



A REPORT ON THE TRAINING ATTENDED AT THE MEDICAL UNIVERSITY OF GRAZ, AUSTRIA-2025



Prepared by :
Alex Kisakye

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Introduction

I participated in an administrative training at the Medical University of Graz (Med Uni Graz) in Austria during the Global Partner Week 2025. This was through the framework of an established partnership between Makerere University, College of Health Sciences (MakCHS) and the Medical University of Graz.

The Medical University of Graz established in 2004, stands as one of Austria's leading institutions for medical education and training, research and healthcare innovation. The Medical University of Graz before being established into a full university, it was the former Graz faculty of Medicine of the University of Graz established in 1585. Nestled in Graz a city renowned for its historical significance and academic excellence, the university has built a strong reputation for its contributions in medical advancements locally and globally.

The Global Partner Week 2025

The Global Partner Week, held from May 12th to May 16th 2025 served as a platform for collaboration and knowledge exchange among international institutions of higher learning that partner with the Medical University of Graz. Designed to foster partnerships, strengthen existing networks and explore best practices in internationalization of medical education and other global health programs. The event brought together 27 members from 17 institutions of higher learning worldwide. Through engaging in discussions, interactive sessions and immersive experiences, I gained invaluable insights into internationalization strategies, cultural exchange and a better understanding of the significance of international office.

This report outlines my experience at the Medical University of Graz during the Global Partner Week 2025, detailing key activities, opportunities explored, experiences and lessons learned. The insights gained will undoubtedly contribute to shaping future initiatives within my professional domain and advancement in my service in the internationalization projects.

Acknowledgement

I foremost extend my sincere gratitude to Makerere University, College of Health Sciences (MakCHS) for providing me with this invaluable opportunity to participate in this event. This training has deepened my knowledge and commitment to the internationalization of health professionals' education, strengthening my understanding on the significance and impact of global academic collaborations.

A heartfelt appreciation goes to the Medical University of Graz and the entire International Office whose dedication and impeccable organization ensured a seamless event. The interactions with peers from this office enriched my understanding of best practices and opened doors to meaningful personal and professional connections. Special thanks to Ms. Heidi Mortel, Ms. Eva Weixler, Birgit Vorgel, Ms. Iris, Ms. Alexandra and other members whose support and guidance made this experience truly enriching.

I also extend my gratitude to my own international office at MakCHS for the unwavering support, both administrative and financial which made this journey possible. A special mention to Ms. Susan Nassaka Byekwaso, the International Coordinator at MakCHS, whose mentorship and expertise in Internationalization and coordination of global health programs continues to inspire my interest in this field. Thank you!

Furthermore, I appreciate the efforts of the Dean's Office, School of Medicine, especially Prof. Mark Kaddumukasa for his continuous support in advancing international partnerships and capacity building efforts for both faculty and administrators.

Finally, I am immensely grateful to my family, Ugandans I met in Austria and the Almighty Lord, whose guidance and encouragement made this experience both successful and meaningful.

Preparations

The preparations for the Global Partner Week at the Medical University of Graz were meticulously coordinated by both MakCHS and Med Uni Graz International Offices, ensuring a seamless process. From administrative paperwork, support in Visa processing and other relevant travel information, their prompt and precise communication made the process smooth and efficient.

In the weeks leading up to my departure, I received detailed information from Med Uni Graz about the week-long program, accommodation recommendations, access to Sim cards, shopping malls, in-country transportation, travel insurance among others.

Beyond logistical arrangements, I familiarized myself with a few German language phrases, cultural norms and expectations for the week. The anticipation of traveling internationally for the first time and engaging with international peers made the preparations even more meaningful.

Departure and Arrival

On 10th May 2025, I embarked on my journey to Graz via Brussels Airlines, ready to immerse myself in the enriching experience of the Global Partner Week. The trip had been meticulously planned from flight logistics to local transportation from Viena Airport to Graz, ensuring a smooth transition upon arrival.

Landing in Austria, I disembarked at Vienna International airport on 11th May 2025 and was met with a new cold atmosphere with bright sunlight and a few hospitable people I met at the airport.

On arrival in Graz. The Medical University of Graz welcomed us with a message from the Rector, delivered by the Vice Rector of Research & International Office – Christian Enzinger and a briefing and overview of the week by the Director of the International Office, Ms. Heidi Mortel. Their words set the tone for a week filled with collaboration, networking and professional growth.

The excitement of stepping into a new academic environment was further heightened by the opportunity to engage with other coordinators and educators from around the world. As the week unfolded, I was eager to immerse myself in the sessions, discussions and activities organized.

Med Uni Graz



Christian Enzinger - Vice Rector of Research & International Office



Vice Rector welcoming all participants

Accommodation & Transportation

For my stay in Graz, I secured my accommodation through Airbnb which provided all the necessary amenities for a comfortable stay. The location was convenient, allowing easy access to public transport and in proximity of the Medical University of Graz and other key areas.

One of the standout aspects of Graz was its efficient public transportation system. The city has a well-connected network of trains, trams and buses which ensure seamless movement across different locations. The punctuality and reliability of the system made my commuting effortless, allowing me to explore the city with ease. One can pay for a transport ticket/card that gives 24-hour access to all public transportation. Payments can be made onboard the bus or tram.

Navigating Graz was a pleasant experience, with clear signage, collective respect of traffic rules from all people despite ages and status and a well-organized system that catered to both locals and visitors. The convenience of public transport should be a priority in any city and is something I wish we as a nation can work on in Kampala.

Activities & Meetings Involved In

The Global Partner Week was structured to provide us as participants with valuable information, networking opportunities and hands-on experiences. The sessions were designed to foster collaboration and knowledge exchange among professionals.

A. Formal Introductions

The event commenced with a formal introduction session, where all participants had the opportunity to meet representatives from other institutions. This session set the stage for meaningful discussions and networking throughout the week.

B. Med Uni Graz Campus Tour

The Campus Tour provided understanding of the geography, state-of-the-art facilities, research centers, bio bank and the unique infrastructure that define the university campus. Highlights included well-equipped specialized simulation and tutorial rooms, laboratories, modern lecture halls, shared research units and project spaces, each designed to foster interactive learning and medical advancements.

A key aspect of the tour was to understand how the university ensures student integration and equipping of students with the necessary tools to navigate academic life in a global setting. The seamless blend of tradition and innovation in medical education was evident throughout the campus, reinforcing the institution's commitment to excellence.

C. Hospital Tour (LKH-Universitätsklinikum Graz)

One of the highlights was the hospital tour at LKH-Universitätsklinikum Graz, a teaching hospital for the Med Uni Graz and renowned medical facility with a rich history dating back to 1788. It was originally established as a general hospital which has evolved into one of Austria's leading

healthcare institutions, known for its cutting-edge medical research and patient care. The tour provided a view into the hospital's infrastructure, specialized departments and innovative healthcare practices. All visiting international students' placements are at LKH. This provides an opportunity to the students to have training from specialists within various Departments.

D. Individual Appointments (Surgery & Internal Medicine Departments)

I had the opportunity to have individual meetings with staff members in the Surgery and Internal Medicine Departments who are in charge of organizing rotations for visiting and local students. These sessions allowed me to share and compare practices and preparations done in relation to placements of students. It was interesting to know that we at MakCHS have some similar practices from administrative paperwork, communication between international office and respective departments, supervising of students, evaluations, case presentations, record systems for monitoring upcoming rotations among others. This showed that we are organized just as other institutions.



Figure 1 Alex with other participants at the Surgery Department

International Office - Med Uni Graz



Right to left (Alex Kisakye and Heidi Moertl)



Eva Weixler at the International Office - Med Uni Graz

E. Poster Presentation

I presented a poster highlighting Makerere University College of Health Sciences, detailing our contributions to international student and staff exchange programs and the different opportunities we offer with regard to learning, teaching and research. This exhibition facilitated learning about what other institutions offer, application processes, contacts and statistics of their student numbers and staff capacity among others.

I had the opportunity to also share some of our delicacies i.e. Uganda grown coffee and roasted groundnuts, notebooks and pens branded with Makerere University Logo which the recipients appreciated.

F. Presentation of Student Experiences Abroad

One of the impactful sessions during the Global Partner Week was the presentation of student experiences abroad. The students who undertook electives abroad shared insights on the impact of their global academic mobility, cultural immersion experiences and general experiences of electives done in different health systems.

Mr. Andreas Wimmer the first student to visit MakCHS from Med Uni Graz who came earlier this year in January to February 2025 at the time when Uganda was affected by an Ebola outbreak that saw many of the students leave. Mr. Andreas chose to stay and continue with his elective despite the nature of environment at the time.

This is what he had to say about his experience at MakCHS *“My experience abroad: I had the most wonderful time in Kampala Uganda and don’t regret a single day spent there. Everyone has been so welcoming and kindhearted from the beginning and Uganda’s captivating landscapes and variety of flora and fauna gave the country the well-deserved nickname ‘Pearl of Africa’. Ugandans made it easy for me to get in touch with them and I’m happy to say I have made a new friend or two while having lived there”*



Figure 2 Christian-Vice Rector with all participants

Poster Presentation and Campus Tour



Alex Kisakye presenting



Left to right (Angela Gitau, Elsie Sammons, Alex, Alison Barnim, Morgane Accorsi)

Social and Cultural Immersion Activities

Beyond academic discussions and professional networking, we had an opportunity to explore the rich cultural heritage and history of Austria.

1. Graz City Walking Tour

The Graz City Tour was an immersive experience where we saw the architectural beauty and historical significance of the place. Walking through the Old Town, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, I admired the unique styles of buildings, monuments, planned and organized street systems and the measures Austrians have taken to preserve their heritage.

2. Dinner at Buschenschank

We made a visit to a traditional Buschenschank, a local tavern serving Styrian cuisine, we enjoyed the regional delicacies, including freshly baked bread, cold meat, locally produced wine while engaging in lively conversations. Great thanks to the Med Uni Graz international office for organizing.

3. Schlossberg (Castle Mountain) Tour

One of the most memorable experiences was the Schlossberg Tour, which offered breathtaking views of Graz and a glimpse into the world war history of Austria.

The Schlossberg, meaning “Castle Mountain,” is a 473-meter-high hill in the heart of Graz. It is known for its clock tower and panoramic city views. The site dates back to at least the 16th century. Despite numerous military conflicts, the fortress was never conquered though much of it was demolished by Napoleon forces in the 1800’s. Today, the Schlossberg serves as a public park and is a landmark.

4. Pub Visit (Brot & Spiele)

We had a casual evening at Brot & Spiele, a popular pub in Graz where we had a few drinks and snacks.

5. Riegersburg Tour

The Riegersburg Castle, located on the outskirts of Graz, is a fortress found on top of a volcanic rock. Known for its architecture and rich history, the castle provided insights into Austria’s military past, noble heritage and cultural evolution.

Social Activities



At schlossberg (Castle Mountain) Tour



Clock Tower at Scholssberg

Opportunities Created

The Global Partner Week provided a fertile ground for fostering new connections, institutional collaborations and professional exchanges. Throughout the week, engaging conversations and strategic networking led to the formation acquaintances with representatives from other institutions.

One of the most valuable outcomes I had was the opportunity to have discussions centered on enhancing exchange programs, student and staff mobility and a joint search for funding which could pave the way for future projects.

Additionally, interactions with colleagues at Med Uni Graz where we had exchange of ideas and knowledge showed me the importance of continuous adaptation and innovation of strategies in this evolving and volatile current environment.

Lessons Learned

The experience at the Medical University of Graz offered me some profound lessons on internationalization, institutional representation and quality assurance measures.

1. Internationalization Strategies

The importance of proactive internationalization, ensuring that higher institutions of learning remain connected though competitive. Understanding the importance of institutional branding, exchange program models and quality of services offered highlighted ways in which institutions can attract international scholars, foster diversity and strengthen global academic engagements.

2. Best Practices in Student Mobility & Institutional Support

Exposure to best practices in student pre-departure, onsite and post-departure preparations provided valuable lessons into how universities can improve academic mobility experiences. A well-structured mentorship program, orientation sessions and streamlined administrative processes were identified as crucial elements in ensuring seamless transitions for students and visiting faculty.

3. Quality Assurance & Accreditation Standards

An important lesson I learned was the significance of quality assurance measures in international placements. Institutions must ensure that the sites where students undertake rotations meet the acceptable standards so that experiences are aligned with the sending institution standards of training. Learning from Med Uni Graz structured approach to faculty-led evaluation of placement sites showed the value of constant review of the suitability of each site not overlooking accommodation, political environments and the culture of the site.

4. Appreciation of Cultural Diversity

Interacting with other institutions representatives from various backgrounds reinforced the need for cultural sensitivity and adaptability in global academic and professional engagements.

Understanding diverse viewpoints and respecting cultural differences in healthcare settings is essential for optimal experiences. This experience provided insight into handling cross-cultural exchanges with professionalism, respect and mutual understanding.

5. Austrian Lifestyle

The way Austrians live quietly shows their culture. Riding bicycles was common and part of daily life. On the first day, the vice rector came to the center on a bicycle, wearing a full suit. I was totally impressed and amazed.

6. Digitalization Approaches

Setting up of online platforms to foster administration of mobility programs, online database, online meetings, streaming of lectures and teaching for virtual mobility among others.

Constraints Experienced

While the Global Partner Week at the Medical University of Graz was an enriching experience, I experienced some few challenges that impacted the overall journey. These obstacles provided lessons on preparation for international travels.

1. Delayed Visa Approval

One of the most significant challenges was the delayed visa approval. Despite submitting all required documents. My first application was rejected and I had to make another visa application. I experienced uncertainty surrounding the visa processing which created financial and logistical constraints.

2. Underestimated the Cold Weather

Despite prior research, the unexpectedly colder weather in Graz posed a challenge on the last day leading to a mild illness, this was due to inadequate preparation on my end. This experience showed the importance of thorough climate assessment and packing appropriate clothing for international travels.

3. Language Barrier.

German is the official language in Austria and English is not widely spoken. I encountered situations where communication was difficult but I managed to communicate through using translators and gestures.

Recommendations

1. Streamlining Visa Application Processes

As an institution, Makerere University should strive to build relationships with embassies, consular offices and respective countries in general. Through this, we can build reputation to having programs that are respected and considered as priority when it comes to Visa Applications.



Alex Kisakye and Eva Weixler



Dinner at Buschenschank

Additionally, applicants should consider early submissions and consultation with knowledgeable people regarding appropriate visa categories to minimize delays.

2. Climate Preparedness for International Travel

Students & faculty traveling to unfamiliar climates should conduct detailed weather assessments and pack accordingly. Institutions hosting international scholars can also provide climate advisories and packing recommendations to ensure that attendees are well-prepared.

3. Enhancing Institutional Support for Internationalization Projects.

Makerere University should expand mentorship and capacity building programs and improve on administrative support towards mobility projects to ensure seamless international experiences, strengthening existing partnerships and negotiating for bi-directional exchange programs, organizing pre-departure orientations and post-exchange reflections can further enhance the impact of global academic collaborations and prepare participants.

Conclusion

The Global Partner Week at the Medical University of Graz was an eye-opening experience that provided valuable insights into internationalization, academic, research collaborations and the best practices in global education. The interactions with professionals from diverse institutions fostered new networks, strengthened existing partnership and expanded my perspectives on healthcare training and institutional development.

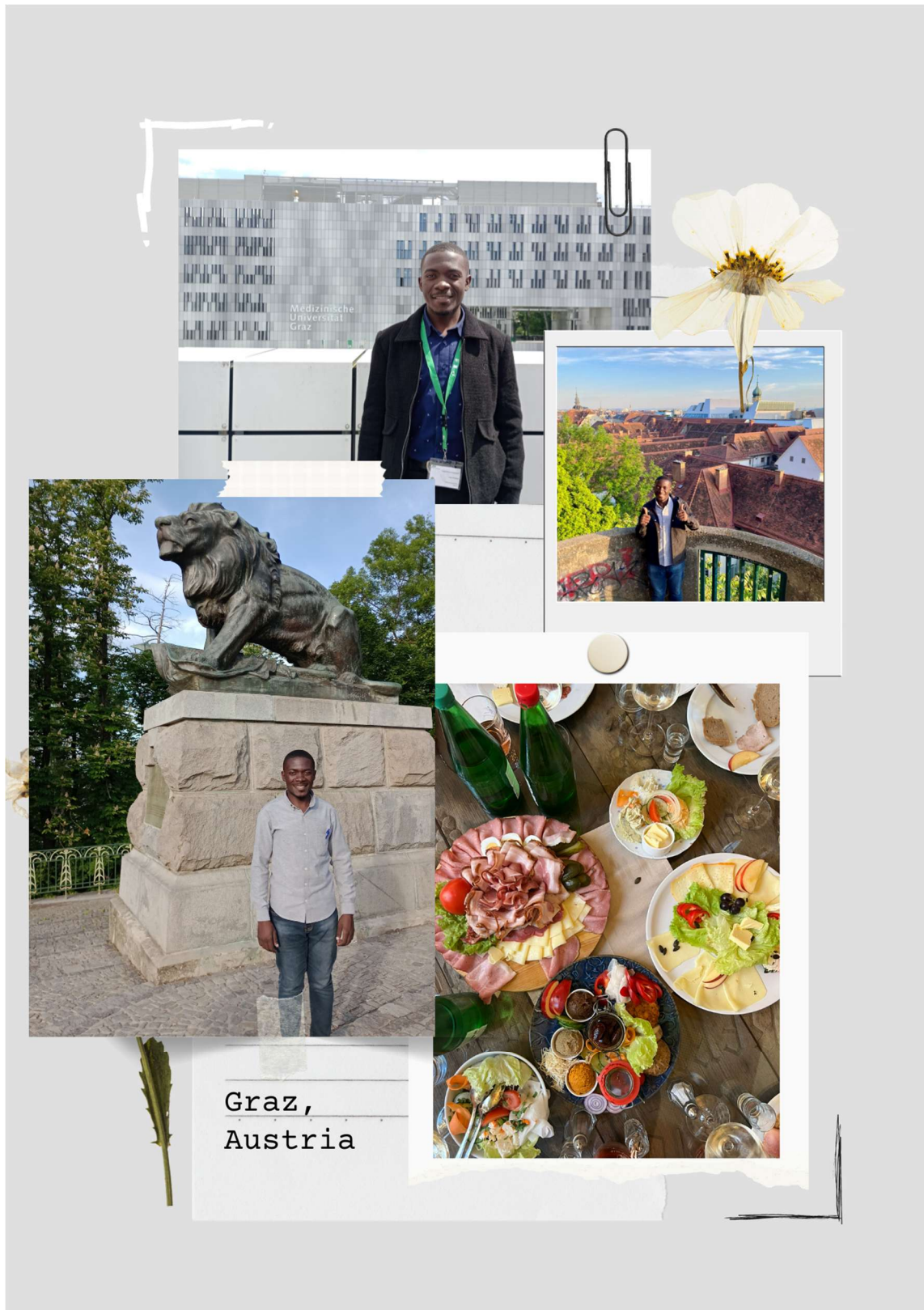
Throughout the event, engaging discussions and practical sessions highlighted critical elements of student mobility, quality assurance and cultural adaptability, reinforcing the significance of structuring international programs. The knowledge gained will undoubtedly contribute to enhancing institutional strategies, improving student support systems and optimizing available professional exchanges.

Beyond professional engagements, the opportunity to immerse in Austria's rich cultural heritage and lifestyle of people added depth to the experience. Exploring historical landmarks, participating in social activities and engaging with locals my appreciation for global diversity.

The lessons learned and recommendations outlined in this report can serve as guiding principles for future initiatives, aiming to foster efficient, impactful and well-structured international collaborations.

As I look forward to future opportunities, the knowledge and relationships developed here will undoubtedly play a pivotal role in advancing internationalization efforts within my field.

Pictures



Graz,
Austria



Figure 3 RatHaus, main city square



Figure 4 Ms. Alexandra (Med Uni Graz)



Figure 5 Alex on the extreme right with other participants in the Vine Gardens at Riegersburg



Figure 6 Bicycles at parks at the street in Graz



Figure 7 At River Mur in Graz



Figure 8 Alex on the extreme left with other participants after the Biobank tour



Figure 9 Alex Kisakye at Riegersburg