

Global Mental Health at Palo Alto University

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PAU's Summer 2014 Trip to Rwanda By Bill Froming, Ph.D., Provost

During summer 2014, PAU's Provost, Dr. Bill Froming, three clinical psychologists (Drs. Karen Froming, Amanda Gregory and Allison Thompson) and nine Palo Alto University



(PAU) PhD students traveled to Rwanda to learn more about the 1994 genocide, visit mental health facilities, give presentations at a jointly sponsored conference in mental health in Rwanda, and exchange ideas with Rwandese mental health professionals. The trip was emotionally intense, informative and transformative. It provided the PAU students with a new frame of reference for what they thought they knew about culture and new options for how they might spend their professional careers.

Part of the trip was devoted to learning and understanding what happened in 1994. The group visited the [Kigali Genocide Memorial](#) and the [Murambi Genocide Memorial](#). Each of the memorials have educational displays which gives the background of the genocide. In addition, there is material about other genocides around the world in the 20th century to help visitors understand that this is a human problem, has occurred around the world and continues to happen. Dr. Bill Froming gave context to the evolution of genocide from prejudice and stereotyping, dehumanization, and ultimately, murder.

The trip included a trip to [Butaro hospital](#), which is a collaborative effort between the government of Rwanda and Partners in Health, a Harvard affiliated non-profit global health organization. The hospital is beginning to offer mental health services and the students were able to see what those services look like in a developing country. The kinds of medications available, the number and training of the mental health professionals, the facilities to treat mental health problems and other issues were topics of discussion. They also gave a tour of the facilities that exemplified how thoughtful design can influence mental health in recuperation from illness.

The students also participated in the first mental health conference to examine mental health issues 20 years after the genocide. Along with Rwandan colleagues they presented papers on empirically supported interventions that could be of use with genocide survivors who continue to experience trauma. Much of the focus of these techniques was on self-help as well as group interventions.

Finally the trip included a bit of fun. The group did a hike to visit the highland gorillas that inhabit the forests in northwest Rwanda. The hikes are guided by experts and the chance to see the gorillas in their natural habitat is a thrilling experience. There was also a trip to a national park where all kinds of wildlife roamed freely.