

Western Heads East receives Award of Excellence in Internationalization

On November 6th at Western's Great Hall, the *Western Heads East* project was awarded the **Scotiabank-Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC) Award for Excellence in Internationalization**. Dr. Gregor Reid of Western's Department of Microbiology and Immunology and Lawson scientist, and Bob Gough of Housing at Western, received the award on behalf of the group. In attendance were **His Excellency Ombeni Sefue, The High Commissioner for Tanzania, Minister Plenipotentiary for Tanzania Richard Tibandebage, and His Excellency Eugene Munyakayanza, Ambassador to Rwanda**.

The Western Heads East project is a multi-dimensional effort which embraces the staff, students, faculty of **Western, Lawson and Brescia College**. Intern students spend several months in Mwanza Tanzania where they have been teaching local mothers ('yogurt mamas') how to make a disease-fighting probiotic yogurt. The probiotic strain has been donated by Dr. Reid, Director of the Canadian Research and Development Centre for Probiotics at Lawson and the formulation developed by Dr. Sharateh Hekmat, nutrition scientist at Brescia University College at The University of Western Ontario. Faculty and staff have raised sufficient funds to help build a community kitchen in one of the poorest areas of Tanzania. Over 150 'mamas' have now been taught, and 50 HIV/AIDS patients walk for miles each day to consume the yogurt. For some of them, it is their only meal of the day. The project has been expanding rapidly, and caught the attention of Rwandan scientists and diplomats, thus leading to the Ambassador's visit to London, accompanied by the newly appointed Dean of Medicine at the Rwandan medical school, whose programs are linked to Western's.

Research studies are underway and planned, to determine the benefits of the probiotic yogurt, but there is already some evidence from Mwanza that it may help **reduce diarrhea and enhance immunity**. In addition, a randomized, placebo-controlled study from Dr. Anukam in Nigeria and Dr. Reid, soon to be published in the Journal of Clinical Gastroenterology, has shown that probiotic-supplemented yogurt can increase the CD4 count (a measure of immunity) and rapidly alleviate diarrhea in AIDS patients who are not receiving any anti-retroviral therapy.

In September, a Global grant from CIHR made it possible for WHE faculty Dr. Isaac Luginaah and Dr. Sandra Smeltzer to visit to the Mabatini Community Kitchen where the probiotic yogurt is being produced. Dr. Reid joined them along with Dr. Sven Thormahlen, Vice President R&D Groupe Danone in France and scientist Dr. Raphaelle Bourdet-Sicard. The visit was coordinated by WHE intern Ellena Andoniou. The team met the 'yogurt mamas', the Kivulini Women's Group who helped host the UWO Interns, and the National Medical Research Institute scientists who have been monitoring the quality of the yogurt. The meetings proved very fruitful and have led to the submission of a CIDA/IDRC/CIHR Capacity Building grant application, with the goal of setting up a Clinical Investigation Centre in Mwanza for functional food and vaccine trials on HIV/AIDS.

The AUCC Scotiabank award is **Western's first for this 10 year old competition**. Western President Dr. Paul Davenport received the Award with Dr. Reid and Mr. Gough in Ottawa at the National Arts Centre on October 25th, prior to the local celebration event.



Dr. Davenport, Western President; Bob Gough, Western Housing Department; Dr. Gregor Reid, Microbiology and Immunology accepting the Award in Ottawa at the national Arts Centre on October 25th.



Photo on left, taken in October, 2006 in Mwanza. Back row: Western's Dr. Sandra Smeltzer, Dr. Gregor Reid, WHE Intern Ellena Andoniou, and Western's Dr. Isaac Luginaah.

Joining them outside the Mabatini Community Kitchen are children who have been enjoying the probiotic yogurt (and the attention of the camera!).



Photo above was taken following the WHE Celebration Lunch on November 6th, on a tour of where the yogurt was initially made. From left to right: Dr. Theresa Topic The Principal of Brescia College, Dr. Shari Hekmat, His Excellency Eugene Munyakayanza Ambassador for Rwanda, Dr. Gregor Reid, His Excellency Ombeni Sefue High Commissioner for Tanzania, Dr. Isaac Luginaah, and Tanzanian Minister Richard Tibandebage