

## *Uganda Christian University: A Center of Excellence in the Heart of Africa—An Overview of the UCU Library*

*by John Kiyaga*

**ABSTRACT:** The purpose of this essay is to introduce North American readers to the history and current status of the library of the Uganda Christian University (Mukono, Uganda).

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*The author (who wrote this essay as a participant in the 2009 Jay Jordan IFLA/OCLC Early Career Development Fellowship Program) also outlines the University's current plans for a major redevelopment of the library.*

### INTRODUCTION

Uganda Christian University (UCU) is a private not-for-profit university chartered and accredited by the Government of Uganda. UCU has a main campus in Mukono, Uganda, 25 kilometres from the Capital city of Kampala; a constituent college, Bishop Barham University College at Kabale in South Western Uganda; and study centers and other institutions in five locations nationwide. The university was founded and is owned by the Church of Uganda (Anglican).

UCU's motto is "Alpha and Omega: God the beginning and the End." Its official vision is to be "A Center of Excellence in the Heart of Africa." The University's mission statement reads as follows: "Uganda Christian University is dedicated, through teaching, scholarship, service, spiritual formation, student development and social involvement, to preparing students for thoughtful, productive lives of Christian faith and service in their respective professions and places."

### BACKGROUND OF UGANDA CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY

The Church of Uganda (Anglican) established UCU in 1997 when its leaders sought to expand higher education in the region. They promoted Bishop Tucker Theological College in Mukono into a University. Bishop Tucker Theological College trained clergy and educators during its eighty-four-year history.

Since 1997, the university has preserved the original courses in theology and education, and added programs in business, social science, science and technology including health science, and law. In 2004, the Government of Uganda granted the university a charter, which is the highest level of national accreditation. UCU was the first private university to receive such a charter. UCU's Christian identity is cemented in the charter. Over 5,400 graduates are now working in Uganda. UCU now includes a constituent college and works with study centers and theological colleges:

- Constituent college: Bishop Barham University College in Kabale
- Study centers: St. Paul's (Arua) and Buwalasi/Mbale (Mbale)
- Theological colleges:
  - Uganda Martyrs' seminary (Namugongo)
  - Janani Luwum (Gulu)
  - Bishop McAllister College (Bushenyi)

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*John Kiyaga is a Library Assistant, Uganda Christian University, Mukono, Uganda.*

## *LOCATIONS AND FACILITIES*

The university's main campus in Mukono is situated on an 86-acre campus about 14 miles east of Kampala. Nearby is a square-mile tract of land (Ntawo) that houses the university farm and agricultural programs. A separate company, UCU holdings Ltd., is planning to develop that land for the university.

## *GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF THE UNIVERSITY*

The three strategic principles guiding the university's direction and focus are

- UCU shall remain faithful to its Christian identity. As a Church-founded institution, UCU seeks staff and students who share its commitment to "Alpha and Omega: God the beginning and the end." It offers foundation courses in religious and practical subjects as well as a vibrant chaplaincy program.
- UCU aims to have half its registered students at the main campus studying sciences by 2015, including information technology, health, agriculture, environment, and engineering, plus preparation of secondary school science teachers.
- UCU remains committed to "quality" not merely quantity. The main campus could comfortably accommodate 6,000 full-time students, many of whom are young, direct-entry students who would benefit from an intensive and structured environment. Development of constituent colleges should extend UCU's impact in the region and relieve pressure on the main campus.

## **THE UGANDA CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY LIBRARY**

The mission of Uganda Christian University Library is to provide all the information resources required by the University staff and students for teaching, study, and research. The Library aims to help students develop the ability to recognize when information is needed, and to locate, evaluate, and use information to assist them in their future careers. The library is housed in three centers, with a total capacity of about 500 seats.

The "power house," as the Main Library is usually referred to, is located in front of the historic Bishop Tucker Administration Block. The main library houses the main reserve section with textbooks on all subjects, a theology collection, periodicals, audiovisuals, Internet access, and archives. It serves as the university's reference center.

The Technology Park Library holds books on natural science and applied technology, information technology, business, and social sciences. There are multiple copies of most books in this library, which makes possible extended-loan borrowing.

The Law and Health Sciences Library is housed in the former dining hall. This library houses all the law resources: textbooks; cases, reports, and books on health science and counseling; and the Uganda studies program.

## **LIBRARY COLLECTIONS**

### *PRINT*

There are about 113,000 books, 100 hard copy periodical titles, some audiovisual materials, and archives. The Library boasts over 20,000 books on theological studies, accumulated since 1913 by the university's predecessor, Bishop Tucker Theological College, which was the training center for Church of Uganda Clergy and educators.

## *ELECTRONIC RESOURCES*

Currently the Library is connected to the Internet and has access to the freely available electronic resources on the Internet. It also has access to databases sponsored by the International Network for Availability of Scientific Publications (INASP) through the Program for Enhancement of Research Information (PERI) such as Wiley Interscience, EBSCO, Emeraldinsight, and others. An ongoing challenge is improving the information literacy skills of our users, and improving proficiency with electronic resources. Currently the library has twenty computer terminals dedicated for this purpose.

## *ARCHIVES*

This houses the church of Uganda Provincial Archives and Bishop Tucker Theological College records. A preservation agreement has been signed between UCU, Yale University Library (U.S.A.), and Brill Publishers to scan all Church of Uganda provincial archives to DVDs and microfilm.

## *OTHER*

The university also has a children's library, which is separately funded and run on a voluntary basis by some staff and their children.

## **LIBRARY STAFFING**

The University Library Administration consists of eight professional librarians, eight semi-professional librarians, and four clerical staff.

## **PLANS FOR THE FUTURE OF UCU LIBRARY**

The Vice Chancellor of UCU, Professor Stephen Noll, aptly stated that the Hamu Mukasa Library is the single most significant development project being planned for Uganda Christian University.

Uganda is becoming one of the most successful countries on the continent of Africa for a variety of reasons, education being one of them. One of the greatest success stories has been the founding in 1997 of UCU. The university has grown from 120 students to over 7,000 students in the 2008/09 academic year.

The university's new library will be named to honor Mr. Hamu Mukasa, who gave the land in 1905 on which the university sits. Mukasa was one of the first educated Ugandans and wrote:

A great city is not built in one year. Let us then go ahead slowly and surely; perhaps our grandchildren will be much wiser than we are, but we should encourage our children daily to learn all they can, that they may teach their children after we have gone, and so they may go in increasing in wisdom both in mind and in handicrafts.

I am sure Hamu Mukasa would be amazed and delighted to see the progress of UCU these past years. But I also think he would say, "A great university deserves a great library. So let's build it."

Over the past ten years, the university's partners abroad and in Uganda have helped with many projects, including the building of new halls of residence, lecture blocks, water treatment plant, a sports complex, sewage treatment plant, supporting academic and spiritual programs, and offering about 1000 scholarships this year worth over \$1.2 billion Uganda dollars.

And while these building projects and programs have helped, there has been a major deficiency: a place where students can study and have access to resource materials.

The Hamu Mukasa Library will be centrally located to accommodate about 2,000 students and faculty each day with an additional study space in an open courtyard inside the complex. UCU has already received major donations of textbooks, but most are being stored until a more adequate space is completed. Most notable was a gift from World Vision of 10,000 new textbooks covering many topics of the more than fifty academic programs that are offered.

The new Library will be a state-of-the-art building with wonderful spaces for independent research, group study space, and computer access. It is certainly a challenge, but one that will change the lives of thousands of students not only in Mukono district but in Uganda and all over Africa. The university is in the business of helping to educate young Africans for Christ, and we believe that God will bless in seeing this come to a reality!

The theme of the capital campaign—"A Great University Deserves a Great Library"—speaks for itself. From the earliest beginnings of civilization, libraries and learning have gone hand in hand. The famous universities have also had famous libraries—from the Bodleian at Oxford to the Widener at Harvard. But even more modest universities have prided themselves on the excellence of their library resources.

It is our contention that our theme, our dream, can be realized at UCU, a young, up-and-coming university in Africa. We at UCU would dare to believe that UCU can develop within the next few years a first-class library that will serve the students and the wider society in Uganda and East Africa with excellence in library and information resources.

### **THE CHALLENGE OF THE LIBRARY PROJECT**

The broader problem is the deficit of library facilities in Africa and Uganda in particular. The absence of public and university library facilities impairs the development of school libraries, and discourages a culture of reading, which is essential to academic and economic growth.

The challenge to achieve world-class academic standards is no different for university students in Africa than elsewhere. Students cannot afford textbooks, so they depend on "storehouses" of textbooks in the library. Increasingly, university students are using the Internet to pursue knowledge, but access to the Internet has been severely hampered at UCU due to the cost of bandwidth. All of these problems will be addressed with the new library.

In support of the campaign, the First Lady of Uganda, Mrs. Janet Museveni, had this to say:

I have been associating with Uganda Christian University for several years now, and I can confidently state that it is, indeed, a beacon of light in the arena of education in Africa, a place that constantly strives towards excellence. However, for such a center of learning, a spacious and well-stocked library is a vital requirement, and it is lacking.

I therefore urge anyone who can contribute towards the acquisition of this very essential facility by the University to do so with confidence that the donation will be utilized with integrity and wisdom.

I thank you in advance for whatever you will be able to do to assist this endeavor.

The Principal Judge of Uganda, the Honorable Justice Ogoola, endorsed the Campaign as follows: "A Library is to a University, what oxygen is to life. Without a fresh breath of oxygen, death sets in within a matter of seconds."

As Howard Howe (former U.S. Commissioner of Education) so aptly proclaimed: "What a school thinks about its library is a measure of what it thinks of education."

A library contains the professional nutrients that nurture and enrich the intellectual prowess of a university. It is the treasure trove, the wonderland which excites, stimulates, and arouses the young scholarly mind into intellectual curiosity and creativity, and which edifies the research effort of the university's scholarship.

Justice Ogoola added:

Fittingly, the UCU Library has been named after a scion of the patriarchs of the Mukono Community: Hamu Mukasa, who had the generosity of heart and the acuity of vision to selflessly donate one full square mile of virgin land to what is now the University. I urge all people of goodwill to arise to the occasion, to walk that extra mile along the worthy path so perceptively paved by Hamu Mukasa. Together, let us all bring to fruition, in this new century, what Hamu Mukasa and like-minded sowers planted in the last Century. This is your singular chance to sow a seed in the fertile soil of this budding University; to lend a wing to the young minds: to let their intellect soar like the eagle into the skies of their imagination. Remember: 'A great University deserves a great Library'!

## **BUILDING PLAN**

The new library has been designed with simplicity of design yet beauty and durability (cement and brick materials), to stand for generations to come.

### *PHYSICAL FACILITIES*

- Three levels with an interior courtyard, consisting of media holdings, reading room, library staff offices, computer and seminar rooms, restroom block, and support facilities.
- Estimated at 4,695 square meters (50,518 square feet)
- A main seating area with space for 1,200 students
- An outdoor courtyard with seats for 200 students
- Media holdings distributed among three floors with a total number of collections/volumes at 250,000

### *TECHNOLOGY FACILITIES*

- Computer Lab: 200 computers
- Wireless Internet throughout library
- Access to universities in Africa and worldwide through "UbuntuNet"
- Electronic databases available

### *PROPOSED TIMETABLE FOR CONSTRUCTION*

- May-December 2008 Architectural Work
- January-March 2009 Tender Bids
- April 2009-January 2010 Construction

- January-February 2010 Completion of Site Works
- March 2010 Completion of Furnishings
- May 2010 Library Opens

#### *FINANCIAL PLAN*

- Professional Fees \$100,000
- Construction of Library \$4,785,905

#### *FURNISHING*

- Books/Computers/Furniture—\$ 480,000
- Site Works —\$100,000
- Total: \$5,465,905

#### **CONCLUSION**

Indeed a great city is not built in a year. The journey to realize such big dreams may appear long, especially for an institution that is financially constrained, but where there is a will, there is always a way.

#### **REFERENCES**

1. Uganda Christian University Annual report 2008
2. Uganda Christian University Library brochure 2008
3. <http://www.ucu.ac.ug/hamulib>

