I have my brother that goes to university and I’m going to...so I saw all the change education can bring a family and this is why I remain, I believe in the HELP mission that is creating another community, another young people, young workers that can make change and improve the life in this other communities. (HELP Student Gregory Auguste)

The following student had just completed her first year in HELP and reflected on what she thought HELP was going to offer, and ultimately what she gained from being a HELP student. She also discussed her changing views and attitudes as it relates to her role as an educated individual in Haiti:

As a HELP student you start to have a different vision of life in general. You take on another vision like how will this your community, help the country. Because in HELP, because especially the Leadership department, they shape the student in a context for

them to come to be a leader. Not just for their own head but for the country, for every person who lives near them. Thus, I think that these benefits help me a lot, what I learn from HELP. Specifically I believe this can help me get ahead, more importantly, get a lot more understanding of life and remaining positive. (HELP Student Sherley Felix)

Finally, the following student discussed the combination of the university degree and the HELP experience and the benefits received by participating in both:

The skills that you gain, you can add to the knowledge that you get from the university. They will help you when you go to work. I think that the English and Leadership courses can help us, can give us the presence we wish to have in our own house. (HELP Student Marc Luc)

The students and staff appreciated the benefits students' received by gaining and enhancing their skills. Student and alumni understood that they could be transferrable to contexts outside of HELP like future jobs or in other academic experiences (for example graduate or professional degrees).

### **Strategy: Addressing Barriers to University Access**

A major barrier to access for students is finances and the location of the universities. HELP addresses these challenges by providing each of its students a full scholarship and housing in the capital. In addition, HELP provides student's with a monthly stipend that students use to pay for book, meals, transportation, and other needs. The following HELP alumni, staff, and student discuss the impact of and benefits of a HELP scholarship:

...leave the *province*, HELP takes these people, where it would have been difficult for them to leave these places, go to a private university that is expensive, that is really expensive, the *facultes*, the universities they have in Haiti they do not have the capacity

to hold us, thus, I would still be...thus with HELP...the youth now have the capacity...we have found this opportunity for us to be able to do what we want to do, what we love to do for our country... (HELP Alumni Kesner Cesar)

**Full scholarships.** Given the lack of a financial aid or education loan system in Haiti, HELPs full scholarship relieves a major burden experienced by HELP students and their families. The following HELP alum discussed the impact of receiving a full tuition scholarship from HELP:

It was a big relief, it was definitely, it was because I often said, I have my brother that finished one year before me but he did not succeed to go into the public college so he spent one year doing nothing so because I go the chance now to enter the state university and have all the books from HELP, books, stipend, all the help so my parent now they have the opportunity to manage the little bit of money that they have to pay the university for my brother. If I was not part of HELP so it would have been difficult to manage university for the 2 kids. Probably I would have gone and then the other would be would be embarrassed to stay. And as I often say my father never know how much a medical book costs, if he knows it's because this is the price of the book, but they never know that and even when I when use to travel to Dartmouth they know nothing about the cost. I have just to tell them HELP is going to take care of it. (HELP Alumni Ernest Duncan)

**Housing.** The majority of Haiti's universities are located in the capital. This is a hardship for families who do not live in Port-au-Prince or do not have family or close friends that they can stay with for the 5-year duration of their university experience. HELP providing housing to all HELP scholars who need it relieved yet another burden for students:

A lot of the students are coming from lower low income; rural backgrounds where they would, you know, not first of all have the financial means to pay the tuition at a lot of these universities. But also the infrastructure means to attend the university in Port-au-Prince if they are coming from the central plateau or *Cap Haitien* or any of the other more rural places, since I think all of the major internationally accredited universities that HELP sends its students to are located here in the capital city. So it's not only the financial means for you to pay for tuition at these schools, but also just having the support network that for most of them doesn't exist here in Port-au-Prince.

Transportation to and from school, housing, enough to live, eat, eat on a regular basis.

That sort of stuff (HELP Student Recruiter/HELP Alumni Margareth Mathieu).

One of the components of the Leadership course is having the Chef du Centre d'Hébergement de HELP (CCHE), a position equivalent to a Resident Assistant/Advisor at a U.S. university. Each HELP residence has at least 2 CCHE's. In addition to this leadership role, CCHE's receive a slight increase to the monthly HELP stipend that they receive. One of the CCHE's described the experience:

Ok, in my role as a CCHE it's just to put leadership in application. Help run a house, run all of the HELP affairs in the house, watch over the student, a support for the HELP staff.

They put a student responsible in each HELP house, so that we can continue the leadership objectives. (HELP Student/CCHE Regine Nelson)

Every student and alumni interviewed talked about the magnitude of having tuition and fees covered by HELP. It is a source of relief not only to the students but to their families as well. Some students reported their other siblings being able to attend college since their families have a little more money that they can devote to other siblings.

## **Strategy: Addressing Barriers to University Persistence**

HELP recognizes that it is not enough to provide access to university to its scholars, but they also have to provide the tools necessary for their students to be successful. HELP has an onsite computer lab and library. Students have access to prior year's class notes. Each student is assigned an academic advisor for the duration of his or her time at HELP. The Academic Advisor supports all aspects of student needs, even those beyond academics. HELP supports students as they seek funding for short-term experiences abroad. The monthly stipends that students receive ensure that their immediate needs are met. HELP also supports emergencies that may arise related to medical, dental, vision, and mental health. The following narrative is from a HELP staff member who explains how HELP student's persistence, even if students may not realize it for themselves:

I don't think there's enough support (at university) in terms of showing the students the potential to work here. What they see is their professors who can't make it. So they have to work two other jobs and miss class and students and they're like man and these are people who are educated just like I'm going to be. So there aren't good examples so for people who don't have a program like HELP that really shows them yes you can do it, think about your identity, think about your communities what kind of role do you want to play in this. They're never forced to think about those questions. Whereas at HELP and our leadership program I think really has a big role in that. You take...disadvantaged Haitian youth and you kind of take away the immediate issues of you know money for food and shelter and then you're also paying for the tuition. There's a greater margin for success and so then it frees their mind a little to honestly they can they have the time and the space to contemplate things more than a student say who is barely making it barely

making it though UEH... and then the goal is to is to leave because you you think you can get a better life and provide for your family. Whereas here take away the stress of not having food, not having shelter, not being able to pay for school, and the students are able to maintain a happier relationship with their families I think and then they can recognize that they don't want to leave. (HELP ESL Program Manager Myrtho Izikyel)

**Thesis guidance.** A consistent theme among staff and the two individuals I interviewed outside of HELP was the thesis requirement for graduation. This requirement appeared to be a major factor that impacted students' ability to graduate from university. HELP has responded to this concern by providing one academic advisor whose sole role is to guide seniors through their entire thesis writing process.

So right now we have one of the advisors. He is an advisor specifically for students who are writing their thesis. He works with them especially on their projects to make sure that it is focused and to make sure that they are getting their work done on time. And HELP is doing, he began this program....so a pre defense. So it's like a practice defense and they invite staff members at HELP and they kind of go through, they walk the defense with the students. So I think we've already done like 2 or 3 this year. And they plan on continuing this for all of the students that are doing final projects or thesis. (HELP ESL Program Manager Myrtho Izikyel)

A major issue within the Haitian higher education system discussed by the HELP Country Director was the number of students who do not graduate. HELP students discussed how important it was for them to earn their degree and the comfort they felt knowing that HELP had an in-house resource, the thesis advisor, who will support them as they attempted to successfully complete their last major university requirement.

### **Strategy: Post HELP Support**

HELP students are comforted by the knowledge that once they are a HELP scholar, they will always be a HELP scholar. All HELP scholars who successfully earn a baccalaureate degree automatically become members of HELP's alumni network. They can continue to receive services from HELP, especially from the Alumni Coordinator. HELP Alumni often give back to HELP financially (those who graduated prior to the ACM program also contribute funds to assist students) and by discussing career options with soon to be graduates. HELP's Alumni Manager outlined her role and what she provides to alumni:

I coordinate the activities for them and try to provide them...maintain the network a little bit active. Because what they found was that there was there was nobody to actually contact them. They were kind of in the black hole if you will. When they come they are very happy to see them. But when they are not here then what happens? So what I do is that I keep in touch with them via email. I send them communications let them know what's happening at HELP. If we have newsletters there is always an article involved by an Alumni, a different article about an alum. So I maintain contact with them. I am the contact point. And if there are job opportunism as well, because some of them, all of them are placed, but maybe they are not well placed, maybe there are better opportunities, then I communicate that with them. And when they come here for whatever if they need a reference letter or recommendation letter if they come to me. I organize meetings also. Just to keep them aware to keep them in the loop of what's happening at HELP and how we can improve things ...and trying to show them that they are very important to us (HELP Alumni Services Manager Farah Paul).

Because HELP alumni who remain in Haiti are employed at a rate of 100% and are having unique experiences both in Haiti and abroad, HELP donors want to know that HELP has accomplished its mission. The Alumni Coordinator helps to ensure that the organization and its founders are kept abreast of how HELP alumni are doing:

Because they are results that the sponsors are going to want to see. So it's not only a matter of being able to take in students. But it's a matter of showing the sponsors hey this is our product, this is a HELP scholar, an alum from HELP. And this is what he's done and this is where he's at right now. That's what really...attractive, I mean really compelling for the sponsors. Ok what have you done so far? And we're able to see, to say that we have 100% employment rate. And most of our alumni are in Haiti. And these, those who are not in Haiti they are pursuing studies with the idea of coming back. And so the main idea is that it's to keep in touch with and to maintain the network active. (HELP Alumni Manager Farah Paul)

HELP's Leadership Assistant sums up the benefit of the HELP experience to HELP scholars:

...because they are preparing the students. How they are preparing the students? HELP has realized that to compete on the international level in Haiti you cannot just rely on Haitian universities, because as I said before, there is a lot of informal learning that the average Haitian student has missed out on. So to supplement, you are going to get your leadership classes, that kind of leadership that you can learn all along if you had after school classes, if you had clubs, if you were accustomed to volunteering, if you had Girl Scouts Boy Scouts, that summer thing, you went to summer camp (HELP Leadership Assistant Nadia Hillaire).

HELP is comprised of many staff members who are responsible for a variety of components. As a result of their work, HELP scholars are able to successfully enter the university, navigate the system, and earn a university degree. HELP students are also prepared for the workforce, and get successfully employed or choose to pursue academic experiences abroad. Alumni continue to receive the benefits of HELP by having access to the Alumni and Career Services manager.

The findings from this chapter have implications for policy and practice for HELP as an organization, other NGOs in education environments in low-income countries, the Haitian university system, and the Ministry of Education in Haiti. Given the limited amount of literature on empirical research regarding programmatic efforts to address higher education challenges, the findings of this study has implications for further research on this topic. The next chapter includes my discussion on the findings, implication and recommendations, and my concluding thoughts.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION**

The purpose of this study was to learn how key stakeholders perceive the challenges of access and persistence within the higher education system in Haiti and to learn the Haitian Education and Leadership Program (HELP) strategies that support the academic and future success of the university students, HELP Scholars, in its program. This study provided an overview of the purpose and benefits of higher education, the role of higher education in development, the influence of international funding organizations in higher education decision making in low-income countries, and the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) providing education services in developing countries. Also included in this study was an explanation of how education is operationalized in Haiti, and in similar countries, to provide a context for understanding the role of HELP in the higher education landscape in Haiti.

I explored HELP staff, students, and alumni perceptions of the challenges within the Haitian higher education system. Further, I examined how they believed HELP addresses the higher education challenges that HELP scholars experience within the Haitian higher education system. As a result of my analysis, two major themes emerged from the study: access and persistence. More specifically, based on my interviews, two major challenges within the Haitian higher education system are related to barriers for students to successfully access and to persist (graduate) at universities in Haiti. Similarly, based on the data collected, the services that HELP provides to its scholars can be grouped into two main categories: those that eliminate barriers to university access and those that aid in university persistence.

This study contributes to the literature on higher education in developing countries. This research is important because it addresses the universal challenge of university access and

persistence in these areas and also because it provides a framework and a successful model for addressing the deficits within higher education systems in low-income countries like Haiti. Moreover, my data revealed that innovative partnerships and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) could be successful in providing services to university students. Finally, my study illuminates the need for and importance of functional capacity building that includes governmental, university administrator, and non-governmental organization (NGO) involvement with strategic initiatives that address educational needs.

This chapter provides a broad discussion on the study findings. It includes an analysis on the experiences of the study participants within the Haitian higher education system and at HELP and connections to the literature. The discussion section is organized by the two overarching research questions of this study, which were:

1. How do key stakeholders perceive the challenges of access and persistence within the higher education system in Haiti?
2. How do Haitian Education and Leadership Program's strategies support the academic and future success of its scholars?

The discussion related to the first research question will include the following themes that emerged from the study:

- the aftermath of the Haiti earthquake
- barriers to access
- barriers to persistence
- leadership and governance
- teaching style and quality of education

The discussion related to the second research question will include the following strategies that

were discussed by the study participants:

- HELP enrichment courses
- co-curricular experiences
- life-long skills development
- addressing barriers to university access and persistence

I include implications for practice and policy for HELP and other entities in Haiti as well as recommendations for future research. I conclude with a synopsis of this study.

### **Perceptions of Challenges within the Haitian Higher Education System**

This section addresses participants' perceptions on the challenges within the Haitian higher education system. Understanding the perceptions of challenges to the Haitian higher education system is important to this study because participants discussed their lived experiences as current and former students of the system and as staff members working to address the gaps therein. Their thoughts on higher education in Haiti provide a lens for understanding the role of HELP in the lives of HELP scholars and alumni, how the higher education system shapes the work of HELP staff and those who research or work in Haiti's education sector, and how and where HELP fits within the higher education environment in Haiti.

HELP students and alumni discussed their experiences as current and former students within Haiti's higher education system. HELP staff discussed their experiences supporting HELP students navigate the policies and practices within their respective universities. The two individuals interviewed outside of HELP discussed their perceptions as researchers of Haiti's higher education system and individuals working for the Ministry of Education in Haiti respectively. Overall, participants shared that the 2010 Haiti earthquake, barriers to access to and persistence within universities, leadership and governance, and faculty teaching styles were

factors that contributed to the overall challenges within the Haitian higher education system.

### **Haiti Earthquake**

The effects of the 2010 earthquake were still being felt during my 2012 consultancy visit to HELP and at the time of this study in 2013. According to INURED (as cited in Lloyd, 2010), the earthquake “killed an estimated 121 to 200 university professors and administrators and between 2,599 and 6,000 students” (p.1). Additionally, many of the buildings and their libraries across the state university campuses were heavily damaged or completely destroyed, including the Ministry of Education building. With the loss of so many faculty and peers, many university students who were near completion were granted the opportunity to finish their studies at universities in other Caribbean nations and a few of them attended institutions in the United States that have a high concentration of Haitian and Haitian American students, namely Florida (Haiti Libre, 2011). The earthquake revealed that there were many deficiencies within the system such as the dearth of qualified faculty, insufficient resources, and poor infrastructure. Further, at the time of this study, as a result of the earthquake, students enrolled at the state university still had to contend with a heavier course load to ensure that they graduated on time.

Although Haiti could not have prevented the earthquake that occurred, technical training and practical understanding on post-natural disaster response may have contributed to a more efficient recovery felt by the Haitian higher education system, among many other entities that were affected. Barakat and Sundaram (2013) stated that the field of education in emergencies and post-conflict transition is still in its infancy. They discussed the need for greater understanding of the needs and preparation of a country before an emergency were to occur there. Higher education systems could serve as one entity that could address this gap in knowledge and practice by offering courses and degrees in this area of study or serving as

location for experts to meet and implement plans and policies for rapidly and efficiently addressing outcomes of disasters. Penson and Tomlinson (2009) support this argument by explaining that countries that are affected by natural disasters should identify and analyze successful interventions from other countries in various contexts in regards to the nature and level of the disaster. This is important information to have as it can provide a guide for responding to the effects of natural disasters, including disruptions to the education sector.

### **Barriers to University Access**

Every study participant discussed barriers that impacted access to universities for Haitian students. Although the term “access” was used specifically just a handful of times, the concept of “university access” was implied during the interviews. The cost of university attendance and the location of universities were two major issues for students and their families. The HELP ESL/Leadership Course Instructor discussed the challenges of almost all of the universities in Haiti being located in the capital of Port-au-Prince. Because of this, students who are not from the capital or who do not have family or friends living there and who cannot afford the cost of renting a space, and related educational expenses, have to forgo a university education (Rena, 2010). Similarly, the HELP ESL Program Manager Myrtho Izikyel stressed the importance of the state university becoming decentralized. The state university campuses are all located in the capital, which vastly reduces the opportunity for students from other locations, *departements*, from attending them. The ESL program manager stressed, “coming down to Port-au-Prince you don’t have family or anyone here it is basically impossible.” (Myrtho Izikyel)

The lack of a university financial aid or education loan system is a major barrier for students from the most disadvantaged economic backgrounds in Haiti. Some students are fortunate to have their schooling financed by family members outside of the country, most

notably the United States and Canada. The Haitian Diaspora remits approximately 20% of Haiti's Gross National Product, 2 billion a year, and their remittances are the greatest contribution they make to the country (Wah, 2013). However, as study participants shared, students who do not have extended family members that can make monthly or yearly contributions towards their education have few options. Some are fortunate to find programs like HELP while others are either shut out of school or their families making significant sacrifices to support their attendance. The lack of a financial aid or loan system is consistent with reports on financing higher education in developing countries (Sawahel 2014; Barr, 2005). Sabry (as cited in Sawahel, 2014) discussed North African nations and pointed out that they, like other developing countries like Haiti, "lack the administrative capacity to increase revenue through extra taxes or even more effectively collect currently imposed taxes, reducing the funding available for all areas of government spending" (p 1). Presently, the Ministry of Education provides very little funding to public education in Haiti leaving the private sector (NGOs, religious groups, international organizations, etc.) providing and funding the majority of education in Haiti (Wolff, 2008).

The lack of opportunity to attend a university in Haiti was another barrier discussed by participants. Many of the students and alumni of HELP discussed the potential challenges they would have faced attempting to attend a university in Haiti if they were not selected as a HELP Scholar. Institutional barriers, like the state university's quota system, are an example of students being left out of higher education. Rena (2010) shared that attendance to tertiary-level institutions increased from 2000 to 2007 and that institutions in developing countries will have to become more flexible and be able to confront "social inequalities deeply rooted in history,

culture and economic structures” that have negatively impacted disadvantaged students’ ability to access and be competitive within the higher education environment (p. 305).

### **Barriers to University Persistence**

Similar to the barriers related to access, study participants described experiences that conceptually refer to challenges related to “persistence” within the Haitian higher education system. Experiences with faculty, insufficient resources, the thesis requirement for graduation, and the role of international funding were examples provided that participants felt hindered students’ success at universities in Haiti. The conditions described the study participants are not unique to Haiti. Many students in higher education systems in developing countries encounter teacher absenteeism, large classroom sizes which lead to a high student/teacher ratio, and minimal resources, which at times lead to extended time in school and lower graduation rates (Bloom et al., 2006; Eris, 2011).

The majority of study participants discussed faculty as a subtheme. More specifically, they described their various experiences with faculty that they felt negatively impacted the student experience, which in turn affects persistence. Some explained that faculty absenteeism is a major issue facing students at universities, while others asserted that faculty absenteeism is a direct result of non-sufficient or non-existent faculty salaries. HELP Recruiter/HELP Alumni Margareth Mathieu described scenarios where some faculty members have multiple jobs in order to have a combined salary that is sufficient for a quality of life for his or her own family. As a result, some of these faculty members have to make the decision to prioritize a position that pays a consistent salary, which leads to them not showing up to teach and students not learning for days or weeks. Students are then responsible for their own learning and for ensuring that they know the material for that class. This phenomenon is compounded by the lack of adequate and

sufficient libraries and computer labs with the Haitian higher education system. UNESCO (UNESCO Position Paper on Education Post-2015, 2014) addresses the various challenges in education systems worldwide. The organization urged countries to make changes in their education systems and to improve their quality so that students could success once they have accessed higher education.

Resources were another challenge described by many study participants. Given HELP's role in closing the gaps between what students need and what universities are capable of offering, it is understandable that many of the HELP staff had thoughts on the limited amounts of resources available to university students. One staff member described the lack of labs for engineering students and limited practicum opportunities to put learning into practice. Another staff member discussed the lack of computer labs, insufficient number of desks given the large classroom sizes, and minimal research opportunities. These challenges are similar in other low-income countries and were described in a paper on Ugandan higher education (Bunoti, 2012) and in a paper describing the quality of higher education in India (Bali, 2014).

A major barrier for students attempting to earn their baccalaureate degree in Haiti is the mandatory thesis requirement. The fact that there is a thesis requirement is not unusual, it is standard in many disciplines, including those reflected at U.S. based institutions, for example. The challenge that students at Haitian universities experience, however, is the lack of thesis writing preparation and training, and little guidance on how to start and complete a research project. A HELP staff member who has attended thesis defenses said, "the methods aren't there...the base isn't there, the foundation isn't there...they (students) don't have proper *formasyon* (training)..." Ojokheta (2010), describing long distance and online education in Nigeria, found that the strongest predictors of student persistence in higher education were the

“learning conduciveness of the environment” (p. 181). According to this study’s participants, the thesis requirement, coupled with little guidance by faculty and insufficient training and preparation, is one of the main reasons students do not complete their studies and earn their degree in Haiti.

The role of international funding organizations in higher education decision making in low-income countries like Haiti is what perhaps underscores the myriad of challenges that can be found within the Haitian higher education system. Collins and Rhoads (2009) describe the state of higher education systems in developing countries and place some of the blame with the World Bank and their years of undervaluing the role of higher education in locations like Haiti. They asserted,

Although the Bank has econometricians working on a whole host of complex projects, it strikes us as odd that none are working to calculate the financial damage done to developing nations by under-supporting higher education. Although the higher education systems of developing countries are described as out-of-date, dilapidated, and over-crowded, there is little explanation as to why this is the case, other than the oft-repeated mantra that developing countries suffer from vast amounts of corruption. (p.192)

What Collins and Rhoads (2009) describe is consistent with the higher education system and institutions in Haiti. One of the interview participants, the INURED AD described the consequences of international funding organizations on the education system in Haiti, specifically the consistent support to primary and some support to secondary education but little to no support to higher education. The INURED AD stated “why are we focused on... improv[ing] basic education if you don’t improve higher education? You can’t develop a development plan for nations...you can’t develop policies, laws, you know if you don’t have

politicians, government officials who have an appropriate education...” The findings from this study related to barriers to university persistence suggest that focusing on university access is not enough. Ministries and university systems will also need to consider the social, economic, and institutional barriers that impact students’ ability to persist and successfully complete their university education.

### **Leadership and Governance**

A consistent theme among participants was the limited number of experts in particular disciplines. More specifically, they described experiences of faculty members who may be the only specialist in a particular subject in the country. A HELP alumni member said, “for higher education, this is a bad academic result.” Nunn and Price (2005) discussed the effects of brain drain in Africa, and suggested that the loss of intellectuals in Africa is a loss of the collective social knowledge that had been supplied to them from their society and through government financing of their university degrees. A HELP staff member describes this issue further by explaining that due to the limited number of experts, there is an increase of *estrangé*, or strangers, in Haiti who are picking up the slack. Some of this issue can be attributed to the high rate of brain drain in Haiti, which has left a dearth in the number of intellectuals in Haiti who can educate and train the next class of future graduates.

Another challenge discussed by participants is the role of the Ministry of Education within the higher education system. Many private entities establish themselves in Haiti and refer to themselves as universities. Because of this, they are not under the purview of the Ministry and are not held to any standards or the guidelines of the Ministry. This has led to what participants view as a major reason that a Haitian degree is undervalued both within and outside of the country. Another challenge explained by a HELP staff member is the reporting structure for

higher education in Haiti. More specifically, based on law, the state university system oversees both public and private universities in Haiti and all new higher education institutions are supposed to go through the state university to be created (Dumay, 2010). Two factors that stand out are the entities that establish themselves and open without any connection to any governing body (as stated above) and the fact that the state university is seemingly responsible for the establishment of new universities, as opposed to the Ministry of Education.

### **Teaching Style and Quality of Education**

Another challenge discussed by participants is the teaching style of faculty at the universities. In Haiti, the overwhelming majority of the ways in which teachers impart knowledge is through rote learning. Dupoux et al. (2006) explained that schools in Haiti rely on a strict curriculum plan, rote learning, and rarely, if at all, use experiential learning or student centered teaching tactics. While some study participants saw the value of a rote learning method for retaining large quantities of information, many participants questioned if they were truly learning if they had not been taught to think critically and apply what they had learned to practical or real world experiences. Further, one HELP student felt that a memorization only learning style did not offer opportunities for developing innovative solutions to problems or learning *how* to reason with all of the knowledge retained through memorization techniques.

Heng (2010) discussed Malaysia's reliance on the "quantity of knowledge rather than development of the intellect" (p. 1). Heng's (2010) description of the factors related to the reliance on rote learning helps to understand why this may be still persisting in Haiti. Factors include society preferring to measure a student's success in tangible terms such as the numbers of As on exams, the ease of developing exam questions that assess facts and the ability for teachers to evaluate those type of responses, and the difficulty of teachers teaching students how

to think critically and learning how to assess those skills in students without having been trained to do so for themselves (Heng, 2010).

Finally, study participants discussed the overall quality of the education received at Haitian universities. Many participants believed that the majority of faculty members want to teach and value teaching and that for the most part universities are doing the best they can, given the circumstances, to educate and graduate educated citizens in Haiti. However, participants described conditions (as previously stated) that hinder and undermine the quality of education offered at universities and that it circumvents all of the good work that dedicated educators perform within the higher education system. HELP's Career Services Manager Farah Paul had insight on both the type of students that the universities produce and the type of employees that the local labor market is looking for. "Ultimately, the concern is that companies in Haiti have expectations of what they are looking for but in their potential employees 'how are you going to ensure the delivery of that' and is the Haitian higher education system attuned to those needs." (HELP Career Services Manager Farah Paul)

This discussion on study participant's perceptions of higher education challenges in Haiti illuminates a myriad of issues within the system and suggests that there will need to be a multi-prong and multi-unit approach for addressing these issues. Almost all of these challenges can be described as financial in nature but addressing them will also require a shift in attitudes and culture, policies and practice, as well as structural changes to the physical higher education environment in Haiti.

### **Haitian Education and Leadership Program Strategies that Support Students**

This section discusses the various strategies that HELP has identified as necessary for fostering the academic and post HELP success of its students and the findings related to these

strategies as shared by HELP participants. When HELP was founded in 1997, it initially only supported one student and in the following year it supported two and presently HELP supports over 100 students yearly (HELP Haiti Country Director 2012; 2013). Over time the organization has strived to meet the gaps that it identified were preventing students from gaining access to universities in Haiti and eliminating barriers that were preventing students from persisting to completion. Learning and unpacking HELP's interventions are necessary and vital to this study because it describes the possibility of non-governmental organization's filling gaps in the education sector that local governments do not have the capacity to address. Further, HELP's strategies may provide a framework for addressing issues of access to and persistence within universities in ways that can be viewed as innovative in other low-income/developing countries such as Haiti.

In this section, HELP students and alumni thoughts on their experiences with the various components of HELP is included as well as how they believe HELP's strategies support their success as students and alumni. HELP staff offer their perspective on how students interact with them in their roles at HELP and their thoughts on how the various HELP interventions meet the needs of HELP scholars and the overall mission of HELP. Their experiences are examined through the lens of my conceptual framework, which offers a framework for those working with university students to increase student's participation and persistence in higher education worldwide

### **Enrichment Courses**

HELP offers three courses, Leadership, English as a Second Language, and Computer Science that HELP students are required to take in addition to their university course load. The Leadership course follows a social change model. Among other components of HELP, this

course strives to meet HELP's mission to "create, through merit- and needs-based university scholarships, a community of young professionals and leaders who promote a more just society in Haiti" ("Mission and Vision," n.d.). In addition to course work, students are required to participate in community services projects at the HELP campus (during their first year in HELP) and at various organizations in the community for the remainder of their time at HELP. Students also participate in various leadership activities that encourage self-reflection of one's leadership potential.

HELP Leadership Program Manager (LPM) Marie Belizaire discussed how initially, students are resistant to her methods. Her teaching style is highly interactive, requires meaningful and participatory discussion, and student led activities. Student's experiences in this course are counter to the lectures and rote learning that they are used to in their university classes. The LPM also shared that the idea of self-reflection and there being "no right or wrong answer to write down on paper was" a difficult transition for most students. Mintzberg (2006) discussed organizations building on the best of their own cultural traditions and that organizations can foster the conditions "that give rise to indigenous leadership, particularly those of thoughtful self-reliance" (p. 13). One of the components of the HELP scholar application is to identify a Haiti problem and a Haitian solution for addressing it. Students then work toward addressing the problems they identified in the Leadership course. This can prove to be beneficial for Haiti in the long run as Dutra (2012) explained that bringing in expatriates to lead organizations can be difficult because "cultural assimilation can be barriers to success for "imported" executives—language, habits, [and the] ability to cope with sometimes unconventional ways of doing business" (p. 1).

HELP Student Stephan Calixte shared that the Leadership course helped him to consider

how he could be a leader, not just for himself or at school, but how who he is as an individual could contribute to positive changes in Haiti. Dutra (2012) emphasized that higher education in developing countries often only focuses on training students in basic technical skills. Many of the HELP students discussed how the Leadership course helped them to reflect on their role as future professionals in Haiti and how their post HELP experiences could be about more than “just” having a job, but can also be about contributing to the change that needs to occur in Haiti. The Leadership course was the course that was most discussed most in depth by the HELP students. To them, the Leadership course was different than ESL and the Computer Science courses, which are primarily skilled-based experiences. The Leadership course, in their opinion, helped them to apply what they learned from all components of HELP and approach their learning and application of knowledge in a new way. In other words, HELP fosters the development of soft skills that the students may not have experienced in their universities.

English as a Second Language (ESL) is another component of the HELP curriculum and it provides HELP scholars with additional skills for themselves, the local and international job market, as well as potential academic opportunities outside of Haiti. ESL Program Manager Myrtho Izikyel shared that this course helps students by “giving them more tools to be more successful in whatever professions they have.” Ms. Izikyel further noted that ESL became especially beneficial after the Haiti earthquake when many “international actors, NGOs” flooded Haiti and who did not come to the country speaking Haitian Creole or French, the two national languages of Haiti. HELP recognizes that the ability to speak English sets their students apart in the local job market, which is overwhelmingly comprised of international organizations requiring employees to be fluent in English. Pinon and Haydon (2010) found that employees with strong English language skills were in the best position to take the fullest advantage of new

opportunities. In addition to supporting students' acquisition of English speaking skills, HELP students are also taught how to read and write in English. ESL supports the other components of HELP by offering workshops for students on curriculum vitas, cover letters, and applications that need to be written in English as well as preparation for the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) for students who want academic experiences in the United States.

All of the HELP students discussed the ESL course to varying degrees. Some shared that the ESL course was helpful and they practiced their English by interacting with friends and family on Facebook or by reading comments on various YouTube videos. Others found learning English to be difficult and one student shared that although he saw the value in learning the language, he was resentful for *having to* learn how to speak English in order to find a good paying job in his own country. His comments bring to mind solly (2013) who questioned, "in promoting English in a particular context, am I contributing to a greater good, or participating in something with potentially long-lasting harmful effects?" HELP sees the benefit of offering ESL in the increasingly connected international community, but one has to wonder what it means that English is necessary in order to get a job at many of the international organizations in Haiti, a country that speaks two entirely different languages. Why not instead require international organizations to be able to speak at least one of the two national languages in the country? HELP Student Marie Claremont felt the ESL course was important because she saw English as a commercial language and that she found it necessary to practice it a lot because it is not offered at her university. She sees English as a language that is entrenched in the international community and she does not want to be left behind. Pinon and Haydon (2010) reinforce this thought by explaining in their report of companies in Bangladesh, Cameroon, Nigeria, Pakistan,

and Rwanda that they found that staff with English language skills had a strong advantage over those who did not.

The third course offered by HELP is Computer Science (CS). Students take the course at the computer lab at the HELP center. Students are taught basic intro to computers (how to open, close, print and save a file) and are introduced to the Microsoft Office suite of programs: Word, Excel, PowerPoint, and Access. Students are required to open an email account and are taught how send emails and how to write professional correspondences electronically. The HELP scholars are also taught how to research on the Internet. The CS course prepares students for potential job opportunities that require basic computer skills and literacy as well as academic experiences outside of the country that assume that students are equipped and entering with basic computing skills. Computer Science Assistant Manager Viola Persine described that most students come in with minimal exposure to computers and her role is to start them from the beginning “what is a computer, what is in a computer...this is something that you start small so that they can have abilities with it.” Chhachhar et al. (2013) stressed that information technology in the educational environment fosters new ideas and creativity, which in turn produces innovation. By offering CS courses, HELP opens up the doors for its scholars that can lead to greater connections with the global community.

Some HELP students are enrolled at ESIH (Ecole Supérieure d'Infotronique d'Haiti) and are learning computer science skills at their institutions. One of the ESIH/HELP students I interviewed fulfilled his HELP internship requirement by working as intern in the Computer Science department at HELP. He shared that the internship helped him to expand his information technology (IT) knowledge and to apply what he was learning in the classroom at ESIH by working in a “help desk” role at HELP by trouble shooting IT related problems that arose with

staff and students, and also by supporting Ms. Persine during the Computer Science classes.

Bukhatwa (2014) identified the importance of integrating technology into student's educational experiences. Both HELP student Marie Claremont and HELP Student Winston Mondesir shared how important the Computer Science course was to them because it offered an opportunity to learn a skill that they would not have been able to develop at their respective universities.

Winston Mondesir also shared that the CS course advances his studies, gives him a skill that way stay forever, and that it taught him how to use the HELP computer lab by creating and printing documents.

### **Co-Curricular Experiences**

HELP students have opportunities to develop as students and future professionals in addition to the enrichment courses. They are encouraged to have international experiences. Some students have taken summer courses at Cornell University and Dartmouth College over the years, a recent HELP alumni spoke at the 2014 Clinton Global Initiative Annual Meeting in New York, and three HELP scholars were selected to attend the WISE Conference on international education in Qatar in the past. HELP Student Gregory Auguste shared that his experiences outside of Haiti will provide him with the opportunity to meet individuals from different countries with background different from his. These international opportunities allow HELP scholars to apply what they have learned from their universities and at HELP in an international context, which in turn, broadens their perspectives on themselves and the global community of which they are a part.

HELP students are also required to have a *staj*, an internship, beginning their third year in the program. HELP Alumni Daniel Jacobs discussed his first internship experience, which was at HELP, as a Computer Sciences teacher. That experience allowed him to share what he learned

from his university courses with the students at HELP who were new to computers and their capabilities. HELP Career Services Manager Farah Paul facilitates the internship experience for HELP scholars. In addition, the Ms. Paul develops partnerships with local organizations and companies to develop internship or other work related opportunities with them. Ms. Paul explained that one of the aims of the Career Services department is for students to have a professional experience, regardless if it's at a Haitian organization or a foreign organization, as long as it could provide the students with experiences in their academic discipline. Students can also assume a volunteer leadership position as a Chef du Centre d'Hebergement de HELP (CCHE) in one of the HELP residences. This position is similar to the Resident Assistant/Advisor position at U.S. universities. One of the HELP Students/CCHE Regine Nelson explained that the CCHE role allows for putting leadership in application and continuing the objectives learned during the leadership courses. The co-curricular experiences that the HELP students experience are consistent with Kumar et al. (2004) who emphasized the positive benefits that students receive when participating in co-curricular activities.

### **Developing Life-Long Skills**

Billing (2010) noted the importance of graduates from higher education institutions having the transferable skills and abilities that employers want, which include problem solving, communication, teamwork, and critical thinking. Although HELP does not list these traits in their materials, they are outcomes that students achieve as a byproduct of being HELP scholars. By accessing the various services that HELP offers, HELP students have the opportunity to develop skills that will be transferable to the next phase of their lives after HELP. Ms. Paul, the HELP Career Services Manager, stressed that the workshops she offers is for the HELP scholars to gain a better of idea what they are capable of and how they can use what they learn in their

careers.

During the summer, incoming students attend a required orientation that introduces students to HELP, Port-au-Prince, university life, and living with others. For many students, this is the first time that they are away from home and living with others who are not members of their families. During this time they also learn how to open and manage a bank account. They attend workshops on budgeting and time management skills and interpersonal relationships. They also learn how to live with others who are different from them in terms of gender and regional backgrounds.

Students also have the opportunity to interact with alumni and invited guests from both the local and international community. HELP Student Olivia Jean appreciated the opportunities to meet others because it allowed for public speaking and networking practice, in addition to learning from the visitors. Paulson (2001) shared that analytical skill, problem solving, interpersonal skills, the ability to negotiate and influence, and self-management were important to future employers. These various activities and services of HELP allow its students to practice and reinforce these skills, which will be necessary for them as professionals and in their various academic and co-curricular experiences.

### **Addressing Barriers to University Access and Persistence**

This final discussion section represents the two main themes of access and persistence that emerged from this study. Study participants did not consistently use the terms “access” and “persistence” during their interviews. However, when considering all of the strategies that HELP employs and how HELP students and staff discussed these interventions in relation to the challenges within the Haitian higher education system, it was evident that these were the two main gaps that HELP fills. The following descriptions of university access and persistence shape

this section; access refers to the ability of individuals, who had the opportunity to be academically prepared and equipped for post-secondary education, to take of advantage of higher education with a reasonable degree of ease (Usher and Medow 2010; Wang 2011) and persistence refers to a student continuing in higher education with the result of graduation and earning a degree (Arnold, 1999).

### **Access**

The two main challenges that resonated with study participants related to university access were financial and location of the universities. HELP addresses financial barriers by offering students full scholarships to cover the cost of tuition and provide students a monthly stipend, which they use to pay for their meals and transportation to and from school, among other things. HELP Alumni Kesner Cesar shared his thoughts on the difficulty of students leaving the *province* to attend a private university in the capital and that the expense would have been a hardship for him and his family. For many of the students, it is not just the cost of attendance that would prove to be a deciding factor on whether or not they could afford to attend, but also the need to finance the related costs, such as living expenses, educational supplies, and miscellaneous needs that occur.

When reflecting on the benefits received from the organization, HELP Alumni Kesner Cesar talked about the act of HELP taking students, where it would have been difficult for them to leave, and providing them with the opportunity and increasing their capacity to be change agents in their country. Financial challenges for attending a college or university are not unique to Haiti; they existed for me as a first-generation college student in the United States. However, what Mr. Cesar describes are challenges in educational environments where there are no interventions that exist to address them as a matter of policy and practice.

During my 2012 consultancy trip to Haiti/HELP, some students shared that they used a portion of their stipends to help support the educational costs of siblings who were not HELP scholars. This fact indicates that HELP is not just changing the lives of their scholars, but they are also making positive impacts on their families as well. HELP Alumni Ernest Duncan discussed how becoming a HELP scholar also benefitted his older brother, who was not a student in the program. After being offered admission as a HELP scholar, Mr. Duncan's family did not have to worry about paying the cost of his tuition, books, spending money, and housing. Thus, the family had the opportunity to "manage the little bit of money that they have to pay the university" for Ernest's brother. The books and related academic resources offered by HELP is also a source of relief for students. As Ernest indicated during the study, "my father never know how much a medical book cost...I just have to tell them HELP is going to take care of it."

The location of the universities in Haiti is a challenge for students who do not live in Port-au-Prince. Because the majority of the internationally accredited universities are located in the capital, students from the more rural areas of Haiti have to find ways to get to the capital to attend them. Similar to U.S. high achieving students from low-income backgrounds who aim to attend high status universities, HELP students want to attend the best schools in Haiti so that they are afforded the best possible outcome post graduation. However, Haitian universities do not have a residence life system like those found at higher education institutions in other locations around the world. As a result, the lack of housing is often a determining factor for students who do not have family or family friends that they can live with during the academic year. HELP Student Recruiter/HELP Alumni Margareth Mathieu talked about HELP providing more than just tuition but also providing a support network that does not exist for most students in Port-au-Prince. The financial support provided by HELP puts students minds at ease because

as Margareth explained, “HELP supports transportation to and from school, provides housing, allocates stipends that are enough to live on, not just an opportunity to eat, but to eat on a regular basis.”

## **Persistence**

After eliminating many of the barriers to university access for its students, HELP strives to provide interventions that support students’ persistence as well. HELP ESL Program Manager Myrtho Izikyel described that by taking away immediate issues for students, HELP “frees their mind a little...so they have the time and the space to contemplate things.” All of the HELP study participants talked about the various services that HELP provides, which assist the students in being academically successful. The term persistence was not used by many of the participants. However, when evaluating the resources and services of HELP utilized to support students, it is evident that those strategies are in place to ensure that the obstacles that students often face when attempting to earn their degrees are reduced. Each student is given an Academic Advisor, who I would characterize as a “life advisor,” for his or her duration in the HELP program. Students are assigned their Academic Advisor during orientation to HELP and the advisor helps support the newly admitted HELP scholar to HELP and university life. In addition, the Academic Advisor responds to all aspects of student needs, whether they are academic, personal, regarding mental or physical well-being, related to student’s spiritual identity or inter/intra personal relationships, as well as other needs that may arise. The HELP advisor role is similar to the student support staff found at U.S. based institutions of higher education.

The HELP center includes a computer lab and library. HELP students have access to the center so that they could utilize HELP resources after hours. During my 2012 consultancy visit to HELP one of the students shared how vital the computer lab is for their success in school. The

student indicated that because the universities do not have computer labs, libraries, or quiet places to study, many HELP scholars will stay in the HELP center well into the night studying, researching, and working on academic projects. Furthermore, if students need assistance on a project, they are able to rely on their HELP advisors to help them troubleshoot their concerns. Universities in Haiti do not have a formal academic advising function and faculty are not always easily accessible to students. Having access to academic resources at HELP serves as a relief for students who would have little opportunity to have their academic needs met elsewhere.

Completing a thesis is one of the final requirements for graduating from many of the universities in Haiti. I learned during my 2012 visit to Haiti that many students stop just short of graduating because they are unable to complete their thesis. Then, the HELP advisors shared that students find it challenging to start and successfully defend their thesis. Factors contributing to the lack of thesis success include faculty not discussing the thesis requirement much with their students, students not being adequately trained on how to conduct research, and students receiving little to no support on finishing their projects. Students also have to contend with their thesis advisor being out of the country or not being available for other reasons to attend their defense, which then prolongs the time to degree completion. As a result, many students leave their universities without earning their baccalaureate degree.

After returning to Haiti in 2013, I learned that HELP employed a thesis advisor, Theodore Antoine, whose sole role is to help students in their final year complete their thesis requirement. Mr. Antoine supports students with their final projects and thesis. He ensures that the students are following the parameters of their projects/thesis requirements, assists them with the research that needs to occur and provides feedback on their writing. Further, HELP Thesis Advisor Theodore Antoine requires all of the graduating students to participate in a practice

defense at the HELP center and invites HELP staff members to observe and critique the student's presentations. He then meets with the students at a later time to provide suggestions and edits as necessary. The HELP thesis advisor role responds to a major barrier for university persistence and completion in Haiti. This fairly new position has proven invaluable to the HELP scholars because they are able to get support for the parts of the thesis requirements that they can control and that HELP can support.

This study included perceptions of challenges within the Haitian higher education system as experienced by students and administrators who operate within and on the periphery. Secondly, this study outlined HELP's response to university challenges in Haiti. HELP provides a comprehensive range of services and resources to university students in Haiti, which it has identified as vital for addressing the needs of its scholars. This study provided insight from HELP students, alumni and staff on how the strategies HELP employs supports the academic and future success of its students. When considering the mission of HELP, in part, "...to create a community of young professionals and leaders..." and its wide ranging support, services, resources, and opportunities that meet its mission, at its core, HELP appears to be addressing a need that is universal to students across the globe: eliminating barriers to university access and providing opportunities for university persistence and ultimately completion.

There is an abundance of literature that addresses college access, success, persistence, and completion. The majority of it relates to U.S. and European university contexts. There is also scholarship regarding higher/tertiary education in developing countries across the globe. However, much of that literature relies on U.S. based scholarship to make sense of or to describe the experiences there. Swail and Perna (2002) asserted, when discussing access and persistence (in U.S. higher education), there was not "sufficient attention to the steps required to be

academically, socially, and psychologically prepared to enter and succeed in college” (p. 15). They go on to stress “success is ultimately dependent upon the ability of our society at large to address inequalities that affect education and opportunity for all groups” (p. 15). Their points are important and necessary for discussions on student success in higher education. However, how do you address access and persistence in locations where the system of higher education, the physical spaces provided for higher learning, and the resources allocated towards post-secondary education do not include what would be considered basic (financial aid, consistent faculty, housing, cafeterias, supportive and student services, etc.) in places like the U.S.? Further, what if those “basic service” needs are met outside of the Ministry of Education and the university system, as is the case of HELP in Haiti? This study revealed that a multi-prong approach is necessary to support the academic and future success for university students in an international setting. This study also provides a model for addressing university access and persistence in a low-income/developing country educational context and fills a gap in the literature on this topic.

### **Implications**

The following section includes the implications I view as significant as a result of completing this study. After reviewing relevant literature, conducting the research project, and analyzing my findings, I provide implications for policy, practice, development, and theory, as well as recommendations for future research.

#### **Implications for Policy**

Implications for policy are discussed in this section. More specifically, I provide implications for policy changes for the Haitian government, Haiti Ministry of Education, the universities in Haiti and external agencies that contribute to the education sector in the country.

## **Government-Haiti**

The Haitian government as a whole was outside the scope of this study. However, based on some of the challenges described in my findings, I do offer one policy implication for consideration. Given the amount of international funding that Haiti receives and the number of international organizations within the country and in the educational environment, the government may want to consider including, as a matter of policy, higher education as a priority for new initiatives that emerge there. The Haitian government may want to consider requiring higher education as a line item in new educational funding opportunities in the country or requesting higher education being included in new educational initiatives in Haiti. These changes may begin to address the challenges and some of the immediate and long term needs of students and educators within the Haitian higher education system.

## **Ministry of Education-Haiti**

There is an abundance of scholarship related to education in Haiti. The majority of the information is written by individuals and organizations that are based outside of the country, myself as the author of this study included. Some of what is written is from those who study Haitian education or by individuals who are affiliated with international organizations that work in Haiti and who contribute policy briefs, reports, or opinion pieces on the Haitian education sector. There is limited scholarship from educators who live in Haiti, who work in Haitian education, and who are graduates of the Haitian education system. The Ministry of Education is the voice of Haitian education and can also be the source of information that contributes to the scholarship that is about their work. There are documents on the Ministry of Education website on enrollment statistics, operational plan, standards, and information on the most education reform). However, there does not appear to be documents related to empirical research. The

Ministry can develop a policy in which periodic assessments of its system and empirical research on the work of its affiliated educational institutions (primary, secondary, vocational, tertiary) occur. By developing such a policy, the Ministry can ensure that its practice is aligned with its mission as well as the needs of the country.

In order to follow the expectations of this policy, the Ministry may want to consider partnering with professors from its university system who have expertise on conducting research as well as the Interuniversity Institute for Research and Development (INURED) in Haiti to continue the assessment on the state of education and higher education in Haiti. This research will not only provide more relevant and timely educational information about Haiti, it will also be from individuals who work within the system and may be the most knowledgeable. By partnering with others to conduct research, the Ministry can further assess the challenges that students and families face within Haitian education and it could then direct its policies and practice to be more aligned and in tune with the needs of its constituents.

### **Universities in Haiti**

During both my 2012 and 2013 visits to Haiti, I was struck by how much the thesis requirement appeared to be a barrier in university student persistence and completion. Given the importance of being successful in this endeavor, universities in Haiti may want to revise their policies regarding the thesis requirement and consider providing a few options that would prove beneficial to students. They can offer research courses that provide students opportunity to conduct different forms of research. If offering a semester-long course is a hardship, universities could offer monthly workshops for students who are a year away from their thesis defense. These workshops could address the various components and requirements for the thesis. Finally, if offering a workshop and suitable instructor is not feasible, universities may want to create a

thesis packet for students to study from. If offering packets to all graduating students is cost prohibitive, universities may want to consider charging a nominal fee for copies, making it available on their website, or emailing them to students. Although not all students have access to computers in their personal homes or may not even have an email account, there are a number of Internet cafes in Port-au-Prince that students can visit. Students could pool their resources to print the thesis packet and share it. A slight change in the thesis policy can prove to be a significant outcome for students.

Universities in Haiti may want to include in their yearly planning a component that assesses institutional barriers that impede student access and persistence within their systems. For example, one of the HELP participants discussed the quota system for entry to some of the universities in Haiti. This quota does not allow for waiting lists or account for students who do not show up or drop out. As a result, many students who have the competence and the will to enter a university are unable to because of this seemingly arbitrary policy. By reassessing their quota system and changing their policies relating the admission, universities can allow for flexibility or change that will provide a greater level of access to potential students.

### **External Agencies**

This study included a review of the literature on the influence of external agencies on higher education systems in developing countries. Specifically, the literature and a few of the study participants discussed the role of international aid organizations historically underfunding higher education, which has contributed to the poor state of the higher education system in Haiti today. External funding agencies and development organizations that often provide aid to locations like Haiti are beholden to the mission of their organizations, funders, and leadership. It has been discovered that often the agendas of external actors are not always aligned with the

needs or expectations of the receiving country. The conundrum in Haiti is that the government sorely lacks the capacity to successfully provide education to children in need of primary education, which has a domino effect on the number of students eligible to enter its higher education system. As a result, much of the on-the-ground initiatives, as well as the funding related to education in Haiti, is provided by external agencies. Although the government has a functioning ministry of education, it is hampered by its financial and resource limitations, leaving external agencies as the main source and providers of education in the country. This phenomenon, not unique to Haiti, has left external agencies with a strong voice in how education operates in locations like Haiti. Given this, how should external agencies proceed?

It is imperative that external agencies work alongside, instead of parallel to, the government. Rather than usurping the authority of the ministry of education due to their limited capacity, external agencies should prioritize policies that eventually result in changes that render the support from these organizations as no longer necessary. In other words, external funding and development organizations should develop interventions that respond to the immediate and long term educational needs of the population. They should also address the professional development and training needs of governmental officials and offices by introducing emerging strategies and practices that have proven successful in educational environments like Haiti. Further, initiatives should take into account the historical, cultural, and contemporary factors that are the root causes for the current state of education in Haiti. Finally, it is not enough to address the higher education challenges in Haiti. The issue of Haiti's current brain drain rate of 85% will also need to be accounted for. As demonstrated by the 90% retention rate of HELP alumni in Haiti, university graduates will remain in the country if they are able to find local jobs that are on par with their educational backgrounds and financial needs.

## **Implications for Practice**

Implications for practice are discussed in this section. Suggestions are outlined for universities in Haiti, the Haitian Education and Leadership Program (HELP), and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The recommendations provided in this section are broad, although based on the specific and unique educational environment in Haiti and of a Haiti-based organization. Thus, entities outside of Haiti should consider how these implications transfer to their contexts and needs.

### **Universities in Haiti**

I have studied HELP from my lens as a United States based and trained student affairs practitioner and higher education scholar. From this perspective, I view HELP as similar to the student affairs divisions that are found within U.S. based colleges and universities. HELP's various components (orientation, leadership, housing, advising, general student support, etc.) function like offices of student leadership and activities, residence life, counseling centers, and career services that are at institutions of higher education in the United States. HELP's Haiti based model for student support is working for its students in Haiti. Given the success of HELP, the universities in Haiti may want to consider developing a similar system, or perhaps designating individuals (given budget constraints) that address some of the challenges that arise for students that impede their academic success and university completion.

A previously discussed issue of university access for students was the location of the universities. The distance from their homes coupled with the lack of housing options for out of town students has created a major barrier for students who do not have the financial support or local family or friends to overcome this challenge. Universities may not have the budget to build residence halls but they may be able to help facilitate connections between students and locals

who have rooms or houses to rent. More specifically, universities may want to develop an initiative where they ask local residents who want to earn extra income to register with them rooms or houses that they have available for rent. Universities could then share this information with students each term. I recognize that this solution is only partially helpful, as it does not address the financial resources that students will be required to have in order to pay monthly rent. However, by offering this service, students would have one of their challenges addressed (needing housing close to a university) and could focus on finding funds to cover this cost.

### **Haitian Education and Leadership Program**

HELP staff and students provided details on the various ways in which the organization supports the needs of students. HELP's Haiti Country Director shared that much of what is seen in HELP today, in terms of services, is based on the interventions that have developed over time because of student needs. What was consistent from the HELP participants was that they believed that HELP was doing a good job of addressing higher education challenges, as well as introducing new concepts to students (Leadership Course, social change framework, community service, internships, etc.). A suggestion for HELP would be to conduct periodic "360 evaluations" that would allow for self-assessment and continued growth. These evaluations could include all HELP groups: students, staff, and alumni as well as organizations outside of HELP that they partner with (internship locations, organizations that employ HELP graduates, individuals they interact with from the Ministry and the local universities).

Current HELP students would be able to provide anonymous feedback on how HELP is meeting their needs, offer critiques in areas that they believe fall short of their needs or expectations, and suggestions for improvement or changes based on their experiences at their universities, at their internship placements, and during their time abroad. As HELP continues to

grow it will also have an increased number of alumni. Alumni could be a good source for HELP to determine how successful their model is for students who have accessed their services through university graduation. In addition to statistical data (number or percentage employed, location employed, salary amounts, etc.) alumni can offer anecdotal data on *how* the strategies that HELP provided supported their success after graduating from their universities and HELP. They can share whether or not the skills that they learned from the enrichment courses and workshops were useful in their careers or graduate education, they can note what skills were missing based on the job market they may be in, and they can provide reflections on their overall HELP experiences. Finally, staff can offer thoughts on their roles at HELP and their effectiveness, offer suggestions based on their interactions with organizations and actors outside of HELP, and potential solutions for problems they may encounter in their interactions with students. Organizations and individuals outside of HELP can offer their feedback on their interactions with HELP staff and students and highlight gaps that HELP may not be aware of.

By conducting annual, comprehensive evaluations, HELP will continue to grow and develop as an organization. The data collected can help HELP avoid stagnation and remain sustainable in Haiti for the long term. Finally, it can ensure that HELP is remaining in tune with the needs of its constituents as well as changes within the Haitian higher education and higher education globally.

### **Non-Governmental Organizations**

Non-governmental organizations play a significant role in Haiti. A great number of NGOs address issues such as those related to health and education that the Haitian government does not have the capacity to meet (De Cordoba, 2010). NGOs also influence the trajectory of projects and development in the country, and are often more powerful and effective than the

local government (Schuller, 2007). Given this distinction, I suggest that NGOs strive to develop objectives that include developing partnerships with local universities and ministries as a goal of their organizations. This suggestion is provided with the understanding that relationship building is a two-way street and can only occur if there is willingness on both sides.

Another suggestion for practice would be for NGOs to ensure they are responding to the needs of a location, rather than developing initiatives based on their own organizational mission and inserting themselves somewhere that they might not belong or may not be wanted. This is particularly important for organizations that are new to a country and are not aware of the indigenous learning, customs, traditions, and knowledge that are contained there. Part of the success of HELP is that two individuals who worked in secondary education long-term in Haiti started the organization by responding to the higher education needs of one student there. HELP then grew from that moment and has continued to address the needs of university students. The organization changes and expands over time based on what their students need and the changing environment in which HELP is situated (Port-au-Prince, Haitian higher Education system, Haiti).

Finally, given the overwhelming number of NGOs in Haiti, it is essential that they not only register their presence in the country with the local government but that they also do an environmental scan of the NGOs that already exist there. This is important because in Haiti, organizations often arrive and establish themselves there without interacting with the local (city) or national (ministry) government. This has contributed to the overwhelming number of private organizations in the country that are not beholden to any one entity in the national government and the limited control that the government has over them. It will also be vital, as a matter of practice, for NGOs to be in communication with each other. This will ensure that there is not a duplication of services in one area. Or, if there are similar organizations in any one area, it will

be helpful for them to develop a collegial relationship that will ultimately be in the best interest of those they are striving to serve.

### **Implications for Development**

Recent scholarship has provided evidence that higher education supports and is important to development. The Task Force on Higher Education (2000) noted that higher education promoted income growth, enlightened leaders, expanded choices, increasingly relevant skills, and vibrant development. Their assertion supports the experiences and perspectives of this study's participants and the findings of this research project. According to HELP statistics, the 90% of HELP alumni who have remained in Haiti after graduation earn an average annual salary (\$15,000USD) that is about 18 ½ times more than that of the non-HELP graduates (\$810USD). The earned university degree, coupled with the HELP model, has set HELP alumni apart in the workforce, which has led to the income differential and positive outcomes for these graduates.

Findings from this study imply that further investments in improving the delivery challenges within higher education in Haiti, including curriculum changes and professional preparation and training, can potentially have similar outcomes for a greater number of university graduates in Haiti. An overall increase in the number of university graduates will positively impact the local workforce as these graduates will contribute to various sectors in society (health, education, science, technology, politics etc.) and provide skills that are useful and necessary for growth and development. Further, increased income results in increased funds being used in the local economy as well as opportunities for an increased investment in entrepreneurship in the country. Finally, with more education comes increased and new knowledge. This new knowledge introduces places like Haiti to the global knowledge community and also influences the perspectives of government leaders to consider new

approaches and ideas to implement in their countries. Simply put, higher education stimulates positive changes that are significant in low-income countries that need support in order to foster the upward mobility of its population and substantial development of its infrastructure.

Given the extreme poverty in Haiti, and the positive gains to both the individual and the society with higher education obtainment, greater attention to and investment in the Haitian higher education system is warranted. As the Task Force on Higher Education (2000) noted, the benefits experienced are not automatic and will not occur immediately. Changes to the Haitian higher education system will only be successful if changes are also made to other aspects of the country (social, political, economic systems) are addressed as well (The Task Force on Higher Education, 2000). However, in order for development to occur, higher education should play a role and be included in the interventions that are established to respond to the myriad of development needs in low-income countries.

### **Implications for Theory**

This study used a conceptual framework that included the terms access and persistence. This framework provided a lens for understanding the challenges that students experience in their pursuit of higher education. In a U.S. context, the terms university access and persistence imply a particular experience in most circumstances: that students will have access to resources (libraries, cafeterias, computer labs, housing, etc.) that are standard at colleges and universities and that barriers to persistence (finance, academic, etc.) could be addressed by an individual or office at one's institution. These concepts are not easily transferrable in education contexts that exist in location in Haiti. In fact, much of the scholarship that investigates higher education challenges and interventions in low-income countries cite U.S. based scholarship and theories to understand and reinforce the premise of their argument. Rather than attempting to fit non-U.S.

experiences into a U.S. based perspectives, an expansion of the terms “university access” and “university persistence” is warranted so that the educational realities in developing countries like Haiti could be better understood.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

The findings from this study revealed many challenges and some successes within the Haitian higher education system. Although the educational experiences are extreme, many aspects of the education sector are not unique to Haiti. Despite this study being situated in Haiti and within the Haitian higher education system, the implications provided and the recommendations soon to be discussed are transferrable to other locations that are experiencing similar challenges. The recommendations for future research are significant and timely because along with this study, they will help to fill the gap in the literature on empirical research that examines higher education interventions in low-income/developing countries like Haiti. As a result of this study, I recommend six areas for further research on understanding and responding to the challenges within the Haitian higher education system. These recommendations include:

1. Interviewing more HELP alumni to better understand how HELP is supporting the future success of its university students
2. Examining the perspectives of non-HELP university students
3. Expanding the research to include the perspectives of university faculty, administrators, and other higher education stakeholders in Haiti
4. Investigating the policies and practice of the Haitian Ministry of Education as it relates to higher education in Haiti.
5. Conducting research on other non-governmental organizations in Haiti that are responding to higher education needs in the country

6. Learning about how rebuilding higher education works in developing countries and in post disaster/post conflict environments in particular

### **Recommendation One**

This study investigated, in part, how HELP supports the future success of its scholars. In order to answer this question, HELP alumni were recruited for this research. Five HELP alumni participated (two of whom are current HELP staff) participated. Although they provided important information regarding HELP's strategies and their perceptions of how the strategies supported their success post HELP, they did not represent the cross section of HELP alumni that exist. A future study on HELP alumni could include a range that represented graduates from 1997-2015. This group could offer reflections on the growth and expansion of HELP overtime, discuss how they believe HELP impacted the trajectory of their lives, provide critical feedback on their experiences at HELP, and offer suggestions for HELP given their status as HELP alumni. This research could not only prove beneficial to HELP, it can also be helpful for other organizations that hope to emulate HELP in their countries based on their own educational contexts.

### **Recommendation Two**

Given that this study was a single-case study of HELP, it was limited in scope and did not encompass the experiences of other university students in Haiti. HELP supports a relatively small number of students each year, approximately 130. This implies that there are a greater number of students who are successfully entering and exiting the Haitian higher education system. A study on their perspectives and experiences can illuminate the strategies they use in order to successfully matriculate through the system. A future study can answer questions such as, what are their perceptions of challenges within the Haitian higher education system. How do

students with the same demographics as HELP scholars navigate the challenges within the Haitian education system? What are the resources that these students use in order to support their university pursuits? How do they believe they are equipped for success post-graduation? Learning of their experiences during and after their university attendance would provide a comparison and contrast of the interventions that HELP scholars experience and can highlight areas to be further examined.

### **Recommendation Three**

A limitation discussed in this study was an absence of the experiences of university faculty, administrators, and other higher education stakeholders (researchers, Ministry and NGO staff, etc.) in Haiti. Given the number of higher education challenges shared by participants in, it would be useful to know how individuals working within the system would respond to their claims. It would also be interesting to learn what perspectives they could share from their vantage point with the system, including an explanation of their roles, what they believe is going well and what their recommendations are for improvement. Understanding the viewpoints of these individuals could provide a holistic understanding of the higher education system in Haiti.

### **Recommendation Four**

Another area for research would be investigating the policies and practices of the Ministry of Education to better understand its approach to higher education in Haiti. In recent years, particularly after the earthquake, there has been a greater attention paid to the development of the Haitian higher education system. There have been a number of news reports, particularly from *Haiti Libre*, as well as announcements regarding consortium partnerships, finance schemes, the building of education centers, and the increase in university scholarships and educational opportunities abroad. A study conducted on the policy and practice of the Ministry, which serves

as the coordinating body for many of these initiatives, could offer insight on the inner workings of an entity tasked with addressing systemic issues and the process by which it responds to them.

### **Recommendation Five**

I recommend a research study that investigates other non-governmental organizations in Haiti that are addressing higher education needs there. Given the scope of higher education challenges in the country, it could prove to be helpful to learn who all the actors are who are involved with supporting university students. This research could highlight the various strategies that are being used, uncover any duplication of services, and inform each other as well as the entities responsible for higher education in Haiti of these organization's existence. Further, results from the study could be used to create an inventory of effective higher education practices of non-governmental organizations to develop a model for national and international use.

### **Recommendation Six**

During my 2012 trip to Haiti, the aftermath of the 2010 earthquake was a reality still being dealt with by HELP, students, and the universities. I learned then that given the overwhelming destruction to Port-au-Prince and many of the universities in the capital, classes were suspended for a good portion of 2010 and HELP students and staff assisted with relief efforts for the interim. During that time, some members of HELP supported the post-earthquake assessment of higher education institutions in Port-au-Prince sponsored by the Interuniversity Institute for Research and Development (INURED), an organization based in Haiti. Their assessment efforts culminated in a written report that outlined the impact of the earthquake to the Haitian higher education system, the loss of lives of thousands of students, administrators and faculty, as well as the near and total destruction of many institutions within the system. Their report not only revealed the dire state in which the higher system had come to, but it also noted

the historical legacy and contemporary challenges of higher education in Haiti that compounded the issue. Most notably, the INURED report provided insight on the realities of higher education in a post-disaster location and it discussed the challenges of rebuilding higher education in a low-income country such as Haiti. While conducting research for this project, many study participants indicated that the aftermath of the earthquake was something they were still contending with. This finding has led me to question: how do you approach rebuilding higher education in post-disaster, developing countries?

Haiti is not the first country to experience disaster and to experience an impact to its higher education system as a result. In fact, there are similarities with countries that address rebuilding their higher education systems in post conflict situations. However, aside from the UNESCO Guidebook for Planning Education in Emergencies and Reconstruction (2006), there is not much information on how countries should approach their next steps after a catastrophic disaster. When reviewing the scholarship on “post disaster higher education,” I found that the literature that exists can be grouped into broad areas. The categories include post disaster readiness (incorporating post disaster planning and training in education systems), post disaster education (incorporating post disaster risk reduction in higher education curriculum), humanitarian responses (experiences of development and aid organization responding to disaster), and Hurricane Katrina in the United States (how universities in Louisiana responded to the impact of Hurricane Katrina to their institutions). What is missing from the literature is empirical research on how, specifically, developing countries have addressed impacts to their higher education systems in post-disaster situations and the approaches they have taken to rebuild.

Further understanding of the experiences of countries like Haiti who are faced with having to rebuilding their higher education systems after a disaster is useful and advantageous. This knowledge is useful because it will provide others with a framework for approaching their rebuilding process based on a context that is similar to their locations. Greater understanding is advantageous for countries who want to approach their rebuilding process with the intent of addressing the challenges that existed within their higher education systems prior to the disaster. There are lessons that can be learned from Haiti as it continues to address how it will make significant changes to its system and address the myriad of challenges experienced by its students and other stakeholders. As INURED noted in its 2010 report, Haiti suffered an irreparable loss. Given the benefits of higher education to individuals and society, and the important role that higher education plays in development efforts, gaining a greater understanding of *how* low-income countries rebuild higher education after post-disaster situations is important and further research on this topic is warranted.

### **Summary**

Higher education is important and obtaining an increased education provides benefits to the individual and to the society of which they are a part. The aforementioned suggested empirical research on higher education practices in Haiti could serve as one avenue for strengthening the system as a whole. In addition, other countries that have some characteristics in common with Haiti can use the recommended future research to strengthen their own higher education systems. By determining which of these recommendations could be applicable to their educational context, other low-income/developing countries can begin the process of developing initiatives and interventions that prove to be helpful for their own higher education systems and to the development of their countries.

## **Conclusion**

This study examined how key stakeholders perceive the challenges of access and persistence within the Haitian higher education system and investigated how the strategies that the Haitian Education and Leadership Program (HELP) employs supports the academic and future success of its students. The findings from this study highlighted the experiences of 18 university students and graduates navigating the university system in Haiti and 14 administrators who work to respond to the challenges they experience. HELP student participants outlined the difficulties that exist in the higher education system, which can be situated in two categories, “barriers toward university access” and “barriers of university persistence.” Further, HELP participants described the various HELP strategies as necessary for supporting student’s academic and future success. Overall, this study reveals that a multi-prong approach for responding to university student needs in an international context like Haiti is necessary for academic success. It is not enough to ensure that students receive the appropriate level of education to be admitted to a university in Haiti. It is critical that barriers are eliminated in order for students to have the opportunity to enter and successfully exit their university program.

HELP is successful in its approach to changing the trajectory of the lives of HELP scholars, and consequently their families. Their strategies allow students to focus on their academics free from the personal, institutional, and contextual educational challenges that exist in Haiti. By receiving a comprehensive scholarship award and a range of services and resources, HELP scholars succeed. Given the extent of its impact on HELP scholars, and in turn Haitian society, it seems as though HELP could serve as a model for addressing university challenges in Haiti on a larger scale. HELP approach can serve as a model, particularly if the positive accolades and considerable national and international attention it has received could be leveraged

for targeted funding to incorporate some of the strategies that HELP employs. All of what HELP provides may not be financially viable for Haitian universities or the Ministry for some time to come. However, there are some that may be doable:

- begin the process of researching loan programs for students to pursue in order to pay for academic and related costs
- offer research courses or thesis workshops so that students can be successful in their requirements
- develop bridge programs between universities and employers to provide opportunities for internships and job shadowing
- Create a connection between foreign organizations and the Ministry of Education where they offer complimentary ESL courses at the university as a part of their scope of programs offered in Haiti

Although the full HELP approach may not be sustainable on a national scale given the cost per student and budget constraints, they are an example of the possibilities that can occur within the higher education landscape in Haiti.

Higher education is important and necessary, particularly in places like Haiti. Haiti still faces many years of recovery from the earthquake and the country needs to address its challenges related to infrastructure, health care, the education system and poverty. Haiti cannot simply rely on international funding agencies to fix its problems. It is imperative that knowledgeable citizens participate in the problem solving and solution making for their nation. An educated population is critical for effective leadership, relevant research, appropriate policy development, and strategic practice. In order for this to occur, individuals need to receive an education commensurate with the needs of their society. In addition to its historic legacy and contemporary

problems, the lack of a critical mass of highly educated professionals has contributed to the underdeveloped country that Haiti is today. HELP is one example of an organization impacting the trajectory of Haiti. Further investing in the Haitian higher education system could be the next big step in responding to the myriad of development needs there.

## **APPENDICES**

## Appendix A: IRB Approval Letter

### Initial IRB Application Determination \*Exempt\*

June 11, 2013

To: Reitumetse Mabokela

427 Erickson Hall

Re: **IRB# x13-485e** Category: Exempt 1.2

**Approval Date:** June 11, 2013

Title: The Influence of the Haitian Education and Leadership Program (HELP) on the Haitian Brain Drain

The Institutional Review Board has completed their review of your project. I am pleased to advise you that **your project has been deemed as exempt** in accordance with federal regulations.

The IRB has found that your research project meets the criteria for exempt status and the criteria for the protection of human subjects in exempt research. **Under our exempt policy the Principal Investigator assumes the responsibilities for the protection of human subjects** in this project as outlined in the assurance letter and exempt educational material. The IRB office has received your signed assurance for exempt research. A copy of this signed agreement is appended for your information and records.

**Renewals:** Exempt protocols do not need to be renewed. If the project is completed, please submit an *Application for Permanent Closure*.

**Revisions:** Exempt protocols do not require revisions. However, if changes are made to a protocol that may no longer meet the exempt criteria, a new initial application will be required.

**Problems:** If issues should arise during the conduct of the research, such as unanticipated problems, adverse events, or any problem that may increase the risk to the human subjects and change the category of review, notify the IRB office promptly. Any complaints from participants regarding the risk and benefits of the project must be reported to the IRB.

**Follow-up:** If your exempt project is not completed and closed after three years, the IRB office will contact you regarding the status of the project and to verify that no changes have occurred that may affect exempt status.

Please use the IRB number listed above on any forms submitted which relate to this project, or on any correspondence with the IRB office.

Good luck in your research. If we can be of further assistance, please contact us at 517-355-2180 or via email at [IRB@msu.edu](mailto:IRB@msu.edu).

Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,  
Harry McGee, MPH SIRB Chair  
cc: Louise Vital

## Appendix B: Participant Solicitation Letter (English)

Greetings--

My name is Louise Michelle Vital and I am currently a doctoral student in the Higher, Adult, and Lifelong Education PhD program at Michigan State University. I am reaching out to you to invite you to participate in a research study on the influence of the Haitian Education and Leadership Program on equity, access, and persistence within the Haitian higher education system. Your involvement in the study is important because it will provide information on the factors that lead to the success of HELP participants and graduates in Haiti.

Your participation will help me better comprehend the Haitian higher education system, understand the strategies HELP utilizes to support university students, and will illuminate your perceptions of higher education challenges in Haiti. The information from the interviews will help to focus my dissertation research interest in the Haitian higher education system.

Participation will include one interview. Interviews will be in person and will accommodate your schedule. My goal is to conduct interviews between xxxxx. Any identifying information will be removed from final documents and analysis.

*\*Current student participants must have completed a full year or more of HELP*

If you are willing to participate, please send me an email at ----- with all of the days and times that you are available for a one-hour interview at the HELP Center. You can also schedule an interview with me in person while I am in Haiti.

I appreciate your willingness to consider participating in this research study. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions.

I look forward to meeting with you in person.

Best,  
Michelle

---

L. Michelle Vital  
Michigan State University

## Appendix C: Participant Solicitation Letter (French)

Salutations—

Mon nom est Louise Michelle Vital et je suis actuellement un étudiant au doctorat dans le programme de doctorat d'éducation plus élevée, adulte, et permanente à l'université de l'Etat d'État du Michigan. J'attends à vous pour vous inviter à participer à une étude de recherches sur l'influence du programme haïtien d'éducation supérieure et de direction sur le "exode des compétences Haïtien." L'exode des compétences est défini comme phénomène des personnes fortement qualifiées et/ou instruites quittant leur pays d'origine pour poursuivre des occasions à l'étranger. Votre participation dans l'étude est importante parce qu'elle fournira des informations sur les facteurs qui mènent à la conservation et au succès des participants et des diplômés d'HELP en le Haïti.

Votre participation m'aidera mieux à comprendre le système d'enseignement supérieur haïtien, comprennent que HELP de stratégies utilise pour soutenir des étudiants, et illuminera vos perceptions sur l'exode des compétences haïtien. L'information des entrevues aidera à focaliser mon intérêt de recherches de dissertation pour le système d'enseignement supérieur Haïtien.

La participation inclura une entrevue. Les entrevues seront en personne et adapteront à votre programme. Mon but est de conduire des entrevues entre le 2 juin - 1er juillet 2013. N'importe quelle information de identification sera enlevée des documents finaux et de l'analyse. Comme marque d'appréciation pendant votre temps, vous serez présenté dans un dessin pour recevoir un chèque-cadeau \$50 à Amazon.com à la conclusion de votre entrevue. Chaque groupement des interviewés (personnel, étudiants actuels, anciennes élèves) sera écrit dans le dessin et une personne de chaque groupe recevra un chèque-cadeau \$50 à Amazon.com.

*\* Les participants actuels d'étudiant doivent être dans leur troisième année ou plus haut de l'HELP*

Si vous êtes disposé à participer, satisfaire envoyez-moi un email chez ----- avec tous les jours et fois que vous êtes disponible pour une entrevue d'une heure au centre d'HELP. Vous pouvez également programmer une entrevue avec moi en personne tandis que je suis en le Haïti.

J'apprécie votre bonne volonté d'envisager de participer à cette étude de recherches. Veuillez ne pas hésiter à me contacter avec aucune question.

J'attends avec intérêt de vous rencontrer en personne.

Le meilleur,  
Michelle

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L. Michelle Vital  
Michigan State University

## **Appendix D: Interview Questions (English and French)**

### **HELP Staff**

1. Would you please share with me your observations on the system of higher education in Haiti
2. Would you please share with me your thoughts on what is going well in the Haitian higher education system
3. Would you please share with me your thoughts on the challenges to the Haitian higher education system
4. Would you please share with me your thoughts on equity, access, and persistence within the Haitian higher education system?
5. How does your role complement the strategies HELP uses to support HELP participants? Address the issues of equity, access, and persistence?
6. How do you believe Haiti should address issues of equity, access, and persistence within the Haitian brain drain?
7. Why do you believe HELP's success rate for university graduates in Haiti is greater than the national average?
8. Are there topics that you believe are important for me to know that we have not yet discussed?

### **Personnel d'HELP**

1. Vous svp présenteriez ses observations sur vos pensées sur le système d'enseignement supérieur en le Haïti
2. Vous svp présenteriez ses observations sur vos pensées sur ce qui entre bien dans le système d'enseignement supérieur haïtien
3. Vous svp présenteriez ses observations sur vos pensées sur les défis au système d'enseignement supérieur haïtien
4. Voulez-vous s'il vous plaît partager avec moi vos réflexions sur l'équité, l'accès et la persévérance dans le système d'enseignement supérieur haïtien
5. Comment votre rôle de compléter l'aide des stratégies utilise pour soutenir les participants D'AIDE? Aborder les questions d'équité, l'accès et la persévérance?
6. Comment croyez-vous que Haïti devrait aborder les questions d'équité, l'accès et la persistance au sein de la fuite des cerveaux haïtiens?
7. Pourquoi croyez-vous que les taux de réussite des diplômés de HELP aux universités d'Haïti est supérieure à la moyenne nationale?
8. Y a-t-il des questions importantes que je ne t'ai pas parlées à ce sujet il pense êtes important pour que je sache que vous?

### **HELP Students**

1. Why did you apply to the HELP?
2. Prior to becoming a HELP participant, how did you believe that you would benefit by becoming a member of HELP?
3. Now what you are a member, how have you benefited by becoming a HELP participant? How have you experienced any challenges?
4. Why do you remain a HELP participant?

5. How would you describe the Haitian higher education system?
6. How do you define equity, access, and persistence?
7. How has HELP influenced your career decisions after graduating from university?
8. Are there topics that you believe are important for me to know that we have not yet discussed?

### **Étudiants d'HELP**

1. Pourquoi vous êtes-vous appliqué au programme haïtien d'éducation et de direction?
2. Comment vous avez-vous cru bénéficieriez-vous de devenir un membre du programme haïtien d'éducation et de direction?
3. Maintenant que vous êtes un participant, comment est-ce que vous bénéficiez-vous d'être un membre de l'éducation haïtienne et de la direction programmez? Quels sont les défis?
4. Pourquoi êtes-vous resté un participant dans le programme haïtien d'éducation et de direction?
5. Comment vous décrivez le système d'enseignement supérieur haïtien
6. Comment définissez-vous l'équité, l'accès et la persévérance?
7. Comment le programme haïtien d'éducation et de direction influence-t-il vos plans de courrier-obtention du diplôme
8. Y a-t-il des facteurs importants que je ne t'ai pas parlés à ce sujet il pense êtes important pour que je sache que vous?

### **HELP Alumni**

1. How did HELP influence your experiences as a university student?
2. How did HELP influence your decisions related to your university experience? Career choice?
3. Why did you choose to remain in Haiti after obtaining your diploma?
4. Would you please share with me your thoughts on equity, access, and persistence in the Haitian higher education system
5. How does HELP respond to issues of equity, access, and persistence?
6. Are there topics that you believe are important for me to know that we have not yet discussed?

### **Anciennes élèves d'HELP**

1. Comment le programme haïtien d'éducation et de direction a-t-il effectué votre expérience éducative d'université?
2. Comment le programme haïtien d'éducation et de direction a-t-il influencé vos décisions de degré de carrière ou à l'avance?
3. Pourquoi avez-vous choisi de rester dans l'obtention du diplôme de courrier du Haïti?
4. Voulez-vous s'il vous plaît partager avec moi vos réflexions sur l'équité, l'accès et la persistance dans le système d'enseignement supérieur haïtien
5. Comment HELP répond aux questions d'équité, l'accès et la persévérance?
6. Y a-t-il des facteurs importants que je ne t'ai pas parlés à ce sujet il pense êtes important pour que je sache que vous ?

### **Higher Education Stakeholders**

1. Would you please share with me your observations on the system of higher education in Haiti
2. Would you please share with me your thoughts on what is going well in the Haitian higher education system
3. Would you please share with me your thoughts on the challenges to the Haitian higher education system
4. Would you please share with me your thoughts on equity, access, and persistence within the Haitian higher education system
5. How do you believe Haiti should address issues of equity, access, and persistence within the Haitian brain drain
6. What areas of the Haitian higher education system do you believe is going well?
7. What are areas of the Haitian higher education system that you believe should be addressed?
8. Are there topics that you believe are important for me to know that we have not yet discussed?

### **Dépositaires d'enseignement supérieur**

1. Vous svp présenteriez ses observations sur vos pensées sur le système d'enseignement supérieur en le Haïti?
2. Vous svp présenteriez ses observations sur vos pensées sur ce qui entre bien dans le système d'enseignement supérieur haïtien
3. Vous svp présenteriez ses observations sur vos pensées sur les défis au système d'enseignement supérieur haïtien
4. Voulez-vous s'il vous plaît partager avec moi vos réflexions sur l'équité, l'accès et la persévérance dans le système d'enseignement supérieur Haïtien
5. Comment croyez-vous le Haïti devriez-vous adresser l'exode des compétences haïtien ?
6. Comment croyez-vous que Haïti devrait aborder les questions d'équité, l'accès et la persistance au sein de la fuite des cerveaux haïtiens?
7. Comment va-t-il l'avantage de système haïtien d'enseignement supérieur Haïti?
8. Y a-t-il des questions importantes que je ne t'ai pas parlées à ce sujet il pense êtes important pour que je sache que vous?

## Appendix E: Participant Consent Form (English)

### PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM FOR STUDY

Dear Participant:

This research study is intended to investigate strategies that the Haitian Education and Leadership Program (HELP) employs to address issues of equity, access, and persistence within the Haitian higher education system. Your participation in this study will help me to better understand the factors that lead to the success of HELP participants and graduates in Haiti. This is an invitation to participate in one 60-minute interview and completion of an information sheet. Data analysis will follow standard qualitative procedures and will be conducted by L. Michelle Vital under the supervision of Dr. Reitumetse Mabokela. Participants will be assigned pseudonyms prior to analysis, and all identifying information will be removed from transcripts prior to analysis.

Your participation is completely voluntary and you may withdraw at any time, with no penalty for doing so. However, if you are under the age of 18, you cannot participate in this study. You can choose not to participate at all, or not answer some or all of the questions. There are no foreseeable risks associated with participation in this study. The interviews will be audio recorded. If this is an issue, you can choose to not participate in the interview. If you agree that I may do so, you can request at any time that I turn off the recorder. Digital recordings will be kept in a secure location until three years after this study is completed, at which time they will be erased. The information form, on which you indicate your name, contact information, and chosen pseudonym, will be maintained by the researchers in a secure location, until three years after the end of the study, when it will be destroyed. The information form will be kept in a separate secure location than that of the digital recording.

Your identity will remain confidential in all transcribing, analyzing, and reporting of data. Because this study involves face-to-face interviews, I cannot provide anonymity to participants. However, your confidentiality will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law. I will use a pseudonym of your choice in transcribing, analyzing, and reporting data.

It is possible that you may become uncomfortable discussing your experiences. I remind you that you may, at any time and without penalty, elect not to answer a question or terminate the interview.

Please indicate on the information form if you would like me to provide you with a copy of the findings of the study, a bibliography of resources for further reading on the topic, or both. If you have any concerns or questions regarding your rights as a study participant, or are dissatisfied at any time with any aspect of this study, you may contact the researcher: L. Michelle Vital, [-----] or my faculty advisor Dr. Reitumetse Mabokela, Assistant Dean for International Education, 620 Erickson Hall-Room 517, Michigan State University, [-----]

If you have questions or concerns about your role and rights as a research participant, would like to obtain information or offer input, or would like to register a complaint about this study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Michigan State University's Human Research Protection Program at 517-355-2180, Fax 517-432-4503, or e-mail [irb@msu.edu](mailto:irb@msu.edu) or regular mail at: Human Research Protection Program, Michigan States University, 408 West Circle Drive Room 207 Olds Hall, East Lansing, MI 48824.

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Signature of Participant

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Date

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Name of Participant (please print)

## Appendix F: Participant Consent Form (French)

### FORME DE CONSENTEMENT DE PARTICIPANT POUR L'ÉTUDE

Cher participant:

Cette étude vise à étudier des stratégies qui HELP emploie pour aborder les questions d'équité, l'accès et la persévérance dans le système d'enseignement supérieur Haïtien. Votre participation à cette étude va m'aider à mieux comprendre les facteurs qui conduisent à la réussite des participants d'HELP et diplômés en Haïti. C'est une invitation de participer à un entrevue 60 et achèvement minute d'une fiche d'informations. L'analyse de données suivra des procédures qualitatives standard et sera conduite par L. Michelle Vital sous la direction de Dr. Reitumetse Mabokela. Des participants seront assignés des pseudonymes avant l'analyse, et toute l'information de identification sera enlevée des transcriptions avant l'analyse.

Votre participation est complètement volontaire et vous pouvez se retirer à tout moment, sans la pénalité pour faire ainsi. Cependant, si vous êtes sous l'âge de 18, vous ne pouvez pas participer à cette étude. Vous pouvez choisir de ne pas participer du tout, ou de ne pas en répondre ou à toutes les questions. Il n'y a aucun risque prévisible lié à la participation à cette étude. Les entrevues seront audio enregistré. Si c'est une question, vous pouvez choisir de ne pas participer à l'entrevue. Si vous convenez que je peux faire ainsi, vous pouvez demander à tout moment que j'arrête l'enregistreur. Des enregistrements numériques seront maintenus dans un emplacement sûr jusqu'à trois ans après que cette étude est achevée, quand ils seront effacés. La forme de l'information, sur laquelle vous indiquez votre nom, information de contact, et pseudonyme choisi, sera maintenue par les chercheurs dans un emplacement sûr, jusqu'à trois ans après la fin de l'étude, quand elle sera détruite. La forme de l'information sera maintenue dans un emplacement sûr distinct que cela de l'enregistrement numérique.

Votre identité demeurera confidentielle en transcrivant, en analysant, et en rapportant des données. Puisque cette étude implique des entrevues face à face, je ne peux pas fournir l'anonymat aux participants. Cependant, votre confidentialité sera au maximum protégé permise par loi. J'emploierai un pseudonyme de votre choix en transcrivant, en analysant, et en rapportant des données.

Il est possible que vous puissiez devenir inconfortable discutant vos expériences. Je vous rappelle que vous pouvez, à tout moment et sans pénalité, choisir de ne pas répondre à une question ou terminer l'entrevue.

Veillez indiquer sur la forme de l'information si vous voudriez que je te fournisse une copie des résultats de l'étude, d'une bibliographie des ressources pour davantage de lecture sur le sujet, ou de chacun des deux. Si vous avez n'importe quels soucis ou questions concernant vos droites en tant que participant d'étude, ou êtes dissatisfait à tout moment avec n'importe quel aspect de cette étude, vous pouvez contacter le chercheur : L. Michelle Vital, [-----]; ou mon membre de la faculté: Dr. Reitumetse Mabokela, doyen auxiliaire pour l'éducation internationale, 620 Erickson Hall- bureau 517, Michigan State University, [-----].

Si vous avez des questions ou préoccupations au sujet de votre rôle et des droits en tant que participant de recherches, voudrait obtenir l'information ou offrirait l'entrée, ou voudrait enregistrer une plainte au sujet de cette étude, vous peut entrer en contact, anonyme si vous souhaitez, le programme humain de protection des recherches de l'université de l'Etat d'État du Michigan à 517-355-2180, envoyer par fax 517-432-4503, ou email irb@msu.edu ou courrier régulier à: Human Research Protection Program, Michigan States University , 408 West Circle Drive Room 207, East Lansing, MI 48824.

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Signature de participant

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Date

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Nom de participant (imprimez svp)

## Appendix G: Higher Education Stakeholders Participant Consent Form (English)

### PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM FOR STUDY

Dear Participant:

This research study is intended to investigate strategies that the Haitian Education and Leadership Program (HELP) employs to address the Haitian “brain drain.” Brain drain is defined as the phenomenon of highly skilled and/or educated individuals leaving their country of origin to pursue opportunities abroad. Your participation in this study will help me to better understand the higher education environment in Haiti. This is an invitation to participate in one 60-minute interview and completion of an information sheet. Data analysis will follow standard qualitative procedures and will be conducted by L. Michelle Vital under the supervision of Dr. Reitumetse Mabokela. Participants will be assigned pseudonyms prior to analysis, and all identifying information will be removed from transcripts prior to analysis.

Your participation is completely voluntary and you may withdraw at any time, with no penalty for doing so. However, if you are under the age of 18, you cannot participate in this study. You can choose not to participate at all, or not answer some or all of the questions. There are no foreseeable risks associated with participation in this study. The interviews will be audio recorded. If this is an issue, you can choose to not participate in the interview. If you agree that I may do so, you can request at any time that I turn off the recorder. Digital recordings will be kept in a secure location until three years after this study is completed, at which time they will be erased. The information form, on which you indicate your name, contact information, and chosen pseudonym, will be maintained by the researchers in a secure location, until three years after the end of the study, when it will be destroyed. The information form will be kept in a separate secure location than that of the digital recording.

Your identity will remain confidential in all transcribing, analyzing, and reporting of data. Because this study involves face-to-face interviews, I cannot provide anonymity to participants. However, your confidentiality will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law. I will use a pseudonym of your choice in transcribing, analyzing, and reporting data.

It is possible that you may become uncomfortable discussing your experiences. I remind you that you may, at any time and without penalty, elect not to answer a question or terminate the interview.

Please indicate on the information form if you would like me to provide you with a copy of the findings of the study, a bibliography of resources for further reading on the topic, or both. If you have any concerns or questions regarding your rights as a study participant, or are dissatisfied at any time with any aspect of this study, you may contact the researcher: L. Michelle Vital, [-----], or my faculty advisor Dr. Reitumetse Mabokela, Assistant Dean for International Education, 620 Erickson Hall-Room 517, Michigan State University, [-----]

If you have questions or concerns about your role and rights as a research participant, would like to obtain information or offer input, or would like to register a complaint about this study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Michigan State University's Human Research Protection Program at 011-1-517-355-2180, Fax 011-1-517-432-4503, or e-mail [irb@msu.edu](mailto:irb@msu.edu) or regular mail at: Human Research Protection Program, Michigan States University, 408 West Circle Drive room 207 Olds Hall, East Lansing, MI 48824.

---

Signature of Participant

---

Date

---

Name of Participant (please print)

## Appendix H: Higher Education Stakeholders Participant Consent Form (French)

### FORME DE CONSENTEMENT DE PARTICIPANT POUR L'ÉTUDE

Cher participant:

Cette étude vise à étudier des stratégies qui HELP emploie pour aborder les questions d'équité, l'accès et la persévérance dans le système d'enseignement supérieur Haïtien. Votre participation à cette étude m'aidera à comprendre mieux l'environnement d'enseignement supérieur en le Haïti. C'est une invitation de participer à un entrevue 60 et achèvement minute d'une fiche d'informations. L'analyse de données suivra des procédures qualitatives standard et sera conduite par L. Michelle Vital sous la direction de Dr. Reitumetse Mabokela. Des participants seront assignés des pseudonymes avant l'analyse, et toute l'information de identification sera enlevée des transcriptions avant l'analyse.

Votre participation est complètement volontaire et vous pouvez se retirer à tout moment, sans la pénalité pour faire ainsi. Cependant, si vous êtes sous l'âge de 18, vous ne pouvez pas participer à cette étude. Vous pouvez choisir de ne pas participer du tout, ou de ne pas en répondre ou à toutes les questions. Il n'y a aucun risque prévisible lié à la participation à cette étude. Les entrevues seront audio enregistré. Si c'est une question, vous pouvez choisir de ne pas participer à l'entrevue. Si vous convenez que je peux faire ainsi, vous pouvez demander à tout moment que j'arrête l'enregistreur. Des enregistrements numériques seront maintenus dans un emplacement sûr jusqu'à trois ans après que cette étude est achevée, quand ils seront effacés. La forme de l'information, sur laquelle vous indiquez votre nom, information de contact, et pseudonyme choisi, sera maintenue par les chercheurs dans un emplacement sûr, jusqu'à trois ans après la fin de l'étude, quand elle sera détruite. La forme de l'information sera maintenue dans un emplacement sûr distinct que cela de l'enregistrement numérique.

Votre identité demeurera confidentielle en transcrivant, en analysant, et en rapportant des données. Puisque cette étude implique des entrevues face à face, je ne peux pas fournir l'anonymat aux participants. Cependant, votre confidentialité sera au maximum protégé permise par loi. J'emploierai un pseudonyme de votre choix en transcrivant, en analysant, et en rapportant des données.

Il est possible que vous puissiez devenir inconfortable discutant vos expériences. Je vous rappelle que vous pouvez, à tout moment et sans pénalité, choisir de ne pas répondre à une question ou terminer l'entrevue.

Veuillez indiquer sur la forme de l'information si vous voudriez que je te fournisse une copie des résultats de l'étude, d'une bibliographie des ressources pour davantage de lecture sur le sujet, ou de chacun des deux. Si vous avez n'importe quels soucis ou questions concernant vos droites en tant que participant d'étude, ou êtes dissatisfait à tout moment avec n'importe quel aspect de cette étude, vous pouvez contacter le chercheur : L. Michelle Vital, [-----]; ou mon membre de la faculté: Dr. Reitumetse Mabokela, doyen auxiliaire pour l'éducation internationale, 620 Erickson Hall- bureau 517, Michigan State University, par téléphone: [-----].

Si vous avez des questions ou préoccupations au sujet de votre rôle et des droits en tant que participant de recherches, voudrait obtenir l'information ou offrirait l'entrée, ou voudrait enregistrer une plainte au sujet de cette étude, vous peut entrer en contact, anonyme si vous souhaitez, le programme humain de protection des recherches de l'université de l'Etat d'État du Michigan à 517-355-2180, envoyer par fax 1-517-432-4503, ou email [irb@msu.edu](mailto:irb@msu.edu) ou courrier régulier à: Human Research Protection Program, Michigan States University, 408 West Circle Drive room 207, East Lansing, MI 48824.

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Signature de participant

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Date

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Nom de participant (imprimez svp)

## Appendix I: Participant Information Form (English and French)

All information on this form will be considered confidential, and the form itself will be stored in a secure location.

Pseudonym: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Affiliation to HELP: Staff \_\_\_\_\_ Student \_\_\_\_\_ Alumni \_\_\_\_\_

Number of Years at HELP: \_\_\_\_\_

If a current university student, year at university: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Would you like a copy of the research findings? \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No

Would you like a copy of the bibliography of resources? \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No

### **Forme de l'information de participant**

Toute l'information sur cette forme sera considérée confidentielle, et la forme elle-même sera stockée dans un emplacement sûr.

Pseudonyme: \_\_\_\_\_

Nom de participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Affiliation À HELP: Personnel \_\_\_\_\_ étudiant \_\_\_\_\_ d'une université \_\_\_\_\_

Nombre d'années à l'HELP: \_\_\_\_\_

Si un étudiant actuel, année à l'université: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Vous aimez une copie des résultats de recherché? \_\_\_\_\_ Oui \_\_\_\_\_ Non

Vous aiment une copie de la bibliographie des ressources ? \_\_\_\_\_ Oui \_\_\_\_\_ Non

## **Appendix J: Introduction Email (Haitian Creole)**

Dear Students and Staff,

M kontan pou fè w fè konesans ak Michelle Vital ki yon etidyan doktòra nan Michigan State University epi la fè memwa li sou anflans HELP pour ranvèse 'sòti entelijans' en Ayiti. Donk li vle fè antèvu ak kèk etidyan (3eme ane e plis), kèk staf HELP, e kèk alumni. W ka gade lèt entwoduction ke Michelle voye nou. Michelle ka kontakte w avek yon imel apa pou mande yon antrevu avek w nan mwa jwenn ou byen w ka ekri li pou di w interese pàtisipe.

Pa gen yon obligasyon pou patisipasyon w, men m swete ke w tap dakò pou fè l.

Mèsi,  
Amber

Dear Alumni,

M kontan pou fè w fè konesans ak Michelle Vital ki yon etidyan doktòra nan Michigan State University epi la fè memwa li sou anflans HELP pour ranvèse 'sòti entelijans' en Ayiti. Donk li vle fè antèvu ak kèk etidyan (3eme ane e plis), kèk staf HELP, e kèk alumni. Ou ka gade lèt entwoduction ke Michelle voye nou. Michelle ka kontakte w avek yon imel apa pou mande yon antrevu avek w nan mwa jwenn ou byen w ka ekri li pou di w interese pàtisipe

Pa gen yon obligasyon pou patisipasyon w, men m swete ke w tap dakò pou fè l.

Mèsi,  
Amber

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