

AN EXPANSIVE VISION OF STUDENT-CENTRED, ETHICAL PROGRESS

THE UNIVERSITY OF IRINGA

IRINGA, TANZANIA | WWW.UOI.AC.TZ



With a student roll of more than 4,000 and having recently acquired autonomous university status, the University of Iringa (Uoi) in Tanzania has ambitious plans for expansion. Formerly a college within Tumaini University, Iringa's six faculties and departments—arts and social sciences, business and economics, law, science and education, theology, and counselling and psychology—offer undergraduate and postgraduate degrees, as well as shorter diploma and certificate programmes.

The university's Vice Chancellor, Professor Nicholas Bangu, is eager to instigate change in the University of Iringa's attitude to student learning. "We need a paradigm shift," he says. "We recognise that the education being offered in the country as a whole could be different. We would like to move away from information teaching and towards a more student-centred approach."

His plan involves offering learners more personal involvement in their education. "The new system we are instigating takes account of the students' cognitive behaviours—including comprehension, recall analysis, application and evaluation—and bases its teaching on those." Courses are now subdivided

into lectures, seminars and tutorials, independent studies, assignments and practical training.

ENTERPRISING SPIRIT

The university has recently established an entrepreneurial centre, which provides participants with the opportunity to experiment and experience real-life situations. Professor Bangu has already noticed a change in the students' responses during workshops held at the centre. "They are visibly excited," he says. "We invite guest business people to come and talk about their work, with the intention of encouraging our young people to take initiative and ultimately become entrepreneurs themselves."

Wednesday afternoons at Uoi are free from academic study, to enable students to take part in activities of their own choosing. "They must register with a relevant official," says Professor Bangu. "Then they can choose to do things that interest them, such as developing business plans, playing both entertainment-based and applied games, forming clubs, laying on talent shows or volunteering for community work."

Uoi is determined to excel as a centre for entrepreneurship in order to maximise the economic potential of sub-Saharan Africa's abundant natural resources. To this end, the university has begun a programme of conferences, at which international academics and policy-makers are encouraged to come and share their knowledge. Under discussion are issues such as small- and medium-scale business sector development and sustainability.

"We also have plans to expand beyond Iringa and offer study programmes in other locations, as well as expanding our outreach service," says Professor Bangu. "Our university's vision is to be a leading establishment that produces ethical, competitive and entrepreneurial leaders."