

**REPORT ON THE ERASMUS+ STUDENT EXCHANGE PROGRAM AT MAGNA
GRAECIA UNIVERSITY OF CATANZARO (19th May- 18th July 2026)**



MAKERERE

UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF HEALTH SCIENCES

SCHOOL OF MEDICINE



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I give thanks to the Almighty God for having enabled me to be chosen for this exchange program, His hand has been upon me from the very onset of my desire to take part in this program. I thank Him for the guidance, provision, grace and most importantly his Love.

I extend my sincere appreciation to Makerere University for providing us with such an opportunity. In a very special way, I would like to thank the International Office under the leadership of Madam Suzan Byekwaso and Mr. Alex Kisakye, for everything they did to ensure we went for the ERASMUS PROGRAM on time, their dedication and unwavering support ensured we got everything we needed to travel in time. I was so much inspired by the passion they put into ensuring the welfare of each exchange student.

I am deeply grateful to the Erasmus+ Program, Magna Graecia University of Catanzaro, and all the involved coordinators for granting me this enriching opportunity. Special thanks to Prof. Hribal Marta Letizia for her dedicated coordination of our stay, and to Miss Ivanna Cariniti for their kind assistance and continuous support throughout the program. Your hospitality and efforts greatly eased our settling-in process and made us feel at home in a new environment.

I would also like to extend heartfelt thanks to the entire team at Azienda Ospedaliera Universitaria “Renato Dulbecco” particularly Professor Alessandro Russo, Prof. Antonia Rizzuto, Prof Giuseppe Sena, Prof. Angelo Lavano, Prof. Giorgio Gasparini, Doctressa Hellen Morrone and whose mentorship and clinical insight greatly shaped my experience. To the resident doctors and the entire medical staff thank you for your patience, guidance, and willingness to share your knowledge.

A special mention goes to Dr. Lwanga Sempijja who even in his absence ensured we had transportation waiting for us at the train station to take us to the Residenza.

Lastly to everyone who made this experience possible, I am immensely grateful for the personal and professional exposure and may God bless the works of your hands.

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

UMG – Università Magna Graecia

MakCHS – Makerere University College of Health Sciences

SOM – School of Medicine

Dott/Dr – Dottore / Doctor

Prof. – Professor

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PRE-DEPARTURE EXPERIENCE

Selection phase

The opportunity to participate in the Erasmus+ exchange program at Magna Græcia University of Catanzaro began as something I heard about from friends while I was in year one but it was gradually transformed into an exciting reality when I reached year 4. The selection process was both competitive and rigorous, requiring a minimum CGPA of 3.6, comprehensive curriculum vitae, a motivation letter outlining the reason behind my university of choice, recommendations from doctors and a formal interview.

The call for applications was announced by the International Office at Makerere University midway through my fourth year's first semester. I was hesitant in the beginning because I did not have a passport nor was I vaccinated against yellow fever and Hepatitis. I was also told that in one way or the other I had to invest in my own money as well on top of the rotation being fully funded, so I did not apply at first. It was when the international office made the second call that I applied. I decided to get authentic information first; I approached one of the students that went before (Jamal) who told me that everything was indeed fully funded. He directed me on how to get a passport and directed me to KCCA clinic that vaccinated for free. Encouraged by curiosity, ambition, and the testimonies of students who had previously taken part, I submitted my application, expressing a clear preference for Magna Græcia University (UMG).

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 that life-changing email: I had been selected for the exchange. The confirmation was met with immense gratitude and an immediate sense of responsibility to prepare for what lay ahead.

Preparation phase

My colleague (Nabukalu T Deborah) and I 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.

Preparing for travel came with its own set of challenges, including navigating visa applications and dealing with appointment delays. Fortunately, I was able to complete all necessary vaccinations including Hepatitis B and Yellow Fever. I also received financial support from the Erasmus Program that enabled me to book my flight ticket in time.

We, however were not able to undertake Italian classes while in Uganda. We heavily relied and learnt a bit of Italian from Duolingo.

TRAVEL EXPERIENCE

First Flight

We set off on May 18th, 2026, this marked a very defining moment in my life, **my very first time flying**. My excitement was over the roof, with a bit of nervousness. I traveled with my colleague on Qatar Airways, departing from Entebbe International Airport in the evening. After a brief layover in Doha, we continued on to Rome. From Rome we travelled to Lamezia via a high-speed train.

My experience flying with Qatar was nothing short of amazing, we had the most reassuring and dedicated cabin crew, we were online courtesy of star link while in air and had a lot to eat.

Warm Welcome

We arrived at Lamezia Terme Centrale on the 20th May 2026, where we were warmly received by our colleagues Tayebwa Carol and Ssenyonga Peter who had gone before us about three weeks ago. Their presence made a new country feel less lonely. They helped us book and board a train from Lamezia centrale to Catanzaro Lido. We briefly got something to eat and sat in the taxi that was ordered for us by Dr Lwanga. They personally escorted us to the University Residence, where we were helped to settle in and shown around. This was to be 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 the university Mensa the next day.

Shortly after arrival, we got in touch with Ms. Ivanna at the Erasmus Office to report our arrival. She warmly welcomed us and on May 21st, we were officially signed in and our mobility program commenced. Through the coordination between the Erasmus Office and Didattica, faculty in charge of medicine, we were successfully registered and issued with the learning schedule for the different departments and a booklet 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. As part of the Erasmus+ exchange, I had the opportunity to rotate through both the Infectious and Tropical Diseases Unit and the Department of Surgery at Azienda Ospedaliera Universitaria “Renato Dulbecco”.

Under the mentorship of Professor Alessandro Russo and several surgical professors, I took part in ward rounds and the Ambulatorio. These experiences expanded my clinical knowledge, strengthened my diagnostic skills, and offered a closer view of interdisciplinary teamwork in patient care.

I must say, I have never seen people as welcoming and loving as Italians. I discovered true freedom living among the locals, they are comfortable in their skin, they openly complement each other and do not wait for special days to do special things, I carried this liberty back with me.

Living in Southern Italy for two months offered me a refreshing cultural and environmental shift. As someone experiencing Europe for the first time, I was struck by the calm and laid-back lifestyle of the locals, their deep sense of community, and the warm way they interacted even with strangers. The culture placed a strong emphasis on family, food, and daily rituals taking walks with their dogs in the evening, which I found heartwarming and grounding. Though I initially faced a language barrier, many people were kind and patient, and I gradually picked up essential Italian phrases that helped me navigate daily life and hospital routines.

While at the university, we linked up with the Rotaract club of Catanzaro through Dr Franchesco, we met him at the Infectious disease outpatient where he was working. We participated in the Bella project (we fundraised for food for Bella and her puppies). We also twinned Rotaract Mulago with Rotaract Catanzaro.

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 affiliated with the university. This placement provided a diverse and enriching academic experience across multiple medical and surgical specialties. For some surgical specialties like Neurosurgery and Orthopedics we rotated at the sister hospital Azienda Ospedaliera Universitaria Pugliese for some of the days.

I began with a two-week rotation in the Infectious and Tropical Diseases Unit. Subsequently, I rotated through General Surgery, Neurosurgery, Orthopedics and Urology each for one week. We were not able to rotate in cardiac surgery because it was very busy at the moment and could not admit students to its wards.

The 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, and learned from both consultants and resident doctors, who offered guidance and teaching throughout. It was in Italy that I first saw long-acting antibiotics (Dalbavancin and Oritavancin) in use. I also appreciated the use of ozone therapy in pain management.

I and my colleagues also attended the Forte Summer School organized by the department of Orthopedics. Magna Graecia University was hosting and Prof Gasaparini signed us up. Summer school went on for a whole week from morning to evening, we attended afternoon sessions only because in the morning hours we had to attend ward.

Infectious Disease Rotation (25th May – 1st June, 7th July to 9th July)

Our first clinical rotation took place in the Infectious Diseases Department at Azienda Ospedaliera Universitaria “Renato Dulbecco”, under the supervision of Professor Alessandro Russo. We were introduced to a dedicated multidisciplinary team and immersed in the full continuum of care — from initial patient assessment to diagnosis, treatment, and follow-up. A key highlight was learning about the use of multiplex PCR testing, a rapid diagnostic tool that enabled early and accurate identification of infectious agents. This significantly improved diagnostic efficiency and informed appropriate therapeutic decisions. I also learnt the best antibiotics to give for each of the bacteria that was identified. Special thanks to Prof Russo and Dr Hellen Morrone, Dr Vincenzo and Dr Roko for translating for us to English during ward rounds.

I was particularly impressed by the team’s strong emphasis on antimicrobial stewardship. Diagnostic tests were applied deliberately at each stage of care not only to confirm infections but also to monitor treatment response and support the rational use of antibiotics. This methodical approach helped prevent antimicrobial resistance (AMR) and promoted evidence-based prescribing. The experience strengthened my understanding of infectious disease management in a resource-rich setting and highlighted the critical role of diagnostics in improving patient outcomes and safeguarding global health.

Italian Language Training

In conjunction with our clinical work, we attended Italian language classes with Prof on Friday. We had one class with him. This session built on the basics we learned through Duolingo. Despite the language barrier, the class helped us better understand and communicate in shops since he taught us the use of words like perche, quando, quanto etc. He also taught us how to count in Italian.

Surgery Rotation (2nd June – 17th July 2026)

We commenced a five-week surgery rotation covering general surgery, neurosurgery, orthopedic surgery, and urology

General Surgery (4th – 8th June, 10th to 14th July)

We worked under Prof. Antonia Rizzuto, head of general surgery and Prof Giuseppe Sena. We participated in both ward rounds and operating theatre sessions, observing aseptic techniques, anesthetic protocols, and surgical procedures. I gained hands-on understanding of patient flow from admission through surgery to recovery.

Neurosurgery (22nd – 26th June)

This rotation was under Prof. Angelo Lavano, where we were introduced to advanced neurosurgical care, including pre-op physiotherapy and post-op rehabilitation. Among several surgeries, a decompression and laminectomy for a 64-year-old male with lumbar spinal stenosis

and removal of a neuro stimulator were the most impactful to observe. A special thanks goes out to this ward, thank you for keeping up our photos all over your office Dr Lavano.

Orthopedic Surgery (15th June –19th June)

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 and Morton's neuroma. In theatre, I observed the surgical management of Primary Hip Osteoarthritis using Total Hip Arthroplasty with posterior approach, which deepened my understanding of orthopedic procedures and post-operative care. Thanks to Prof Giorgio for enrolling us into Orthopedic summer school.

Urology surgery (1st July – 7th July)

In my sixth week, I rotated through the Urology Department, 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.

A significant part of our experience involved observing cystoscopy transurethral (transurethral cystoscopy), a procedure routinely used for the diagnosis and follow-up of conditions such as bladder tumors, strictures, and recurrent urinary tract symptoms. I gained a better appreciation for the precision and visual clarity offered by this minimally invasive approach. However, what stood out most for me was the use of ultrasound-guided prostate biopsy, particularly in the evaluation of prostate cancer and benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH). Seeing how real-time imaging was used to accurately target and sample suspicious prostate tissue highlighted the importance of early and precise diagnostics in urologic care. This rotation deepened my interest in minimally invasive procedures and emphasized the importance of technology-assisted diagnostics in modern urology.

SOCIAL EXPERIENCE

Cultural exposure

I was intrigued by the rhythm and simplicity of daily life in Catanzaro. Life there felt peaceful and relaxed, with a slower pace unlike the noise and hustle I was accustomed to back home.

One of the most charming aspects was the tradition of evening walks families and couples taking leisurely strolls late in the evening, enjoying each other's company and the warm Mediterranean air. 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 way hotter than what I was used to, especially in June all through to when we returned, but the occasional visits to the beach made it more bearable and refreshing. The local cuisine was rich in flavor and deeply rooted in Italian tradition, with dishes like pasta, lasagna, and pizza forming the core of most meals. Overall, immersing myself in this lifestyle gave me a fresh appreciation for simplicity, community, and tradition in everyday living.

Building connections

We managed to make as many friends as possible. My first friend was a Ugandan called Maria; she is a waitress at the Pizzeria Ciro di Angelo Ceci. She introduced us to more of her friends. I made other friends like Saima, a beautiful Pakistan lady doing sports science. We also met and interacted and shared with fellow medical students of which we created strong relationships with some.

Within the hospital, I formed meaningful relationships with resident doctors, medical students, and professors across various departments. These bonds were strengthened by shared learning experiences, clinical teamwork, and moments of informal interaction that helped break cultural barriers. Being part of the Erasmus+ exchange student community further enriched my social experience. Interacting with peers from diverse countries gave me insight into global perspectives on medicine and life. The group fostered a sense of belonging, and their stories and support made Catanzaro feel like a second home. These relationships not only enhanced my learning environment but also left me with friendships I hope to carry with me into the future.

Adapting to new life

Thanks to the immense support we received upon arrival, settling into life in Catanzaro was generally smooth. While we occasionally got lost navigating the university campus and nearby areas, these moments turned into opportunities to explore and become more independent. One of the most significant challenges we encountered was the language barrier, as most clinical and social interactions were in Italian. However, rather than being discouraged, this challenge became a motivation to actively learn the language, enhancing both our communication skills and our ability to engage meaningfully in hospital activities. We were fortunate to receive continuous support from our friends, resident doctors, and even professors who generously translated and explained whenever necessary, ensuring we remained involved every step of the way.

Adjusting to practical aspects of daily life, like using the scheduled public bus system which only stopped at designated stations was initially unfamiliar, as this is not standard practice in Uganda. Yet, these differences contributed to my personal growth. I learned to be more punctual, organized, and self-reliant, qualities essential both in medicine and everyday life. More than just adapting, I evolved. I developed a greater appreciation for cultural differences, became more confident in unfamiliar settings, and gained language skills that I now consider a valuable asset. This period of adjustment transformed into a season of growth, helping me build resilience and flexibility that will undoubtedly shape my professional and personal journey.

Exploration

Beyond the academic and clinical experiences, the exchange gave me an extraordinary chance to explore Catanzaro and other beautiful parts of Italy. Located in the Calabria region, Catanzaro is known for its peaceful atmosphere, breathtaking coastlines, and delicious gelato my favourite being marron glacé. I thoroughly enjoyed eating ice cream (Fodgio Latte flavour) by the sea side.

Among my favourite coastal spots was the coast along Terminal Teti, a lively seaside still within Catanzaro.

My colleague and I also took the opportunity to venture beyond Calabria, exploring Italy's rich cultural and historical tapestry. We visited Rome, we toured the colosseum and surrounding historic areas. The Colosseum was Rome's grand amphitheatre. Its ingenious system of vaulted arches and a retractable awning reflected Roman Engineering at its peak. The surrounding areas we visited included The Roman Forum, and the Palatine Hill.

We also visited St Peter's Basilica, Vatican City. We also visited the Trevi Fountain (the largest Baroque fountain in Rome) designed by Nicola Salvi.

My colleague and I also visited Tropea (located on Calabria's coast). We looked over the Tyrrhenian Sea on the cliff top. We swam in the sea and also visited the Santa Maria dell 'Isola church located on a rocky promontory just off Tropea's beach.

LESSONS LEARNT

- I learnt the use of an antibiogram at every step of treating infections caused by bacteria. I was privileged to see and learn how antibiotics were given specific to the causative bacteria.
- I deepened my clinical exposure across specialties like orthopaedics, neurosurgery, urology, infectious diseases, and general surgery working through real cases like FBSS, spinal cord stimulators, hip osteoarthritis, and breast carcinoma.
- I learnt how careful testing and documentation were integrated at every stage of care to prevent antimicrobial resistance (AMR), a practice I hope to promote back home.
- Advanced Clinical Exposure: I witnessed cutting-edge procedures such as image-guided prostate biopsies, which expanded my understanding of modern medical techniques.
- Teamwork and Collaboration: Working with professors, resident doctors, and students from diverse backgrounds taught me the value of collaboration and the strength of multidisciplinary teams.
- Language and Communication: Immersion in an Italian-speaking environment improved my language skills and taught me to communicate more effectively across language barriers.
- Cultural Adaptation: I learned to appreciate and adjust to different cultural norms from food and family routines to how the community values relaxation and social connection.
- Time Management: Balancing clinical duties, travel, and personal study helped me become more disciplined and efficient with time a skill I will carry forward into my medical career.
- Confidence and Independence: Living, learning, and traveling independently in a foreign country enhanced my self-reliance, adaptability, and decision-making skills.

- Global Medical Perspective: The experience broadened my view of medicine, showing me how health systems can function differently yet effectively inspiring me to be part of system-level improvements in my own country.
- Working with Italian-language patient records and translating them into English case write ups gave me practical experience navigating language barriers in a clinical setting, a real-world skill for any international elective.
- While in theatre in was lucky to have been given the opportunity to learn how and be taught how General anaesthesia is given. This was not part of the learning agreement but I was glad to have been given the opportunity to intubate.
- I appreciated the division of labour at AOU Mater Domini, every one knew their role in patient care and they did it so well. This taught me to love my part as a Doctor and the mastery that came with it.
- I had to navigate practical relocation challenges: sorting out Vodafone Italy for connectivity, understanding Schengen visa rules, and adjusting to a new environment (including skin/climate adjustment concerns).
- Managing the transition from Makerere's system to UMG's clinical environment sharpened my ability to adapt quickly to new institutional cultures and expectations.
- I learnt how to navigate every new place using google maps and AI.
- I learnt many common Italian phrases and words. This greatly helped me to fit in.
- I used the opportunity to grow my X account from three followers to 193 followers.

CHALLENGES AND SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS

- **Language barrier.** Italian is the wisely used language in Italy and knowing only English puts you at a big disadvantage as you won't be able to communicate at all.
I suggest starting the recruitment process earlier like at the end of third year, and by beginning of fourth year those going to Italy are known and Italian classes can be started months from the date of departure. It would be nice to go Italy with an Italian proficiency of least B1. An alternative solution is ensuring the doctors in every ward know some English to help communicate with us in English so that we can benefit more, otherwise I have had to rotate in specialties where only the head of the unit knows English and the rest don't know. Making learning harder.
- **Transport costs.** The university is in a segregated place, so to buy anything, ranging from water to drugs to essential needs, you need to take a bus to get to Catanzaro Lido or the city. This puts a huge financial stress on the exchange students. For the times we went to the city hospital we also had to buy at least two tickets per day(3.6 euros)
I suggest building a supermarket near the university, in the mean time, a transport allowance could be given to exchange students to enable them easily access the city. Or they could be given some form of ID that exempts exchange students from paying transport.

- **The rooms at the residence are so beautiful but very hot.** Having had to stay in Italy during summer, all places without an AC on were unbearable. The rooms at the residence do not have air conditioning so we slept with open doors and windows. **I suggest installing ACs in rooms to make them liveable in during the heatwaves.**
- **No orientation given.** Navigating the new environment, including the university campus, hospital, and surrounding areas, was initially confusing and overwhelming. **I suggest day one be given for orientation upon reporting arrival to Ms Ivanna.**

RECOMMENDATIONS

To the Sending Institution (Home University)

1. Timely Selection and Interviews

Conducting interviews and confirming selected students well in advance would allow them sufficient time to process travel documents, learn the language, and prepare mentally and emotionally for the exchange.

2. Extended Pre-departure Italian Language Preparation

Offering more intensive and longer-duration Italian classes before departure would greatly aid communication in both clinical and community settings.

3. Cross-Cultural Exchange Initiatives

Pairing outgoing exchange students with local Italian students (or alumni of the program) before travel would help build early cultural understanding, reduce culture shock, and foster long-term international relationships.

4. Post-Exchange Engagement

Creating platforms where returning students can share experiences, mentor future exchange participants, or take part in related academic projects would extend the value of the exchange.

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

1. Allow us work and learn from the nurses as well. I recognize that in Italy there is division of labour and so doctors don't do what nurses do, however, in Uganda we

as medical students are required to know some basic skills like cannulating, catheterizing, cleaning wounds and taking off samples from the patient.

2. Consider giving students transport allowances and supplying new students with bus schedules, route maps, and mobile app recommendations would reduce transportation-related confusion.
3. Consider installing Acs in the rooms at the Residenza
4. Assignment of Academic or Clinical Mentors
Assigning each exchange student a dedicated mentor would enhance learning, provide a point of contact, and offer personal guidance through clinical rotations.
5. Structured Orientation on Arrival
An organized orientation covering campus navigation, hospital workflow, and local amenities would ease adaptation during the first week.
6. Access to Language and Translation Support. Providing professional translators or bilingual staff especially during clinical practice—would help exchange students fully participate in patient care and discussions.
7. Fostering Long-Term Collaboration. Strengthening ties between students and the university through Erasmus+ alumni networks or collaborative research opportunities would enrich both institutions and inspire future partnerships.

CONCLUSION

My two-month exchange program at the Università degli Studi Magna Græcia di Catanzaro was a truly transformative experience academically, professionally, and personally. It expanded my global perspective, enhanced my clinical competence, and allowed me to appreciate the value of cultural diversity in healthcare. The friendships I formed, the lessons I learned, and the challenges I overcame will remain with me for a lifetime. I am deeply grateful to both my home and host institutions for making this unforgettable journey possible. Grazie Mille Per Favore.

CAPTIONED PHOTOS



Figure 1: A photo of me(left) and my colleague and friend, Deborah (right) at Entebbe airport



Figure 2:Arrival in Rome

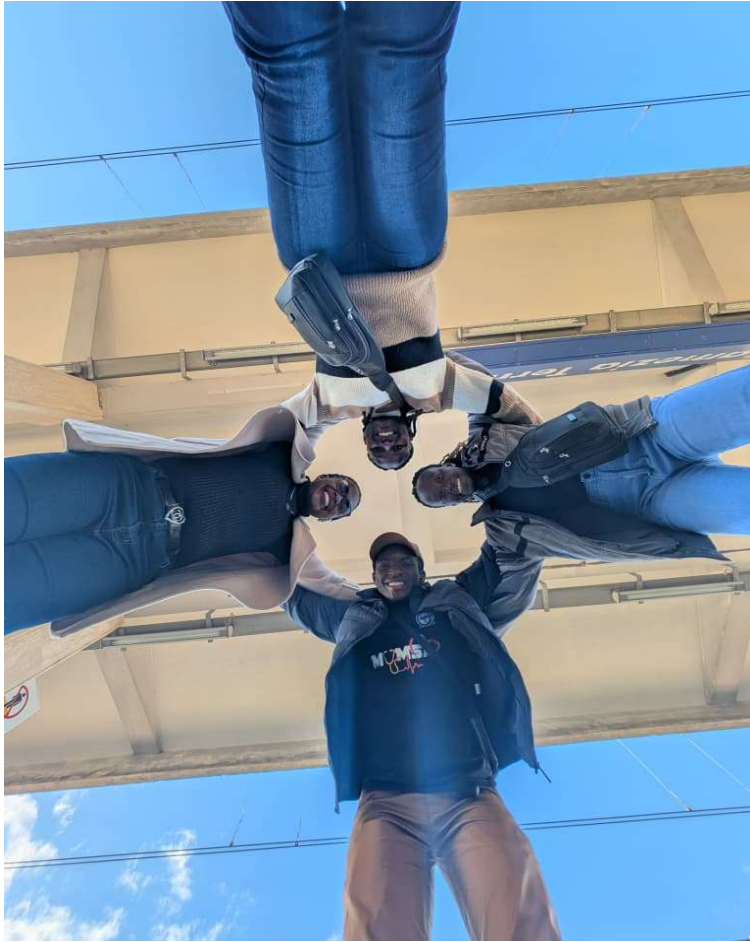


Figure 3: Peter Ssenyonga (below) and Deborah (opposite Peter) then Carol (on the right) and I (on the left opposite Carol) at Lamezia Terme Centrale Train station



Figure 4: A selfie of us on our first day at campus with Peter and Carol



Figure 5: A picture of Deborah(right) and I on the left on our first day at campus.



Figure 6: A picture of us with Ms Ivanna Cariniti upon reporting our arrival



Figure 7: Professor Rocco Damiano (middle) Deborah (right) and I (left) on Urology ward



Figure 8: A photo with the entire Urology team



Figure 9: A photo of us and our friends at the Mensa during Lunch time



Figure 10: A selfie taken by our friend Brice at lunch



Figure 11: Professor Alessandro Russo(left), and I (right) on infectious diseases unit



Figure 12: Professor Angelo Lavano(middle), Anne (right) and I (left) on Neurosurgery unit



Figure 13: A photo of me at the main entrance of Azienda Ospedaliero Universitaria Renato Dubblecco



Figure 14: A photo at the community park of Deborah(Right) and I (left)



Figure 15: A photo of me at the Colosseum



Figure16: A photo of me in front of the ancient temple of Antoninus and Faustina



Figure 17: A photo of me outside St. Peter's Basilica in Rome



Figure18: A photo of me in front of the Fontana Di Trevi



Figure19: A photo with our friends on the General surgery ward



Figure 20: A photo of me in Tropea



Figure 21: A picture of Peter (Left) and I (Right) at the Arco di Costantino



Figure 22: A picture of me at the UMG Campus



Figure 23: A picture of us with the Rotarians from Rotaract Catanzaro at the Twinning ceremony between Rotaract Mulago and Rotaract Catanzaro, this took place at the President's apartment in Catanzaro





Figure 25: A picture of Deborah and I on arrival at Entebbe National Airport