



The Evolution of African Rural University

Co-Designed by Its Faculty, Students, and End-Customers (People the Grads Will Serve)

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April 11, 2013

NETTING IT OUT

This is the story of the creation of a unique institution—one that is likely to impact the lives of millions of people in Africa. It's a story about having and realizing a vision—a BIG vision. The vision isn't the creation of a successful university. The vision is about the work that the graduates of that university will be empowered to do. The vision is about the seeds of creativity and innovation that will be planted in the people these graduates touch.

The African Rural University (ARU) is unique in a number of respects:

1. It offers transformative education—As a departure from the classic university education that emphasizes theory, ARU emphasizes the practicality of learning, hence there are many course hours devoted to contact with communities.
2. It is part of a continuum of educational institutions, from primary through secondary (URDT Schools) to university—all with similar learning threads in: the Principles of the Creative Process, community learning, entrepreneurship, creating social capital, and sustainable development in order to produce visionary leaders.
3. The curriculum is developed and evolves from the experiences and aspirations of the communities in which ARU is embedded.
4. ARU draws inspiration from its Traditional Wisdom Specialists, the old men and women who are repositories of traditional knowledge, and who serve as auxiliary "professors."
5. ARU offers the first course ever in rural transformation, combining sciences and humanities.
6. It is an all women's university, drawing from the intrinsic attributes of a woman as a teacher, manager, peacemaker, counselor, integrator and innovator.
7. It provides training in visionary leadership that is badly required in the rural areas of Africa.

Direct link: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1571/cs04-11-13cc>

The African Rural University (ARU) is not a religious institution. It is fiercely secular. Yet the design for the institution that has emerged through its infancy and childhood resembles that of a religious institution. It attracts people—women—who want to make a difference in their world. It equips them with a creative orientation and a set of methods, tools, and experiences that make them uniquely qualified to engage in grass roots integrated rural development. When these women graduate, it sends them out into the field to teach others what they have learned and to empower them to create their own prosperity and happiness.

This is the story of how a group of innovative young women have been involved in co-designing the innovative University they decided to join.

INNOVATIVE INSTITUTION GRADUATES RURAL TRANSFORMATION SPECIALISTS

University Education to Create Sustainable Development in Rural Areas

Many universities in third-world countries are located in urban areas and prepare their students for jobs in urban areas. ARU's founders wanted to create an institution of higher learning that would educate people who want to devote their careers to "bottom up" integrated rural development. ARU graduates would work—not in the cities, but in remote villages—to promote sustainable development in rural areas of Uganda and the rest of Africa.

ARU education is contextualized in rural communities. One of its goals is to enable national and international "experts" to listen to, and learn from, rural people in their own communities.

Outgrowth of Community-Driven Development

For over 25 years, the local people in the Kibaale District of western Uganda have been participating in community-driven integrated development. Although the infrastructure in this rural district lags that of more populated urban areas (little electricity, no paved roads, no public water supply, little government support for local schools, inadequate healthcare, etc.), the people in this region have improved their education, sanitation, nutrition, health, and income-generating capabilities dramatically. Approximately three million people have been empowered due to the holistic methods and the creative mindset they have learned from a locally-founded and run non-profit, Uganda Rural Development and Training (URDT) Programme which is located in the town of Kagadi. For 25 years, URDT has been training local children, young adults, farmers, and entrepreneurs—both men and women—in visionary leadership and creative approaches to development. The training takes place both on URDT's 80-acre campus, through its educational institutions and through its radio programs, as well as through working directly in the communities with local people who become excited about taking charge of their own destiny and making things happen.



The “Launch” of the African Rural University—before we even had pilot students and faculty (or a building) was celebrated by Girls School students and teachers.

Although the founders of URDT envisioned and planned for an institution of higher learning when they founded URDT in 1987, the vision for the African Rural University began to crystallize in 2001. Mwalimu Musheshe articulated the idea for ARU when he was recognized as an Ashoka Fellow in 2001. Ashoka considered the African Rural University a systems changing idea. The need for the University became more urgent in 2003 to 2005. The URDT Girls School had started in 2000. In 2006/7 it would have its first high school graduates—young women who had already become de facto leaders in their local communities—who were thirsty for further training as rural development specialists. At the same time, the URDT founders recognized that the university was a logical organic outgrowth of all the development work that had been going on in the surrounding communities. There was so much information and knowledge flowing from the strengthened rural population that had been taking charge of its own development, they needed a way to capture and disseminate that learning and knowledge.

First All Women's University

The African Rural University is the first all Women's university in Uganda. Part of the reason for restricting admission to women is:

1. To create a core of visionary female leaders to champion rural transformation.
2. To rapidly produce women leaders and role models.
3. To help achieve gender parity in higher education in Uganda and to reduce infant mortality. (According to Unicef, infant mortality rates decrease 100% once women have a college education.)



The ARU Student Guild 2011-2012: (from the left) Evelyn Asiimwe, the Student Guild President, Rose Asiimwe, the Secretary for Information, Rebecca Biryeri, Secretary for Finance, Immaculate Nyagol, Secretary for Academic affairs, and Edith Mbabazi, Secretary for Students' Welfare.

When the URDT founders first envisioned an institution of higher learning back in 1987, they had no gender bias. But they gained experience over 25 years working with the people in local communities, with the students of the Girls School (which was founded in 2000), and with the families of those girl students. By the time that ARU began to be formalized, its founders were more convinced than ever that women were the most effective change agents and leaders to champion rural transformation. They felt that:

“Women have an inherent capacity to mobilize and teach around an issue. ARU draws on the intrinsic value of a woman leader as a teacher, a mother, a coach, a guide, peacemaker, social integrator, intuitive and rational manager. Women perform integrated work at the family, household and community levels. These strengths need to be tapped and nurtured for community and continental development.”¹

In its first prospectus describing the university to attract its first group of pilot students, ARU described the need to focus on educating women as Rural Transformation Specialists this way:

“African children’s health and education are in women’s hands. Women’s leadership at the community level is indispensable for rural transformation. Yet, the majority of girls drop out of primary school after the age of twelve. Furthermore, schools’ curricula don’t prepare girls and women to meet the exigencies of rural life, including family income-generating activities.

Uganda does have women represented in many professional areas, such as women doctors, lawyers, teachers and engineers and politicians as role models. (Several of these role models sit on the ARU Council). Still, their numbers are dismal. The proper mix of women’s leaders—professional, political, business, and housewife, would create the proper synergy for transforming Ugandan and African societies.”



An ARU student receiving the thanks of a grateful community member.

~ ARU Summary, May 30, 2006

¹ Quoted from the Introduction to: The Powers and Functions of the African Rural University Senate, December 2012, African Rural University, p. 2.

HOW THE UNIVERSITY PROGRAM WAS CO-DESIGNED WITH STUDENTS AND CONSTITUENTS

A 5-Year Pilot Program with 29 “Researcher-Students”

The fledgling African Rural University launched a pilot program with 29 “researcher-students” in September 2006. These students went through a pilot curriculum for three years, followed by a two-year internship in the field. This learn-by-doing approach allowed the pilot students, faculty, and administrators to see what parts of the curriculum needed to be adjusted based on students’ feedback, the results they achieved, and their success in the field.



ARU researcher–students [2006-2011] in front of their brand new University building.

Three Years of Course Work & Field Work

By May 2009, 21 of the ARU researcher students had completed their three-year course and fieldwork. (One student became critically ill, and a few others had dropped out of the challenging pilot program.) As you can probably imagine, these researcher-students had become a close-knit group, supporting one another and sharing their successes, their failures, and their learnings with one an-

other throughout their three years on campus. Their field work included projects that they carried out with members of local communities as well as on campus. Fieldwork in their third year required pairs of students to live in a rural community for one month, running visioning workshops with community members and helping those people kick off the projects they cared the most about. These projects included things like: building new schools, improving roads, starting savings groups, launching Functional Adult Literacy (FAL) classes, improving sanitation, as well as helping local farmers improve the productivity of their farms.



Students at the URDT Girls School, which recruits girls from low-income rural families between the ages of 10 to 18.

Since the African Rural University was still in its provisional start-up phase, ARU didn't yet have the authority to grant degrees. The total pilot program was five years long. But, to celebrate the pilot students' successful completion of their three-year coursework, ARU arranged to have these 21 Ugandan researcher students acknowledged with honorary degrees granted by Unity College in Unity, Maine in May, 2009.

Two Years of Internship—Living and Working with Communities

The next step for each of these pilot ARU students was to complete a two-year internship in the field working as a Rural Transformation Specialist. Each of the interns was placed in a different region within a few hours commuting distance of the ARU campus. They were assigned a sponsor in a village, usually a local chairperson (elected official), who would arrange a suitable lodging for them and introduce them to others in the community. The accommodation was very basic: A roof over their heads; nothing else. The interns typically had to build their own latrines, find a place to plant a subsistence garden, and walk miles to reach the people in the 10 to 12 communities they now had as “clients.” They didn’t even have bicycles or motorbikes. They were provided with a small subsistence stipend to cover their food and transportation, but it was typically not enough, and it arrived sporadically. The interns had personal mobile phones, but often no access to electricity and little money to buy more air time. They had no Internet access in the field. They *did* have faculty coaches and supervisors, and they could always ask for help from the faculty and staff who were watching over them.



The Campus and main buildings of the African Rural University.

It was a pretty tough internship—and it tested the stamina and inventiveness of each intern. Many of the pilot group had health problems (including cancer), which made it difficult for them to stay in the field, and yet they persevered.

At the beginning of their two-year internships, each intern conducted a baseline survey, visiting with, observing, and interviewing the people in every household in her communities (several hundred households). At the end of their two-year internships, each intern conducted a follow up survey to determine how much progress had been made at the household level (income, nutrition, health, sanitation, etc.) during her two-year tenure. Of course, these young women change agents were not the only factors influencing people in the communities, but they did act as catalysts in integrated rural development, and each intern could take credit for multiple successful projects that community members had decided on and carried out with their cheerleading and support.

This first crop of ARU interns had impact in 177 villages and on 95,000 people. These projects, and all of the steps along the way, were well documented in monthly reports that each intern submitted to her faculty advisor, along with photos and videos. There is also a statistical analysis of the results of the surveys done at the beginning and end of the two-year internship that ARU plans to publish soon.

*This first crop of ARU interns had impact
in 177 villages and on 95,000 people.*

Lessons Learned in Co-Designing the Curriculum with the ARU Students and Stakeholders

The original curriculum was modified quite a bit as the pilot students provided valuable feedback. The good news is that the faculty was very responsive as the researcher-students provided their feedback. The students were treated as the adults they were and as co-creators of the ARU experience. Because their input was valued, students usually focused on the most substantive issues. Instead of complaining about the on-campus food (which is actually quite good since the campus uses its own organic demonstration farm to supply much of its needs), the most persistent concern the pilot students expressed was what kinds of careers would be awaiting them or what kinds of enterprises they could create when they graduated.

Provide a Career Path for Rural Transformation Specialists. ARU, and its parent URDT, recognized the seriousness of the pilot students' concerns about starting careers as Rural Transformation Specialists. After all, they were being trained in a new discipline. Although there are many government jobs and NGO jobs in the rural countryside, the people who run those organizations don't necessarily share URDT's values and principles and methods. So, in its typical creative orientation, URDT seized the opportunity to create a new position—which it calls “Epicenter Managers.” These are Rural Transformation Specialists who replicate many of the services that URDT provides in Kagadi in all the surrounding sub-counties and, eventually, throughout Uganda and into other parts of Africa. Some universities create extension programs and campuses. URDT/ARU has opted to seed receptive areas with its graduates. They provide a fully-trained Rural Transformation Specialist who will help community members practice community-driven development and participatory decision-making. “The ARU graduates are catalysts, subject matter specialists and energizers who work alongside marginalized communities to make change happen.”

Instill the Creative Orientation Early and Often. ARU's curriculum is based on the success that its parent organization, URDT, has had in using the principles of the creative process to shift people from a reactive mode to a creative, active mode.

Starting in their first semester, students learn and apply the “Fundamentals of the Creative Process.” This is a course based on [Robert Fritz’s Technologies for Creating](#). It’s also a course the students will learn to teach to others before they move into careers as Rural Transformation Specialists. Students learn how to create a vision of the outcome they want to achieve, compare that vision with their current reality, and then leverage the structural tension created by the discrepancy between their current reality and their vision to catalyze the actions they’ll take and convince others to take until they achieve their vision. Mastering the creative process is a fundamental core competency for all students, faculty, and staff at ARU and the other URDT institutions.

There are additional courses each semester that build on the fundamentals. The students move from the Fundamentals of the Creative Process, to Visionary Leadership, to Principles of the Learning Community in their first three semesters, building on the same fundamental principles, yet expanding their skill sets.

African Rural University’s Core Beliefs

- The people of Uganda, like the people world over, are KEY to their own development.
- Lasting change comes only as people shift from reacting or adapting to events and circumstances to being the creators of events and circumstances.
- People who share a common vision can transcend traditional barriers and prejudices caused by tribal, religious, political and gender differences and work together to achieve that which is truly important to them all.
- People have innate power, wisdom and authority, which they can tap, to transform the quality of their lives and that of their communities.
- Training, education and information sharing are key strategies of transformation.

Integrate Systems Thinking in Everything. One area that ARU realized it needed to bolster was the systems thinking part of its curriculum. Being a good holistic thinker is absolutely critical to the success of a professional in integrated rural development. So, systems thinking is no longer a separate course—it’s the foundation for *all* the courses that are taught. It permeates the curriculum. It starts with the first hour in each day. From 8 am to 9 am, ARU students and faculty join the rest of the staff and adult students on the URDT campus for a one hour Foundation Course in applying systems thinking to current events.

URDT Chairman and ARU co-founder, Mwalimu Musheshe, works tirelessly with each group of students to expand their skills in systems thinking. He listens patiently to their observations and their analysis of the complex situations they encounter in the communities, and then he asks probing questions, exposing entire areas of interdependencies the students hadn’t yet uncovered. He is an excellent and patient coach. The students’ goal is not to “fix” the system in place, but to understand as much of it as they can—all the forces in play—which constitute the current reality. Then they are better equipped to help community members articulate and use their individual and shared visions to transform that system to support their shared visions as they co-create.

Place a Stronger Emphasis on Collecting the Right Metrics. Figuring out *what* to measure is critical to success in evaluating the change in a complex system. You can observe and note that families are now eating three meals a day rather than one meal a day, but unless you also monitor the nutritional value of those meals, you won’t know whether there’s been a substantive nutritional

improvement. The kids may not be starving, but if the family is eating a diet of easily-grown but very starchy cassava, they haven't really improved their condition. Realizing that students needed more guidance in identifying and collecting the right indicators in different contexts, University Secretary Jacqueline Akello has led the charge in bolstering this aspect of the curriculum. She is also establishing the databases that ARU will use to monitor and measure its students' field work over time.

Mwalimu Musheshe Visiting an ARU Intern's Community Project



Mwalimu Musheshe visits the ARU Interns' and the Epicenter Managers field projects. The white woman in the background is Susan Warshauer, who served as the University's first Vice-Chancellor and helped gain its provisional certification.

Have Tangible Results You Can Measure. In an academic setting, students are often evaluated using grades. ARU students are no exception. They receive grades and scores on their homework, their papers, and their final projects. But what counts the most are the results that the community members that students worked with actually accomplished. The ARU faculty, founders, and administrators aren't just measuring students' academic success, nor are they just assessing the quality of the students' projects—radio programs, video documentaries, crop yield in their demonstration farms. What really counts is how well their *customers* do—the community members they work with—in achieving the goals they set out to achieve.

Each of the projects that students and interns were involved with in the field was created out of a desire on the part of the local people to create something better for themselves. Each group of community members decided what, if anything, they wanted to do together, and they organized themselves to get it done—e.g., deciding on group work times, passing the hat to raise funds from every household, getting local people to donate supplies and to train workers. The ARU students—and later as interns—provide the visionary leadership and facilitate the visioning and organizing processes, but they don't provide the project ideas, nor do they give out money or tools. They provide moral support, coaching, and occasional technical expertise (with help from the faculty and subject matter experts at ARU).



Resty Namubiru, one of the pilot ARU students who is now an Epicenter Manager, leading a visioning workshop in the Village of Kabamba.

Engage Your Constituents/End-Customers in Evaluating Results. Having community members within commuting distance of the University as key stakeholders in evaluating the success of the program is brilliant! What better way to evaluate how well your students are doing as Rural Transformation Specialists than to be able to get evaluations, feedback, and testimony from the people they are working with in the field. It's like being able to assess how good a doctor's training was by looking at their patients' outcomes. As a member of the University Council, I have visited with many of the interns in the field, looked at the projects their customers have launched (new roads, new schools, new savings societies, new marketplaces, new farmers' co-ops, improved school attendance, better sanitation), and interviewed their end-customers.

Reduce the Internship from Two Years to One Year. The two-year internship period was probably necessary for the pilot program. Both the faculty and the students had to learn how to design a structure for that program that would adequately support the students and would let them hit the ground running. Both the students and the faculty members felt that two years was too long and that the internship should be integrated into the degree program. You should complete your one-year intern-

ship before being granted your Bachelors of Science in Technologies for Rural Transformation degree. That's now the way the current curriculum is structured.

Combine Theory and Practice in Every Course. The original curriculum was designed so that each course had a mix of 50 percent theory and 50 percent practice. Based on the experience and feedback from the pilot students, now each of the semester-long course units incorporates 60 percent theory and 40 percent practicum.

For example, in the first year/first semester course on Research Methods, freshmen ARU students will now be asked to compile and analyze the results from a group of households' Back Home Projects. These are the projects that the families of each URDT Girls' School student undertake each semester to improve their living conditions (improve sanitation, improve nutrition, increase income through a small business or by more productive farming methods). The primary and secondary students from the URD Girls School are graded on their ability to mobilize their families to improve their living conditions while their daughters are away at URDT's boarding school.² There is now a treasure trove of information that has been collected every semester for each of 240 families over 12 years, in the form of surveys and site visit reports. By turning some of this qualitative information into quantitative data, the entering ARU students will be learning first hand how important it is to collect the right data in the field so that it can be analyzed. The students and their faculty advisor, Ronald Buye, will be building a knowledge base that will serve as one of the core research assets of the University and a key evaluation tool for the Girls School.

Retain Team Project Work as a Fundamental Core Competency. Some universities include student projects as part of the core curriculum. ARU does too. Starting in their second semester, ARU students work together on applied projects—many of them in the field. In their second and third semesters, students choose projects in two of these areas: Public Policy, Civil Society Organization work, Community development and mobilization, Entrepreneurship, Gender equality, Local government, and Decision making. Their fourth semester project is in Agribusiness. In their third year, they do a Leadership Practicum in which they practice facilitation skills by designing and implementing a training program, they do project proposal writing and budget crea-



Often, community members decide to build a school in their community. In Uganda, if your village is small, there is no public school provided. You have to build and staff your own.

² For more information, see [“It Takes a Child to Raise a Village”](#) written and illustrated in 2009 by the 42 URDT Girls School students, and edited by Alida Bakema-Boon, Mwalimu Musheshe, and Patricia Seybold, 2010.

tion for a real project, and they formulate a strategic plan. Then they apply their learning during their one-month internship in the field.

Add More Co-Curricular Income-Generating Activities. The majority of the students who are drawn to this program come from households with very limited incomes. Thanks to the generosity of donors, there are academic scholarships available, but, like everyone, students need “walking around money.” And they also need to be able to pay for their room and board and other incidentals. So the current group of ARU students lobbied for and received their own farm plots where they can practice the agricultural techniques they’re learning and sell their produce to earn money.

The students have also set up an Entrepreneurship Club, and they are launching a number of small businesses—again, as a way to learn by doing, and as a way to earn some money. The current businesses being undertaken by the students include:

- Soap-making
- Briquette-making
- Building furniture

ARU Students Generate Results While They Are at the University

We’ve all heard about the start-up mentality in today’s colleges and universities around the world. Since Michael Dell and Mark Zuckerberg’s breakout success, every college student wants to create a business in his/her dorm room. The ARU students are no different, but, because of their roots and their aspirations, many of the enterprises they start are back in their home communities. Here’s an example from a current ARU sophomore, Rose Asiimwe:

“Thanks to the technology and skills I have acquired in two years at ARU, when I go home, I can implement things. I created a Women’s Development Group. We have carried out sanitation and hygiene projects, and my community members are doing better.



Asiimwe Rose

I also noticed that the rate of drop out of the children in my community is too high. So I mobilized the students and local leaders, plus the parents—we are organized now and we’ve created a Primary School called Golden Treasure Primary School. This is all due to the knowledge, skills, and learning I’ve acquired at ARU. The school is up and running. Children are going to school. For the children who are in need of help, the school has carried out some income-generating projects and given some scholarships to children who are orphans or who are disadvantaged and don’t have enough money to pay for the school fees.

One of the girls that the school was paying for, she just got into secondary school and now she’s in Senior 1. So she’s doing well. So, you can see that with the skills and knowledge I’ve gotten so far in the two years I’ve spent here, I’ve made contributions in my community and my home for my family members. Now, my sisters and brothers are all going to school and they are getting a good education due to the projects I’m carrying out at home. My whole community is benefiting.”

~ Rose Asiimwe, ARU Second-Year Student

HOW SUCCESSFUL ARE ARU'S FIRST RESEARCHER-STUDENT GRADUATES?

17 Are Employed as Epicenter Managers in Sub-Counties

In spite of (or because of) their grueling internships, 17 of the researcher-students who completed their internships have opted to continue to work in the field as Rural Transformation Specialists. URDT hired them as “Epicenter Managers,” offering them jobs as full-time paid professional staff to 17 different sub-counties in the region.

The sub-counties need to apply to receive a Rural Transformation Specialist (RTS), and the officials sign a Memorandum of Understanding, agreeing to supply office space (a desk in a crowded office, shared with other sub-county employees) as well as access, cooperation, and support for these RTSs. URDT provides them with a salary, technical support, and moral support. So they are operating as an extension to URDT in the field—providing rural transformation services and support to people in 30 or so communities in the sub-county to which they have been assigned.

It is now the second year since these initial ARU graduates were deployed as professionals in the field. They are already reporting solid results.

Other Pilot Students Have Created Their Own Careers

There are two other groups of ARU pilot students the University is tracking: those who did not complete the first three years, and those who completed their Internships but chose a different career path. The good news is that all of these women report success in building their own businesses and in becoming successful change agents. One former student has started a school. Another is employed in local government. Others have returned to their native villages and ramped up their farming operations and other small businesses, and they are acting as leaders in their own communities. Another has enrolled at Makerere University to pursue a medical career.

There are no “failures!” Nobody who has been exposed to ARU’s philosophy and curriculum has been left untouched by the experience.

WHY WOMEN COME TO THE AFRICAN RURAL UNIVERSITY

Inspired to Transform their Rural Communities

The (mostly young) women who have been drawn to ARU are pragmatic idealists. They are idealists because they have a vision of how prosperous and comfortable community life could be in the lush Ugandan countryside. They are pragmatists because they know full well what it’s like to barely eke out a subsistence living from a small plot of land, with little in the way of infrastructure (no electricity, no clean water, no paved roads, little education, poor healthcare).



Grace Biira

“I joined ARU to improve my rural area and to make my village a better place to live in. When I look at the situation in my village, I see a big gap. Why should some be rich and some poor? We are trained in the creative process and in entrepreneurship. I want to go back to my village to make my village a better place to live, so that mothers are getting better maternal care, and the infrastructure is good, and nutrition is better.”

~ Grace Biira, ARU Second-Year Student

They understand that the degree they will receive—A Bachelor's of Science in Technologies for Rural Transformation (BSc TRT)—will equip them to work side by side with people in rural communities in Uganda (or elsewhere) to show them how they can increase their incomes, improve their living conditions, and work together to create lasting transformation.



Muhindo Milly Dezire

“After we become change agents, we'll be able to show people that regardless of their cultural or tribal beliefs, they can work together and have a common vision. They can start with individual visions and then share them, and this would increase the rate at which Uganda—in particular, the rural area—is developing.”

~ Milly Desire, ARU Second-Year Student

These women, and the many others like them who have graduated from and/or are attending ARU, plan to become rural transformation specialists. Their course work, their projects in the field working with rural community members, and their one-year internship living in the field and facilitating community-driven development with dozens of small communities, all equip them to become community development professionals. They also learn enough farming skills and entrepreneurship skills that they can establish their own income-generating projects wherever they live—to demonstrate to others how this can be done and to earn some supplemental income.

Interested in Becoming Rural Entrepreneurs

In addition to its four-year Bachelor of Science degree, ARU also provides a one-year certificate program in Rural Entrepreneurship and Business Management.

“Last semester we studied Agribusiness, Entrepreneurship, Computing skills, Planning and Analysis using spreadsheets, Comparative English Communication skills. Now, we're doing Business Planning and Business Law.



Christine Masubiki

The entrepreneurship course has inspired me to be an entrepreneur. I have learned that you can start your own business without needing a lot of capital. And, you can begin a business anywhere. It is flexible. Being a business owner is something that is appropriate for both skilled and unskilled workers, but the more skills you have, the better. When I graduate at the end of the year and receive my certificate, my plan is to go out and do something practical. Then, once I have more experience, I can come back to the University (and when I have made some money).”

~ Christine Masubiki, Certificate Student

The academic year 2012/2013 is the first year in which ARU has offered certificate courses as well as its four-year Bachelors of Science program, so we have yet to see how well these students do in setting up their own businesses. However, much of the curriculum is based on the proven courses developed for the URDT (Vocational) Institute, which has been cranking out entrepreneurs in large numbers for 20 years. The town in which URDT and ARU are based, Kagadi, has become a hotbed of small businesses with many businesses of all types and sizes that have been created by URDT Institute graduates. The philosophy of both URDT and ARU is to educate job creators, not job seekers.

ARU's goal with its certificate program is to equip women who choose to live in rural areas to create their own businesses and then provide training and jobs for others. Graduates of the one-year certificate program can also re-apply to join the full University program, gaining credit for the coursework they've already completed in the Certificate program.

CURRENT CHALLENGES

Recruiting More Students

Since the African Rural University obtained its ability to grant degrees for its four-year program and certificates for its one-year programs two years ago, ARU has been focused on delivering high quality education to the students who apply and are accepted.

The number of applicants for each of the past two years has disappointed the administration and faculty. They have intentionally limited each incoming class to 30 students for each degree program (to insure that each student has time for quality interactions with her faculty), but they haven't yet managed to fill all 30 places. One part of the recruitment problem is that ARU is new. Many potential applicants aren't aware that it exists. Another part of the recruitment issue is that of there are many fewer young women than men who have completed their secondary education and are qualified to enter university. Finally, of those women who are qualified, many have been brought up to believe that they need to go to the city to get an education and then plan to work in the city, only going back to their families in the countryside during holidays. Many Ugandan women don't realize that they have an alternative: a University education in a safe, beautiful, quiet natural environment that will equip them for careers in the countryside.

Students Are Mounting a Student-to-Student Radio Campaign. The best way to promote a service for people who live in rural areas is via radio. Very few people have TVs; there aren't a lot of newspapers. But everyone listens to the radio. So this year's students have recorded their own radio advertisements—talking about why they chose ARU, what they like about it, what they're learning and what they plan to do when they graduate. We're hopeful that by hearing the voices of their peers, more young women will become inspired to apply to ARU.

Building a University Library

In order to gain its final certification as a University, ARU needs its own library. Right now, the ARU students share a small library with the other campus institutions. The National Council for Higher Education is very specific about what the requirements are for a University Library in terms of the number of square meters per student and number and types of physical books and journals. But there's also room to be creative—to think deeply about the purpose that a library/resource center should serve—particularly a library that will no doubt become a magnet for learning in a region of 10 million subsistence farmers with low literacy rates.

Participatory Design of a New Library. When I was on campus last month, we held a two-hour design session with students (customers), faculty, staff, librarians, media personnel, and other key stakeholders. We broke into teams to discuss the activities that students and faculty and staff each perform, and how



they'd ideally like to be able to do those things, what outcomes they needed to achieve, and what outputs they needed to produce. As a result of this activity-based focus, the group realized that they needed some resources that they might never have thought of, such as:

- Project rooms for teams to work on ongoing community-based projects and field work.
- Resource area for creating courses and recommended resource lists, and for evaluating and improving courses.
- An evolving directory/wiki of faculty/staff/student/visitor-curated sources. (Every time someone finds a valuable data set or research paper or collection, they add a link to it and provide annotations about why this information is useful, how it might be used, and any cautions about defects or accuracy).
- Repository of multimedia assets (cataloged video, audio, and photos that the students and staff and visitors have created or acquired).
- A Multimedia Lab for editing and producing multimedia products (video, audio, documentaries, radio programs for broadcast on the campus-based community radio station, etc.).
- Agricultural samples: plants, soil, seeds, inputs and outputs, as well as databases and knowledge bases around value-added agricultural practices.
- Lab for analyzing soil samples, etc.
- Cultural Assets Collection for studying African agricultural and household tools and artifacts. (The University has a cultural assets museum in a small mud hut on campus—the catalog and/or the entire collection could be moved to the Library.)
- Statistical databases and resources for use by students, faculty, local government officials, local community members.
- Statistical and analysis software and support.
- E-book readers, access to online books, online courseware, as well as physical books, journals, and databases.

The next step in the library co-design process will be to prioritize these (and other) requirements, to specify the immediate, medium-term, and longer term needs. Then, it is important to find an architect who is able to work with the budgets and materials required to design an environmentally sustainable and appropriate library/resource center that can be implemented in stages to match the organization's limited fund-raising capacity.

Like everything else on the campus, the ARU University Library will be co-designed using participatory design techniques with students, faculty, staff, and the end-customers involved: the community members and government officials who are the real end-customers for the services provided by ARU's graduates.

HOW TO MEASURE THE SUCCESS OF AN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION

It's not often that one is able to witness the birth of a university. I've been privileged to be a part of the governing body of the African Rural University since its pre-pilot phase. What the staff, faculty, and students have accomplished together is amazing! What other university are you aware of that measures its results in terms of the number of end-customers (students' end-customers) who have improved their lives in measurable ways as a result of the education, experience, and intellectual capital its graduates embody? As Jacqueline Akello, the University Secretary, explains: "ARU measures its success by the transformation in the rural areas as a result of the students' and graduates' activities/programmes."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



With 30 years of experience consulting to customer-centric executives in technology-aggressive businesses across many industries, **PATRICIA B. SEYBOLD** is a visionary thought leader with the unique ability to spot the impact that technology enablement and customer behavior will have on business trends very early. She assesses and predicts how new and evolving technologies will impact customers. She forecasts the ways in which both business and consumer customers will make new demands on companies in many different industries.

Seybold provides customer-centric executives within Fortune 1000 companies with strategic insights, technology guidance, and best practices. Her hands-on experience, her discovery and chronicling of best practices, her deep understanding of information technology, her large, loyal client base, and her ongoing case study research enhances the thought leadership she provides.

Seybold uses a coaching, mentoring, and learn-by-doing consultative approach to help clients achieve their goals as they transform their corporate cultures to be more customer-centric. She helps her clients' teams redesign their businesses from the outside in by inviting their customers to invent new streamlined ways of accomplishing their desired outcomes, using their own real-world scenarios.



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The CEO and founder, Patricia Seybold, is the *New York Times* best-selling author of *Customers.com* and *The Customer Revolution*. Patty's latest book, *Outside Innovation*, is [now available](#).

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