Are universities preparing students for today’s market?

Faced with a grim job market, a slow economy and competition from other graduates, universities need to ensure their former students stand out from the crowd of the millions of graduates in the job market.

BY DESIRE MBABAALU

Universities keep coming up every other year in Uganda today. As of today, the number could be coming close to 40 institutions of higher learning. Therefore, it is important to note that the graduates that will beat the competition in the job market are those equipped with a practical approach to the theory taught in the lecture rooms.

The discovery came rather late when the rate of youth unemployment is on the rise but pushed most institutions out of their slumber to start introducing subjects and activities that enable students acquire practical skills.

At Uganda Christian University (UCU), for instance, Joseph Kiwa, a lecturer, says they have programmes out of the lecture room to create an all-rounder student.

"The careers department organises career fairs where students get skills in writing their resumes, cover letters and answering interview questions," he says.

A leaky brief

To students pursuing law degrees, mooting is one critical activity universities use to help give students get a sneak peak into the world of advocacy in court. These are normally organised as inter-university competitions by different organisations and or universities.

In a moot, a hypothetical case is drafted. This is usually on the theme/issues going on in the world. Parts of the case are drafted and sent out to different universities. The universities then interest law students to register for participation.

From the case, a student prepares a legal brief, which would qualify as submissions in court. Gerald Wool, a former UCU Law Society president, explains.

"By doing this, students master advocacy skills, learn how to prepare crucial documents needed in the real world of work, develop their confidence and ready themselves for their future work," he asserts.

Competition

Additionally, universities can encourage their students to take part in competitions in different fields of work to help broaden their horizons and think beyond the lecture room to what the world needs.

A competition such as African Biomedical Engineering Consortium Design Competition goes a long way in creating students' innovators.

For instance, this year, the competition sought innovative multidisciplinary ideas, overlapping engineering and medicine paradigms from student teams. These ideas also needed to tackle global challenges associated with surgical practice, obstetrics and anesthesia with an emphasis on low and middle income countries.

Science and innovation

The world needs more innovators and universities know that the job market requires innovative students that can provide solution-based knowledge not only in Science and technology but across all fields.

Collins Nswagaba, a student at Uganda Technology and Management University, pursuing a Masters in Computer Security, believes he has been given a good platform and push with his "Intelligent" innovation.

He has also had his Intelligent Irrigation system exhibited at the International Conference on Technology and Management, Science, Technology and Innovation exhibition week at Parliament.

The Standard, a UCU newspaper, helps the students to practice journalism.

Why the fuss?

Kiva says not only do practical skills help students to be confident but they also help in developing their public relations. "The students get to know people and get mentorship from those in the same field. This propels their career as early as possible," he says.

With an abundance of universities emphasizing a balanced education by offering leadership seminars, and more practical lessons, the solution to ensuring the worth of a college degree is as good as found.