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Latitudes: Few refugees go to college. These students have a plan for change.

1 message

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Latitudes

THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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Winning students have a ‘passion’ for expanding college access to refugees

When Joselyto Charite Baho sat for Rwanda’s college-entrance exam, many of his fellow test takers were refugee students.

Rwanda has become a hub for forcibly displaced people, sheltering more than 135,000, most fleeing political unrest and violence in two

neighboring countries, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Not far from Baho's family home is a refugee camp.

But when Baho started his studies at Kepler College, in Kigali, Rwanda's capital, there were few refugees among his classmates. This isn't unusual — while about 70 percent of displaced students in Rwanda are enrolled in high school, just 4 percent go on to college.

He wanted to erase that disparity. Together with three friends — Amina Mkova and Obed Korusenge Nsanzimfura, who also attend Kepler, and Nimco Ibrahim, a student at African Leadership University, also in Rwanda — he entered a global student competition focused on refugees and higher education, sponsored by the UNHCR, the United Nations refugee agency, and CIEE, an American-based study-abroad and student-exchange organization.

In late June, the Rwandan group, called the Eagles, beat out 130 teams from 38 countries, winning \$50,000 to put their idea, a comprehensive mentoring program for refugee high-school and college students, into action. Two other teams, one from Wellesley College and another made up of friends from four different American colleges who met while studying abroad, also pitched their ideas at the CIEE Global Internship Conference, in London.

The Eagles' idea was "simple and elegant," said Stacey Purviance, a member of CIEE's conference-planning team who helped run the student challenge.

By studying the issue, they identified key stumbling blocks. Displaced students often did not understand the complicated college-application process and lacked the funds to pay for their studies. Even if they won admission, they struggled to adjust to higher education.

Refugee students need a helping hand to surmount those hurdles, the Rwandan team realized. They proposed a multistep system of mentoring, first with recent high-school graduates, to improve their

computer literacy, ensure that they have the academic prerequisites for college admission, and assist with their applications.

Once the displaced students start college, mentors would help them tap financial assistance, provide academic and social guidance in the transition to college, and act as a support network. And the mentorship would continue as the displaced students near college graduation, with networking, interview practice, and workplace simulations.

For refugee students, it's not just about tackling one challenge, Ibrahim said. "We wanted a program that would solve all the problems together."

The Eagles will get mentoring themselves, with Ruth Nyabuto, an academic manager at the University of Oxford Refugee Studies Centre and one of the refugee experts who judged the competition, advising them.

Team members are working to develop a curriculum, which will be delivered online, on campuses, and in refugee camps. They also will recruit and train mentors — fellow students with similar academic interests and backgrounds — with the goal of running a small pilot program later this year. Under their ambitious timeline, they hope to have the full program up and running in about 15 months.

Purviance said CIEE started the competition to give students an opportunity to use their skills on real-world problems. One of the other top teams proposed building an app to help refugee students network, get translation support, and access local and international resources. The other focused on setting up a system to evaluate the credentials of students and graduates who lost transcripts and diplomas when they were displaced, and providing them with a globally recognized certificate.

Sponsoring the student challenge “resonated with CIEE’s efforts to break down barriers between different people, cultures, and nations,” said James P. Pellow, the organization’s chief executive. The refugee crisis is one of the most globally pressing issues, he said.

There are more than [31 million refugees worldwide](#), according to the UNHCR. While the agency’s goal is to have 15 percent of college-age refugees [pursuing higher education](#) by 2030, only about 7 percent currently do so.

Mkova, the Eagles’ captain, said her team members “had a lot of passion” for the project because it was personal to them. “We don’t treat them as refugees but as friends who have the right to have access to higher education,” she said.

Read more about higher education’s efforts to [support refugee students](#).

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Students from Bangladesh cheer change at home

Bangladeshi students at American colleges are cheering the resignation of the country's prime minister, who had ordered a harsh crackdown on mass protests. Now they are waiting to see what comes next.

Students and postdoctoral fellows in the United States had taken the unusual step of [speaking out](#) against the government suppression. Bangladeshi student groups at more than 100 colleges signed a petition in solidarity with the protesters. Even abroad, students are often hesitant to criticize the government because of fears about the safety of their families at home, said Nasrul Islam, an organizer and former international student.

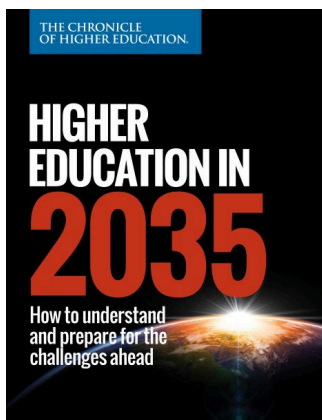
"It's not an easy thing," said Islam, who graduated from the University of New Orleans. "Yet the community has spoken."

Hundreds of people have been killed or injured in the clashes in Bangladesh, which were initially sparked by students' frustration at quotas for government jobs. But the dissatisfaction expanded into broader opposition to the increasingly authoritarian rule of Sheikh Hasina, the longtime prime minister, who resigned and fled the country earlier this week.

Student leaders helped select Muhammad Yunus, an economist and Noble laureate, to lead an [interim government](#). They should also be part of the interim government, Islam said.

Watching from overseas, Bangladeshis hope that democracy and civil society can be restored, but that could take time, Islam said. “People are aggrieved,” he said. “The anger and frustration of 15 years, realistically, we cannot stop in one or two days.”

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Vice-presidential nominee has international-education ties

Gov. Tim Walz, of Minnesota, who will be the Democratic nominee for vice president, spent a formative post-college year teaching in China.

Walz taught English and American history and culture at a high school in Foshan, a city in southern China, after graduating from Chadron State College, in Nebraska, in 1989.

He was warmly welcomed by his Chinese hosts, Walz told the [Chadron Star-Herald](#). “If they had the proper leadership, there are no

limits on what they could accomplish,” he said. “They are such kind, generous, capable people. They just gave and gave and gave to me. Going there was one of the best things I have ever done.”

Walz went to China just a few months after the deadly crackdown on protesters in Beijing’s Tiananmen Square.

Walz said that many of his students — who he described as industrious but not overly creative — hoped to come to the United States to study. “America is ‘it’ in the eyes of the Chinese,” he told the newspaper.

Vice President Kamala Harris named Walz, a former high-school teacher, as her running mate on Tuesday.

Academic exchanges to China have [tumbled](#) due to the pandemic and geopolitical tensions, although both Chinese and American leaders have said they want to reverse the downturn. Walz and his wife previously [organized trips to China](#) for high-school students.

Around the globe

More students are being [expelled](#) from Russian universities amid greater political pressure of higher education.

Medical students from Gaza have been [denied visas](#) to study in Norway because of concerns they might not leave the country after graduation.

Police in Zimbabwe arrested 44 students who were [meeting](#) about education policy, alleging that they were summoned because of complaints that the students were destroying property.

The Chinese government is increasing scrutiny of **foreign degrees** from lesser-ranked institutions.

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And finally ...

As any international traveler will tell you, there comes a time during a trip abroad when you just want a little taste of home.

Chinese athletes, fans, officials, and journalists in Paris have found that in a tiny Chinese restaurant in the 15 arrondissement, located, fortuitously, a few blocks from the Summer Games' table-tennis arena. The lunch rush at Yang Xiao Chu has been, well, Olympian as visitors seek out authentic Sichuan dishes like *suan cai yu* (boiled fish and pickled cabbage soup) and *shui zhu niu rou* (spicy boiled beef).

Chinese athletes are to table tennis what French phenom **Léon Marchand** is to swimming, and Tang Zhongqiu's restaurant has become the sport's **unofficial clubhouse** during the competition.

Tang, who had moved from China to Europe to study hotel management, isn't complaining about the busyness. "I'm still happy even when I'm tired," he said. "I get to meet all kinds of different customers. I get to make many new friends."

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