

## **Students from two UWO colleges study, serve in Africa**

by David Williams - Tuesday, June 22, 2010

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University of Wisconsin Oshkosh professor Alfred Kisubi has an ulterior motive every time he teaches “Seminar of Globalization: Africa’s Experience.”

The study abroad course, which exposes College of Education and Human Services (COEHS) students to the socio-cultural, economic, historical and geo-political implications of globalization in an African country, was first offered at UW Oshkosh in 2005. Since then, Kisubi has led four groups of students to Uganda and two groups to Kenya.

It’s all part of his master plan.

“My hidden agenda is that I bring Americans and Africans together. I want to be an ambassador of the world,” said Kisubi, who was born in Iganga, Uganda, and has taught at UW Oshkosh since 1992.

Kisubi and Professor Emeritus Richard Paxton started the COEHS study abroad program by drafting a memorandum of understanding between UW Oshkosh and Busoga University in 2003. To Kisubi, it was the realization of a dream 10 years in the making.

While studying at the University of Missouri, Kansas City, he had written a paper in which he vowed his future work would increase international interaction between Americans and Africans.

“I always knew I would end up a teacher,” Kisubi said. “I wrote that I wanted to start a people-to-people university. If I had a job in Africa, I would make sure that I brought African students to America, and if I was teaching in America, I would bring students to Africa.”

In an era where technology connects individuals from around the world, Kisubi believes exploring globalization through immersive and face-to-face relations is increasingly important to today’s scholars.

“Cameras have captured the whole world. I can send an e-mail to my son in London, and he gets it in an instant. You can drink Coca-Cola in Uganda and in Oshkosh,” Kisubi said. “We live in a world where we need to understand each other so that we can solve our human conflicts amicably rather than demonizing one another.

“I do this for peace purposes,” he said.

### **Another college, a new perspective**

The 2003 memorandum of understanding between UW Oshkosh and its partner universities in Africa encompasses not only the exchange of students, but also an exchange of professors. Later that year, after hearing a presentation from the visiting principal of Buckley High School, a girls boarding school in

Iganga, and after hearing Kisubi's findings on the health and environment in the Iganga District, Patti VanderLoop, a clinical assistant professor at the UW Oshkosh, approached Kisubi and expressed interest in going to Uganda.

VanderLoop then spent two weeks in Uganda, working in the maternity ward of Iganga hospital and giving educational presentations to children, addressing such topics as hygiene, oral/dental care, gender issues and reproductive health. She formed a lot of relationships and returned to UW Oshkosh with a lot of enthusiasm and a desire to return to Africa.

Earlier this spring, the University's ties to Uganda were tightened when VanderLoop and Jill Collier, an assistant professor in the College of Nursing, brought 13 UWO nursing students to Iganga to satisfy their clinical requirements in Africa.

"Clinicals are a time when students get actual, hands-on experience in different patient settings," said VanderLoop, who has taught at UW Oshkosh for 17 years. "The clinicals for Uganda focused on community health — promoting health and wellness in different populations."

While this was the College of Nursing's first study abroad in Africa, nursing students have had the opportunity to gain clinical experience in India the past three years.

"Because the summer weather in India would be too hot, we only offer that program to students who are in their first year of clinicals during winter interim classes, which is only about half of the students," said VanderLoop, adding that she hopes to continue to offer Uganda clinicals in June.

VanderLoop, who has participated in all of the college's clinical abroad programs, said the India and Uganda study abroad experiences are important for students because they focus on cultural understanding and because students develop a self-awareness of their own culture.

"They learn the importance of communication and recognize the differences in values. Every single student walks away with a new perspective," she said.

Collier added that the Busoga instructors shared knowledge about their role and their abilities to work within the funding sources that are provided. UW Oshkosh students saw nurses working in expanded roles, much like nurse practitioners do in the U.S., out of necessity.

"Our students learned much about Ugandan culture through interactions with the Busoga students and tutors and about the limitations of providing healthcare in a developing nation," Collier said. "They had much to teach us, and we are grateful they were willing to share their knowledge with us, as well."

### **Making a positive impact**

Lindsey Walker, a senior nursing student at UW Oshkosh who had never been out of the United States before signing up for the Uganda clinicals, was inspired by professor VanderLoop's recounts of visiting Uganda.

"I've always wanted to go to Africa, so it was the perfect opportunity," said Walker, of Mazomanie, Wis.

“The biggest culture shock was the healthcare system. It’s not very advanced, so it was very hard adapting to what they have and what they believe.”

Walker and her fellow UW Oshkosh students worked in hospitals with the Busoga University nursing students. They also participated in clinic outreach programs focusing on prenatal care and went to urban and rural schools to teach hygiene and how to prevent and recognize the signs of river blindness, which is caused by bacteria carried by a black fly.

In addition to the students’ time and energy — the three-credit course entailed 126 clinical hours — UW Oshkosh faculty and students bring much-needed supplies whenever they go abroad. Before the recent trip to Uganda, students collected donations for the purchase of vision screening tools, and the group also brought medical supplies, textbooks, school supplies, toothbrushes, soap and 500 pairs of glasses donated by Wisconsin Lions International.

Walker said she gained confidence in approaching people from other cultures and individuals who speak a different language. The most rewarding aspect for Walker was seeing how their work was making a difference both in the short term and the long term.

“When we first got there, the nurses didn’t use any kind of comfort measures for women in labor, so we showed them how to rub patients’ backs and taught them breathing exercises and new positions to relieve pressure in the back,” Walker said.

“Before we left, we saw some of the nurses applying those techniques. We actually made an impact,” she added.

Throughout the nursing students’ time in Uganda, human services and educational leadership professor Alfred Kisubi provided “cultural navigation” and saw to the logistics of the trip. Both he and VanderLoop hope more nursing students will have the opportunity to gain clinical experience in Africa in the years to come.

“I think a good teacher, a good nurse, a good human services worker should be well-traveled. I have been many places, and it has made me who I am. You can’t learn that in a textbook,” said Kisubi, whose not-so-secret mission to increase interaction between Americans and Africans finds success at UW Oshkosh, one semester at a time.

- For more information about studying abroad at UW Oshkosh, visit [www.uwosh.edu/oie](http://www.uwosh.edu/oie).

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