

Oberlin College
Nepali Dreamers
Bikalpa Baniya, Oberlin '19; Gaurab Pokharel, Oberlin '21
June 3rd - August 15th
Nepal

Contribution to Peace

Nepal's history has been littered with unrest. Just in the past 20 years, it has undergone a civil war, a royal massacre, and violent political protests: the most recent of which killed three people in 2017. Many interlocking issues conspire to result in this turbulence. As challenges of unrest and unequal opportunities become more pronounced, a need for educated leaders who can function as mediators arises. Nepali Dreamers is creating these leaders. We work to improve international educational access for Nepali youth and to incentivize these eventual highly skilled changemakers to return home and become leaders and mediators. We are working to ensure our alumni create opportunities and establish long term peace in Nepal based on economic and social prosperity.

Background and Context

Nepal is the fourth most remittance-dependent country in the world¹ as 30% of the GDP comes from foreign workers; a significant number of whom work in poor conditions. There are limited opportunities in Nepal: the jobs available for an average Nepali are very restricted, as are the opportunities for higher education. So, 60,000 graduates go abroad every year for better educational prospects². This emigration is neither surprising nor entirely without benefit. Foreign higher education and subsequent work experience provide valuable growth for Nepali students and Nepal's economy. Nepal depends upon a number of our youth to be in these foreign positions and to outsource their expertise for Nepal's development. However, Nepal also needs well-trained leaders who will return to develop the economy, create jobs, and to serve as mediators, policy-makers, and change-agents. Investments needs to be made to ensure more youth are supported to use their skills to uplift the lives of their compatriots from their host countries and in Nepal.

Project Description

Nepali Dreamers is creating system change in Nepal through college counseling and reflection. We are fostering a community of changemakers to empower millions of young Nepali dreams. We believe that everyone deserves an opportunity to work towards their goals, and a supportive network is essential to uplift the lives of others. We are working with high school students on their foreign university applications to maximize their chances of getting accepted into high-quality schools. Furthermore, our reflection-centered programming helps students understand themselves and the ways they are connected with other Nepalis.

We are focused on college counseling and reflection for two reasons. First, the Institute of International Education states that the annual number of students enrolled in US institutions has reached thirteen thousand in recent years. However, most of these students do not find high-quality schools that are a good fit with their qualifications and needs because most Nepali high schools do not have college counseling programs. This situation is especially handicapping high-ranking students, forcing them to compromise on the quality of their education. Using our strategic advantage as students at Oberlin College, our team has organized to support students applying to US schools. Secondly, we understand our identities as Nepali are central to the ways we connect with our compatriots. As students in foreign schools adapt to new cultures these national identities and connections can be weakened. This situation is especially germane to U.S. schools that only have a few Nepali students. So, we focus on reflection-centered community to empower students to acknowledge and preserve Nepali identities.

¹ McCarthy, N. (2018, April 26). The Countries Most Reliant On Remittances [Infographic]. Retrieved January 16, 2019, from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/niallmccarthy/2018/04/26/the-countries-most-reliant-on-remittances-infographic/#1ca0cf4d7277>

² Signs of growth in Nepal. (2018, May 22). Retrieved January 22, 2019, from <http://monitor.icef.com/2018/04/signs-growth-nepal/>

We have already made progress on our goals. During our first year of organizing, we recruited volunteers and created partnerships with test preparation non-profits and Nepali high schools. We have a multitude of offerings, including involvement from three high schools. Students skyped with native English speakers to work on spoken and written American English. They participated in college application workshops centered around reflection. The students were also offered online SAT classes and practice tests with Aspire Education Project, a Californian based test preparation non-profit. We aim to build on these partnerships to expand our programs during the summer of 2019.

With the Kathryn W. Davis Project for Peace's support, we can take our next steps towards building a larger community and establishing greater sustainability. We are keenly aware that uncontrolled expansion could drastically decrease the quality of our service: defeating our cause of creating a strong community. The Davis grant will greatly mitigate this concern, as it will allow us to make strategic investments in communication equipment, college application resources, and online platform construction. These assets will enable us to deliver our programming effectively and accelerate sustainable growth for our community.

During the summer of 2019, in addition to organizing our normal offerings mentioned above, our team will make two advancements. First, we will work with a programmer to create an online platform. This online resource will help us facilitate secure access, storage and sharing of application research done by our students. This construction is important because the platform will allow us to monitor our student's interactions with our resources and provide individualized guidance: thus ensuring quality of our service. Second, we will establish strategic relationship with NGOs to provide our students with service learning opportunities. These opportunities are vital as we continue strengthening our student's commitment to service.

These operations will be carried out by Bikalpa Baniya '19 and Gaurab Pokharel '21 (Nepali Students at Oberlin College) under the supervision of our advisors: Dr. Rajeev Cheetri (Education officer with 30 years of experience in Nepal), Devon Skritt (Former Assistant Admission Director at Harvard Graduate School of Education and Colgate University) and Prof. Deborah Roose (Emeritus Prof. of Education at Oberlin College).

Currently, the increase in enrollment of Nepali students in the US is higher than ever before. With the support of the Kathryn W. Davis foundation, we can capture this opportunity to create a community of Nepali leaders and make dreams come true.

Project Timeline

April 15th-May 25th:

- Recruiting our second cohort of students through our partnership and general recruiting
- Work with our advisors to build our reflection centered application workshop curriculum
- Reconnect with Aspire Education Project to organize planning

May 25th - June 8th:

- Locate and reserve space in Kathmandu for our programming
- Organize volunteers

June 10th - August 9th:

- Perform our American English, application, and community building activities
- Organize weekly test prep classes
- Build further partnerships with schools and organization

August 9th - August 15th:

- Evaluate progress and write reports