

Keep It Real Newsletter

December 2015



Message from the Presidents

Hello! We are coming to the end of another great semester of tutoring and special events. During this half of the semester, we saw so many students improve their grades. Many students made honor roll and received awards at school. Utilizing new supplies we purchased with funds from the university, tutors brought flash cards and counters into the homes to help students. I am extremely proud of all of the hard work our tutors have done this semester and am excited to see what the New Year holds. Thanks for another great semester!

Lauren Benish and Juliana Warchola

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Upcoming Events

- 1/7 Spring Activities Fair
- 1/12 General Body Meeting
- 1/15 New Tutor App Due
- 1/25 First Week of Tutoring

Mohamed Mugasa, a freshmen at Drexel University, reflects on his experiences with Keep It Real.



Keep It Real has been a great source in my life for the past 10 years of school. I can't stress enough how grateful I am to have the KIR program. I have built a great bond with most of the tutors, most whom became very significant part of my life and family. If it wasn't for the them, maybe I would still struggle with the English language and its grammar. With the personal extra help after coming home from school, the tutors helped me with my homework. Also having the tutors come to our home gave me the confidence and comfort with interacting with other classmates and expanding my horizons at school, especially in regards to college preparations. Thank you to April Myung, Eric Moran, and Brett Orren for providing me resources and help for the SATs and applying to colleges.

When I first had tutors back in 2005, I remember the tutors promised my brothers and I that if we do our work and stay focused, we will have the time to play cards/board games with them or go outside. I learned how to play Checkers, UNO, Goldfish, Chess, and many others from the tutors. This also really motivated and gave me excitement into being really focused with my school work. In this way, I think tutors should find efficient ways to work with kids and get them into finishing their school work.

Mohamed Mugasa, a freshmen at Drexel University, reflects on his experiences with Keep It Real.

In my four years of high school at Fox Chapel, I was very involved and interested in the engineering field. During my junior year, I came across many guest speakers that talked greatly about the business field, which I was very much attracted to. From there, I went into taking a couple business courses such as Marketing and AP Economics and many engineer electives. When it came to applying to colleges, I applied for undecided engineering.

After being accepted to four of the colleges I applied to, I decided to enroll to Drexel University due to the scholarship aid I received. Also I was very interested in the Co-op program at Drexel and I figured that it would open doors into finding a job career as soon as possible. Drexel was also the only school that offered Business and Engineering major as in one.

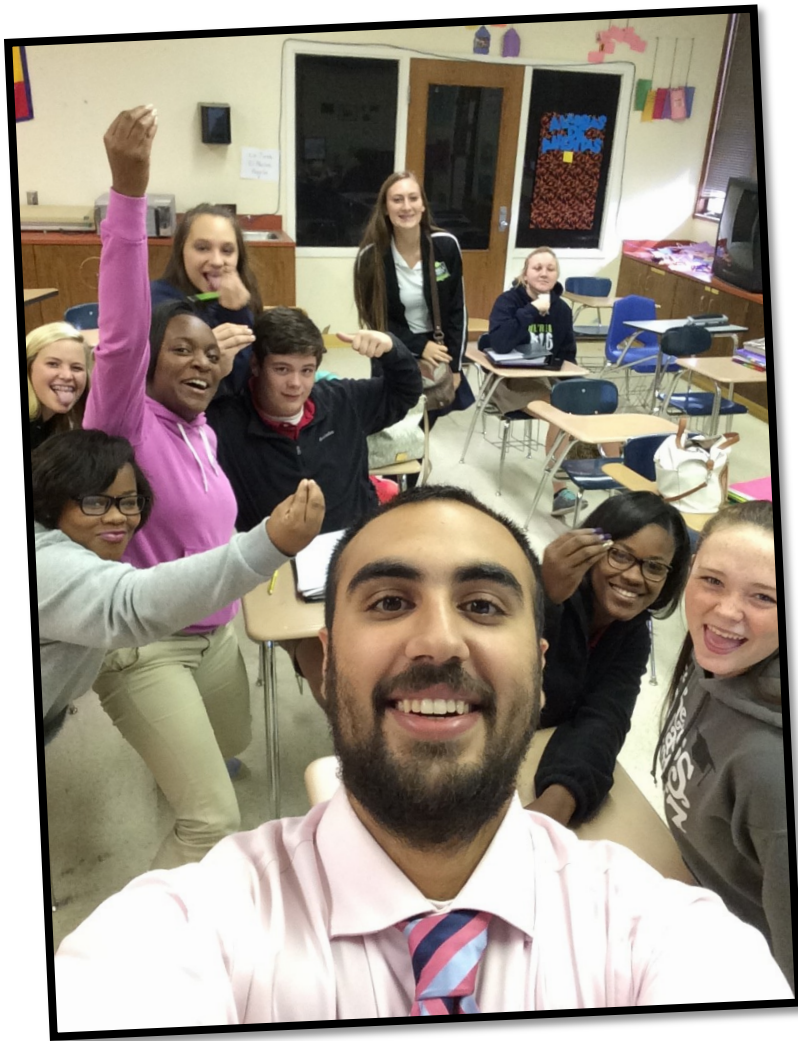
College is going great. I feel as if I was very welcomed and have made lots of new friends. I'm thankful to be surrounded with such great people at Drexel. This semester I'm taking Calculus 1, Engineering Design lab, Foundations of Business, Engineering Computation, General Chemistry, and English Composition. I do have a large workload of class work to do most of the time, but I'm capable of managing to get everything done and keeping up with my grades.

I'm very much appreciative for the KIR tutor community- Thank you guys for everything.



Alumni Spotlight: Brett Orren

Hola/Jambo/Hello Keep It Real:

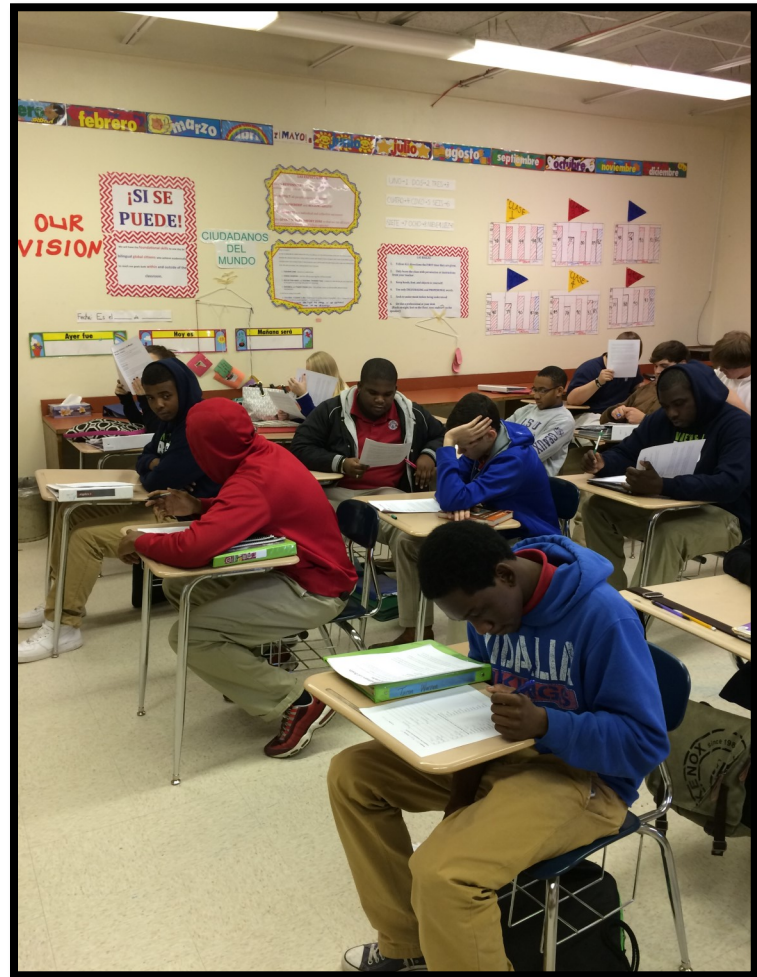


I'm Brett Orren, former Keep It Real president and current Teach for America Corps member in the Louisiana Delta. I teach high school Spanish in Vidalia, a very small community in northern, rural Louisiana. Teach for America is an organization that seeks to end educational inequity in the United States. It is no small task – it is one that may seem daunting most of the time and is often talked about as an organization with more flaws than strengths. Many people feel that Teach for America puts teachers into schools and consequently takes away experienced teachers from that school. However, in the south, Teach for America truly saves students and schools because there is such a high teacher shortage. My school district was still trying to fill teaching posts a week before school started. At our Professional Development day, just two days before the start of school, I walked into the district office and met a teacher who was hired earlier that day to fill the final teaching position at the school. A lack of teachers in schools is a *huge* problem in the entire United States, not only the South.

There is a specific story that is even more disturbing, but true to my heart. When I interviewed with my school to become a teacher, I was originally requested to teach high school English. I was pumped because this was a great opportunity. However, at the interview my principal asked me if it was true that I had a minor in Spanish. I responded yes, confused as to where he was going with the question. Then he stated something that I will never forget. He said that the state requires two years of a foreign language for students to graduate on the college track, yet they did not have a foreign language teacher. The students would be taught Spanish via a computer system in which students sit in front of a computer for an hour each day and read articles, listen to conversations, and attempt to learn from a computer. I was dumfounded and deeply concerned. I stressed these concerns of how anyone was expected to learn a language without any direct instruction. At this point my principal asked if I would teach Spanish. I immediately accepted and have not looked back since. This conversation is a constant reminder of why I am doing what I do. Any personal instruction is better than computerized instruction, and I have thrived in teaching Spanish so far (knock on wood for me).

Alumni Spotlight: Brett Orren

I have a group of 120 of the most amazing students. I did not think that I could find any students more amazing or who have been through more struggles than the students we tutor in Pittsburgh. Yet after only 5 months of teaching, I can name an interesting fact about each and every student. Destinee, a freshman, moved from Florida this past year and is a superstar in Spanish, but struggles with other classes because she was enrolled in a heavily Hispanic-populated school in Florida. Kevin could not afford glasses, but realized he needed them and through a lot of effort and constant pushes to get them, now sports glasses with bright red frames, which look on fleek every day. Julius “Catfish” Wilson, a star basketball player, asked me one day after class for help on the ACT so he could go to college. When I told him the biggest trick was to keep on reading, he informed me he has never finished a book cover-to-cover because he was never told of the importance of reading.



I love each and every one of my students for all of their unique and intricate live stories. The list can go on and on about my love for the students and their stories, but the biggest point to make is the amount of help that just a singular teacher can provide is astonishing. It is very true that no teacher will be able to end educational inequity or change the school system on his or her own, but it is very real to be able to change the life of a single student. Julius for instance is now reading his first book that I gave him and has come to me twice to tell me how interesting it is to read for fun. The best part by far about Vidalia and the area is the close-knit community. Everyone is here to help and everyone is so close together. This year alone, I am coaching football, leading prom committee and I am taking a group of 20 students to Costa Rica, none of whom have ever flown on a plane before. This would not be possible without the help from the community.

Alumni Spotlight: Brett Orren

It is also true that you are put into these schools for a reason. These are not A level schools and there are reasons for them failing. However, stories of Julius, Kevin, Destinee and many more students continue to remind me daily of why I do the work that I do. The work is long and hard. Often I put in 12 plus hours of work each day, but the rewards are seen daily. Some days, getting up at 5:30 am to teach is the hardest job in the world, but the moment I see my students, a smile lights up my face and I know that I am in the right place. I know many of you probably have the same feeling with KIR. Going to tutoring twice a week sometimes seems so inconvenient and stressful as work piles up around you, but the moment you see your family, that smile is present and the difference you make is immediate. The work you all do is truly amazing and even if you don't continue to pursue teaching, realize that you are super-stars already with the super-power of teaching and helping others.

I want to make sure that you all know one thing, I am here for you as a resource. Please don't hesitate to call me at 570-490-6210 or email me at brettorren@gmail.com. Please Keep In Touch KIRers. #KIRlyfe #KIRlove

Arsenal After School Program

Adrusht Madapoosi

Over the past couple of semesters, Keep It Real tutors on the executive board have collaborated with the Pittsburgh Public school, Arsenal Middle and Elementary, to participate in an afterschool program for the kids. The program started off in the middle school but the focus has shifted to the elementary school, where roughly 35 ESL students ranging from kindergarten to fifth grade participate every Monday to Thursday. Unfortunately, the Somali-Bantu students in the elementary school were unable to participate in this program due to the busses not being able to run to where they live. However, we help other students with various academic activities such as homework and reading time. The school staff also set up small "field trips" every week for the kids to go out and expand their knowledge so they are not confined to the restrictions of a classroom. The program itself is structured through the school, with both high school volunteers and school staff already involved, but the addition of KIR tutors helps them out a lot. From a personal standpoint, helping these kids has added an invaluable facet to my experience with Keep It Real. The ability to interact with students in a classroom setting to get a deeper understanding of what and how the kids actually learn is great and very helpful with in-home tutoring. Even though the Somali-Bantu kids are unable to participate, I urge everyone to give it a try because it is an experience that is valuable to every tutor. The program starts at 3:30pm and tutors usually leave around 5:30pm, Monday through Thursday. If you would like to participate next semester, please email keepitrealthgh@gmail.com

Peace Corps: Kyle Ciccone



Interested in the Peace Corps? Have questions about the application procedure? Keep It Real tutor Kyle Ciccone was recently accepted to work in Malawi as a secondary school teacher and has been through the process. He originally decided to apply because of his interest in Africa. He's also passionate about language and the way people communicate with one another. He decided to use this passion and apply to an educational program that would allow him to travel to Africa and specialize in teaching English.

The Peace Corps' application process itself is pretty easy and efficient. They recently updated their system to make it easier to apply to a specific region or interest. Since the update, more people have applied and it has become more competitive in the past couple of years. Kyle finished applying to English programs in Africa in late September and they assigned him to be considered for the Malawi program around early October. He then had a skype interview with a recruiter on October 18th. The interview questions were mainly focused on Kyle's personal experience with teaching and handling challenging situations, so Kyle spent most of his time talking about KIR. Then he was finally accepted on October 26th.

Many might be hesitant to work in the Peace Corps because they fear that they might not make a difference. But making a difference can start at the individual level, as we know from our tutoring experiences. The Peace Corps is another way to make a difference while also learning about a different culture. If you have any questions about the Peace Corps or Kyle's experience, please contact him at kjc67@pitt.edu or 412-980-0064.

Thanks for reading! Stayed tuned for our newsletter next semester. Until then, check out new updates on our website:

<http://keepitrealpitt.wix.com/keepitreal>

