

The CO-OP Project

Dartmouth College

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1. **Project Summary: Describe location, timeframe, participants, other funding involved, scope of work, and goals intended.**

Twenty kilometers north of the Tanzania-Uganda border live 270 bright and hard-working primary and secondary school students. They are the Children of Uganda. The CofU students, with their solid educational foundations and first-hand knowledge of adversities, deserve leadership positions that allow them to make the changes to their society that they know are necessary. Working closely with these young scholars, who had the drive and skill to contribute to future Ugandan development, we found an impressive level of knowledge and ability but an evident need for information and materials about higher education and college admission processes. We thought that enhancing the educational opportunities and prospects would have a lasting and reverberating impact.

Through five goals in our CO-OP project, we intended to make the dream of an American college education a realistic possibility. We aimed to: (1) bring books, textbooks, and two computers with Internet links for on-line courses; (2) bring training materials and conduct test preparation at CofU for American standardized college admissions tests; (3) conduct training on the college application process, including how to write college essays and recommendations, prepare resumes, gather a student's activities list, etc; (4) link CofU to the U.S. Embassy's education office; and (5) contact US college admissions' offices to understand their needs and inform them about CofU and applying students.

Initially, these goals were primarily intended for CofU in the Rakai district. We ultimately worked with over 200 students in various Rakai schools but after three weeks in Rakai, we traveled north to Kampala, the capital, to work with schools of similarly high academic achievement. We made this adjustment when we recognized that knowledge of the global educational system was sparse within Uganda. There, we found that a crucial element of our time in Kampala was spent building connections and a lasting relationship between the US Embassy's educational office and the administrators of CofU, such that our program could be continued by the Ugandans themselves.

Our ideas, work, and teaching in this project would not have worked alone. Several other people worked tirelessly and continue to contribute to the success of the project. The true participants of the CO-OP project are Abel Mwebembez, the director of CofU, Deborah Nakiduuli, the House Director of Sabina school in Rakai, and Connie Mutazindwa, the Director of Education at the US embassy. Additionally, the enthusiasm, participation, and dedication of the teachers and students at the various secondary schools made our visits a joy.

Ultimately, we spent six and a half weeks in more than three districts teaching, interacting with, and learning from over 300 students. Our hope is that by making the opportunity of higher education a possibility, we may have offered students at CofU and other stellar secondary schools a chance to bring development to their villages, their country, and the region.

2. **Project Results: Self-evaluate the project; your assessment should enumerate what goals were and were not accomplished.**

Overall, our project was a success. Each goal was met in varying and appropriate degrees; as we worked, we adjusted goals. Work in a foreign community must mold its goals to meet the needs the local population expresses. To ensure that our Ugandan coworkers would be enthusiastic about and invested in the project we worked closely with local administrators and students. Our project therefore evolved as we went.

Emerging Goals

First, instead of solely working with Children of Uganda, we soon realized that we should work with several top secondary schools to make the project available to many more students. Almost every day in Rakai, we worked at one or more of the top four secondary schools: Kakko, Christ the King, Kimanya Blessed Sacrament, and Kibuye.

Another adjustment was implemented to make our project sustainable. The CofU suggested more institutionalization through two additional programs: 1) a computer program and 2) a university-secondary school pairing system. The computer program was set up exclusively with CofU. In this program, Moses Nsubuga, a graduate of CofU who later majored in computer science, will use the two computers we provided to teach general computer skills to children as young as 7 years old. Additionally, Moses will help students use the computers to gather information and apply to American universities on the Internet.

The pairing system is to occur through a partnership between Dartmouth University, the American Embassy's Education Department and Mt. St. Mary's College Namagunga. In this partnership, each interested Ugandan secondary student is to be paired up with a Dartmouth student; they will communicate over the course of the year by email. In brief, the Dartmouth students will act in lieu of a college counselor, "advising" the Ugandan students as they complete their applications and refine their essays. While in Uganda, we met with both the headmistress of Mt. St. Mary's and the director of the Embassy's Education Department to establish this collaboration. Both agreed to provide interested Ugandan students with Internet access. With the beginning of the 2007-2008 academic year, we will finalize the Dartmouth side of the

partnership by setting up a club and hopefully bringing in a representative from the Admissions office to train the students in the application process. Several interested Ugandan students and Dartmouth students have already contacted us; their enthusiasm and drive is invigorating.

Original Goals

We were able to facilitate a strong connection between the American Embassy's Educational Advisor, Connie Mutazindwa, and CofU's Ugandan Director, Abel Mwebembezi. Connie has traveled to meet with the CofU to explain the application process and how the Embassy can facilitate the process.

Our plan to bring textbooks and calculators was very successful and appreciated. Many of the classes had only one textbook for all the students; our textbooks meant that only a handful of Children of Uganda students had to share each book. CofU also expressed a dire need for calculators; students were taking calculator-permitted tests without any calculators. We were able to provide the needed calculators.

Additionally, we gave presentations at many schools, particularly in the Rakai District, about the process of applying to American colleges and universities. The audience size ranged from fourteen to over one hundred and fifty students and teachers. At these presentations, we provided packets of information delineating the college admission process.

Challenges

We encountered several challenges. One obstacle related to unreliability in the Rakai district's infrastructure. Because of their lack of electricity, Internet access, and limited accessibility to the Embassy's resources, it was difficult to extend our Dartmouth-secondary student pairing program to these students. The privileges and opportunities seemed to go to those who were already privileged at urban boarding schools. Consequently, we devoted most of our on-site time to rural schools, trying to provide them with sufficient information and resources to sustain the schools. We are also looking into setting up a system where Dartmouth students can return on a regular basis, an idea the schools were also excited by. Working with these schools revealed other challenges, including, for instance, the fact that many students did not have mailing addresses to give to universities.

We felt dissatisfied with the amount of individual tutoring we had been able to accomplish. Additional one-on-one time would have been valuable, particularly if we could have trained more teachers. We made an effort to remedy this by leaving test preparation books and mailing more.

3. Implications: What are the project's implications for peace? What are the future prospects for the project? What have you learned?

Implications for peace

We stood in front of a packed room. We had just finished our presentation - explaining the differences in educational systems, how to apply to American colleges, what colleges are looking for, and where to find financial support - and we now opened the floor for questions. In a clear voice, a young man thanked us but proceeded to question us on how we could improve the Ugandan education system to benefit many more students and indeed the whole country. The audience of a hundred students laughed and attending teachers looked chagrined. But it was a great question. We told him that this is where he became pivotal. Our hope was that he would attend an American university and then be able to return to Uganda with the knowledge and ability to refurbish the educational system, to help his country obtain for every child not only the right to but also the reality of a good education. We argued that education was the foundation of both development and peace. We expressed our hope that the project would enhance the students' understanding of the developed world, gain an international perspective on their own country, and become leaders in Uganda. The young man seemed happy with our answer. These seemingly extravagant plans got further support when, over a lunch two Ugandan students who were both headed for American universities told us their stories. One, headed to Dartmouth College, hoped to become a lawyer and then return to Uganda. Another Uganda student, studying at Mount Holyoke, intends to ultimately return to Uganda and fight governmental corruption.

Future prospects for the project

We anticipate that the project will continue and grow through the partnerships we have established, as described above. Particularly Children of Uganda's Sabina School hopes to host American students in the future who can continue the project. Since several of our peers have indicated interest in both traveling to Uganda and working from Dartmouth, we are optimistic that continuity will occur. We have also connected several schools with the American Embassy's USAP program that finances and helps students through the application process. We also fostered personal relationships between the Embassy's educational staff and school administrators.

What we learned

Beyond becoming more knowledgeable about the systems within the American Embassy, the university application process, and the Ugandan education system, we learned a great deal by living amongst Ugandans as Ugandans live. The Ugandan's welcoming, enthusiastic, and optimistic nature gave us great insight in how one should live and pursue life. It was a privilege to live and work with them.