

News of PIASS During the COVID-19 Lockdown

Academic Activities Underway: Creation and Imagination!

The virus known as coronavirus cause to Covid-19 pandemic has provoked huge global lockdown of activities worldwide including grounding home the movements of the population, suspension of all businesses nationally and internationally, among other measures to stop the rapid spread of the virus. The eruption of this virus toward the end of 2019 disrupted the life of all institutions and sectors of society. Schools, universities and higher learning institutions including the Protestant Institute of Arts and Social Sciences (PIASS) were promptly urged to interrupt their normal and routine academic activities.

In Rwanda like the majority of countries worldwide, the government ruled that people must stay indoors and business suspended except for those essential to the daily existence of the population. In such circumstances, there was no way, the face to face teaching and learning, the ongoing assessments and exams could take place. But as the poet telling the tale in the Omniscient put it: “life is a continuing struggle”; during and after the devastation of the pandemic life pursues its course. Instead of crossing the fingers, the Senior Management staff of the Protestant University [PIASS) under the leadership of the Vince Chancellor, Professor Elisée Musemakweli met - thanks to the digital technology- and took the decision to pursue the academic activities. Online working, including teaching, learning, assessments as well as research activities, was adopted as the only possible option in the present circumstances.

Through this mode of delivery, PIASS has started offering courses online, a move that has helped to avoid the academic stagnation for both students and the teaching staff. The Senior Management continue to convene through meetings online; the deans of faculties were instructed to regularly convene meetings. The Heads of Departments provide the timetables for teaching. A good number of modules have so far been taught successfully; students who do not have laptops are founding smartphones extremely helpful. The PIASS ICT department is working hard to provide support and to train the staff and students wherever needs are expressed for all to optimize the use of online tools in particular those proposed by the High Education Council. Close online monitoring of the process is done by the Heads of Departments under the supervision of the Deans. All staff have been instructed to work online, including conducting meetings, strategizing on how different activities would run smoothly.

Being a brand of PIASS, research activities are thoroughly going on. These include but not exclusively, the annual Scientific week expected in December 2020; the work on the second volume of *Home Grown Solutions*; the research on the history of our university from its original nucleus, the School of Theology up the present day Protestant University in the intention to celebrate a triple anniversary sometime in a near future; the editing and publication of the

proceedings of Scientific Week 2019 (topic was: “Quality of Education in Rwanda. Challenges and Opportunities”); the editing and publication of the dissertations of the IMPEQ Master students, etc.

“A Quelque chose Malheur est bon ! » [To something, Misfortune is good!]

COVID-19 has proved some truth in this French common saying. While these activities including online teaching are going on well, some uncertain trials and errors with plenty of learning rooms for improvements are frankly acknowledged and appreciated. The lockdown period is being both a challenging moment of our time but also a moment for appreciating things that we often take for granted, such as waking up in the morning, taking shower and walking out for daily work and meeting with people to exchange ideas. We have also learned to appreciate some of the usefulness of technology in times of trial, cell phones were meant to be tools for social interactions. Now people are forced to learn how to make them useful tools for important business including teaching and learning without physical contacts. Importantly, as the consequences of Covid-19 are projected stay for longer term, we see the need for courage and determination to overcome our fear toward technological skills and infrastructure. This moment of change of our attitudes, to open our mind for better collaboration and global unity than ever, if we are to overcome this pandemic.

However, interruptions from usual activities mean that some people can be left behind especially those who have no current technological infrastructure. While the lockdown has provided an opportunity to make use and improve our ICT skills and facilities, we still acknowledge that a gap exists among those who are not able to access the opportunities offered by the digital revolution. PIASS has made a plan for catching up moments immediately after the lockdown when life comes back to normal working conditions. This phase will be crucial for students who have been confronted with any difficulties to properly follow the teachings organized online. Some experts in various disciplines have already predicted that the global inequality will increase even further after the lockdown. What this means to higher learning institutions, government and policy makers is the absolute necessity to put in place strategies for many to access the modes of learning, to continually expand and make affordable the digital infrastructures and ensure employment for all, in particular people from the most vulnerable categories.

For any question or suggestion please contact:

Penine Uwimbabazi, email: u.penine@gmail.com

or Tharcisse Gatwa, email: tharcissegatwa@Hotmail.com