

Faculty: Zarin Machanda, Assistant Professor, Arts and Sciences

Project Locations: 1-2 weeks in Medford; 5-6 weeks in Uganda, 0-1 weeks in Medford

Dates: Beginning of June – August. Dates are flexible

Project Title: How conservation and health information is transmitted between parents and children and among peer-networks at a Ugandan NGO

Project Details: Professor Machanda is one of the directors of both the Kibale Chimpanzee Project (KCP) and the Kasiisi Project. Together, these two organizations work towards the conservation of Kibale National Park, Uganda through programs that support education, health, and care for the environment in local government primary schools. Since we work with large numbers of children (over 10,000) we need to find ways to most effectively reach the whole school population by working first with small manageable groups which will then carry our health and conservation messages first to their peers and then into the community.

This project will explore how information is best transmitted in 2 ways.

1. Within peer groups. It has been shown that key individuals can change cultures of bullying in schools. Informally, we have already experienced how a few peer educators have raised knowledge of sexual health in hundreds of their classmates. In this project we will explore ways to identify social networks in our schools and test ways that key children can spread our messages of conservation and health both within schools and out into the community.
2. Between Parents and Children. Traditionally sexual information is passed on by paternal aunts and uncles. Changes in family structures have led to a loss of traditional sources of sexual support. This project will explore how cultural taboos prevent parents fulfilling this role and how we can help them become accurate sources of sexual knowledge for their children.

Data from this project will provide valuable information on how information can best be transmitted and consequently how to most effectively plan our programming to reach as many children as possible.

To date, we only have preliminary information on how health information is spread by peer educators, but we have not systematically looked at peer networks and would like to better understand how to do this and how to involve parents specifically. We currently have health and conservation teams who are in the process of gathering some of this information and the students will be tasked with assisting these teams and with providing input from their background research. We are hoping to have one student work on a project looking information transmission within peer groups and another student to work on information transmission between parents and children.

The Research Assistant will spend the first or two week on campus doing some background literature review to assess how different projects around the world have approached these issues. The students will then spend at least 5 weeks in Uganda at the field site to work with our existing health and conservation teams and amass some preliminary data on how our program information is transmitted. They will then spend the last week (either in Uganda or the US) writing up their report and suggesting some ways forward.

Tasks and Responsibilities of Research Assistant:

- Literature review on either a) how peer education networks function around the world and how to best collect data on peer networks or b) how do we assess information transfer between parents and children with respect and what kinds of information are more effectively transferred in this kind of relationship.
- Assist the current health and conservation teams in planning their programming for the summer especially in the design of evaluations with the specific aim of assessing how information is transferred through these networks.
- Assist their team with observations and the collection of data
- Assist with data entry and analysis
- Write a final report synthesizing their findings and with suggestions for how to move forward.

Qualifications:

Required

- Comfortable traveling to a part of the world without first world amenities like running water and reliable electricity
- Be extremely adaptable and patient
- Have an interest in the intersection of health and conversation in the developing world
- Demonstrated personal responsibility and cultural flexibility

Housing in Uganda: Volunteer house near Kibale National Park, near Entebbe.