

Leveraging African Expertise for Swiss Education

Tuesday June 28th, 2022

Leveraging African Expertise for Swiss Education

We provide students from
Swiss universities with
possibilities to improve their
intercultural skills and to
learn from the expertise and
experiences of African
lecturers, students, and
organizations.

The five components of our program

1. African guest lecturers
2. Internship opportunities for students from Switzerland
3. Remote exchange with African students
4. Attracting new talent for Swiss universities
5. Coaching and support of African scholars accepted to Swiss graduate programs

African guest lecturers

Gabriele Medici, political science student,
University of Zurich:

“I do not doubt that it is possible for any scholar to achieve a very high level of knowledge in any geographical context, regardless of where they come from. But a person who was born, grew up, and lived in such a context can more fully grasp its characteristics, which would be impossible for an outsider. I am not saying that without this experience one cannot understand, or talk about Africa, quite the contrary! But discussing Africa with someone who grew up there certainly brings something extra.”

Internship opportunities for students from Switzerland

Leonie Frei, student at the University of Zurich:

*"This month at Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA) has been very instructive to me. I learned a lot about myself. I enjoyed getting to know the Kenyan culture and gaining insight into a leading organization in research. **Experiencing working with people from a different cultural background than mine and applying all the tips you gave us such as "ask a lot of questions, don't assume, be aware of your single -story perspective and potential power dynamics" etc. was a defining experience.** The internship was also a crucial first step in finding out and defining a little bit more what I can see myself doing with my studies."*

Remote exchange with African students

Konstantin Poensgen, University of Zurich:

“It is just such a different and amazing learning experience studying issues of international economic development while having lively discussions with remote classmates who can share stories and insights from their daily first hand experience.”

-

Attracting new talent for Swiss universities

Feedback from an anonymous professor in one of our Swiss partner universities:

"I am looking forward to working with you and getting your support in selecting the right African students for our graduate programs. To be honest, we had mixed experiences in the past with African students, as we found it difficult to evaluate who would be able to succeed in the Swiss educational system. If you can help us evaluate their background and credentials and provide a better matching of their qualifications to our program, we are grateful for your support since we would love to have more African students."

Coaching and support of African scholars accepted to Swiss graduate programs

Frank Odhiambo, PhD student at ETH Zurich, originally from Kenya:

“Transitioning to a new continent and a very different educational environment is at the same time highly interesting but also very challenging. Getting support from peers who have gone through a similar process, and from mentors who can provide advice, is invaluable. Such support has been extremely helpful for me to better integrate in the Swiss educational system and to succeed in my PhD in development economics at ETH.”

Our Cooperations

1. **Swiss universities (6 agreements)**
 - To support them in the internationalization of their teaching and educational offers
2. **International Organizations (5 agreements)**
 - To help recruit African guest speakers, facilitate the internships, attract suitable applicants for remote student exchanges and to apply to Swiss programs
3. **Swiss African Student Associations (4 agreements)**
 - support to incoming African students who were accepted into Swiss graduate programs

Benefits for Swiss Tertiary Education

- Increase the exposure to international know-how and ideas
- Broaden the intercultural expertise
- Increase the possibilities for cross cultural collaborations
- Enrich the classroom environment through the virtual participation of African students in Swiss courses
- Tackle the issue of underrepresentation of African students

Challenges

1. **Ensure the quality of the program**
 - Yearly evaluation of the work packages across a number of predefined targets
2. **Managing the cooperations**
 - Regular events to disseminate the results and discuss potential improvements to the cooperation and program