

**REPORT ON THE ERASMUS+ STUDENT EXCHANGE PROGRAM AT
MAGNA GRAECIA UNIVERSITY OF CATANZARO, ITALY**

(13th APRIL- 12th JUNE 2026)



MAKERERE

UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF HEALTH SCIENCES

SCHOOL OF MEDICINE



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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

UMG – Università Magna Graecia

MakCHS – Makerere University College of Health Sciences

SOM – School of Medicine

Dott/Dr – Dottore / Doctor

Prof. – Professor

CABG _ Coronary Artery Bypass Graft.

CGPA _ Cumulative Grade Point Average

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PRE-DEPARTURE EXPERIENCE

Selection phase

I heard about the opportunity to participate in the international exchange program from my seniors in the upper years when I was still in lower classes. Particularly, my dream was to go to Italy. The Erasmus+ exchange program at Magna Græcia University of Catanzaro, Italy gradually transformed into reality. The selection process was competitive requiring a minimum CGPA of 3.6, comprehensive curriculum vitae, a motivation letter outlining the reason behind my university of choice, and after we had a formal interview.

The call for applications was announced by the International Office at Makerere University during my fourth year's first semester. Encouraged by curiosity, dreams, ambition, and the testimonies of students who had previously participated in the program, I submitted my application, expressing my interest.

I was later shortlisted for the interview. The interview process tested not just my academic and clinical knowledge, but also my confidence and adaptability. A few weeks later, I received an exciting call from madam Susan Byekwaso of the international office that I had been selected for the exchange and this was followed by a confirmation email.

Preparation phase

Together with my colleagues who had also been selected to go to UMG, we embarked on the logistical and academic preparations, guided by our dedicated international coordinators. We completed the placement application forms provided by UMG, selected our desired rotations, and created student profiles to be used during our stay.

In Preparation for travel, it came with its own set of challenges, including navigating visa applications and dealing with appointment delays because the Italian embassy visa application portal would open only two days in a month and even on those days the portal would be down, but finally we managed to secure the appointment and visa after about two weeks past the date of start of our mobility period. Fortunately, I already had a passport and had completed all necessary vaccinations including Hepatitis B, Yellow Fever and Covid 19. I also received financial support from the Erasmus Program that enabled me to book my flight ticket.

As part of preparation, I started taking on Italian lessons by use of online applications like Duolingo and Google Translate to introduce me to the language before I travel.

TRAVEL EXPERIENCE

Flight

Setting off on April 11th 2026, marked the beginning of my transforming life experience, The excitement was massive, mixed with a natural sense of nervousness. I traveled with my colleague Ssenyonga Peter using Qatar Airways, departing from Entebbe International Airport in the evening. After having a stopover at Doha, we continued to Rome, finally landing in Italy on the afternoon of April 12th, 2026. It was a wonderful experience with Qatar airways having welcoming cabin crew with good customer care and services.

We later had our last flight late in the evening with Italian airways arriving at Lamezia Terme International Airport on the same day coming to midnight, where we found a taxi waiting for us that was coordinated by Dr. Lwanga Ssempijja. The taxi gentle man took us to the University Residence, where we were welcomed and helped to settle in and this was our home for the next two months. A total of 180 euros covered our accommodation and maintenance throughout the stay. We also received meal cards which would cater for our meals at a very reduced cost of 2.33 euros at the university cafeteria.

The next morning after arrival, we got in touch with Ms. Ivanna at the Erasmus Office to report our arrival. She warmly welcomed us and on April 13th, we were officially signed in and our mobility program commenced. Through the coordination between the Erasmus Office and faculty in charge of medicine and surgery, we were successfully registered and issued with the learning schedule for the different departments and a booklet/ log book to record our daily activities.

EXPERIENCE AT THE HOST UNIVERSITY

My experience at Magna Græcia University of Catanzaro (UMG) was a fulfilling blend of academic learning, clinical exposure, and personal growth and social learning. As part of the Erasmus+ exchange, I had the opportunity to rotate through the Infectious and Tropical Diseases Unit and the Department of Surgery at Azienda Ospedaliera Universitaria “Renato Dulbecco”.

Under the mentorship of Professor Alessandro Russo from the department of infectious and tropical diseases and several professors from surgery department, I took part in ward rounds, clinics, patients history taking and physical examination and surgical procedures. These experiences expanded my clinical knowledge, strengthened my diagnostic skills, and offered a closer view of interdisciplinary teamwork in patient care especially in a high resource setting.

I also experienced cultural and environmental exposure, living in Europe for the first time gave me a great experience of new culture and environment, I experiences new lifestyle of the people in the community, their good social interactions and welcoming new people in the community. I

had an opportunity to taste and explore new Italian food, and gradually learnt new phrases of the Italian language which helped me to navigate and communicate through.

I managed to make new friends with in the university, the hospital and within the city.

ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE

During my two-month Erasmus+ exchange at Magna Græcia University of Catanzaro, I undertook clinical rotations at Azienda Ospedaliera Universitaria “Renato Dulbecco”, a teaching hospital attached to the university. This placement provided a diverse and enriching academic experience in infectious and tropical diseases and surgical specialties.

I began with Surgical specialties with one week in each unit, which include; General Surgery, Urology, Cardiac Surgery, Orthopedics and Neurosurgery subsequently and lastly infectious and tropical diseases. These rotations exposed me to a wide range of clinical cases, operative procedures, and multidisciplinary care practices. I observed surgeries, engaged in pre- and post-operative care, clerked patients, physical examination of patients and learned from both consultants and resident doctors.

Surgery Rotation (20th April – 22nd may 2026)

We started with a five-week surgery rotation covering general surgery, urology, cardiac surgery, Orthopedics, and neurosurgery.

General Surgery (20th – 24th April)

We worked under supervision of Prof. Antonia Rizzuto, head of general surgery. We participated in both ward rounds and operating theatre sessions, observing aseptic techniques, anesthetic protocols, and surgical procedures. I was amazed and I learnt how surgical patients are approached in a high resource setting, how almost all patients with breast cancers are diagnosed at a very early stage during routine mammography screening which give a good prognosis with almost all patients getting full recovery. I gained hands-on understanding of patients care in general surgery.

Urology surgery (27th April – 30th April)

I rotated through the Urology Department during my second week, under the mentorship of Professor Rocco Damiano. This rotation provided valuable exposure to both diagnostic and interventional urologic procedures, enhancing my understanding of genitourinary pathology and the role of technology in improving early detection and patient outcomes.

I observed cystoscopia transuretrale (transurethral cystoscopy), a procedure routinely used for the diagnosis and follow-up of conditions such as bladder tumors, strictures, and recurrent urinary tract symptoms. However, what stood out most for me was the transurethral prostatectomy due to benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH), transurethral resection of bladder tumor due to bladder cancer and laser treatment for bladder, kidney and ureter stones. This

rotation made me to appreciate the minimally invasive procedures and the importance of technology-assisted diagnostics and treatment in modern surgery.

Cardiac surgery (4th May- 8th May)

My next clinical rotation was in the Cardiac Surgery Department under the guidance and supervision of Professor Pasquale Mastroberto. This placement offered a great opportunity to observe high-risk, life-saving procedures that demand precision, teamwork, and advanced technology.

One of the most procedures that stood out for me during this rotation was witnessing Coronary Artery Bypass Graft (CABG) surgeries using the great saphenous vein, observing the use of the cardiopulmonary bypass machine, which temporarily takes over the function of the heart and lungs during surgery, Watching the surgical team skillfully stop the patient's heart, re direct the blood flow through the machine, and restore circulation after the procedure was really impressing and amazing . I also gained insight into postoperative management, where close monitoring in the intensive care unit played a critical role in patient recovery. This rotation made me appreciate the complexity of cardiac surgery and how delicate it is, while it plays a vital role in saving patients' lives with the use of advanced technology.

Orthopedic Surgery (11th May –15th May)

During the 4th week, we are rotated in orthopedic surgery with Prof. Giorgio Gasparini. We saw a wide range of outpatient cases including bilateral flat foot, management of fractures, Trigger finger, Dupuytren's contracture, carpal tunnel syndrome, injuries of the Rotator cuff, and many others. I also attended theatre where I observed the surgical arthroscopic repair of a rotator cuff tear in a 60-year-old female following trauma, which deepened my understanding of orthopedic procedures, pre- and post-operative care, and management of common orthopedic conditions.

Neurosurgery (18th May – 22nd May)

This rotation was under Prof. Angelo Lavano, where we were introduced to advanced neurosurgical care, including pre-operative care and post-operative rehabilitation. I observed different neurosurgical cases which include lumbar stenosis, lumbar spondylosis and lumbar radiculopathy. I got a chance to attend theater and observed surgeries; the most catching one was a decompression and laminectomy for a patient with lumbar spinal stenosis.

Infectious and Tropical Disease Rotation (25th May – 12th June)

Our last clinical rotation took place in the Infectious Diseases Department at Azienda Ospedaliera Universitaria "Renato Dulbecco", under the supervision of Professor Alessandro Russo for two weeks and the last week at the city hospital (Azienda Ospedaliera "Pugliese Ciaccio" Catanzaro). We learnt how to approach patients with infectious diseases from initial patient assessment to diagnosis, treatment and follow-up. I participated in history taking, patients' physical examination, ward rounds and day today managements of patients on the ward, outpatient department and follow up of consultations for patients admitted in other departments. A key highlight was learning how culture and sensitivity tests are done to almost all patients before starting empirical treatment of antibiotics for accurate identification of infectious agents and this was a good emphasis on antimicrobial stewardship and support the rational use of

antibiotics which helped to prevent antimicrobial resistance (AMR). The experience gave me a deeper understanding in the management of patient with conditions like Pneumonia, Infective endocarditis, Hepatitis, HIV, covid-19, TB, Meningitis and their complications etc in a high resource setting.

Italian Language Training

Together with our clinical work, UMG organized for us and we attended Italian language classes with Professor Giovanni Ferrari every Friday. These sessions added on the basics we learnt using online applications. Despite the language barrier, the classes helped us better understand and learn new phrases which helped us to communicate in Italian medical settings.

Summer School

we had a great opportunity to attend the orthopedics summer school which was held from 8th to 12th June 2026. This opportunity was given to us by professor Giorgio Gasparini during our orthopedics rotation. Besides it happening during the period of clinical rotation, we spared the afternoon time to attend after we were done with the clinical work. This gave us the opportunity to learn the approach to different orthopedic conditions, and the use of advanced technologies with the use of new guidelines as presented by different professors across different European countries and beyond.

SOCIAL EXPERIENCE

Cultural exposure

Although I did not experience significant culture shock, people in Italy were very welcoming just like the ones in Uganda, however, I realized a significant difference among the people in Catanzaro as compared to communities back home. Life there felt peaceful and relaxed, with a slower pace as compared to the hustle am used to back home. I also noticed that many shops closed for extended lunch breaks in the afternoon, something quite unfamiliar but reflective of their value for work-life balance.

The weather was significantly cold when we had just arrived as compared to Uganda, however, towards the end of my mobility program, it became increasingly hotter as summer was setting in. I enjoyed the Italian traditional foods with dishes like pasta, lasagna, and pizza most commonly, all this giving me a wonderful experience.

We made connections with many friends with in the university, in Catanzaro city and in the hospital who gave us a sense of belonging, and their stories and support made Catanzaro feel like a second home. their support helped us the settle in so fast and navigate through campus and with in the city and adapt fast to the new life. These relationships not only enhanced my learning environment but also left me with friendships I hope to carry with me into the future.

As part of the daily life and navigating through the city, we had adjusted to using the scheduled public bus system which only stopped at designated bus stops, it was initially not easy for me to cope up with as it is not the case in Uganda but at the end of it all, it shaped me to be more punctual, organized and respect time.

Exploration

We managed to explore different places in Catanzaro city and beyond as an additional experience to the academic and clinical experiences. I Could always eat my favourite ice-cream, I enjoyed the cool breeze at the coastline of Soverato while enjoying people moving around with their loved ones, children and dogs, with clear salty water and listening to the sound the water waves, this was a greatest moment for me and mind relaxing.

Another greatest experience was our visit to Parco della Biodiversita Mediterranea, located in Catanzaro city, Calabria region, it contained beautiful places, i appreciated the work of art and creativity with different pieces of art in the park. I enjoyed moving with in the maze which reminded me of the movie i watched called the maze runner. My most exciting moment was the visit to Museo Storico Militare Brigata Catanzaro located with in the park where i got a chance to view the historical military attires, guns, etc and the recreation of military formations used by commanders during the world war.

My most exciting moment was the visit and tour to the capital city, Rome, where we had a chance to visit the Vatican City and St. Peter's Basilica. We also explored the Trevi Fountain, the Spanish Steps, and Ancient Rome, where we visited the Colosseum, Roman Forum, and Palatine Hill, it was so exciting to experience the beauty of Rome where history speaks for itself. It was greatest journey of adventure and unforgettable memories.

CAPTIONED PHOTOS



Figure 1: A photo of me at Entebbe airport the day of my departure



Figure 2:Me at Doha international airport as we waited for a flight to continue to Rome.



Figure 3: Peter (left) and I (right) with the Doctor (center) on the general surgery unit.



Figure 4: A selfie with Peter(left), Dr Emanuela Procopio(center) and I (Right) at the Neurosurgery unit.



Figure 5: Dr Cirillo Francesco (center) I (left) and Peter (right) on cardiology ward



Figure 6: A photo of me in the cystoscopy unit during my rotation in urology.



Figure 7: A photo of me and my colleagues with Dr Rocco (extreme right) and Dr Morrone (second left) at infectious disease unit.



Figure 8: A photo of me and my colleagues with Dr Francesco (center) after attending the outpatient clinic at infectious disease unit.



Figure 9: Professor Alessandro Russo(middle), with me and my colleagues on infectious diseases unit



Figure 10: Professor Angelo Lavano(center), I (left) and Peter (right) on Neurosurgery unit



Figure 11: A photo of me at the main entrance of UMG



Figure 12: A photo of me and my colleagues with madam Ivana (center) on the first day of reporting to the university for Ruth and Deborah.



Figure 13: A photo of me during orthopedics summer school week.



Figure 8: A photo of me at St. Peter's Basilica in Vatican City, Rome



Figure 9: A photo of me(right), Deborah (center) and Ruth(left) during our tour of Rome city.



Figure 10: A photo with our friends and colleagues after we has our last lunch together for me and peter as we said as Goodbye

LESSONS LEARNT

1. Advanced Clinical Exposure in a high resource setting. I observed different advanced procedures, such as coronary artery bypass surgery, arthroscopic repair of rotator cuff, etc, which expanded my knowledge and understanding of advanced medicine and surgery.
2. During the infectious disease rotation, I learnt how culture and sensitivity is done mostly address and to prevent antimicrobial resistance.
3. Appreciated the impact of determinants of health and disease e.g Use of technology in patient management, use of air ambulances to transport patients, availability of hospital supplies and other facilities free of charge to patients in government hospitals even if it includes organ transplants etc.
4. Importance and integration of research findings into daily healthcare practice.

5. I learnt the Management of Infectious disease patients in resource rich setting using treatment like monoclonal antibodies, new generation antibiotics and long-acting antibiotics.
6. I learnt a new language and respect for the Italian culture, language and health practices and improving my language skills.
7. I learned to appreciate and adjust to different cultural norms from food and the day today routine.
8. The significance of teamwork, collaboration and respect among colleagues and the doctors, and nurses on the ward.
9. Time Management, from clinical rotation to public transport and managing my personal schedules, which I hope to carry on in my day today life and my entire medical career.
10. Confidence and Independence: Living, learning, and traveling independently in a foreign country enhanced my self confidence, adaptability, and decision-making skills.
11. Global exposure. The experience broadened my view of medicine and life on a global perspective and I was exposed to the Italian health system.

CHALLENGES FACED

1. Delay of visa

There was a delay in securing our visa, due to the malfunction of the visa application portal from the Italian embassy in Uganda and failure of the embassy to respond to the emails which made the starting date of the mobility program being postponed.

2. Lack of Orientation

Navigating the new environment, including the university campus, hospital, and surrounding areas, was initially a challenge because we didn't get a chance to be oriented around.

3. Language Barrier

Communication and navigation in clinical and daily settings was difficult initially because Italian language was unfamiliar in the beginning.

4. Inadequate funds

I was personally not given the disadvantaged top up funds which led me into a financial crisis given that the cost of air tickets was so high and I used part of my welfare fees to cover it up. This made it difficult for me to survive in a new place with the high standards of living in Italy.

SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS

1. Delay of visa

- The two universities should develop a special collaboration with the Italian embassy in Uganda so that the embassy processes visa for Erasmus students in time and easily schedule their special visa interview appointments.

2. Lack of Orientation

- I suggest the host university to provide a structured orientation program to Erasmus students through student mentors to help navigate through the new places.

3. Language Barrier

- The sending university should introduce language lessons to the students as early as possible.
- The hospitals should assign mentors or staff for exchange students to be able to translate.
- Students should take the initiative to learn new phrases and use the available tools like different applications e.g google translate to interpret for them.

4. Inadequate fund.

- The sending university should use reliable methods of evaluating students for their disadvantaged background so that they are not evaluated wrongly.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To the Sending Institution (Makerere University)

1. Timely interviews and Selection.

Conducting interviews and confirming selected students early enough would allow them to have enough time to process travel documents, learn the language and do all the necessary preparations for the exchange.

2. Timely Italian Language Preparation

Offering more timely and longer-duration Italian classes before departure would enable students learn the language to some extent before they travel.

3. Pre travel orientation.

The university should introduce formal orientation to the students intending to go for exchange programs, this can be done through the administrators and student alumni for the program.

4. After mobility mentorship.

The university should create platforms like clubs where returning students can share experiences, knowledge and mentorship for students who wish to take part in exchange programs in future.

To the Receiving Institution (Università degli Studi Magna Græcia di Catanzaro)

1. Orientation on Arrival

An organized orientation covering campus navigation, hospital premises, and local amenities would ease adaptation during the first week.

2. Providing professional translators, students or staff especially during clinical rotations would help exchange students fully participate in patient care and discussions.

3. Student alumni engagements

The university should maintain track of the alumni students of the Erasmus program and create programs and opportunities where they can participate in, for example research, seminars, conferences and training opportunities. This would Strengthen ties and partnership between students and the two universities through Erasmus+ alumni networks.

CONCLUSION

My two-month exchange program at the Università degli Studi Magna Græcia di Catanzaro has been a wonderful learning experience for me. I appreciated the knowledge acquired during classes as it is applied to clinical management of patients. This has been an instrumental step for me to prepare to work in the real world more so the high resource setting, after completion of my medical training. I was able to learn a number of new things like Health system organization, Modernization and technology advances in health sector in a developed country, made new international friendships, and learnt Italian language, new culture that will be very beneficial to me in my future practice and will benefit the patients I encounter both my home country and in outside countries like Italy. I deeply appreciate both my home and host institutions for giving this great opportunity.

