



Re-positioning Uganda Martyrs University in the post-COVID19 era



Uganda Martyrs University (UMU) is a comprehensive private university opened by the Conference of Catholic Bishops of Uganda in October, 1993. The University began with only 84 students and 2 faculties and has grown to 5,000 students and 9 faculties and schools and seven campuses. It was granted a Charter by the Republic of Uganda in 2005.

There is an unprecedented revolution in the world today and more so in the higher education sector. The 21st Century higher education landscape is characterized by rapid changes and requires us to be capable of demonstrating agility, flexibility, innovation and adaptability. This has been made even more obvious and needing urgent action in the past two years of the COVID-19 pandemic and its associated lockdowns. As we emerge from the emergent phase of the COVID-19 and start the recovery and refocusing phases, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) must constantly review their strategies and avoid the Halo Effect of past success. At UMU, the University's focus has shifted from a local emphasis at its inception, to an international presence, forging innovative strategic partnerships with both local and international institutions. The University treasures local, regional and international partnerships in teaching, learning, human resource capacity development and research for mutual benefits. We have partnered with institutions (universities, research institutes, industry, funding organizations and NGOs) and engaged our 30,000-strong alumni base in Uganda, and the East African region, African, European, Asian-Pacific and North American universities. The partnerships are aimed at developing and engaging in joint research, grant applications; industry linkages; teaching and external examination and joint curricula.



Prof. Patrick E. Kyamanywa
Vice Chancellor
Uganda Martyrs University,
Uganda



Notably the University offers a unique MBA program in Innovation and Entrepreneurship for Impact in collaboration with the Catholic University of Milan in Italy. The uniqueness of the MBA is its emphasis on practical learning. Unlike traditional programs requiring a research product, the candidates are required to develop an innovative business plan and demonstrate ability to start and deliver the business with a proof of concept product. UMU has also embarked on an innovative 3-year PhD program in Management and Innovation and a PhD in Agri-systems management in partnership with the Catholic University of Milan. The innovativeness of the PhD is that candidates, initially members of staff at UMU, will be able to conduct their PhD studies through a hybrid of online and frontal sessions in Uganda and in Milan, and in so doing reduce the costs of travel and accommodation in Italy.

Community outreach and relevance is another requirement of HEIs to avoid the Ivory Tower syndrome that has been shown not to impact societal transformation. UMU is the only private institution hosting a World Bank funded African Centre of Excellence in Agri-ecology and livelihood systems (ACALISE). Through ACALISE the University has developed and disseminated the Black Soldier Fly Larvae (BSFL) as an alternative source of protein for poultry keepers; the Indigenous Micro-Organisms (IMO) as an alternative to the chemical pesticides to control the disease causing the flora in the soils, as a way to support organic farming in the communities. The Centre also attracts masters and PhD candidates and collaborative research with candidates and institutions from Uganda, the EAC region and internationally.

Faced with the challenge of a changing consumer behavior, increasing desire for mobility, rapid advances in digital technology and the changing economic landscape and higher education funding challenges, a set of ten (10) reflective questions drive our efforts at Uganda Martyrs University on a daily basis. The questions are meant to help shape our business model so as to anticipate change and respond to the environment. These are:

1- *How much of what we do is actually directed to our growth as opposed to only survival; and how much of what we do is contributing to our stagnation or risking our survival?*

Some of the traditional practices have passed their sell-by date and are only holding us back from taking the next important steps.

2- *How do we deliver UMU to the world and in turn bring the world to UMU?*

Uganda Martyrs University has embarked on an international focus through partnerships and development of programs that will attract an international clientele. These include collaborative research, faculty and student exchanges, graduate supervision, graduate programs and short courses (both frontal and online)

3- *How do we make UMU the preferred choice for students?*





We are taking students' experience and feedback seriously through regular feedback surveys with enrolled students and open day sessions with prospective students so as to understand their needs and in so doing tailor our environment accordingly. The program delivery, facilities and other aspects of student life are given more priority at UMU.

4- *How do we ensure that the students we get have the best university experience, resulting into personal transformation, including instilling in them the UMU spirit and values so that they are fit-for-purpose when they graduate?* And related to this,

5- *How do we cultivate an institutional culture that encompasses a sense of quality, purpose and non-negotiable values of honesty, integrity and respect?*

The world is witnessing a challenging evolution in the value systems and in addition demographic changes, that many university dons are often heard lamenting and asking themselves why the students we see are not like we used be? This is a big challenge and at Uganda Martrys University we have become intentional about developing graduates with the four Cs namely: Character, Competence, Confidence and Creativity. With a strong Christian ethos, Character development is one of our unique selling propositions at UMU. Our graduates stand out!

6- *How do we craft our programs to equip our students with the necessary skills and competencies for the 4th and even the 5th industrial revolution?*

Allowing industry to influence curricula development and review and moving away from the traditional programs that only produce job seekers instead of skilling future job creators for the real world of competition is one approach we are taking on at UMU. A review of programs on offer has become an obvious need. Some of our programs only expose students to a university education and give qualifications but do not create job creators.

An entrepreneurship module with every student required to produce a tangible project as part of the final assessment for graduation will soon be a part of all programs at UMU. This aims at equipping our students with an entrepreneurial mindset and skills.

In addition,

7- *How do we support our alumni and how do we engage them in giving back to their Alma mater?*

8- *How do we attract, recruit, resource, reward and retain the best talent to join our faculty and staff*

9- *How do we nurture vibrant debate, research and innovation teams that will attract partnerships and funding and transform society?*





10- How do we ensure a sustainable funding of the University's strategic goals and interventions?

Learning from Socrates, *"The unexamined life is not worth living"* and the same is true for our universities. Therefore, answering these questions forms our daily challenge and the key reason for our loss of sleep! If we do not change with the times we risk becoming irrelevant.

About the Author

Prof. Patrick Edrin Kyamanywa is the Vice Chancellor of Uganda Martyrs University in Nkozi Uganda. He is the former Deputy Vice Chancellor of Kampala International University's Western Campus in Uganda and former Dean of the School of Medicine and Pharmacy at the University of Rwanda. He is a professor of general surgery, a global health expert, medical educator and a seasoned higher education institution leader. Prof. Kyamanywa is an international scholar, researcher and change leader. He is a graduate of Makerere University in Uganda, the University of Leeds and York St. John University in the United Kingdom. He holds qualifications in medicine, general surgery, public health, higher academic practice and an MBA in Leadership of Change and Innovation.

This is our thirty-third issue in a series of articles we are releasing as part of the RUFORUM Seventh Africa Higher Education Week and RUFORUM Triennial Conference Digests. More information about the conference is available at <https://www.ruforum.org/Triennial2021/>. Join the Conversation on Social Media using our Official hashtag **#AfricaHEWeek2021**.

