Co- Curricular Write-Up

*Girl Rising*

Katie Walker

The young women of *Girl Rising* represent a unique and inspiring group of individuals committed to making real change to the accessibility of education for girls in underprivileged areas of the world. Their organization began about four years ago when a group of students were so moved by the movie *Girl Rising*, that they decided to take real action to elicit change. The group began with a more local focus, helping homeless women in the community gain access to everyday necessities such as sanitary products. Soon, they evolved to target the inaccessibility of education for young women in areas such as Mexico, Bolivia, Swaziland, and many other countries. Their main goal is to provide young women with the financial support they need to attain a quality education. To raise the $500, it costs to sponsor a student, the group holds fundraisers at their high school and local restaurants, then sends it to Save the Children. The young women choose the recipient of the funds based on financial need and cultural background.

As I sat with these young women, I was blown away by their commitment to their cause. Their current leader, Malak, was incredibly thoughtful and compassionate in her description of the group’s mission and she made sure to note that in our current world, it is important to be conscious of the cultural influences on educational availability. She said that in her family especially she has experienced a culture that encourages women to stay in the home rather than pursue their dreams, but she seems to be breaking through these expectations as she pursues a college education and law degree. Her hope is to help others overcome the limitations she personally had to face, while being understanding of the cultural differences that prevent educational opportunity. Other group members loosely discussed the challenges women in our modern society face and the “bad wrap” feminists sometimes get for being too extreme. I was surprised by their in-depth consideration of their own place in the world as young women. I’m not sure I was this self-aware when I was in high school.   
 The group also has plans to create posters depicting influential and inspiring women and explaining their contributions to society. They will display these posters during Woman’s Day on March 8th to bring awareness to their organization and the powerful effect women have had on our world. I suggested that the group expand their fundraising efforts by looking for opportunities that require less involvement as well as those that require more effort. By this I mean I encouraged them to create a simple flier that expressed their message and their need for financial aid and paste it to a large jar they could place in participating local business. I explained that this would be an easy project to complete and the fundraising efforts would be minimal because they would just have to pick up the containers once a week. On the other end of the fundraising spectrum, I suggested they look into grant writing because although it takes a lot of effort to apply for grants, the money they potentially could acquire would enable them to support many more young women’s educations and the skills gained from writing grants would help them throughout their lives. I will be truly touched if any of my suggestions lead to further success of their fundraising efforts.

Equal access to education is a cause that I have been passionate about for a long time. As a non-traditional student, I am no stranger to the inaccessibility of higher education when you have low financial standing. Through hard work and help from donors in our community I managed to pursue my education and it has bettered my life in so many ways. I am now able to pursue my passions for art and education which has given me so much more purpose and happiness in my life. I’ve always professed that once I gain my degree I would like to turn my efforts towards the fight for equal accessibility of education, but I have to admit, I don’t even know where to begin or what that looks like. When I sat in on *Girl Rising* I was so taken aback by these individuals because they were not just talking about their goals of educational equality but doing something tangible to help solve the problem. It made me see that even if I don’t have the big picture of how to solve the problem of inequality in education, I can start by taking little steps. Even affecting people on an individual level can elicit a flame of change, and that flame, when fed the right kindling, can develop into a blaze that causes change on a major scale.