Kenyan short film screened at USIU-Africa

By Jackline Chirchir

On 7th July 2017, Neophobia - a Kenyan short film that tells the story of a young African woman obsessed with old routine and an unwillingness to try new things, pre previewed at USIU-Africa during a screening at the auditorium attended by the entire cast.

The 17 minute film was the only African movie to be screened at the prestigious 70th Cannes Film Festival in France from the May 24-26 2017. The film was selected by the festival’s Short Film Corner panel and Creative Minds Group. The movie was directed by Mark Maina and former USIU-Africa Director of Film Production Dr. Marc Rigaudis.

The CEO of the Kenya Film Classification Board (KFCB), Ezekiel Mutua and his team were in attendance to support the Neophobia crew. “KFCB is pleased to support the screening of the movie and efforts geared towards marketing Kenya as a preferred filming destination and advances like this create a new tunnel of light for young emerging film makers thirsty to tell Kenyan stories. That alone is reason enough to celebrate this film and the film makers,” the CEO said in his remarks.

“This screening was an opportunity for USIU-Africa to engage industry and is in line with our plan to launch the Bachelor of Arts in Animation program and the Bachelor of Arts in Film Production and Directing,” said Director University Advancement, James Ogolla in his closing remarks.

The Bachelor of Arts in Animation program to be offered by the School of Science and Technology, is the first of its kind in Africa, while the Bachelor of Arts in Film Production and Directing is the first of its kind in East and Central Africa.

Michezo Africa back with new play

By Dan Muchai

USIU-Africa’ Drama Club - Michezo Afrika will stage a theatrical production this Thursday July 20 at 7pm, while the two shows will be featured on Saturday, July 2.

The play revolves around the drama playing out in a hospital common room, where a certain neurologist who suddenly learns of a son born 18 years ago, makes frantic attempts to salvage his family life and professional reputation. Advance tickets are available from the club at KES 200, which is the price while tickets sold to non USIU-Africa community members will be KES 400.
USIU-Africa alumni have embarked on an initiative to strengthen national resilience as well as rally the psychology community and other players into action in the face of high anxiety and complex trauma currently experienced ahead of the General Elections in Kenya on August 8, 2017 through a Pre-election Anxiety and Trauma conference to be held on Saturday, July 15.

The conference aims at raising awareness, mobilizing action and offering positive alternatives to cope with anxiety and trauma. The conference speakers, Dr. Joseph Nasongo (Commissioner, National Cohesion and Integrated Commission), Dr. Oscar Githua (Assistant Professor of Psychology in the School of Humanities and Social Sciences), Major (Rtd.) Wairimu Mukuria (a pioneer military psychologist with the Kenya Defense Forces), Ms. Sandra R. Twinomugisha (Psychologist and founder of Kaitesi Psychology Services) and Mr. Arthur Muriuki (Director of Clinical Services at The Brain Initiative) will depict the effects of hate speech, divisive ethnicity and language use; the role of media to hype or conversely quell anxiety and trauma levels; heightening awareness of youths’ risk of recruitment and radicalization; and violence prevention for innovative, lasting and constructive solutions.

Treatment models that have worked in the alleviation of suffering of those psychologically affected by anxiety and trauma will also be presented. The keynote speaker is Dr. Joseph Nasongo whose address will be on “How politically-themed statements can lead to anxiety in individuals.”

This conference, which contributes to the National Disaster Management Strategy, is an initiative by the proposed USIU-Africa Alumni Association (Psychology Chapter) that is currently under review by Executive Committee of the USIU-Africa Alumni Association with a view to receiving approval to form a Psychology chapter.

Further details are available on the conference webpage (www.usiu.ac.ke/peat).
USIU-Africa appointed a committee to study the retention rate of students, the factors that undermine retention, and the measures that it can adopt to boost the retention rate.

The committee was appointed on March 10, 2017, in part as a recognition of the serious challenges such as student attrition that constitute an facing not just USIU-Africa, but the higher education sub-sector in the region.

The study revealed that the university was retaining a large number of students because of certain key factors that included multicultural diversity, a modern and very well equipped library, state-of-the-art facilities, high quality of education, the international status of the university, the university’s brand name and reputation, our dual accreditation status and the presence of a calm and conducive learning environment.

The Management Board will now deliberate on the Committee’s findings with a view to settling on a course of action to be communicated in due course.

The Youth Alliance for Leadership Development in Africa (YALDA) Club in conjunction with the World Youth Alliance hosted a Youth Summit on Friday, July 14 in the auditorium. The summit whose theme was “Celebrating Youth Excellence” was attended by over 400 participants from various universities and corporate organizations, to discuss the challenges affecting contemporary youth in Africa.

Dr. Ngure wa Mwachofi performed the song ‘Jifunze mengi ya dunia’ (learn more from the world) emphasizing why youth should embrace African culture. He challenged participants to be proud of and embrace their African culture, while being aware of its negative elements. The next speaker Ms. Njoki Karwega challenged youth to view education as the most important qualification for ethical competitive leadership, asking them to remained focused, so as to achieve their goals in life.

Several participants were offered the opportunity to showcase their social action projects that demonstrated the value of taking advantage of available opportunities to alleviate social ills such as poverty and ignorance. The projects additionally engaged the government in bringing the issues facing young people to the fore, thereby accelerating their implementation.

The World Youth Alliance is a global coalition of young people committed to promoting the dignity of the human person in policy and law through advocacy and education and culture.
Creatives celebrated at three-day event

By Sheila Njeri Kimani & Antonio Longangi

The second edition of the Creatives Week was held from Tuesday July 11 to Thursday July 13 to celebrate entrepreneurship, innovation, performing arts, dance and visual arts, through exhibitions and performances. The week-long series of activities offers a platform for students to showcase their work and various talents, and culminates in the Campus Choice Awards, which were held in the auditorium on Thursday, July 13.

Mr. Diaz encouraged students to venture into entrepreneurship and seek to fill a market gap as the starting point to building a successful business. He also spoke about how Bidco Africa creates agribusiness opportunities for students through their sunflower farming program.

Ms. Oryango urged her audience to select careers based on their drive and passion, using her own media experiences as a reference. She urged them to take risks and believe in themselves.

Mr. Claver provided an overview on the current state of the entertainment industry in East Africa, and what he does to manage the disruption the music industry is currently going through. He also offered insights into his creative process as an artiste.
Mr. Felix Okil (right) receives an award for the Most Active Student during the Campus Choice Awards 2017 on Thursday, July 13.

Mr. Alvin Walter (left) and Mr. Kadidi Adams (center) of the Red Cross Club receive the Club of the Year award from their Patron Mr. George Onyango during the Campus Choice Awards on Thursday, July 13.

Journalism Senior Shelmith Mureithi (left) and Journalism Junior Kendy Wanjiku (center) receive an award for Best Video Blogger from the Chairman of the Student Affairs Council Mr. Chad Naggi.

Ms. Elizabeth Muthoni (Journalism Junior) receives an award for Best Radio Personality from Mr. Bonfas Salano (Sports Coordinator) during the Campus Choice Awards on Thursday, July 13. Ms. Muthoni is a co-host of the award-winning “Morning Madness” show on USIU 99.9FM campus radio station.

Journalism Senior Mr. Hillary Othigo (left) receives an award for the Best Radio Personality (Male) from Mr. Bonfas Salano (Sport Coordinator) on Thursday, July 13 at the Campus Choice Awards held in the auditorium.

Campus Choice Awards Organizing Committee Chairperson Ms. Agnes Karanja (left) hands over a trophy for Best Captain (female) to the Captain of the ladies hockey team Ms. Beatrice Mbugua (right), during the Campus Choice Awards 2017 on Thursday, July 13.

Photos: Antonio Longangi
From Idea to Exhibition Driven/Fueled by Design Thinking

By Max Musau

How does design thinking work in practice? Why do highly successful companies like Apple, Facebook, Amazon, IBM and Google innovate continuously? It's because of their culture of design thinking. Design thinking links inspiration, passion, and drive to execution and delivery.

Design thinking helps people deeply understand problems and allows them to think like designers to solve problems by understanding their stakeholders to create radical and innovative solutions built based on the values of their stakeholders. This allows them to create solutions that people love and care about both emotionally and intellectually.

The typical stages in the design thinking methodology are ideation, discovery, problem framing and rapid prototyping. This methodology is specifically designed to generate an idea and carry it through to the prototyping stage within a short period of time. A process not only used by the Stanford design school but also by Harvard Innovation that teaches one how to move a product idea or service from being just an idea stage through to the testing stage of a product or service allowing one to engage with real customers or users in a way that allows one to draw meaningful responses and feedback to improve or pivot their idea to better serve them.

Ideenation stage is the phase where teams generate a large number of ideas and solutions through practical sessions such as brainstorming, sketching, mind mapping, and role playing among other methods and then narrow them down to only the most practical and ideas.

The discovery and problem framing phase builds the foundation for new ideas. It allows teams to engage their clients, customers and community members in a way that allows teams to think about the problem from the user’s perspective which allows the teams to not only engage and involve users in the design process, but also to place themselves in their user’s shoes to observe their experiences and how they view and relate to the world with the goal of revealing the real pain points that will allow them to design more meaningful solutions.

The rapid prototyping phase is the building phase where teams quickly build something that users can interact with and is a working model that is normally used to evaluate design before it is manufactured in larger quantities.

There are a range of prototyping processes ranging from building physical complicated shapes with 3D printers, building simple sketches and visuals describing in detail how a system should behave and look to building interactive simulations. The rapid prototyping process allows one to validate design by allowing it to interact with users and generate feedback early in the process so as to improve the final design.

The hands-on approach to creation and innovation that design thinking provides helps in understanding and improving the world around us, and by supporting and empowering diverse and multi-disciplinary teams (such as those in the Student Research Fair) that treat every solution as unfinished and waiting to be improved.

We are in turn empowering ourselves as a community and building ourselves as a nation of creative problem solvers and skilled builders.

Alumna mentors campus radio team

By Antonio Longangi & Joan Murage

USIU Radio 99.9FM, hosted Ms. Rachel Kiragu, an alumna on Friday, June 30 for a mentorship session, as part of the Radio Mentorship Program.

Ms. Kiragu, who presents “Weekend Breakfast” on local radio station HomeBoyz Radio, spoke on “Entry Requirements in the Media Industry”, dwelling on the how to plan a career in media, and the role played by drive, skill and constant improvement, to attain one’s career goals.

Since Fall 2016, the USIU Radio Mentorship Program has invited USIU-Africa alumni who are media professionals to speak on various media industry topics, and thus train USIU Radio staff to improve their skillset and understanding of the industry.

So far, Mr. Teddy Otieno (Hot 96) Mr. Robert Otieno Apiyo (“Prince Nesta”) formally at Nation FM, and Mr. Maxwell Nguku (Homeboyz Radio) have spoken at such sessions.
A debate often rages within workplaces across Kenya about whether task-oriented leadership or people-oriented leadership yields the best results. In the literature too, researchers jostle between the two different leadership behaviour types.

Leaders strong in transactional skills hold three specific capabilities prevalent in social science research. First, boundary spanning behaviours include external activities that encompass managing external transactions with staff. Such transactions involve negotiating resource usage and goal setting with workers and other stakeholders, as well as scanning the workplace and industry environment for new information and interesting creative ideas to induce more resource access to the firm.

Second, transactional leaders excel in setting disciplinary standards followed consistently, setting rewards for staff actions, and clarifying expectations when employees ask. Good transactional leaders also stay on top of whether the organisation’s rewards and disciplinary measures remain appropriate for the industry and for the behavioural targets that management desires. A leader should not just set the goals and then go blind as to the effectiveness of such procedures.

Third, initiating behaviours aid a transactional leader whereby the manager plans, organises, and controls subordinates. Initiating activities structure tasks and highlight explicit attempts to achieve the organisation’s targets.

Person-focused leadership behaviours, on the other hand, incorporate six different abilities that must be displayed by a manager. Notice the different emphasis on the employee’s psychology first rather than the task first in comparison to the earlier three transactional behaviours. First, a people oriented leader utilises his or her emotional intelligence to perceive, appraise, express, and regulate their own emotions as well as in reading others. An emotionally intelligent leader would more likely set appropriate targets for staff abilities and know what type of communication and responses are appropriate under different workplace conditions.

Second, charismatic leaders hold enormous personal power from their magnetism that causes profound and astonishing effects on their subordinates. People oriented managers with charisma utilise their highly articulate speech patterns to form impressions on followers to garnish support and excitement for a shared organisational vision while remaining sensitive to their employees’ needs and the constraints of the firm.

Third, transformational leaders convert their follower’s values, desires, and needs into team-first mentalities whereby the employees reduce their own self interests. Fourth, empowering leaders exhibit behaviours that give their workers autonomy and responsibility instead of controlling power themselves. Fifth, considerate leaders exhibit human-relations oriented behaviour highlighting two-way communication and listening with mutual respect. Sixth, people-oriented leaders coach their subordinates so they enhance their own skills, capabilities, and career horizons through intentional one-on-one feedback, encouragement, and advice.

Now, on a five point scale, assess your own leadership behaviours in each of the above nine categories. Give yourself a “1” if you feel you rarely display the behaviour, “2” if you occasionally invoke that behaviour, “3” if you frequently utilise such behaviour, “4” if you usually do indeed incorporate such behaviours in your daily leadership, and “5” if you almost always use the behaviour mentioned in your daily leadership journey at your firm.

Then, total your three transactional leadership behaviour individual scores and divide by three to arrive at your transactional average. Also, total your six person-focused leadership behaviours answers, but this time divide by six to get your average. Which of the two do you score highest in? In order to get a more clear and accurate picture, have your colleagues and subordinates also rate you on the nine behaviours and see if their perceptions of you match your own self-perception. A good leader should hold high self-awareness and not manage out of tune with reality.

Researchers Meltem Ceri-Booms, Petru Curşeu, and Leon Oerlemans exhaustively looked at dozens of studies on transactional versus people-focused leadership to decipher which types of leaders yield the best organisational performance and released their results earlier in 2017. The answer surprised many in organisational behaviour science. Definitively, both leadership types are required for optimal performance and a focus on any one of them alone, regardless of which one, will yield almost the same results as the other alone. So, leaders across Kenya need to know their strengths but also shore up their weaknesses since the majority of managers only focus on one type of leadership behaviour over another.

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Alumni win hockey trophy during Wazee-Vijana sports day

By Beatrice Munyiva

Alumni Sports Day (Wazee Vs. Vijana) was held on 8th July 2017 at USIU-Africa. The day brought together current hockey, football and basketball student teams to compete against alumni teams in the respective sports.

The alumni men’s hockey team beat the students 2-1, while the basketball mixed (men and women) student team beat their alumni opponents by a thin margin (64 -58).

Alumni did not fare very well during the round-robin football tournament where they lost by an identical margin (2-1) against USIU-Africa staff and students.

The sports day is organized annually by a committee of alumni, in conjunction with the Office of Alumni Affairs, to create opportunities for current USIU-Africa teams to be mentored by former members. Alumni also use the event to catch-up and renew old-relationships.

Students and alumni faced each other during the Wazee Vijana Alumni Sports Day held on campus on Saturday, July 8. The students registered a rare victory against the alumni whom they beat 64-58. Photo: Beatrice Munyiva

Mr. John Kabuu (IBA Class of 2004) tackles a member of the USIU-Africa hockey team during their Wazee-Vijana match on Saturday, July 8, at the hockey pitch. The alumni afterwards hosted a mentorship session for the current university team, urging the students to balance their sports and academic endeavours. Photo: Beatrice Munyiva

Upcoming Events

Saturday, July 15 - Sunday, July 16
Kings of Rugby Tournament
KCB Sports Club

Wednesday, July 19
Public Lecture by Dr. Rob Marchant (University of York)
“Human-Environment Interaction in East Africa: Past Changes And Future Challenges”
1.30pm | Auditorium

Thursday, July 20
Uncommon Room - A Play by Michezo Afrika
7pm | Auditorium

Saturday, July 22
Uncommon Room - A Play by Michezo Afrika
3pm & 6pm | Auditorium

Sports Updates

By Jackline Chirchir

United States International University-Africa Tigers stunned fellow students Kenya College of Accountancy 69-65 in the Basketball Men Premier that took place in Nyayo stadium. They also beat JKUAT Nairobi 45-38 in the NBA Men Division league that took place at UoN.

Media Mentions

Compiled by Jackline Chirchir

12 July: USIU-Africa was mentioned in a story by Capital FM titled ‘USIU to Improve Research from Trilateral Partnership Initiative’

12 July- A student was featured in article by The Star titled ‘Tired of war, South Sudanese youth turn to art to push for peace’

12 July- The Kenyan mentioned USIU-Africa’s faculty on a story titled ‘USIU to Improve Research from Trilateral Partnership Initiative’

11 July – Techweez.com covered a story on our Faculty member titled ‘Kenya’s USIU-Africa Professor Awarded With a Nanotechnology Research Grant’

7 July – Daily Nation covered a story of one of USIU-Africa’s students in a story titled ‘Student fights pollution by turning waste glass into furniture.’

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