Opening Ceremony of USIU's new Library and Information Center

by


Talking Points for the Vice Chancellor of United States International University

Prof. Freida A. Brown on Monday 24th of September 2007

Written by Prof. Freida A. Brown and Angelina V. Mwashumbe (Head of Public Relations)

1. Acknowledgements

2. It is a pleasure to welcome you to the official opening of the new USIU Library and Information Center.

3. The USIU library is as old as its parent institution. It was established in 1970 to serve the then 25 students of the university. It was very small since students initially only completed two years in Kenya and actually graduated from the parent campus in San Diego. If you visit the International School of Kenya, you will find that there was once a space that housed the library when USIU owned and occupied that space. The university moved to a house in 1975, then another house so you can imagine the type of space the library consumed.

4. Finally, USIU moved in 1983 to what was then the Mayfair Hotel; I actually used that library in 1990 as a visiting faculty member from the San Diego campus. The student population was about 250 and remained at that level during the eight years at the Mayfair. Our librarian was Mrs. Anne Kinara who is with us today and she actually relocated that library to this campus in 1991. I am sure she is just as amused as I am when she enters the now Holiday Inn and finds that her old library is a bar and restaurant.

But she will tell you that when they relocated to this campus, it was not to the Lillian K. Beam Library but what is now the Counseling Center.
5. To demonstrate the importance of the library to the university community, it was the first permanent building constructed. The Library was completed in 1992 and named for my predecessor, Dr. Beam who was Executive Director of the USIU Nairobi campus from 1984 until 1994. When I came in 1994, the Beam Library seated 250 of our 1000 students. With the expansion of the university, an extension was constructed in 2002 for now over 2000 students. This increased the seating capacity to 400.

6. The university was still not meeting the Commission for Education requirement that universities seat at least one third of their student population even with the expansion.

7. So we began planning for this library in our 2002 strategic plan, with student enrollments over 2000, we needed a library that would seat about 600 students. We set a budget of 120 million Kenya shillings. As our population grew (we are now 4098) so did the dimensions of the library and the budget.

8. Fortunately, we were assisted with the budget increase by the American Schools and Hospitals Abroad Program of the United States Agency for International Development. We are very grateful to the American people and the US government for this assistance. We also appreciate the support of our overseas sponsoring agency The Africa – America Institute and their President Mora McLean who is also a USIU Board member. I am especially grateful to Dr. George Jones who worked with AAI to draft proposals and helped us through the intricate workings of USAID.

9. I would also like to introduce all those responsible for the construction of this building:

   a. Simon Woods of Beglin Woods was the architect.
   b. Contractors, Cementers
   c. Project Manager, Knight Frank
   d. Quantity Surveyor, Tom Oketch
   e. Electrical Engineers, GeoMax
   f. Structural Engineers, Gibbs
   g. Landscaping,
   h. Furnishings, Fursys and Furniture International

10. The university community sees this new library not only as a resource for USIU but a resource for higher education in Kenya and the surrounding region. We have always
welcomed patrons to our library; however, our old library did not permit this luxury since we were limited in space.

11. This new library and information, your Excellency, is 12,000 square meters, will sit 1200 patrons and house over 300,000 books. It is replete with the latest technology including wireless and wired access, online data bases and access through bio metric scanning. This is the first time that Radio Frequency Identification technology has been used in a library on this continent. We are proud to be able to offer this facility to the Kenyan community.

12. Ambassador Ranneberger will also be happy to learn that the glass used to protect our books from sunlight and keep the library cool came from the United States and is being used for the first time in Kenya in this library.

13. Your Excellency, we all know that Kenyans are leaving Kenya to pursue their education in the US, India, UK and other countries. The government loses an estimated 20 billion shillings a year in this flight. It is facilities like this that will keep our young people at home to reinvest their education in the building of this nation.

14. This type of world class facility will also provide what one of our Board members refers to as “curb appeal” in other words, it will attract students from outside Kenya and bring in the foreign currency.

15. Unfortunately, higher education is often seen as a luxury whose per unit cost is too high. Asian countries have recognized the importance of higher education and know that the cost to the development of the country is too high if it is not supported.

16. We are encouraged by your support of higher education in both the public and private sectors. Now more students will have an opportunity to study in public universities since admission has been delinked from bed space. Private universities are overwhelmed with your generosity in the elimination of VAT on the construction of facilities in private universities. Unfortunately, USIU will not be able to take advantage of the tax rebate because we are too efficient in paying our taxes. (I can see that pleases you). I was told by the Ministry of Finance to take heart because the taxes would be used to smooth out Thika Road, please also build a flyover with our taxes so that our students can be protected as they cross the road. Two have been injured because there is no cross over.

17. I would also like encourage the government to partner with higher education institutions by eliminating the taxes on educational tuition waivers offered by universities to their employees’ dependants. The taxation on this benefit makes it unaffordable for lower cadre staff. This is consistent with your strategy of education for all.
18. Your Excellency, as the educational arena expands, it is becoming more competitive. The competition is not just been from within the country but also from foreign universities. Local universities must compete in the global market. The university library and information center you have opened today can compete in any global market and even surpass some. We believe quality is the key to being globally competitive. This library and information center is a statement about the expectations of quality we have not only in our facilities but in our faculty, staff and students.

19. As my predecessor knew when she moved to this campus in 1991 and began construction of the first library, a library is the heart of the university. It supplies information to its users for research, scholarly undertakings, student papers and sometimes for satisfying curiosity.

20. Today, some would argue that libraries will become obsolete with technological advances. But a recent study shows that students and faculty, particularly in the humanities and social sciences find the library still a key element in their quest for knowledge.

21. This library is also called an information center because it not only houses books in the traditional sense but is a knowledge hub that stores electronic information from numerous sources. So for those who want their information from electronic sources they simply just plug in. This will also hedge against obsolescence.

22. In closing, I thought you might want to know what happens to old libraries? The Lillian K. Beam library will get a facelift. It will become the Lillian K. Beam Multimedia Center. We plan to totally reconfigure it to house our Information Technology programs so that they can expand. It will also permit us to provide studio space for our journalism program so that it can be expanded as well. This combination of IT and Journalism will respond to the Ministry of Information and Communications plan to digitize the media communications.

23. Finally, on behalf of the university community, let me thank you, your Excellency for taking time to come to open this new USIU Library and Information Center during a very busy time for you. Thank you.