

# IPRO 335 in Haiti: Day 2

Photos courtesy Simon Brauer

By Simon Brauer  
TECHNEWS WRITER

We stirred in the room as the alarm rang - 6 a.m. Our second day in Haiti would bring us across a mountain range to the small town of Lascabobas, and we certainly didn't want to be late for our 7 o'clock departure. As I rose and threw the shades open, I was welcomed by the bright, early-morning vista of Port-au-Prince. The sunken city was below our hill-top hide-away, the sun was reflecting steeply off of the panoramic ocean, and the myriad concrete buildings and palm trees were going out to meet it.

7:30 passed us by but still no word from our escort. "We'll be there in 15 minutes," we were told after many futile phone calls. The time continued to pass as we discovered what we humorously dubbed "Haitian time," until finally at 9:30 the vehicles arrived to take us to Lascabobas. There we would examine three schools to determine which was suitable for our solar implementation. As the houses began to diminish, the open field lay before us holding the mountains in the distance. Suddenly, the ride was as peaceful as it could be, with smooth, straight roads leading us to what loomed ahead. This didn't prepare us for the ride through the mountain range, though, as easy riding suddenly became a swift roller coaster of turns, zipping around hairpins—we in the backseat grabbed onto anything that gave us whatever false sense of security we could believe in.

We arrived at our first school. Its construc-

tion was funded by the Inter-American Development Bank and it served as a primary and teacher training school, with a broad campus dotted by brightly colored stucco buildings, some with simple sheet-metal roofs. As we wandered the paved pathways examining the structures, we couldn't help but think that this was the one we were looking for. We wrapped up and headed to the next one, a nice Catholic school with a large courtyard. The roof seemed terribly weak and there was a strangely ominous dilapidated building opposite the main classrooms—we were told that government funds got caught up and it couldn't be completed. The sisters were more than happy to help us, though, and they led us around the two-storey school house. We left and drove a bit to the last one. As we pulled up, a concrete building with a large, gaping hole in its wall greeted us, a strange welcome after the seemingly pristine school we visited first. Inside the gate, it was cool and shady, with two buildings closely mirroring each other. There were no doors on these buildings and the hollow cement block walls let light into the classrooms. Once again, there seemed to be some issues with the buildings, but the officials were more than happy to show us around and answered all the questions we asked.

After we had completed what we needed to accomplish in Lascabobas, we headed back toward Port-au-Prince. On the way back, we stopped by a hotel complex and ordered some much-needed lunch—it was 2 p.m. by that time and we had eaten breakfast before 7 a.m. "What does the club sandwich have on it?" we



asked. "Is it like what we get in America?" The waitress assured us that it was exactly what we were expecting... well, once we glimpsed upon the awkward layers of egg, tuna, and ham, we realized that it, in fact, wasn't. Needless to say, we arrived hungry and we left in like fashion. With that, we braced ourselves for the next two-hour trip over the mountain and back to the Prince Hotel.

But this was a five-day trip, and had we really just made up our minds after day two? Well, we were confident for that night at least, but we were certainly thrown for a loop the next morning.

For more information on IPRO 335, please check out <http://iitempoweringhaiti.org/> and the IIT Empowering Haiti facebook page for updates, events, and pictures of our work.

## An interview with Student Counseling Services

By Utsav Gandhi  
CAMPUS EDITOR

Tucked away in a small office next to the Student Health Services on the 3rd floor of IIT Tower (a much better location than their previous one, they admit) is an incredible resource that's available just a phone call away for the IIT community. As the interviewer found out, it's run by some very empathetic and qualified professionals who can bring about positive change in the lives of those who approach them for help. I'm talking of the IIT Student Counseling Services, which, since as far back as the 1940s, has provided psychological services, professional counseling and outreach programs on topics including (but not limited to) stress reduction, time management, study skills, homesickness and cultural adjustment. Interviewing Dr. Daniel Kaplan, Director & Staff Psychologist; and Dr. Jean Tzou, Staff Psychologist & Outreach and Group Therapy Program Coordinator, was just as enlightening and transformative as an actual counseling session.

**What do you feel are some of the most striking psychological issues specific to the IIT community, both in regard to your experience here, and as compared to other campuses you'll have worked at?**

This is [Dr. Tzou's] 5th campus, and [Dr. Kaplan's] 4th campus, and what is most notable about issues brought forward by the student community is that academic stress tends to figure quite high on issues felt by students, especially because of the tech-heavy math and engineering majors. This causes depression and anxiety in some cases, especially before exams, and the center has in the past had to deal with quite a bit of such cases. On the other hand, we have seen a lot less substance abuse here as compared to other campuses, which is really heartening and reflects positively on our students as a focused, driven, we-know-our-limits kind of bunch!

Since such a large proportion of students here is international, homesickness and adjusting to a new environment is obviously a major issue. What kinds of services are offered keeping this group of students in mind?

The Counseling Center welcomes students of all nationalities, faiths and beliefs. I

[Dr. Tzou], as well as another one of the four staff members, were international students. I think this really helps them approach homesickness and related issues empathetically, and pushes us even further towards our goal of 'multicultural competence.' There are several outreach programs organized by the Center where students are encouraged to unhesitatingly ask for any kind of help. The Center is open to arranging programs in conjunction with the International Center and really hopes that every student here feels supported and within reach of assistance.

**Who are some of the people you work with on- and off-campus in order to provide your services?**

Clinical Services are provided by doctorate-level psychologists, a psychiatrist and closely supervised professionals in training, all located on campus or locally. We also work with the nearby Mercy Hospitals, if we feel students need assistance from their end; and we also have a counselor at the Downtown Campus. On the main campus, we recognize the tremendous importance played by RA's in the residence halls, as the first friend a student might approach if he or she is facing personal issues that need help. We participate in the orientation and training sessions for RA's somewhere around August, and they are also instructed to either consult higher authorities or refer a particular student directly to the Counseling Center if they feel the student needs professional help. Organizations such as the Muslim Students Association and offices such as the Office of Spiritual Life and Service Learning are also excellent resources for students to approach for help.

**Many students have never approached a**

**psychologist before, so they might be a little apprehensive about what to expect at a meeting. What kind of information is asked for, and what is the general procedure followed when a student comes in for a session?**

Students can either walk in or schedule an appointment over the phone. If the student indicates that he is experiencing an emergency or crisis we will encourage him come in right away for a brief crisis meeting. The intake appointment lasts one hour, and involves discuss-

ing your concerns with a staff member. Based on information gathered in this meeting we will make treatment recommendations. In some cases we may recommend meeting with a staff member here for psychotherapy and/or a medication evaluation. In other cases we may recommend a referral to a nearby mental health professional for treatment. We tailor our services to the individual and make a treatment plan in collaboration with each person to best meet his or her needs.

**What are your plans for this new semester? Any outreach events planned that you'd like students to know about?**

There are three therapy groups we are organizing, the details of which are provided on our webpage under the clinical services section.

First, a group especially for undergraduate women, since we understand the concerns associated in studying male-dominated classes and male-dominated majors.

Second, a group on how to cope with academic stress, especially for international/new students for whom adjusting to a new environment may be affecting their class performance.

Third, a group on keeping the mind and body healthy, possibly a tie-in with some recre-

ation classes the Keating Sports Center offers, such as yoga. Keep an eye out for updates on the website!

**Do you feel the Center has a visible enough presence on campus?**

Judging by the response and referrals we get, I believe that yes, the existence of the Counseling Center is acknowledged by all, but I believe there still is greater need to make students more aware of the programs we offer - sleep pattern assistance, alcohol abuse, anxiety, attention deficit disorder, college survival, eating disorders, depression, homesickness, procrastination, sexual assault, study skills or anything else that might be disturbing and negatively affecting students.

**Does the motivation, that final decision, to approach a psychologist have to come from within, or do students need friends, family, RA's or someone else to guide them and show them that the Counseling Center is the place where they can find assistance?**

You need to trust yourself. Know yourself. Know when it's that limit when you can't handle it by yourself anymore, when you have to accept that you need to approach someone trustworthy, someone qualified and experienced enough to guide you on the right way back. Friends can help, especially if family isn't around and they understand you more than anyone else, but friends must too realize that they must refer those who they feel need professional help. College is an exciting time - but students may face stress along with all the risks they might take and the consequences these risks may have. Questions of identity and purpose may start cropping up, and these require you to find your inner strength and wisdom. Student Counseling Services is one such place which can help you find this inner strength, and pull you out of any personal crisis you may be facing.

To learn more about Student Counseling Services visit their website at [http://www.iit.edu/counseling\\_center/](http://www.iit.edu/counseling_center/). To schedule your first appointment call 312-567-5900 from 8:30 - 5 on Mondays through Fridays. For emergencies that occur during weekends or evenings call the Aetna Student Assistance Program 24 hour support line at 877-351-7889, or 800-442-HOPE, or IIT Public Safety at 312-808-6363, or 911 if need be.