

New Year, New EQ

JANUARY ISSUE - 2024

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What's New with Equiduct

By Whitney Byard and EQ PR - February 7, 2024

Peek into our newest addition and learn about Equiduct, Inc. from the founders themselves.

2024 is off to an incredible start in Lansing. Looking back, our team is proud of all accomplished in our first year of operation. Moving forward, we are excited for a second year of innovation. Program outreach is growing, grades are rising and we are even developing a novel volunteer scheduling and management web app. In this issue, we highlight our new in-school program at Mt. Hope as well as insight from the founders, John Henige and Jonas Padilla!

SCROLL FOR INTERVIEW

In-School Accelerated Instruction

Equiduct has been working closely with Mt. Hope STEAM for the launch of our first in-school tutoring program: EQ Accelerated In-School Instruction. After helping Mt. Hope students since last September, the newly instated principal selected a student cohort to participate in the academic skill development program. Four days a week, these seventh-grade Lansing Public School District students work with Equiduct volunteers to discuss mathematics, reading, writing and ways to thrive as a student.



Photos courtesy of Niccolo Seilo

With this program, we set to reimagine the classroom into something that not only challenges students and provides individual support, but inspires success through active role modeling. We want our students to be excited to come to class each day and hope they discover the self-confidence of a goal-oriented mindset. We are thrilled to be a part of change in the classroom and are excited to see how we can grow In-School Accelerated Instruction. With cohort grades steadily rising, the launch of an after-school Mt. Hope program is next! An immense thank you to our partners at Michigan State, who are helping to fund transportation for Equiduct's volunteers.

From an Idea to an Impact

How Co-Founders John Henige and Jonas Padilla built a catalyst for change

Jonas Padilla and John Henige sat down with EQ PR staff Whitney Byard to discuss where Equiduct came from and where is it heading. The two started Equiduct nearly three years ago and have grown to over 100 volunteers since its founding.



John Henige, left, and Jonas Padilla, right.

Whitney Byard (WB): What is your role with Equiduct?

Jonas Padilla (JP): “John and I share similar roles. We’re both co-founders and directors of EQ. We’re sort of like Swiss army knives with various roles and working parts we oversee. I have a larger role in the tutoring aspect of EQ, and John and I share an equal role with mentorship. My tutoring role came from my experience tutoring with Lyman Briggs and Student-Athlete Support Services. My work with those helped me model the Equiduct tutoring program and build the values and goals of the program. Currently, I am working on a web app with Burgess and keeping the tutoring program in line with some other team members.”

John Henige (JH): “Jonas’ and my role, in a broader sense, is ensuring everyone on our team has what they need to succeed. A lot of times that means an understanding of the varying levels of knowledge people come to us with. We want to connect interests with strengths and provide a collaborative environment where new team members aren't afraid to make (and learn from) a few mistakes. I have been working directly with our wonderful PR interns, recruitment, development and human resource team members. With outreach directly proportional to the member base, I want to increase awareness among MSU students. So the website, social media ads, class presentations and events are helping to spread the word.”

“Being a leader in this realm means simply helping and serving your team the best you can.”

WB: What is Equiduct’s backstory?

JP: “This all started, unsurprisingly, with volunteering. John helped at the Eastside Community Action Center in the food pantry and came to me saying he wanted to do more. We wanted to create something that outlives us and impacts the community on a larger scale than any one person or even

the sum of the Equiduct team can do. Education is the most effective tool for creating positive change in a society.”

“We agreed that doing more for the community isn’t only putting in more volunteer or tutor hours, but building something that goes beyond the power of the individual.”

JH: “Jonas and I met in high school in Detroit, which instilled active participation and community empowerment into our curriculum. We were taught to use the assets we have for the greater good. College volunteerism is a substantial power for change. Millions serve each year. Equiduct rose out of the question ‘*What would happen if we all came together to address a common issue? And, what could be more important than preparing the next generation for success?*’ Equiduct is the bridge between the MSU community and Lansing schools. It’s more than infrastructure- it is a learning experience for all involved. We hope to develop leaders and inspire altruistic ideals. It took us a long time to get to where we are, so we are honored to be able to provide young adults and students with the resources we have.”

What would you say is the most important aspect of Equiduct?

JH: “The way our members care. We are working with natural helpers, who are abundant in the MSU community. Our purpose is to give them an outlet where they can apply their skills and do some amazing things for the Lansing community. There are so many good hearts at Michigan State, and unfortunately, there is a need next door. We are looking to foster genuine human connections between college students and their community.”

What has been EQ’s biggest accomplishment since starting?

JP: “From an individual level, I would say the connections and growth between myself and the students I work with. Whether it be helping them academically, personally or socially, the individual level is very important to this experience. I am most proud of how many people we have brought together to serve a greater purpose. The size and scale we’ve reached already is a dream realized.”

“It’s more than one person, it’s the work of a hundred people, impacting the lives of an entire community.”

Volunteer work is typically seen as an individual act, how does Equiduct help students change this perspective?

JP: “Experience is key. The change happens by seeing the work in person and interacting with the students. When you meet the kids, get involved and see the impact first-hand, a switch flips. You see

the importance of our work and how your time and effort can go beyond what you ever imagined. It's a very abstract and surreal thought that you are a reason a community is empowered, and a student is excited to learn."

How do you feel EQ is different from other volunteer opportunities?

JP: "Helping the community is a commonality and focus among all service organizations. However, we also prioritize making volunteer work as convenient as possible for college students. Our organization shows them a support system that is excited to help them help others, manage their chaotic college schedule, and offer an easy way to get and stay involved. Another difference is how young our organization is. It's a great source of inspiration for those who want to get involved. Many of our volunteers have watched us grow from an idea to a 70-tutor program—recently achieving non-profit status. John and I are not much older than most of the people who drive this program and that shows college students they can make real change."

"We are more than an organization, we're a chance to better a student's life and connect young adults with an opportunity to empower the next generation of learners."

JH: "What inspires me to continue the work is reminding young adults of the power they have to change their environment and the lives of others. I believe that as humans, it's in our nature to work together, help each other, and learn from one another. There is a strong altruistic side in everyone and experiences common to our programs help them recognize it. It's the little things like when students remember your name or are excited to learn, all those little moments we collect and share as motivation to keep going."

If I gave you \$1 million to use on EQ, what would you do with the funds?

JP: "With one million dollars we would continue with the same core focuses we started with: To serve the Lansing community and make college volunteering easy. We would upscale all our attributes, like shuttle transportation and equipping Equiduct participants with all the school supplies and resources they need to be solely focused on academic growth. Ultimately, we would love to remove any burden on the students and volunteers involved in the Lansing Public Schools system so their responsibilities lie within their academic enhancement and involvement."

JH: "If we had \$1 million, everyone in the Lansing community and Michigan State community would know about Equiduct. We would expand our campus outreach and therefore, expand our impact. We could reach our goal: providing each Lansing Public School student with a tutor and mentor."

Equiduct is a great way to get involved with the Lansing community and is committed to making volunteer work fun, accessible and convenient for college students. Keep an eye out for further issues

of the monthly EQ News, as well as upcoming articles and Tutor Talks from Equiduct authors. Contact Equiduct via the website, Instagram, or email with questions or to get involved.

Contact Us

We can help match your academic and personal interests with the right Equiduct volunteer activity.

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