

FOCAGIFO 2015 Internship Report

This summer I was able to internship with a non-profit organization called Friends of Canon Gideon Foundation (FOCAGIFO) based in Kampala, Uganda. The founder of FOCAGIFO is Canon Gideon, the first HIV-positive religious leader to state his status. With the support of his friends and family, he created an organization to destigmatize HIV/AIDS shame. Canon Gideon does this by leading conferences, summits, and guest lecturing all around the world. FOCAGIFO is able to do through its vocational school called Hope Institute. Hope Institute has approximately 70 students and many of them are orphan or vulnerable children. The Institute not only teaches them trade skills that will help in creating a stable income, but also with holistic education. One of FOCAGIFO's missions is to break the cycle of poverty and empower youths in Uganda. The Institute focus is on transformational leadership development and creating productive and independent adults. The holistic education is taught by a variety of instructors throughout the year and the 2015 Sewanee summer interns were also responsible for teaching. The Sewanee interns taught lessons in leadership, communication, spiritual maintenance, community health, and environmental stewardship. I was the environmental intern for FOCAGIFO this summer and was responsible for teaching weekly classes on environmental awareness and stewardship, assisting with FOCAGIFO's social enterprise, Hope Tea, and compiling data for a report, a beautification project around the compound and constructing and implementing a school garden.

I was able to develop many skills through completing my responsibilities. Lesson planning is one of the best skills I learned, due to my weekly environmental lessons. I had to create a cohesive lesson plan that the students would be able to comprehend during my time

there and collaborate with other instructors in different areas to provide interdisciplinary education. One of the sustainable and interdisciplinary projects I was able to accomplish was constructing and implementing a school garden. As the environmental intern, it was very important for me to complete that responsibility. I wanted to provide experiential learning, which is not a common pedagogy for students in Uganda. The garden was constructed and planted with the collaboration of FOCAGIFO staff members and students. It is important environmentally to grow one's own vegetables, economically beneficial to divest money for vegetables to another area, and beneficial for community health to eat more nutritious meals. A difference the garden made for the school and organization is that it is sustainable. The students and staff will be able to grow any crops they want for multiple seasons and the garden will continued to be planted even when all the interns are gone. It also opens another pathway for Hope Institute with possible trade skills in agriculture management and practices. The students have the appropriate setting and environment to learn them.

Another skill I developed was communication. Working for an non-government organization in Uganda requires an increase in communication. Even though English is spoken among the staff and many Ugandans, the interns and staff still suffered miscommunication problems. It requires patience and understanding from both parties but was resolved by the end of the internship. Communication is important in teaching as well. Speaking at an audible and understandable level is very important to maintain students attention and comprehension. It was always good to repeat the main points at the end of the lesson and ask students for feedback. Many of my skills were developed with my teaching responsibility.

The biggest difference I think I was able to make was helping with FOCAGIFO's social enterprise, Hope Tea. I found an alternative shipping company that is almost half the cost of the original shipping company. With this improvement, FOCAGIFO will be able to generate stable revenue that will help all areas of the foundation. I am still assisting with Hope Tea by being on a rebranding and marketing team with FOCAGIFO associates and staff. I will continue assisting in this project while at Sewanee.

There were many highs and lows through the internship experience. My main highs were being able to see concrete projects come to fruition, creating and building relationships with the staff and students, experiencing a completely different culture than the U.S., and learning strengths and weaknesses of myself. The lows of the internship were related to the negatives of working with a small NGO, especially in Africa: one is the lack of financial resources for these projects. Many of these projects were funded by myself or with the small assistance of grant money provided through the internship. Another was time management and scheduling. There is a saying in Uganda that appointments are kept but time is not. There were moments when the Sewanee interns were two to three hours late for an appointment or the program on the schedule was completely taken off. Adjusting to what they call "African time" took a while to cope with and required patience. The initial three weeks were slow and stagnant because my programs were being altered and postponed, but the lows did not diminish my experience with the internship. The greatest lesson I learned is that nothing ever goes as planned and that everything requires patience and communication. I feel that I am able to handle almost any obstacle and create a better alternative because of this internship.

This internship has taught me that I can withstand many obstacles no matter what type they are and make do with what I have. It affected my career goals by revealing that I am less likely to become a teacher, but that I have reinvigorated my passion for environmental studies. I know the problems with working with small NGOs, but I would love to work and start an environmental NGO in my future career.