



UNIVERSITY OF Global Health EQUITY

African Heritage at UGHE: Digital Report

UGHE's commitment to preserving African heritage is evident through its diverse range of initiatives and activities. From language classes to community engagement programs, UGHE actively fosters an environment where African cultural heritage is celebrated, documented, and perpetuated. By embedding these principles into its educational and outreach endeavors, UGHE reaffirms its role as a custodian of African heritage and a champion of cultural preservation.



Kinyarwanda Classes and Cultural Learning

One of the cornerstone initiatives at UGHE is the provision of Kinyarwanda classes to international students. Recognizing the importance of language in preserving cultural heritage, these classes serve as a platform for students to delve into the linguistic and cultural nuances of Rwanda. Kinyarwanda, as a vital component of African heritage, is not merely a means of communication but a gateway to understanding the ethos and traditions deeply rooted in Rwandan society. Moreover, the integration of Kinyarwanda classes and cultural learning into our medical education curriculum not only enriches the students' understanding of Rwandan culture but also fosters culturally sensitive and patient-centered care, thereby empowering our future healthcare professionals to deliver equitable and inclusive healthcare services to diverse patient populations.



Students interact in simulated environments to integrate cultural and linguistic learning in clinical training

Community-Based Education

UGHE's approach to Community-Based Education (CBE) embodies the ethos of preserving African cultural heritage. Engaging with communities directly, students immerse themselves in the rich oral traditions and practices that constitute the bedrock of African heritage. From sitting on mats during community interactions to learning about traditional healing practices, CBE fosters a holistic understanding of African culture. The community is the library of African heritage and since most is preserved in an oral form, UGHE honors this and preserves this by 'sitting' in the community and listening. This in turn is documented and enters the written stories. Learning about traditional healing practices that are still ongoing is part of learning. In Social medicine home visits, these interconnecting dual healing forms are studied. By documenting these experiences, UGHE ensures that the narratives of communities become part of the written heritage, thus contributing to the preservation of African cultural wealth.

UGHE Culture Days Celebration

UGHE actively participates in cultural festivities such as Culture Days and national public holidays such as the Umuganura Day Celebration (Harvest Day), which serve as platforms for highlighting and celebrating African heritage both Rwandan and beyond. These events provide opportunities for students, faculty, and the broader community to engage with traditional practices, rituals, and indigenous knowledge systems. Through these celebrations, UGHE reinforces its commitment to preserving and promoting African cultural heritage. For instance, on Culture Day, campus residents celebrate various African cultural traditions, such as traditional attire, traditional dances, and songs that hold significance to the different African nations represented on campus. On Umuganura Day, the campus residents enjoy various African dishes, from Rukacarara (sorghum bread) from Rwanda to Jollof Rice from Nigeria, among others.



Culture Day celebration on campus, featuring students' traditional dress

African History and Political Economy Teaching

At UGHE, courses like African History and Political Economy, Medical Anthropology, and Social Medicine are meticulously designed to draw from a rich tapestry of social theories, including One Health principles, and interdisciplinary perspectives encompassing history, anthropology, and epidemiology. These mandatory courses serve as foundational pillars in our curriculum, equipping the students with not only medical expertise but also a deep understanding of the socio-cultural contexts that influence health outcomes. Within these courses, students explore the detailed dimensions of African heritage, ranging from the precolonial societies with their distinct languages, religions, and economic activities, to the historical empires and the enduring legacies of slavery and colonialism. The curriculum also delves into the complexities of independence movements and post-colonial challenges, shedding light on the efforts to preserve cultural identity, achieve national unity, and foster economic development across the continent. By integrating historical, anthropological, and epidemiological perspectives, UGHE empowers students to navigate the intricate intersections of health and heritage, fostering culturally sensitive and contextually informed approaches to healthcare delivery in diverse African contexts.

Commemoration of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi



UGHE's campus, Commemoration Week

Every April, UGHE participates in the national commemoration of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi. There is a national period of mourning during which commemoration events happen at all institutions and organizations. Each year, UGHE organizes a commemoration event on campus for all staff, faculty and students, inviting a guest speaker to hold a commemoration lecture, visits to memorial sites and fundraising drives for survivors. This commitment to remembering and honoring the victims of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi is a critical and tangible way to ensure the history of Rwanda is preserved. It also serves to educate UGHE's national and international community about Rwanda's history, and how every part of Rwandan society and culture has been shaped by the events of the past.

By commemorating the genocide and educating our national and international community about Rwanda's past, UGHE underscores the interconnectedness between history, culture, and healthcare. Thus, integrating cultural learning, historical awareness, and commemorative practices into our educational framework reinforces our mission to cultivate socially conscious healthcare professionals who are equipped to address the complex socio-cultural determinants of health with empathy and understanding.



A student lights a candle in remembrance during campus Commemoration activities

Partnerships with African universities

UGHE is currently moving towards forming more partnerships with African universities and institutions. The intuition behind this goal is that South-South partnerships can foster greater collaboration within Africa, highlighting shared cultural heritage and the need to share resources on and within the continent. This creates a greater supportive atmosphere in higher education and research in Africa, allowing countries to bolster one another. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development emphasizes the importance of such partnerships by showing their contribution to self-reliance and national well-being.



Preservation of Native Trees and Architecture

In its ongoing campus development plans, UGHE prioritizes the preservation of native trees and incorporates indigenous architectural features. By planting and conserving trees such as *umuvumu*, *umuko*, and *umugote*, UGHE not only contributes to environmental sustainability but also honors the cultural significance of these species. For instance, *umuvumu* trees on campus, like the one in the middle of Butaro Hospital, represents the preservation of Nyabingi and Abagirwa rituals (Ancient Rwandan beliefs and myths). Furthermore, the incorporation of local architectural elements, such as geometric designs inspired by *Imigongo* paintings, reflects UGHE's commitment to integrating African heritage into its physical infrastructure. Read more about UGHE's Imigongo patterns: <https://ughe.org/rwandas-tradition-comes-to-life-on-ughes-butaro-campus/nggallery/image/basangira-edited/>



Indigenous trees surround UGHE's campus in Butaro, Northern Rwanda

Umuganda



Students, staff and faculty gather for Umuganda

Umuganda, also translated as ‘coming together in common purpose to achieve an outcome’ was started the period immediately after independence in 1962, organized under special circumstances and was considered as an individual contribution to nation building. It was often referred to as *umubyizi*, meaning ‘a day set aside by friends and family to help each other’. It became an official government program in 1974 organized regularly once a week with the Ministry of District Development in charge of overseeing it. Umuganda, also known as community work with the purpose to contribute to the overall national development, was reintroduced to Rwandan life in 1998 as part of efforts to rebuild the country after the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi. Today, it takes place on the last Saturday morning of each month and lasts for at least three hours. Read more about Umuganda: <https://www.allaboutrwanda.com/umuganda.html>



Local community residents and the campus gather in celebration of Umuganda



UGHE community members participate in Umuganda



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