

# UAS 2003 Debrief

Christopher Barrington-Leigh

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## 1 Rewards

1. This was my first visit to Africa; it was beautiful and the people inspiring.
2. CE attracts outstanding teammembers. This is key to its continued success, and made the 6 weeks fun for me.
3. The close-quarters group living and working was a raging success, in my view.
4. Personally, I ended up teaching a module more rewarding and relevant to my interests than I had anticipated. Long, relaxed discussions (mixed with some teaching) with small groups of students were the most rewarding interactions for me.

## 2 Ideas for next year

1. Recruit teammembers in Africa (good recruiting was done last year at Stanford)
2. More scheduled time during UAS, especially if the school planning (local and in advance) is a bit smoother than this year. Planned time on and off work could be stricter: daily/weekly schedules with clear "off evenings" and "off time" etc. Weekly plenary and optional meetings were good to facilitate more discussion / growth of organisation. (e.g. this could be accomplished sometimes by splitting into groups of ~3 for discussion). Possibly have a book that everyone should read before arriving, to form a basis for an early discussion?
3. Facilitator of the Day (FOD) has potential along lines suggested this year. Could also lead a "hash" in the evening as dinner starts, to share rewarding and problematic stories from day's work.
4. Discussion of mission and implementation is still needed, in time to inform plans for next year. An emphasis could be made on choosing module topics with an intrinsic (think idiot-proof??) appeal to students by relating to development or other catchy/personal topics as directly as possible. Examples from this year are HIV, rights, careers, globalisation, leadership, etc. Examples for next year might include new energy sources (can be an incredibly exciting motivation for science education).

- (a) My undistilled ideas for a vision: To help Africa's future population take control of their own future (show them they can; inspire them to want to; give support to).
  - (b) And for a mission statement: (1) Do no harm, (2) Empower students [material that allows students to do new things immediately, including interpretation and prediction], empower teachers; (3) Inspire (personal stories, bringing people from all over to show us overcoming national boundaries and facing common responsibilities); (4) Respect (do all this showing respect for local infrastructure, culture, students, teachers, and our own team/development).
  - (c) And for method: (1) Aim to always offer context, i.e. identify whole range of topics we are teaching (and why), (2) return to schools, (3) Variety, diversity, variety: in types of schools, contact times, teaching formats (e.g. simple vs high tech materials), ages, and levels since science and question-asking is important in different but crucial ways for future scientists/experts and for future non-scientist citizens; (4) Strong emphasis on positively changing the status girls/women; (5) Emphasize African (even African American) rôle models, and organise our work around locals invested in our organisation; (6) Recognizing the selfish aspects of what we do, and catering to them, and recognizing the cultural imperialistic aspects of what we do; (7) Emphasize science and skepticism and independent questioning.
  - (d) on Development: for me, "development" as a desirable end is (1) self-sufficiency (2) intellectual self-development of individuals.
5. Empowering local teachers: this came from a teacher. We could be emphasizing more that further questions after we leave can go to teachers; that is, students must respect and challenge their teachers. Focusing a little on empowering the teachers where we go may both further our aims and make us more welcome.
  6. More transparency: [Read, for example, the book "Rebel Code" to glimpse what transparency could mean in a community.] Given how fledgling are the missions and strategies of Cosmos, and how important it is to invite fresh participation, drafts of documents rather than finished versions could be available to the group, as could notes from executive discussions. This makes sense if final/public versions of any given document/idea/etc are showing risks of not being ready in good time. The
  7. Broad theme: Allow the CE mission/implementation to be directed by availability of locals on the ground. It may be Africa (Baby!) but the time of 15 people once assembled is awfully valuable, as demonstrated by the visitation to 6 schools in one morning in 2003. Thus, having a local organiser (and interpreter etc) should be a near condition of UAS visiting a region. Cosmos may need to think about providing stipends for locals for a couple of weeks per year before UAS arrives.

8. interests and preferences of participants. At the beginning of a UAS trip, it makes sense for group discussion to focus on the meaning of and path to sustainable development (in order to direct the trip's activities). By the end of the trip, though, it is the sustainability of Cosmos that becomes primary for directing the next phase (year) of the organisation. I believe the wishes and interests of team members should be acknowledged as being comparably important to the mission, in the following sense. The sustainability of the organisation, and thus any effect we may hope to have, rests in part at the moment on finding people who return for another year [why?]. Our implementation should be flexible enough to make the experience rewarding for participants – i.e. to facilitate their giving as much as they can. It may be important for the executive/organisation to maintain an awareness of who the target of membership is. At the moment I perceive that an emphasis towards teammembers of undergraduate age might be fruitful.
9. Also in the context of catering to teammembers' interests, a conscious decision to focus the group, or individuals, towards secondary schools (or primary) may be worthwhile: several members this year felt less effective in one or the other.
10. Teaching development: Quality of teaching in some cases must be improved. To use an example, O.E.P.'s primary mission is teaching minimum impact wilderness living and ethic, but it is supplemented by a strong mission of pedagogy and teacher development (in their case, every single class is observed and discussed afterwards). This makes it both more effective and more rewarding for participants. Increasing the level of discussion and feedback between teammembers on their teaching would be fruitful. Personally, I would love to see a progression of (evening) discussions during UAS covering people's motivations for coming, development philosophies, sharing of expertise (in order, in part, that others can learn a level beyond that at which we normally teach), and also to form a system for observation and feedback of classes.
11. Do no harm. Some guidelines on various fronts need to be set up under this theme. On teaching, I think it crucial that not only pedagogy be up to standard, but that content not be wrong/misleading. For accountability and professionalism, I believe it ought to be a requirement that teaching does not happen without peer review. That is, any lesson taught ought to have been previewed by at least one person with comparable or superior knowledge in the subject. If this seems disrespectful to team members, then something is wrong with the community tone.
12. Administration of participants and clear communication with potential teammembers: needs continued but rapid improvement. Efforts should be made to make sure teammembers have a realistic idea of whatever is known about what is going to happen; for instance, warning that schools would not be in session in W Cape etc, and that we had a quota to reach in RSA was or would have been fair.
13. Chalk. Anyone who might wish to use chalk in their lesson should bring it with them. It is embarrassing for school teachers/administrators to have to scramble

for some. Cosmos must have a good supply of it donated or purchased.