Dear Friend of UPOP:

Neither snow, nor snow, nor snow shall stay UPOP from its appointed course ... well, only a little: in spite of record-setting snowfalls that closed the Institute during two of our three major workshops held over IAP and Presidents' Day Weekend, UPOP students were still able to have a full experience of the rich hands-on modules for which we are known, thanks to creative rescheduling, heroic efforts by our mentor-instructors, and some very long days.

Said the students:

- "The UPOP Team Training Camp exceeded my expectations. I feel that I have gained a wealth of tools and experience that will greatly help me in my future endeavors."
- "Everything I learned was useful. I learned things that I didn't even know that I didn't know."
- "I feel more confident working in teams and speaking in front of groups after the Team Training Camp."
- "I enjoyed getting to participate in the different modules to learn by experimenting, and not just listening about leadership, communication, teamwork, etc."

Over the workshops, we welcomed 50 mentors, of whom 11 were new to the program; three veteran mentors came to two workshops each (!); and we set a record for the number of employers (many were UPOP alums) and sponsors who helped make the Friday Networking Luncheons a great success.

We honored Barry Bronfin ’60, a long-time UPOP mentor-instructor, with this year’s Desh and Jaishree Deshpande Award, given to those who have made extraordinary contributions to the program, which was funded in its early years by MIT’s Deshpande Center. And, as you can see below, we were also honored to welcome Desh himself and his wife Jaishree on a visit to one of the workshops.

We thank you for your continued support!

With best wishes,

The UPOP Team
Joel Schindall Director | Leo McGonagle Executive Director | Kate Moynihan UPOP Mentor Liaison | Bethany Walsh & Sharon Leary UPOP Student Relations | Amy Bass UPOP Employer Relations | Jessica Jones UPOP Communications & Operations
"Solve the right problem" urges UPOP's founding supporter

"When you bring the power of innovation to solving the right problem, big things happen," said Gururaj "Desh" Deshpande, founder of MIT's Deshpande Center for Technological Innovation, in his talk to UPOP students on January 13 during the first-session IAP workshop.

UPOP's directors had invited Desh and his wife Jaishree to see how much UPOP has grown since the Deshpande Center funded UPOP's first five years, from its start in 2001 with 60 students to now attracting applications from half the sophomore class. The Deshpandees visited UPOP's new offices in 1-123, and then went to see the program in full flight: an IAP workshop, Walker Memorial filled with students engaging in experiential modules, and many mentor-instructors donating their time and sharing their experiences.

Deshpande encouraged the students to think beyond solving engineering problems to solving social engineering problems. "At some point in your leadership journey, you also have to start thinking about taking an interest in what's the right thing to do," he said.

He went on to describe a current project in India, where the Deshpande Foundation's Hubli Sandbox took a social engineering problem--millions of children going to school hungry--and applied good engineering, good supply chain, good logistics and good methodologies to a solution: a kitchen that makes 200,000 meals a day for cents a meal, and which has now expanded to 20 kitchens across India, producing 1.4 million meals a day. (Deshpande describes the Sandbox program in this TEDx talk.)

By coincidence, one of UPOP's weeklong IAP projects, bringing innovative startups to economically developing communities, tied directly into another Deshpande project, the Merrimack Valley Sandbox in Lowell/Lawrence Massachusetts. One of that week's mentor-instructors, Mitch Tyson '75, has been involved in that Sandbox, and Deshpande chatted to a team that had chosen this as their project, led by mentor-instructors Paul Green '73 and Mindy Garber '82.

"Even though problems look really challenging," Deshpande said, in
his concluding remarks, "when you apply your mind to it they are not as hard as they appear. I'm hoping that all you UPOP graduates will not only learn how to solve problems, but also perhaps spend time thinking about what are the right problems to solve in the world and applying your minds to them."

**Networking Luncheons broke all records**

This year's Friday Networking Luncheons saw our largest employer-engagement yet, with over 115 employers attending on January 16, over 125 employers on January 30, and a total of 17 corporate sponsors. Three annual UPOP sponsors have already interviewed (and hired) a number of UPOP sophomores for the coming summer: Akamai Technologies, Pioneer Natural Resources, and Northrop Grumman (which has hired six so far!).

Many of this year's employers were in fact UPOP alums back to hire UPOP students. One, Christina Qi '13, co-founder of Domeyard, noted "the students this year were incredibly well-prepared! Thank you so much for continuing to inspire students to reach their full potential. It's amazing to see the program continue to grow -- I think they should make UPOP a requirement in order to graduate!"

The UPOP Class of 2017 found the luncheons stimulating and productive, reporting that their networking luncheon was "absolutely amazing," "definitively more enjoyable than career fairs I've previously experienced," and that they left feeling "more confident [after this] opportunity to develop my communication skills and network with employers who actually want to hire me!"

**UPOP workshops build life-long skills**

Despite two (almost three!) snow days, we delivered three successful experiential workshops ("Team Training Camps"), bringing UPOP's "taste of the real world" to a total of 355 students.

The students are grouped into teams (over the three workshops we had 46 teams) anchored by our mentor-instructors, who guide the students through exercises such as "Skyscraper," "Specifications," "Negotiation," and, new this year, "Crucial Conversations."

Each module is designed to build upon the previous modules, so that by the end of the week the students have accumulated and practiced
skills that will help them throughout their professional lives. UPOP's mentor-instructors universally express the wish that they had had this foundation when they left college, and they are happy, year after year, to commit many days to coaching the students in the skills that will help them thrive in their careers. The students appreciate their efforts:

- "I really enjoyed having conversations with my mentor as well as the other mentors and learning about their experiences."
- "I enjoyed getting to know my team - it was fascinating to see how, within a week, we were able to work together very effectively to get things done."

For the team spirit in action, see the photo albums:

- [UPOP IAP Workshop Session 1, Jan 12-16, 2015](#)
- [UPOP IAP Workshop Session 2, Jan 26-30, 2015](#)
- [UPOP Presidents' Day Workshop, February 14-16, 2015](#)

UPOP is the Undergraduate Practice Opportunities Program, a yearlong co-curricular program open to MIT sophomores from across the Institute. The program's mission is to prepare MIT sophomores to successfully integrate into and thrive in the professional world and to be strong contributors to their organizations, supported by a dynamic community of students, program staff, employers and MIT alums. UPOP offers numerous opportunities for MIT alums and companies to get involved—as speakers, coaches, employers, and sponsors.

UPOP | MIT | upop.mit.edu | upop@mit.edu | 617.253.0077