

# Are universities preparing students for today's market?

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Students from Ndejje University showcase a groundnuts thresher at an exhibition. Students must be equipped to innovate solutions to society's problems.

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By Desire Mbabaali

Universities keep coming up every other year in Uganda today. As of today, the number could be coming close to 40 institutions of higher learning. Therefore, it is important to note that the graduates that will beat the competition in the job market are those equipped with a practical approach to the theory taught in the lecture rooms.

The discovery came rather late when the rate of youth unemployment is on the rise but it pushed most institutions out of their slumber to start introducing subjects and activities that enable students acquire practical skills.

At Uganda Christian University (UCU), for instance Joseph Kiva, a lecturer, says they have programmes out of the lecture room to create an all-round student.

“The careers department organises career fairs where students get skills in writing their resumes, cover letters and answering interview questions,” he says.

### **Moot courts**

To students pursuing law degrees, mooting is one critical activity universities use to help give students get a sneak peek into the world of advocacy in court. These are normally organised as interuniversity competitions by different organisations and or universities.

In a moot, a hypothetical case is drafted. This is usually on the themes/issues going on in the world. Facts of the case are drafted and sent out to different universities. The universities then interest law students to register for participation.

From the case, a student prepares a legal brief, which would qualify as submissions in court. Gerald Wooli, former UCU Law Society president, explains.

“By doing this, students master advocacy skills, learn how to prepare crucial documents needed in the real world of work, develop their confidence, and ready themselves for their future work,” he asserts.

### **Competitions**

Additionally, universities can encourage their students to take part in competitions in different fields of work to help broaden their horizons and think beyond the lecture room to what the world needs.

A competition such as African Biomedical Engineering Consortium Design Competition goes a long way in creating students innovators.

For instance, this year, the competition sought innovative multidisciplinary ideas, overlapping engineering and medicine paradigms from student teams. These ideas also needed to tackle global challenges associated with surgical practice, obstetrics and anesthesia with an emphasis on low and middle income countries.

### **Science and innovation**

The world needs more innovators and universities know that the job market requires innovative students that can provide solution-based knowledge not only in Science and technology, but across all fields.

Collins Nuwagaba, a student at Uganda Technology and Management University, pursuing a Masters in Computer Security, believes he has been given a good platform and push with his 'Intelligator' innovation.

He has also had his Intelligent irrigation system exhibited at the International Conference on Technology and Management, the Science, Technology and Innovation exhibition week at Parliament.

### **Hands on learning**

Universities are introducing more practical courses such as oil and gas, environment conservation and hospitality business, among others.

Geoffrey Ochwo, a lecturer at Kampala International University, says it is mandatory for their students to study communication skills. "The problem though, is that some students are just negligent and keep dodging these classes or take them lightly. However, life eventually catches up with them," says Ochwo.

### **Practical skills**

At St Lawrence University, students who study courses that lack in practical ventures such as internships must engage in project planning.

"We have emphasised project planning," says Erias Kakooza, a lecturer of Public Administration. "My class has come up with projects such as turning garbage into manure, land seal, among others."

At UCU, as Kiva says, Mass Communication students are taught how to lay pages, write stories and programming on radio. "We have a university newspaper called The Standard which started 10 years ago. Students gather and write the stories.

By the time they get into a newsroom, they are conversant with news gathering and writing,” says Kiva.

Ochwo says Journalism students at KIU are given chance to go to the field to gather stories which are aired on the university’s weekly bulletin.

“We have a weekly bulletin called KIU @ 7 that is prepared and anchored by the students themselves. They go to the field bring stories to the newsroom where they edit and prepare them for the bulletin,” says Ochwo.

### **Why the fuss?**

Kiva says not only do practical skills help students to be confident but they also help in developing their public relationships. “The students get to know people and get mentorship from those in the same field. This propels their careers as early as possible,” he says.

With an abundance of universities emphasising a balanced education by offering leadership seminars, and more practical lessons, the solution to ensuring the worth of a college degree is as good as found.

### **More than just classwork**

Brenda Nerima, a former student of Makerere University Business School, who is a Bachelors of Commerce graduate found herself employing the business skills learnt in class in selling soap and shampoo she had learnt at the university.

“Before my job as a customer officer in Finance Trust Bank, rather than sitting at home waiting for a call, I made soap and shampoo, a skill I got from the skills development class that would be conducted in the evenings at the university. I sold my products to my neighbours and even got opportunities to train groups of youth at a cost,” says Nerima.