

GLOBAL UNIVERSITY:

More than a name, a worldwide mission

BY SCOTT HARRUP

By some estimates, 1,000 people die each week in continued civil unrest in the Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire). One of Africa's largest nations, the DRC is a bleak landscape of cities and villages separated by barely navigable roads and almost devoid of essential infrastructure. Though desperately needed, missionaries and other ministry personnel are often unwelcome.

But church growth is still a reality there, and one medium of that growth might surprise analysts: correspondence study. When a class project for an "Evangelism Today" course required a personal gospel witness to five people, one man decided to take the assignment to the next level. Organizing a witnessing crusade in a town, he met with an enthusiastic response and ended up opening a church.

Spurred by the success of that outreach, he turned the church over to local leadership after six months and started a second church in a nearby town. Instead of five gospel presentations, the man used his studies as a foundation for hundreds, resulting in two congregations. His academic achievement was really a side note.

It was all thanks to Global University curriculum.

"We're not just educating people," says Gary SeEVERS, vice president of academic affairs for the

university, headquartered in Springfield, Missouri. "We're not just preparing them for ministry. We're helping to propel them into ministry so people are



Gary SeEVERS

won to Jesus and are able and equipped to train others so the kingdom of God will grow."

FORTY YEARS, 2 MILLION SOULS

Originally known as International Correspondence Institute, a name still used in some regions, Global University has distributed millions of study courses around the world since its inception in

Global University President George Flattery (left) and Ron Pitts, executive vice president, in the university's Springfield, Missouri, warehouse.



George and Esther Flattery

1967, the year missionary George Flattery, now university president, proposed the ministry to the U.S. Assemblies of God.

“We emphasized that by reaching people through the mail, we could reach places that were otherwise closed,” Flattery says. “That was part of the reason behind the nondescript name.”

Flattery and his wife, Esther, communicated their passion for the nascent outreach by personally visiting church leaders and congregations. With their two sons, they traveled to some 35 nations in 10 months’ time during 1969 and 1970. Flattery continued his travels to a total of 60 countries.

“Correspondence work was going on in different fields,” Flattery says, “but nothing had been developed in terms of an overall school that would range from evangelism courses now clear up to graduate studies.”

In 1967, ICI’s umbrella structure pulled together about 200,000 students enrolled in AG courses on the Fellowship’s various mission fields. By 1987, study materials were being sent to 167 countries. In those first 20 years, more than 5 million people enrolled in one or more courses.

In 1999, Berean University, the U.S. AG’s distance-learning college, and ICI University merged to become Global University. Global University’s four divisions (School of Evangelism and Discipleship, Berean School of the Bible, undergraduate School of Theology, and School of

Graduate Studies) totaled 497,333 students at the beginning of 2006. Most significantly, by 2006 an estimated 2 million people around the world had made decisions for Christ as a result of ICI/GU materials.

FOUR SCHOOLS, ONE MISSION

Global University’s four partnering ministries work together to introduce someone to Christ, disciple the new believer with an array of biblical materials, train the growing Christian for ministry,



Keith Heerman

and even equip the continuing student with undergraduate and graduate degrees.

“It’s a seamless curriculum,” says Keith Heerman,

director of university relations. “I try to identify strategies and approaches for the international church to train people to be disciples, church workers, credentialed ministers and to go on to a degree or advanced degree.”

“We’re touching every aspect of Christian ministry,” says Ron Tuttle, vice president for global operations. “We’re able to meet the needs of a country from evangelism to training leaders for a developed church.”

The vast majority of the university’s students — 479,736 out of 497,333 in 2006 — are enrolled in the first-level School of Evangelism and Discipleship, also the avenue through which those 2 million salvation decisions have materialized. The school accounts for the greatest number of Global University courses studied. Courses present the claims of Christ in print, audio, and video, and over the Internet. Online expansion since 2003 has allowed for close to 800,000 electronic course distributions.

The Berean School of the Bible prepares ministers around the world and helps them earn credentials. More than 16,000 students are currently enrolled.

“The development of new curriculum for the Berean program offers a format conducive to translation and use around the world,” says Dilla Dawson, dean of Berean School of the Bible and vice president for U.S. student relations. “It is not dependent on the availability of accompanying textbooks.”

The School of Theology offers undergraduate

degree programs in Bible and theology, pastoral theology, missions and religious education. Nearly 5,000 students are pursuing degrees.



Dilla Dawson

“Thousands more, even though not enrolled with us, study our courses in other Bible schools,” Flattery says.

At the academic apex of the university’s program, the School of Graduate Studies is guiding more than 250 students toward completion of Master of Arts and Master of Divinity degrees with concentrations in New Testament, Old Testament, education, leadership and missions. Students at the graduate level team up with Global University Ph.D. mentors who follow their progress closely.



Global University's international headquarters in Springfield, Missouri

“Almost all of our mentors speak two languages,” Heerman says. “They’ve been on the field. It’s not difficult for them to work with people around the world.”

In all, Global University operates through a network of 232 offices worldwide and works closely with churches, schools and other institutions.

“We reach out to people who speak a variety of languages,” Flattery says. “We are working diligently in most nations of the world.”

All of that work points to one goal. “Our lives, commitment, energy and focus are fixed upon fulfilling the Great Commission throughout the world,” Flattery says.

BREAKING BARRIERS, BUILDING BRIDGES

In 2005, more than 59,000 decisions were made for Christ as a result of Global University materials.

“That is an average of one person coming to Christ somewhere in the world every nine minutes,” says Ron Pitts, executive vice president.

At all hours of the day, often in regions where public gospel witness is outlawed, people from all walks of life are encountering Christ as they study Global University courses.

- In Ethiopia, the university presently serves Addis Ababa Bible College (ABC) and Full Gospel Theological College (FGTC). Steve Pennington,

Global University national director for Ethiopia, reports the growth and service of ABC directly contribute to the growth of the church in Ethiopia.



Pastors and leaders for Ethiopia's growing churches

Nearly every major denomination is led by an ABC graduate, and FGTC is mostly staffed by Global University graduates. This church growth is energizing outreach among the nation's dominant religion.

- A strong emphasis on children's Bible curriculum in the Philippines has drawn in about 120,000 children, and ICI courses are sold in 350 Christian bookstores. “I thank God for ICI. These materials made me realize I am a sinner in need of a Savior,” Myra Organo wrote to the university.

- In Finland, Global University materials are used

extensively to train ministers in undergraduate and graduate programs. The church in Finland has produced the courses at its own expense and distributed them among all of its missions programs in about 40 nations, reports Taina Karhu, ICI/GU national director for Finland.

- Evangelism programs in six ICI national offices in India total 129,000 enrolled students.
- Brazil, the nation with the largest Assemblies of God fellowship, has enrolled some 5 million students in courses over the years. The materials are



Global University courses are a multimedia collection.

particularly effective in prison outreach, and will soon be used to follow up national TV ministries.

- Bangladesh, with only a small Christian population, is home to a growing audience to Global University's *Great Questions of Life* radio program.

- Kenya's thriving fellowship is led almost entirely by ICI/GU graduates.

“Missions is our heart and our burden around the world,” says Pitts. “Although we're based in the United States, our vision is the world. All indications are that 2007 promises to bring new opportunities for winning the lost and training the found around the world.”

TODAY'S WORLD, TOMORROW'S NEED

When Flattery proposed the creation of ICI in 1967, he put forward a goal of reaching 1 million people for Christ. Flattery's passion now is for Global University to partner with like-minded ministries around the world with the goal of seeing 10 million people make salvation decisions.

But the driving force of the university's success, he says, has never been tied to human goals or abilities.

“If I could paraphrase a verse we're all familiar with,” he says, “I'd say, ‘God so loved the globe that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.’ The unwavering commitment of Global University is to keep God's love for the globe flowing through us.” **tpe**

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E-mail your comments to tpe@ag.org.