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UC Students To Travel to Haiti in September to Facilitate Discussion with Haitian Peers

The UC Haiti Initiative (UCHI) and Universite d'Etat d'Haiti (UEH) Campus Leaders Work Together to Help Haiti

Berkeley, CA. August 29, 2011. — Five university student leaders from the University of California Haiti Initiative (UCHI) will visit Port au Prince, Haiti, in early September to collaborate with local student leaders from Universite d'Etat d'Haiti (UEH), the state university in Haiti. This delegation from the campuses of UC Irvine, UC Los Angeles, UC Santa Cruz and UC Davis follows an earlier August trip by representatives from other schools to solidify the pre-existing partnership.

The University of California Haiti Initiative (UCHI), was formed by UC students following the devastating Haiti earthquake in 2010. The organization was founded to help empower the Haitian community with resources and knowledge from the University of California, the world's leading public research university. UCHI, a student, faculty, and alumni initiative which spans all 10 UC campuses, reached out to counterparts in Haiti and partnered specially with AIDD, the student leadership at UEH. The goal continues to be to harness the strengths of each UC campus as a resource which the Haitian student leaders can utilize to nurture their vision for their country. This collaboration stands out because it is one of the first times that university students from two separate countries have initiated a mutually beneficial partnership, with both peer-to-peer and faculty-to-faculty collaboration.

The week-long trip by UCHI student leaders from September 9 to September 18 will aid to strengthen the partnership between UEH and UC, which will allow student leaders from both countries to talk about their vision for the future. In the first few days of the trip, the five delegates, each of whom are "campus directors" within UCHI, will learn about Haitian history and culture, meet local leaders, and visit Belle Fontaine, the site of a potential future sustainable development project. In the following days, they will learn about the current and future projects of UCHI in engineering, health, environment, economics, and law and social justice.

"If we can help the next generation of leaders from UEH grow the medical profession, build agricultural industries and the economy, then they can play a significant part in developing Haiti," says Anna Alexandroni, UCHI Director of Operations.

UCHI works on dozens of projects at a time, and many of the projects will be discussed during the trip, including the medical student clinical rotation for 4th year UC medical students at UEH, distance and e-learning educational opportunities, and helping to rebuild a comprehensive library collection, for example.

The five UCHI campus directors hope this trip will not only strengthen the partnership, but also help them identify the sections and departments of UEH and the UC that can best help with individual project goals.

Jessica Jaswal, UCHI Campus Director at UC Davis, says, “No one knows Haiti better than the Haitians. The only way to make a positive change is to work side by side with other organizations, faculty members, students and peers. Only by working with people directly affected can we truly understand what we can do to help our partners.”

This trip will not only offer UCHI members a critical experience in which they continue to learn about the community they are helping, but also give community members the power to address problems and potential solutions for higher education and sustainable development.

According to Laya Reddy, the UCHI Campus Director at UCLA, “This trip is important because we will be able to solidify the internal structures and facilities of both UCHI and AIDD. I feel going to Haiti will help me as campus director get a better picture of UEH’s needs and find out how UCLA specifically can better address them. I also think being on the ground in Haiti will give me a better understanding of local Haitian culture and milieu.”

This trip is the first time in Haiti for many of the UCHI campus directors, and it is a vital engagement for the UC student leaders to better know Haitian culture and people and establish collaboration to bolster working relationships by meeting their Haitian peers face-to-face.

By having field experience and visiting the projects in Haiti, the UCHI delegation to Haiti aims to understand first hand the problems they want to solve and the importance of what they want to accomplish. The UC student leaders can use the in-person time to address and respond to the needs identified by the Haitian university students, so that they can create a fruitful action plan to assist the local communities.

According to Laya Reddy, UCHI's UCLA Campus Director, “UCHI is unique because of its investment in higher education, which plays a vital role in the future and long-term success of Haiti. The UC system has unprecedented potential with the ability to harness collective expertise and experience to build peer-to-peer capacity-building relationships with our UEH colleagues. The UC system has expertise and experience across nearly every field ranging from agricultural science to management.”

After traveling to Haiti earlier this August, Yoori Chung, UCHI’s Campus Director at UC Berkeley, spoke highly about the experience.

“Not only are Californian students and faculty assisting Haitian students with research and organizing, UEH is allowing UC students to practically apply the knowledge that they are learning and will gain in the process. This trip left me captivated about Haiti’s story, its people, and its struggles.”

Jessica Jaswal, UCHI Campus Director at UC Davis, awaits a similar experience.

“We’ll be able to have personal ties with people in Haiti. I hope to leave my heart in Haiti by the end of this trip.”

For questions, additional information, supplementary quotes, and more, contact:

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About UCHI

The University of California Haiti Initiative (UCHI) is a student-led initiative formed in 2010 following the disastrous Haitian earthquake. UCHI features a unique combination of various academic disciplines working across 10 UC campuses in the UC system, with the support of UC faculty and administration, to work collaboratively with local Haitian organizations to improve higher education and increase sustainable development.

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