

Politecnica's Center of Excellence in Health Communication is building the next generation of Health Communication Professionals in Mozambique



Students in the Universidade Politécnica studio lab rehearsing for a radio broadcast

The Center of Excellence in Health Communication at *Universidade Politécnica* was inaugurated by President Armando Guebuza and U.S. Ambassador Douglas Griffiths in February 2013. The Center, located in the School of Management, Science and Technology, and part of the Department of Communication, is just one piece of a bigger initiative at *Politécnica* to invest in the next generation of professionals in Mozambique that will lead the design and implementation of high impact HIV prevention strategies in the country.

In addition to the Center of Excellence the PACTO project, which is supported by the Johns Hopkins University Center for Communication Programs and funded by PEPFAR through the U.S. Agency for International Development, has worked hand in hand with *Politécnica* to introduce a new area of specialization to the existing BA in Communication: Social and Behavior Change Communication (SBCC) and Health Journalism.

Over eight faculty members have been trained to deliver the six new courses, two seminars and two laboratory practica that have been integrated into the four semesters required to earn this new specialization for a BA in Communication Sciences. For the first time ever, students are learning radio production through access to a radio studio at the Center which is equipped with state-of-the-art technology, taking the university to the next level of quality standards and training methodologies.

As the saying goes, if you build it, they will come: within a short period of time interest in this specialization has expanded and growth has been even greater than expected. In 2013 41 students, enrolled in the SBCC and Health Journalism specialization. One year later, more than 100 students have registered. The growing number of students interested in SBCC and Health Journalism helps raise the bar for health communication programs and leaves an important legacy for the future.

Students have said that the SBCC and Health Journalism specialization will influence both their professional and personal lives. In addition, some students who are already working in this field say that the training they are receiving is filling an important gap that exists in university level training in Mozambique.

Rufaro Chitsamba is one of the students who is finishing up his coursework for this specialization. He states that in his opinion, these new courses are so useful that they should be required, not optional. Rufaro goes on to say, "These courses are very much in keeping with the objectives of the Communication Sciences Program, teaching efficient communication by using the latest strategies, methodologies and thinking." At the same time Rufaro notes that his new understanding of SBCC has been essential to his training in health journalism. Without it, his perspectives on public health would not be as informed. With his enthusiasm and understanding of what he has learned, Rufaro clearly belongs to the next generation of professionals leading Mozambique to an AIDS-free generation.

Rufaro Chitsamba is on his way to becoming part of the next generation of professionals leading Mozambique to an AIDS-free generation. Read how he's getting there by earning a BA in the rapidly expanding new specialization in SBCC and Health journalism that was developed by *Universidade Politécnica*, with PACTO's support and funding from PEPFAR.