

Dons protest 'fake' degree at MUST

BY HALSON KAGURE

MBARARA University of Science and Technology (MUST) has announced its graduation date as October 26, but not everything is going smoothly. Some staff and students are complaining that one of the students about to be cleared for a postgraduate doctoral degree in psychiatry was fraudulently admitted and was not supposed to have taken the course.

It has been revealed that Edith Wakida, a doctorate (PhD) student at the faculty of medicine, has no medical background. *Saturday Vision* has learnt that her first degree was in industrial and fine art at Makerere University and her master's degree at MUST was in development studies.

But that is not all. Julius Taremwa, the general secretary of Mbarara University of Science and Technology Academic Staff Association (MUSTASA), said Wakida's husband, Dr Godfrey Rukundo, is the head of psychiatry department; under the faculty of the medicine, which sparks off conflict of interest. The two live together and even have twins among other children.

Another allegation is that Wakida was admitted in 2017 but changed the dates to 2016 in order for her to complete this year.

Sources say that her proposed admission was academic year 2015/2016 at Makerere University, where and when she was declined. She opted for MUST in the academic year 2016/2017.

Sources further reveal that those admitted in the academic year 2016/2017 are supposed to graduate in October academic year 2020/2021.

"A PhD is six semesters and 10 weeks of recess, meaning every two semesters is a year...so that is three years. But for her, she wants to graduate under two-and-a-half years of study, which is always an indication that probably someone has plagiarized work," a source added.

MUST is one of eight public universities and degree-awarding institutions but unlike others, it has not been in the news for what some dons have termed as academic fraud.

This, according to MUSTASA, an umbrella body which unites lecturers at the university, is going to tarnish the university's 30-year reputation.

According to an earlier *New Vision* story, Wakida first applied for a master's degree in textile technology at the University of Manchester but



Edith Wakida who is said to be pursuing a PhD at MUST

did not succeed. She found herself at MUST, where she graduated with a master's degree in development studies around 2011.

Taremwa said Wakida applied for a doctoral degree in psychiatry at Makerere but was turned down.

"They rejected her because she did not have any medical background. She was told to first pursue a master's in public health or psychology or any other related course. But she refused," Taremwa, who lectures at the faculty of science, said.

He suspects that she used her influence as a wife to the head of department and being close to the vice-chancellor to be admitted for a doctoral degree in psychiatry. Psychiatry is a branch of medicine that focuses on the diagnosis, treatment and prevention of mental, emotional and behavioural disorders.

"There should be no shortcut in education. I studied engineering and cannot go to a hospital ward to administer drugs to patients. For Wakida to study that course is academic fraud!" Taremwa said.

■ NO SATISFACTION

Taremwa said MUSTASA brought the issue to the attention of the faculty dean but nothing happened. They escalated the issue to the senate, also in vain.

"The matter is also captured in our petition to the Minister of Education and Sports titled: 'Petition against the university council's deliberate delay to initiate the search for the next vice-chancellor and mismanagement, misconduct by the vice-chancellor and the university secretary of Mbarara University'. It is captured in



PROF OBUA'S TAKE
Prof. Celestine Obua, MUST vice-chancellor, described the allegations as nonsensical, adding that they are aimed at destroying Wakida's career. "Doing a PhD in a second field doesn't mean that you are qualified in that area. The world of science today is that of interdisciplinary. It means that even if you are doing mathematics, you can do your research in history," he said.

the fourth page of our June 13, 2019 petition," he said.

The paragraph reads: "The vice-chancellor is thought to be involved in the scheme of academic irregularity coupled with conflict of interest in which a student, Ms Edith Wakida, whose academic background is bachelor of industrial and fine art and design, is being presented as a PhD candidate in the faculty of medicine, department of psychiatry.

Ms Wakida is also the research manager in the office of research administration, which privately manages over sh100b worth of grants allegedly brought into the university by the vice-chancellor..."

Saturday Vision contacted Wakida over the allegation and she declined to comment.

"My dear, I think you need to get that information from whoever has given it to you. I have no comment. I am sorry I cannot say anything about what you are asking," she said and hang up.

However, a senior academician, who is a member of the directorate of graduate training and research, confirmed that Wakida was in a wrong faculty considering her background in industrial art and development studies.



Prof. Kiwanuka

The academician, who asked not to be identified, blamed the vice-chancellor for influencing her admission.

"It cannot happen that you can be admitted to a department of psychiatry unless you come from clinical psychiatry or clinical psychology. Those and the technical people are the only ones who qualify for that doctorate course," the member said.

Sources have revealed that Wakida joined the university to head a project which was supervised by the former dean of the faculty of medicine, but later got sneaked into the admissions committee.

"This girl has caused herself problems. I do not know why she cannot find a suitable faculty that suits her PhD. She was sneaked into the admissions committee and we do not know whether there are minutes because a PhD is not done under cover," says the source.

■ CLUELESS ON ADMISSION

Prof. Gertrude Kiwanuka, the dean of faculty of medicine, told the aggrieved staff members, who held an emergency meeting to seek a way forward on the matter, that she was clueless about the admission of Wakida.

"In this university, admission of students is not done by one individual," Kiwanuka explained. "What I know and have heard is that she applied and I think the papers were sent to the department, what happened in the department I am not sure."

Kiwanuka, however, said the admission of Wakida should not be blamed on the head of department or the dean but the academic registrar. But sources in the department revealed that the university declined to clear her research thesis but her

husband and the vice-chancellor are doing all it takes to allow her pass.

A senior academic member at the faculty of interdisciplinary studies, who also sits at the directorate of research and graduate training, confirmed that they did not clear Wakida. But that the vice-chancellor and the husband were being adamant.

When contacted, the vice-chancellor, Prof. Celestine Obua, described the allegations as nonsensical, adding that they are aimed at destroying her career.

"Doing a PhD in a second field doesn't mean that you are qualified in that area. The world of science today is that of interdisciplinary. It means that even if you are doing mathematics, you can do your research in history," he explains. "MUSTASA members are ignorant; the university knows what it is doing."

The vice-chancellor referred *Saturday Vision* to the academic registrar, Martha Kyoshaba, to get a clear gist of the matter.

However, the academic registrar in turn referred *Saturday Vision* to the head of department, but when the issue of him being Wakida's husband was raised, she referred us to the dean faculty of medicine.

"It is not prudent to discuss the admission of our student. I need to first find out why you want the information. Besides, we have the head of department, the dean of the faculty and even the university public relations officer," Kyoshaba said before hanging up.

The dean of faculty of medicine said she asked the postgraduate committee to propose names of people to study the allegations and assess the candidate. But her demands are yet to yield tangible results.

However, one of the members who sits on the committee of the directorate of research and graduate training, said they responded.

"I sit on that committee. We responded and advised the dean to first clear the conflict of interest and the rightful placement of PhD which is done in three years and not two years," the source said.

The source also said the candidate was denied research ethics, adding that it was now a Senate matter.

Efforts to get a comment from the public relations officer, Dennis Lukaaya, were futile because apparently, the university is operating without one after Lukaaya was interdicted two months ago.