



Council for Christian Colleges and Universities

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# UGANDA STUDIES PROGRAM

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Mukono, Uganda

## MARCH 2013 EVALUATION STUDENT ACADEMIC PROGRAMS COMMISSION



*March 11-15, 2013*

### *SAPC Commission Members*

**Dr. Brock Schroeder**

Vice-President for Graduate &  
Professional Studies and Enrollment  
Mt. Vernon Nazarene University (OH)

**Mr. Ken Gilson**

Dean of Academic Records &  
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**Ms. Wendy Lippert**

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## VISIT OVERVIEW

The Council for Christian Colleges & Universities' (CCCU) Student Academic Programs Commission (SAPC) visited the Uganda Studies Program (USP) located at Uganda Christian University (UCU) in Mukono, Uganda from March 11-15, 2013. The SAPC team included three members: Dr. Mark Sargent (Provost & Dean of the Faculty, Westmont College), Dr. Brock Schroeder (Vice-President for Graduate and Professional Studies and Enrollment, Mount Vernon Nazarene University), and Mr. Ken Gilson (Dean of Academic Records & Institutional Research, Biola University). CCCU President Ed Blews, Jr. and his wife Debra McKenna Blews (CCCU Senior Fellow), Dr. Ken Bussema (Vice-President of Student Programs), and Ms. Deborah Kim (Director for Student Programs) were also on-site during the visit.

Prior to our visit, we reviewed the Director's report prepared by Mr. Mark Bartels and the report of SAPC's 2006 visit. During our visit, Commissioners held numerous meetings and interviews - both scheduled and ad-hoc - with UCU and USP students, staff, administrators, and faculty. The group also reviewed the supporting materials the USP staff prepared for our visit, which included orientation information, enrollment data, curricular schedules, program evaluations, assessment rubrics, and writing specimens.

## PROGRAM MISSION, HISTORY, AND RELATIONSHIP TO UGANDA CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY

The Uganda Studies Program began in 2004 as a BestSemester International Partner program, in cooperation with UCU which incorporated USP within its department structure. The USP mission is "To transform lives by providing opportunities for students to authentically engage people, culture, and contemporary realities of Uganda in ways that challenge students to be active participants in Christ's claims on all aspects of life." The USP conducted its first self-study in November 2006 in preparation for the initial site visit by SAPC. This first program review was positive in its analysis of the program.

The USP is a partnership program with UCU in Mukono, Uganda. UCU is a private, church-affiliated (Church of Uganda-Anglican) University, and is an affiliate member of the CCCU. The relationship between UCU, USP, and CCCU has deepened over the last decade and provides a supportive, Christ-centered learning community for the USP staff and students. We offer sincere thanks and appreciation to Rev. Canon Dr. John M. Senyonyi (UCU Vice Chancellor ("President"), and his Deputy Vice Chancellors (vice presidents), for their active support of and engagement in the UCU-USP-CCCU partnership.

The program is designed around five curricular themes, which are introduced and developed within the core course, "Faith & Action in the Ugandan Context." These themes are: Relationships, Culture & Faith, Christian Responses for Poverty & Suffering, Living Faithfully in Our Home Culture, and Faith, Hope and Love. Each of these themes has three or four supporting program objectives that cover the affective, behavioral, and cognitive aspects of engaging life in Uganda. USP students choose one of three emphases: Uganda Studies Emphasis (USE), Intercultural Ministry and Missions Emphasis (IMME), or Social Work Emphasis (SWE).

The USP staff consists of a Director (and program founder), Mark Bartels; two Coordinators, Rachel Robinson and Lisa Tokpa; and an Assistant Coordinator, Abby Bartels. In addition, there are several UCU employees that serve as program and administrative assistants. Finally, UCU faculty members teach selected courses that are offered to USP students as elective credit.

## **PROGRAM LEADERSHIP**

### **Commendations**

We commend Director Bartels for cultivating a strong relationship with UCU administration, faculty and staff, as well as among his program staff. The UCU staff and administration affirm the strength of this mutually beneficial relationship. USP students benefit from access to UCU faculty, support services, and integration into campus life and community. Simultaneously, UCU benefits from having a different group of USP students on campus each term, as this helps create a dynamic and consistent international presence.

We commend the USP staff for their ability to work well together. The self-study report shows effective program and curricular organization. While on site, SAPC heard from numerous students that the team pays close attention to their concerns. Similarly, interviews with UCU staff and students show that they are sensitive to and understanding of the questions, behaviors and needs of the USP students. The program staff understands that effective cross-cultural experiences require significant time and space for reflection, processing and learning.

Director Bartels has consistently maintained good communication with the CCCU office in Washington, D.C. SAPC commends Mark for keeping his home-office colleagues informed of any situation that may be of concern to member campuses or parents. In an era of instant communication via social media and the Internet, it is essential for program directors to stay ahead of the communication curve. Director Bartels has demonstrated his ability to quickly identify potential problems and, when necessary, communicate those problems and his plans to address them.

We also commend the program staff for their thorough enrollment process. The USP carefully screens applicants to understand the expectations and needs of prospective USP students. This information provides context for decision-making on living situations (homestays, campus residence halls) and practicum placements (particularly for Social Work students). This early attention to shaping appropriate expectations also fosters student satisfaction with all the cross-cultural experiences they have during their semester in Uganda: on campus, in practicums, and during homestays.

### **Recommendations**

Mentoring and developing junior and/or newer staff is an ongoing challenge in higher education. Indeed, the USP is not immune to this challenge (nor are any of the BestSemester programs). In fact, the nature of the BestSemester programs—most of which are physically located far away from CCCU campuses and disconnected from any academic department—makes this need more acute. Therefore, we recommend that the Student Programs Office and Director Bartels continue to seek ways to mentor and develop the USP staff, focusing on their leadership skills as well as the art and craft of teaching.

Specifically, we recommend identifying an advisory group of faculty on CCCU campuses who are experts in the USP's various discipline areas (cross-cultural/experiential learning; social work; spiritual development; African politics, economics, theology, etc.). Such a group of discipline experts could provide guidance and ideas for enhancing and/or refining the curriculum, assist the staff as they navigate curricular challenges, and help counter the inevitable academic isolation our BestSemester staff experience. The CCCU staff and/or Chief Academic Officers may be able to facilitate these connections.

## ACADEMIC PROGRAM & STUDENT LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

### Commendations

The Uganda Studies Program (USP) is an exceptional model of experiential learning. The architecture of the program—from the general design to the smallest details—shows how intentionally Director Bartels and his staff have thought about fitting each piece into a coherent whole. When describing their work in person or on the page, the USP team displays a rich understanding of experiential learning strategies and offers a compelling narrative about the rhythm of the semester. Over the last several years they have honed their craft, adjusting readings and refining the writing prompts to better suit their aims. The syllabi are extensive, and the various assignments—from response papers, to “guided engagements,” to required readings—urge students to move from experience to reflection. The semester has a lucid progression. Early on, the team provides a fine balance of challenge and support as students adjust to daily life in African culture. By the end of the (spring) term, students are prepared for a final 10-day trip to Rwanda, where they will encounter the history and consequences of genocide.

The USP is also an excellent learning community. In the program's anchor class (“Faith and Action in the Ugandan Context”), Director Bartel's engaging, warm and Socratic style makes for an inquisitive and thoughtful community of discussion, and the students consistently affirm the importance of the class in stirring their minds and providing a core framework for their experience. The course provides the key overview of the USP's five primary themes, which explore students' affective, behavioral and cognitive engagement with Ugandan culture. Director Bartels, along with instructors Robinson, Tokpa and others, has succeeded in establishing a tone of trust and mutual respect in the program. There is openness among the students and a widespread desire to participate as members of a community.

The renowned Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe—who passed away just days after the SAPC visit—once warned, “charity is the opium of the privileged.” Indeed, the USP enrolls many students - often from relatively privileged backgrounds - who go to Africa with charitable intentions. Throughout the semester, the USP effectively helps students become far more discerning about the dangers of paternalism, without losing the deep conviction that the Christian faith calls us to service and understanding. Finding that balance between global responsibility and local respect is no small task, and the USP brings students into the heart of these issues with perspicacity.

For most students, an internship or practicum provides many of the vital components of their semester. Such internships range from 40 hours a semester for cross-cultural ministry practicums to the 400 hours necessary for seniors in Social Work practicums. The USP carefully chooses, develops and evaluates internship sites. Lisa Tokpa, who has an MSW, effectively oversees the Social Work internship placements. The USP team works closely with the internship field supervisors to help them understand their responsibilities, and the staff goes to great lengths to provide students safe transportation to the internship sites. With advanced preparation, the staff endeavors carefully to locate the best practicum and internship settings for the students prior to their arrival, and the students receive a quality orientation to their internship program and have ample opportunity to discuss their experiences in a seminar throughout the semester. Journals or weekly writing assignments in the Social Work practicum ask them to relate the principles of Social Work practice to their field experience, and call for their reflections on poverty, gender, tribal customs, and their own self-discovery during the semester. Reports from students consistently reveal that the seminars are a valuable time for processing with one another about their experience and seeking guidance and perspective from their instructor.

The USP does not simply make use of space on the UCU campus, but is an active department within the institution, contributing significantly to the intellectual life of the University. In the last

several years, the USP has worked hard to find a range of quality electives taught by UCU faculty, and the staff has helped those UCU professors understand American students and their learning styles. The available elective courses cover a broad range of disciplines, including theology, literature, history and politics.

### **Recommendations**

As one of the program's anchors, the Faith in Action course effectively encourages students to analyze their "American Christianity," helps them with their cross-cultural transition, and nurtures their own spiritual values and responsibilities; however, the class relies almost exclusively on Western texts (and often those with a popular bent). For the backbone of a Ugandan Studies Program, we recommend that a more robust selection of African texts be included. While it is valuable for students to read how Western Christians ponder their own responses to poverty and spiritual growth, it is vital that the African voices not be shortchanged on these same questions. Admittedly, students who take UCU courses do hear African professors and read African texts, but a stronger presence of African writers in this anchor course would insure that the students' central interpretive framework for the semester is not overwhelmingly Western.

Similarly, the Social Work seminars effectively ask students to comment on many of the *micro* issues of their work in the field, yet they could more fully explore the *macro* issues specifically relevant to Africa. The opportunity to complete a practicum in an international context clearly provides students a distinctive and horizon-expanding view of Social Work practice. The USP will serve those students well if they can speak not only about their site experience, but also about the larger theoretical and cultural issues that shape Social Work policy and endeavors in East Africa. Students should be introduced to some of the compelling ideas, big-frame debates, and ongoing controversies among African Social Work theorists and agencies.

At present, the rigor of the USP is primarily in the volume of assignments and the obvious challenges of living and working in a cross-cultural context. The Faith in Action class and a few others should require some higher-order critical thinking tasks. The capstone assignments, like most of the previous assignments, dwell on students' responses to required readings and their own experiences, and projects do ask for some summative thoughts about their own growth and experience. But the capstone assignments need to go further, requiring students to engage critical questions and make more synthesizing and sustained arguments, drawing them into additional research or reading materials beyond the syllabus. This recommendation is *not* to layer additional assignments onto an extremely busy schedule, but rather to suggest that a few of the assignments be replaced or re-crafted for higher-order critical thinking.

Finally, the USP quite admirably avoids excessive rhetoric about its capacity to "transform" lives and culture; it encourages students to consider how their experiences accumulate to produce successive "one degree" changes in their own thoughts and goals. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that for many students the Ugandan semester profoundly influences their perspectives and awakens new ideas about future study and vocation. As the semester winds down, the USP might create more opportunities for students to reflect on their future steps. Staff can help students consider not simply how to *re-enter* American life and campus culture, but also how their work on campus or in their future vocations might be *enriched* by the Ugandan experience. Has the semester helped them envision senior theses, internship projects, or co-curricular endeavors? Has the encounter with Uganda awakened ideas for graduate study or vocation? Some USP alums would be ideal candidates to consider Fulbrights or other cross-cultural fellowships.

## STUDENT LIFE ENVIRONMENT

### Commendations

The USP is deeply committed to students' health and safety. Director Bartels has built a strong network with local security officials and the U.S. Embassy in Kampala. Staff members stay regularly updated on Ugandan-based epidemics and diseases, and consistently inform students how to take precautions and minimize risks of illness or danger. Travel and curfew policies are clear, respected, and enforced. A full-time driver (staff member) transports students to and from internship sites. Emergency procedures are extensive and well communicated. The USP has multiple evacuation plans, insuring that the program is not reliant on a sole course of action should it be necessary to leave Uganda on short notice.

The program's student handbook is quite thorough and helpful in acclimating students to life in Uganda. The orientation begins well before the students' arrival, and continues as soon as they reach Africa. As part of its fine tapestry of living and learning experiences, the USP provides multiple opportunities to reinforce the key points covered in the orientation throughout the semester. The program also has prepared impressive materials for parents, not only in anticipation of the semester but also in preparation for their students' return. An excellent program guide for parents describes some of the typical phases that students undergo when they return from Uganda, and advises the parents how their responses could be most helpful.

The USP staff is very adept at creating time and space for students to process their experiences. They have laced into the semester numerous opportunities and expectations for students to interact socially with African students from UCU. The staff proactively anticipates the challenges that students will be facing, and seeks opportunities to integrate them more fully into their social and academic context. By all reports, students receive a high level of pastoral care and concern from the staff. USP students are also welcome to join UCU chapel services, and the format of the chapel programs is both accessible and vibrant. The USP has quite intentionally integrated students into the UCU community and the local city of Mukono.

The homestays are a widely valued aspect of the program. All students spend early weeks in homestays. In fact, some of the Social Work students—who are not required to spend a semester in a homestay—eventually ask if they may continue to live in the home where they have spent their opening weeks. The USP staff members have carefully selected the homestay sites, relying on contacts through churches and the University. Students who choose to spend the balance of the semester on campus are integrated well with the Honors College students at UCU.

A very high percentage of the USP students are females. In light of this, the staff has taken special care to help the women navigate the cultural subtleties and assumptions about gender in their Ugandan context. There are several women on the USP staff, including Abby Bartels, and they provide an essential resource for women students should they need a safe place for conversation or advice. During the SAPC visit, the students consistently assured CCCU staff member Deborah Kim that they felt well guided and supported by the USP staff.

### Recommendations

The USP often informs students of various social activities at UCU, and UCU staff members come to class sessions to announce upcoming events. To help students break the ice and transition to UCU life, the USP staff might identify a few UCU events before the semester begins – or early in the semester - and establish them as experiences for the USP students when they arrive.

The directors and coordinators work as a coherent team, and therefore share some responsibilities. If the IMME emphasis is dropped or altered (discussion below), some of the

current division of labor may need to be reshuffled. So, should a change be made, it will be important for the USP to define how the duties have been realigned and to insure that the staff and students all understand the respective roles of each staff member.

Finally, the USP should continue its conscientious work monitoring health and safety issues in Uganda. Keeping campuses informed of its endeavors in this regard will allow campus-based study abroad staff to reassure potential USP students of the program's careful attention to student health and safety.

## **PROGRAM ASSESSMENT**

### **Commendations**

The USP team is to be commended for a robust and well-developed assessment framework. Appropriate course and program learning outcomes are clearly articulated, and the assessment matrix identifies which learning experiences (coursework, homestays, guided engagements) support each learning outcome. The team is committed to continuous curriculum review and programmatic improvement, as demonstrated by their annual review of all assessment data each May. We also commend the recent transition to an electronic survey tool, and encourage further development of this resource.

### **Recommendations**

Just as the program benefits from regular feedback from (assessment of) students at the conclusion of each term, it will also benefit from regular feedback from alumni. Therefore, we recommend that the USP staff regularly assess their alumni, perhaps annually or alternate years. Because USP is a relatively young program, including questions about the longer-term impact of former students' Uganda experience on their vocation and calling - or plans for graduate school - will assist the team as they continually refine the curriculum.

Some time and attention should be given to further development of the survey instruments. In addition to quantifying students' perceptions and feelings about the program - which is important to do - the course evaluations should be refined to assess students' *learning*. Also, closer attention should be paid to survey design, such as assessing only one construct per question. Finally, the team should document how they use the assessment feedback to make programmatic or curricular changes. Collectively, these refinements will provide a more comprehensive assessment program.

## **PROGRAM SUSTAINABILITY**

Like all BestSemester programs, the USP faces the challenges of serving a wide range of CCCU campuses, students and faculty. At the time of SAPC's visit, the USP was assessing the future of its Intercultural Missions and Ministry Emphasis (IMME), which has been an emphasis since the program's third year. The Social Work emphasis track was developed several years later in response to students' interests, and that track appears to be serving a very distinct purpose, especially since it meets the practicum requirements needed at schools accredited by the Council for Social Work Education. On the other hand, the IMME appears to have lost some of its uniqueness, and currently is defined less by the curriculum than by the requirement for homestays. Consequently, we encourage the USP staff and CCCU leadership to consider discontinuing IMME as a separate track. Students in this track currently come from many academic disciplines, and they complete internships at a diverse range of sites, not simply ministry-oriented projects. It is not at all clear that labeling this a "ministry" track is helpful in

marketing the program; in fact, it may well be that it is limiting. Dropping the IMME label could make the general USP program seem more welcoming to a wider array of majors, and perhaps more male students. As this part of Africa is a hotbed of United Nations and non-governmental organization activity, agricultural/food programs, and micro-financing opportunities, we encourage the USP to identify ways to build relationships with these types of groups and programs to enlarge the practicum/placement possibilities. Most importantly, as the staff weighs options for expanding the curriculum, it's important to build on core strengths and avoid developing too many diverse strands.

The lack of regular interaction with CCCU faculty identified above not only creates challenges for staff and curriculum development, but also requires extra effort on the part of the USP staff to keep campuses informed of their program, and to be aware of changing campus trends and requirements. Again, we recommend that the USP, with the help of the Washington, D.C. office, develop an advisory board of some of the Africanists on CCCU campuses. In addition to providing a rich resource of ideas for refining the curriculum and insuring that it will continue to meet the needs of CCCU campuses, an advisory board will help the program develop a network of faculty at multiple institutions who are strong USP advocates.

In light of President Blews' vision to make the CCCU the global leader for Christian Higher Education, the CCCU might consider an initiative for strengthening the partnership between North American and African scholars and institutions, and the UCU-USP collaboration could be one of the linchpins of that effort. In strengthening the partnership, the USP would gain even greater stature as a place for students to spend a semester if college presidents and leaders perceived the program as part of a broader CCCU objective to promote conversations and collaborations among Christian scholars from both continents.

### **SUMMARY**

The Student Academic Programs Commission commends the Uganda Studies Program staff for providing a well-organized, challenging, experience-rich program that stretches our students in an environment that is vastly different from our North American campuses.

The Commission is pleased to continue to endorse the Uganda Studies Program as a CCCU BestSemester program worthy of the full support of our member campuses.