

Creating Free Global Online Healthcare Education for  
Under-served Developing Countries  
Sabbatical Report – Fall 2013

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## Acknowledgements

Thank you to the Sabbatical Committee for this award. I am so grateful for the opportunity!

Donors made it possible for me to travel to Kenya for the service learning and needs assessment portion of this sabbatical project. Thank you to the following donors for such generosity and support: My Gram – Martha Climer, my parents – Jim and Lee Ann Thorpe, Lane President Mary Spilde, Maggie Cooper, Bettina Huber, Jill Andrews, and TheraTek.

My gratitude to Lane PTA Program Coordinator Christina Howard and instructor Brian Wilkinson for assuming my work responsibilities fall term.

Thank you to my family and friends who worried about me but still encouraged me to follow my heart.

Lastly, the warm and loving Kenyan people I encountered during this sabbatical touched my life and changed me forever. Asante sana.

## Background and Collaborative Partners

In 2011, I had dinner with a physical therapist friend, Ginny Mulvey, and her co-worker, Melanie Carlone. Conversation sparked about a project Melanie was working on creating a free online physical therapist assistant (PTA) program intended for under-served developing countries with potential for a hands-on training center and mentorship program. Considering I had just completed a very similar endeavor co-creating and launching an online/hybrid PTA program here at Lane Community College and I have a strong desire to serve others on a larger scale, this was a very interesting opportunity for me to join the efforts. The ball started rolling that night.

Melanie explained that [NextGenU<sup>1</sup>](#) is the world's first free online university with support and endorsements from many global experts and health agencies. Programs of study focus on health sciences such as mental health, emergency medicine, and substance abuse and founder, Erika Frank, wanted to add physical therapy to the list. Coursework is competency based and all resources must be free open education resources and free of advertisement to be used. Students sign up for NextGenU with a personal mentor in the field. There are no assigned instructors for the courses as students can register and set their own timeline.

The idea intrigued me and I did not think this would be a terribly challenging endeavor after already putting together a nationally accredited PTA program. I asked some questions. Is this program needed in the world? Will it be well received? Are there willing mentors for potential students? How can we ensure mentors are qualified clinical teachers? Is there a way to have some hands on training center for mentors somewhere? A needs assessment would provide answers.

Years ago, Melanie was involved in a program that brought several Kenyan physical therapists to the United States for formal education and training then returned home to work and share new skills. One of the leaders of this program was another physical therapist named Rick Neilsen. He was so inspired by service that he went on to create multiple non-profit organizations including [World of Difference<sup>2</sup>](#), leading teams of volunteers to Kenya to build schools and promote education. Dr. Neilsen, also known as "Ranger," founded [Rocky Mountain University of Health Professions<sup>3</sup>](#), which offers a Doctor of Physical Therapy degree. He was pushing to take PT students on one of the future summer service learning trips.

The connections were coming together to facilitate our project. Over the course of several months, we formed the Be the Difference Team and had many conference calls to coordinate our efforts. Melanie and I would travel with World of

Difference for the needs assessment and consider a beta testing site in Nairobi to test our program. I was accepted into the [Lane Community College Aspiring Leaders Program<sup>4</sup>](#) for 2012-2013 with President Mary Spilde. As part of the program, aspiring leaders set leadership goals. My goals have grown to include involvement in college, state, and national professional activities. Adding a global activity seemed like the next natural step. I included the Be the Difference Team service learning and needs assessment trip in my goals and started raising funds.

With support from President Mary Spilde and Aspiring Leaders, World of Difference, Rocky Mountain University of Health Professions, and NextGenU, we raised funds and made connections with schools and hospitals in Nairobi that we would visit on our needs assessment.

## Objectives

The main objective of my sabbatical project was to create a free online PTA program for under-served developing countries. After the needs assessment, objectives were re-evaluated and modified.

## Service Learning and Needs Assessment Trip

Be The Difference Team Kenya 2013 traveled to Nairobi, Kenya, for a service learning and needs assessment trip August 15 – September 3, 2013. The group consisted of 10 World of Difference work group volunteers, 15 doctoral physical therapy students from Rock Mountain University, a television news anchor and videographer, plus 6 faculty members and team leaders. The workgroup volunteers and team leaders spent the days at the worksite building a block schoolhouse in the slums of Kibera. The physical therapy students and faculty split between two local hospitals, working side-by-side with their physiotherapists, as they are known outside of the United States. The whole trip was documented in video by the news anchor and videographer.

At Kenyatta Hospital, the public hospital, supplies were limited but all patients were seen whenever they arrived in the outpatient department. Staff was overloaded with patients early in the day as many people travel long distances by bus and want to avoid traffic. Patients in the hospital were packed multiple beds per room with makeshift equipment. All therapy students from Kenyatta Medical Training College train at this public hospital.

The scene was significantly different across town at the private Nairobi Hospital. Patients were wealthier with private insurance allowing more private

rooms and better staffing. Physiotherapists were under less pressure of productivity and often had time for a tea break. They were the cream of the crop or had connections to get hired at Nairobi Hospital. Students were shown great respect from patients and staff.

Melanie, Rick, and I met with Daniel Kangutu, head of physiotherapy at Kenyatta Medical Training Center, faculty, Minister of Health, and local physiotherapists from both hospitals for candid discussions of their needs. Our Kenyan colleagues were very receptive to our ideas while expressing very clearly their challenges and desires, as well.

The entry-level physiotherapy program at Kenyatta Medical Training College (KMTC) awards a diploma upon completion. The standard in Africa is a bachelor degree. In order to earn the higher degree, physiotherapists of Nairobi must travel 2000 kilometers to study. For a higher level master's degree, the nearest options are Capetown, South Africa or Perth, Australia. Students in higher degree programs still train under mentors with diplomas causing some uncomfortable social situations within the culture.

We gathered quite a bit of information from everyone we encountered at KMTC and both hospitals that helped reshape our project plans. Connections and friendships were made and a bond formed within Be The Difference Team Kenya 2013. During the three weeks, faculty and PT students spent some time at the worksite to help build the school. The entire team took some time for rest and relaxation with a safari on the Masai Mara and a weekend trip to the ocean in Mombasa.

## Needs Assessment Outcomes

Results of the needs assessment after the series of meetings were not surprising.

1. KMTC needs entry-level physiotherapy diploma raised to bachelor's degree with advanced evaluation and complex medical curriculum development.
2. Kenya needs PTAs, especially in the public facilities and rural areas. The current KMTC can be converted to a PTA program.
3. Kenyan physiotherapists need continuing education opportunities to advance their skills.
4. Clinical mentors need training on effective teaching.
5. Remote areas need community-based workers to reach the poorest citizens for basic self-care education and referral for evaluations.

## Fall 2013 Sabbatical – Curriculum Development

During the actual sabbatical time, I resumed curriculum development efforts. Utilizing the well-respected published American Physical Therapy Association [Minimum Skills of Physical Therapist Assistant Graduates at Entry-Level](#)<sup>5</sup> as the list of competencies for the NextGenU program, I divided the lengthy list of skills into three modules or levels. Dividing them allowed for easier management of the spreadsheet and gave a structure for coursework from basic to more advanced skills. Completing courses in a progressive manner would allow students to be more successful and build on skills applied in the clinic.

I continued to search for two advertisement free open education resources for each skill on the spreadsheet. This was far more challenging than I had originally anticipated as education is largely textbook dependent. Without a textbook for content, many resources did not explain the content fully enough for understanding. Many resources previously added to the master spreadsheet had already moved or deleted with broken links. KMTC's number one goal was to raise the diploma to a bachelor's degree, so I put the PTA curriculum on hold for the remainder of the term and shifted focus to clinical mentor training.

As Academic Coordinator of Clinical Education for the PTA Program at Lane, it is my responsibility to recruit and train clinical instructors for our students. Instructors call me when unsure of how to handle a situation or when there is a significant concern about student performance. I realized that it would actually be more effective to have the clinical mentorship training established prior to further PTA curriculum development. Future PTA students of NextGenU need effective mentors to enroll in courses. Also, once the KMTC program went to a higher degree, further development of their clinical mentors with lesser degrees would be very important. More skilled and educated clinical mentors would be able to manage the degree difference with greater success.

During this time, I also communicated with NextGenU regarding challenges and concerns with the system. Without a dedicated server to house resources, links disappear. Even my own resources I house on the Lane media server would be lost if I were to no longer faculty. Courses with no monitor have no regular checks of links and functioning properties. NextGenU uses Moodle as the education platform. My own experience at Lane is enough evidence that technology failures will happen. My suggestion is that perhaps a volunteer course monitor could check course function for a designated period of time or access a webcrawler to perform the task automatically. We also discussed technology and availability in our target areas. Wireless Internet access was free on the matatu busses in Nairobi, but not in the more remote areas or even on the KMTC campus. Efforts would need to be made to

increase access in some areas. Cell phones were very prevalent but I did not see many computers so we may need to remember that when choosing Moodle themes and resources.

It became very clear that I was overly ambitious with the original timeline for launching an online PTA program with NextGenU. The work continues.

## Continued Efforts

One objective multiplied to five interrelated projects. As we have all resumed our busy lives, service gets less attention but we are still committed to the final outcome of free online global education for our friends in Kenya and beyond.

1. Rocky Mountain University faculty is working on supplementing Kenya Medical Training Center's physiotherapy curriculum for an entry-level bachelor's degree.
2. World of Difference is looking for land to build a health professions training center.
3. Melanie Carlone is working on a community health worker/therapy aide training for the more remote villages.
4. NextGenU launched programs in emergency medicine, mental health, alcohol and drug addiction counseling, and others. Founder Erika Frank was scheduled to give a TED Talk this year.
5. I continue developing curriculum for the clinical mentor training and searching for open education resources for the PTA program.

## Alignment with Core Values

This project tied together my professional ethics and [Lane Community College Core Values](#)<sup>6</sup>. Part of the physical therapy profession is adherence to certain professional codes. [Standards of Ethical Conduct for the Physical Therapist Assistant](#)<sup>7</sup> addresses professional involvement in Standard #8.

*Standard #8 – Physical Therapist Assistants shall participate in efforts to meet the health needs of people locally, nationally, or globally.*

*8A. PTAs shall support organizations that meet the health needs of people who are economically disadvantaged, uninsured, or underserved.*

This entire project aligned with Lane Community College vision of transforming lives through learning. It also exemplified each of the core values of learning, innovation, collaboration and partnership, integrity, diversity, accessibility, and sustainability. The focus of NextGenU is accessibility, therefore, the most interconnected of the core values.

The goal of NextGenU is to remove as many barriers to education as possible for any person anywhere wanting education and training. There are no admission requirements. All students are welcome. All courses are free, removing economic or financial barriers. Resources and content are open source so no textbooks are needed. All courses are online, removing geographical barriers. Students do not have to leave home responsibilities to travel to school. Local mentors provide hands on training. Courses can be completed at the student's pace instead of following rigid class schedules. This course delivery method removes many social and cultural barriers in areas where woman are often excluded from the education system NextGenU also uses [Google Translate<sup>8</sup>](#) allowing content to be access in 58 languages, removing most language barriers.

On the even larger scale, educating students to become physical therapist assistants boosts accessibility of health care to patients in underserved areas. Volunteer opportunities throughout development and implementation of this project lends to accessibility of learning from each other, as well. Accessibility is the driving force for developing this program.

My sabbatical experience moved me in ways I have not yet even realized but it has strengthened me as a person and an educator. I am so grateful for this opportunity.

## **Additional Media**

Video documentation by Bryant Bush can be found on You Tube channel World of Difference 2013 at <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLfCmo6Wz9dINAZL2exs8s6z0g69iC6uXI>

Find us on Facebook for more posted videos and photos at  
Be The Difference Team – Kenya 2013

Prezi sabbatical presentation can be found at:  
[http://prezi.com/imttifg4\\_bvb/edit/#31\\_30863873](http://prezi.com/imttifg4_bvb/edit/#31_30863873)

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