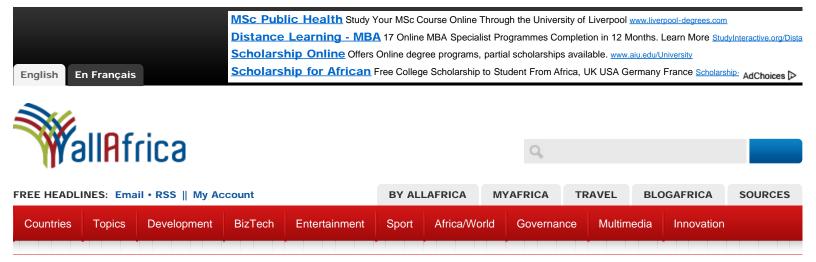
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## New Vision

## Uganda: Super Grades Don't Guarantee a Good Degree

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BY JOHN AGABA, 26 APRIL 2012

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Pre-entry examinations for admission to the bachelor of laws for 2012/2013 intake will be held on Saturday, April 28. Effective this year, the exams are a precondition for all candidates wishing to pursue a bachelor of laws programme at Makerere University.

The move brings to the surface the reservations about the star performers our schools churn out, right from primary school to Senior Six.

Performance trends show that over thepast 10 years, the quality of students has been declining despite the improving grades in national exams.

While in the past you would register a few As in national exams, today hundreds of Senior Six leavers register super As, but on many occasions this superb excellence is not reflected when the students join university and even thereafter in the workplace.

It is a common belief that if you scored As at Senior Six, then you are guaranteed of a good university degree - probably a first class or at least an upper second.

But university performance trends have continued to a cast dark shadow over this belief. Obtaining super As at A 'level is not a guarantee that one will come out of the university with a first class degree.

Andrew Mukiibi scored 23 points and he was admitted for his dream course - civil engineering. But during his first semester at Makerere University, things took a U-turn.

"I was getting six out of 40 in mathematics, a subject I had passed with a Principal A at my A' level," Mukiibi narrates.

But that did not worry him much; after all this was just his first year and first semester. He knew there was still room for improvement.

At the end of the course, Mukiibi had a Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) of 2.87, he had scored a lower second degree.

A second scenario is that of Arinaitwe, who scored 13 points in his A' level six years ago and was never taken on government sponsorship. He was only admitted as a privately-sponsored student to do bachelor of external (B.Com external), a course he had never thought of doing. His dream course had always been human resource management.

"My dad insisted I do B.Com external," says Arinaitwe, who, after his first semester, was surprised to find himself among the best students in his class. In 2009, he graduated with an upper second, with a CGPA of 4.37

Explaining the two cases, Dr. Callist Tumwebaze, a lecturer of psychology at Makerere University, says there is a range of factors responsible. He says life at university is completely different from that in high school.

Whereas in high school there are strict rules and regulations to abide by and teachers to push you around in almost everything you do, at university, things are different. For example, there is no bell to wake you up and to remind you that it is time for class. Hardly anyone is going to run after you to remind you to attend lectures or do coursework.

In the lecture room no one is going to reprimand you for not writing notes, not revising or not handing in your coursework. It is a free world where your life is in your hands; you are expected to make your personal decisions because you know what is best for you.

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In other words, you are regarded as a mature person, who knows what best suits you; and here comes the dilemma; for a person who has been used to being chased around and guided on how to do things, university life can be tempting. That is where many of our star A' level performers fall, head first.

Julius Matsiko, a lecturer of psychology at Makerere University, says many times students who have attained good grades at high school find university life too liberal and end up getting mixed up partying and living a good life.

Masiko explains that the students forget the core reason they are here - reading their books.

At university, it is mainly about self-regulation. If you are not disciplined and self-motivated, then you are bound to lose it, even if you came in with super grades.

Joseph Musalo, a counseling psychologist at Uganda Christian University Mukono, says university can be tricky if the student lacks self-drive.

At university, he adds, you will find lots of distractions you and how you handle them determines the class of degree you walk out with.

"There are girls, boys, alcohol, nightclubs, and friends. All these require time. If a student goes to university and every Tuesday he is at a nightclub, every Thursday at a night club; when not at a night club, he is with a girlfriend, where will he get the time to read? He will definitely fail however clever he or she is," Musaalo advises.

How do you go about university life to strike a balance?

Musalo says you need to understand who you are and what you want and set your priorities right.

"If you know you want a good degree you have to read. You have to attend lectures and consult your lecturers," he says.

Matsiko says at university everyone treats you like a responsible person and you should behave maturely where by you are self-driven and have a sound judgment of what is right and what is wrong, you can maintain being that A student.

Eventually, you can turn your average scores into a good degree, even into a first class.

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