Twenty-six nationalities represented at annual culture festival

By Leah Ngechu

A record number of nationalities participated in this year’s cultural bonanza - Culture Week - held from March 13-15 behind the cafeteria and next to the hockey pitch.

From the exhibition to the concert performances, students, faculty and staff caught a glimpse of the melting pot of cultures that are represented within the University community.

The Week launched with an exhibition from twenty-six national communities who each set up a stand behind the cafeteria, showcasing their artifacts, dances, food and other aspects of their culture.

The Vice Chancellor Prof. Paul Zeleza joined the cultural parade on Wednesday, March 14, as it snaked its way from the Science Center to the Cafeteria, comprising student delegations from such countries as Central Africa Republic, China, India, Japan, Kenya, Nigeria, Norway, Somalia, Rwanda, United Arab Emirates, among others.

Speaking at the launch ceremony following the parade, Prof. Zeleza remarked on the wonderful opportunities provided by Culture Week to bring members of the University from diverse backgrounds together, in appreciation of their rich cultural heritage. He pointed that of all University events, Culture Week possessed a unique ability to create harmonious co-existence among the over 70 nationalities represented within the University community.

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During the Culture Week Concert, fifteen communities showcased their dances and attire to an audience of almost 2000 students, faculty and staff who turned up despite the incessant rain.

Representatives from ten nationalities scooped awards in recognition of their outstanding participation over the course of the three-day festival. The Best Represented Community (Performance) was awarded to the South Sudanese community who performed an eccentric dance that captured the attention of the crowd. Rwanda and Burundi took second and third place respectively.

India took home the Award for the Best Represented Community (Exhibition), followed by the Arabic community and the Somali community in that order.

This category recognized how well the communities executed their exhibition space, and the level of interactivity that they had with their audiences.

Students from Uganda clinched the Award for Best Researched Community, for their skit about a traditional marriage ceremony, while Nigeria and Tanzania took up first and second runners-up positions respectively.

The Incubation and Innovation Center in collaboration with Gearbox Limited, organized a mini-hackathon dubbed “Exposathon” on Saturday, March 10 at their offices on the third floor of the Freida Brown Student Center.

Focused on the use of specific next-generation technologies, the exposathon comprised four teams of students using rapid prototyping, to work on four different projects.

Rapid prototyping is a technique used at the Incubation and Innovation Center to rapidly transition student projects from idea, to proof-of-concept, to a functional prototype, with the goal to publicly launch the product and create upwardly-scalable product activities. This kind of hardware development would ordinarily require an extended period of research and development and would call for significant upfront investment. But with the help of IoT devices, 3D printers and other low-cost prototyping techniques, students now have the chance to experiment with something new and leave room for error.

Each of the four teams went through a process of ideation within allocated four-hour window focused on certain areas; air quality monitoring by sensing for public awareness and policy making, wildlife monitoring for poaching prevention using a convergence of IoT (Internet of Things), satellite communication and artificial intelligence; IoT (Internet of Things) for deforestation prevention, and lastly making greenhouses intelligent by automating the process. The hackathon was aptly named 4:44, smartly referring to the challenge of 4 teams given 4 hours to prototype 4 projects, beginning at 10am with an hour’s break for lunch.

Based on how well the project ideas were defined, justified and implemented, Ms. Grace Owiti and Mr. Vishaal Ravalia, were awarded fully-funded training scholarships at Gearbox worth KES 70,000 and while the rest won a partial training scholarship worth KES 55,000. Gearbox Limited is a rapid prototyping center, with a mission to impact the economy positively by employing technical innovation round IoT, Robotics, Blockchain, AI and 3D printing and virtual reality.

Students win Gearbox scholarships at mini-hackathon

By Max Musau

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By John Kelly

On Monday, March 12, Mr. Abdi Latif Dahir (Journalism ’11) was invited by Journalism lecturer Ms. Robi K. Ochieng, to speak to the Spring 2018 JRN3026 Gender Reporting class. Mr. Dahir graduated in 2011 at the top of his Journalism class, before later joining Columbia University’s School of Journalism, where he obtained a Master of Arts degree in Political Journalism. Since then he has been working as a reporter for Quartz Africa in East and Northern Africa.

In his lecture, Mr. Dahir challenged his audience to base their stories on core topics and questions of seismic importance to the target audience, “Design stories that actually talk to individuals,” he said. He further encouraged members of the class to venture into untapped opportunities in journalism, citing Quartz Africa as an example.

Mr. Dahir also spoke about the format of news stories, asking the students to factor in a broad worldview by designing content primarily for the devices closest at hand: tablets and mobile phones. Indeed, according to GeoPol, African millennials are increasingly using social media sites as tools for communication and a source of news and information. The survey revealed the prevalence of social networks as an integral part of everyday life given that 60% use social media as their primary source of information, television came a distant second at 25%, while newspapers trailed with 6%.

Further data from Statista pointed at the growing number of internet users worldwide, who in 2017 numbered 3.58 billion, up from 3.39 billion the previous year. Such figures illustrate not only the rich source of information available, but also the expanding market for a journalist’s content.

Mr. Dahir concluded his remarks by urging his audience to never ignore an opportunity that comes their way - a remark that no doubt reverberated with members of the class long after the lecture concluded.

Journalism students encouraged to write appealing stories

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Members of the Somali community celebrating their culture during the Culture Week 2018 Cultural Parade on Wednesday, March 14. PHOTO: VICTOR MSHINDI

The Vice Chancellor Prof. Paul Zeleza and the Dean of Students Mr. Robert Onsarigo joined members of various communities participating in the Culture Week 2018 Cultural Parade on Wednesday, March 14. PHOTO: PAUL WAMBUGU

Students splash colored dust on each other to mark Holi - also known as the Festival of colors - a Hindu tradition celebrating love and the changing of seasons. It has become part of the annual Culture Week festival celebrated in the month of March. PHOTO: VICTOR MSHINDI

Members of the Nigerian community explain some of the cultural musical instruments on display in their stand during the Culture Week Exhibition on Wednesday, March 14. PHOTO: VICTOR MSHINDI

Students representing communities from Central Africa perform the Mutuashi dance - a Congolese dance from the Kasai region of the Democratic Republic of Congo - during the Culture Week Concert on Thursday, March 15. PHOTO: VICTOR MSHINDI

Rwandese students perform a traditional Intore dance during the Culture Week Concert on Wednesday, March 14. Rwandese women participated in this dance to welcome back warriors from battle. PHOTO: VICTOR MSHINDI

Bitsiatemariam Demissie (Psychology Sophomore) and Abdurazak Seid (IBA Freshman) showcase Eritrean cultural ceremonial wear during the Culture Week Concert on Thursday, March 15. PHOTO: VICTOR MSHINDI

Tulsi Desai (IBA Freshman) performs a classical dance during the Culture Week Concert on Wednesday, March 14. PHOTO: VICTOR MSHINDI

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Ajak Kuel (IR Sophomore) receives the Award for Best Represented Community (Performance), on behalf of students from South Sudan, at the conclusion of the Culture Week Concert on Thursday, March 15.

PHOTO: VICTOR MSHINDI

The Chair of the Culture Week 2018 Committee Ms. Leah Ngechu (center), hands over the Award for Best Represented Small Community, to Negash Rediet (Pharmacy Junior) representing communities from Eritrea and Ethiopia, at the conclusion of the Culture Week Concert on Thursday, March 15.

PHOTO: VICTOR MSHINDI

IST Junior Kelvin Mansi (third left) receives the 2nd Runners-up Award for Best Researched Community on behalf of Nigerian students, from Research Officer Mr. Carol Yogo (center).

PHOTO: VICTOR MSHINDI

Dalshan Raval (APT Sophomore) receives an Award for Best Represented Community (Exhibition) from model, athlete and entrepreneur Ms. Winnie Muthoga on Thursday, March 15.

PHOTO: VICTOR MSHINDI

Abdi Hussein (Criminal Justice Senior) and Sarah Aden (IR Senior) receive the 2nd Runner-up Award for Best Represented Community (Exhibition) at the close of the Culture Week Concert on Thursday, March 15.

PHOTO: VICTOR MSHINDI

Students representing communities from the Southern African country of Angola, exhibit cultural artifacts and food items from their country, during the Culture Week Exhibition on Wednesday, March 14.

PHOTO: VICTOR MSHINDI

Journalism Junior Ms. Mercy Onyango (second right) receives the Award for Best Researched Community from Stephanie Odhiambo (Qwetu Marketing & Communications), at the close of the Culture Week Concert on Thursday, March 15.

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PHOTO: VICTOR MSHINDI

Mercy Onyango (Journalism Junior) and Sheba Amanya (IST Sophomore) exhibit cultural artifacts from Uganda, during the Culture Week Exhibition on Wednesday, March 14.

PHOTO: VICTOR MSHINDI
Daizy Wanzala: Never quit dreaming

International Relations Class of 2015 alumna describes how her background did not stop her from making the most of every opportunity she came across.

I come from a family of five infected with HIV/AIDS and I was the lucky one who dodged the bullet but I was affected by the attendant stigmatization. In the early 2000s HIV/AIDS was a taboo - you could not talk about it neither could you think of it.

Nonetheless, my dear mother wanted more for me, she believed in this phrase that education was key and that knowledge was power. Having that in mind she insisted on me getting a degree that would open the doors of the world to me. She encouraged me that I was much more than my story and the environment in which I grew up.

I remember her last look, it said so much without her uttering a word, reading in between her unspoken words, I could see fear - she feared for me - of how I would survive after she was gone. Somehow she knew she had raised a fighter, someone who would beat the odds and embark on a journey to greatness.

That was the last I saw of my late mother. Unfortunately, she didn’t live up to see the day that I would tell my story, in its truest and most authentic form.

My name is Daisy Wanzala, and I am the CEO and founder of DW Communications - a public relations, marketing and communications company that offers world-class public relations and marketing solutions to Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) to enable them have an equal playing field with big corporations, convert their products into sales and most importantly, create and convey their brand messages in a more convenient and effective way to their target audience.

I call myself the daughter of the universe because it took a lot of people to get me to where I am, some whom I know and others whom I don’t.

I joined United States International University – Africa in the year 2012 pursuing a Bachelor of Arts in International Relations, just after I had lost my mother. I was emotionally unstable and helpless because I didn’t know how I would fit in with all the stereotypes (it was only meant for the rich) that were attached to this incredible institution.

Let’s face it, for a girl like me there was a 1% chance of making it. But that was not the case; I found my tribe - young, innovative and creative people who had incredible aspirations of becoming the best version of themselves with mentorship and guidance from the knowledgeable lecturers and staff.

I was lucky enough to receive two scholarships that contributed immensely to my education; one from the Mel Kol Foundation and the other was the USIU-Africa Work Study Program. This was a turning point in my life, not only because I could now study peacefully, but also because someone cared enough to take a chance on my dreams and aspirations - something that as made me forever indebted to humanity and my university!

Talent and youth are the currency of this generation - something that USIU-Africa is heavily invested in, by ensuring students are engaged in degree programs that inculcate such values as how to learn and think critically, participation in various clubs such as AIESEC and various exchange programs. These opportunities gave me a broader world view other than that which I was accustomed to back home in Busia County.

As if that was not enough, the multi-cultural environment made me an all-rounded individual who developed excellent communication and people skills, which are the core of my business today, after graduating with an impressive GPA in the year 2015.

Being the only survivor from a family of five makes me accountable to my ancestry and generations to come for what I do with my time here on earth. I have learnt how to make use of a given moment, seek opportunities and break barriers as I try to seek perfection. Someone once asked me what was my greatest achievement in life, and honestly I believe it had to be my next project.

Since I want more responsibility and accountability in life, I took a leap and auditioned for BLAZE BYOB by Safaricom - a television program that brings together 12 young entrepreneurs from across the country to engage with different brand partners such as Kenya Airways, Masoko and M-Kopa Solar just to mention but a few. The contestants undertake different challenges as they compete against each other in order for one to become the ‘last boss standing’!

My experience at BLAZE BYOB has been incredible and beyond measure as I have moved outside my comfort zone in public relations and marketing, to learn various professional skills in such fields as finance and logistics, and how to always put the client first! Other than fulfilling my passion in media relations at Blaze, one thing I have learnt for sure is that there is room for more creativity and innovation, that only we the millennials can execute!

Just like Dr. Nelson Mandela, Prof. Wangari Maathai, Oprah Winfrey or Steve Jobs, may we never quit dreaming regardless of those who cannot fathom the depth of our thinking, the width of our imagination and the audacity of our aspirations.

So here is to us! The outliers! Creators and innovators!
On Sunday March 25, the USIU-Africa cricket team won three matches against Multimedia University, Kenyatta University and Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology (JKUAT), in the ongoing Nairobi Provincial Cricket Association (NPCA) tournament that took place at the Rift Valley Sports Club in Nakuru.

Meanwhile, the ladies hockey team emerged winners after defeating Trans Nzoia Girls and St. Joseph’s Girls as their male counterparts beat St. Anthony Boys High School 4-0 in the just concluded Nabungolo Peace Tournament that took place last weekend in Kitale.

On the other hand, the ladies basketball team recorded mixed reactions in the Tom Munyama Tournament, after they beat Footprints (45-36) but lost to Panthers (52-28) and Equity (56-30) last weekend.

In soccer, the ladies team beat Nation Youth Service 2-0 in the Universities and Colleges Football League (UCFL) that took place in Kabete on Saturday, March 24. However, the men’s soccer team were eliminated at the semi-finals of the Kenya University Sports Association (KUSA) League after beating JKUAT 2-0, but losing to Kenyatta University 2-1 last weekend. The ladies and the men’s teams will face Kenya Medical Training College (KMTC) and University of Nairobi respectively this weekend in the UCFL.

The men’s rugby team narrowly lost 7-6 to Moi University in the Kenya Rugby Union (KRU) Championship that took place in Eldoret last weekend.