

HIGHER LEARNING ADAPTING TO SOCIETY'S CHANGING NEEDS

How much did a first class help you?

Getting a first class is every university student's dream. And at every graduation, several of those who get them are honoured. Indeed, it is believed that a first class degree comes with privileges and opportunities to some, such as getting immediate employment, among others. **Desire Mbabaali** spoke to some first class degree holders about the highs and lows of their career journeys and whether having a first class is a sign that one has "arrived".



David Muunga - Bachelor's in Public Administration and Management, Uganda Christian University

I graduated top of my class in 2015 and immediately got a job offer as a teaching assistant at the university. However, I wanted to develop my career outside academia and so I made a few job applications. This is when I realised that a first class degree does not necessarily guarantee one success, but rather presentation. I got a job with Ecobank where I spent close to two years before leaving to enroll for an interdisciplinary PhD programme at Makerere Institute of Social Research (MISR), where I am currently. I also own a media company, where I share my other passions of life. Partially, the first class degree has made my career path easy, but the other half has been a great deal of personal development and character which I believe matter the most.



Jacob Katumustime - Bachelor's of Education (Literature and English), Makerere University

Before I even graduated in 2017, my lecturers had already realised I would get a first class degree. They also asked whether I was sure of getting a job after my studies but I said no. They introduced me to Hana International School, in Nsangi where I got placement for my last school practice, and subsequently a job which I left last year to start studies for my interdisciplinary PhD at MISR. I will not say it is because of the first class but I feel my grades contributed to this scholarship.

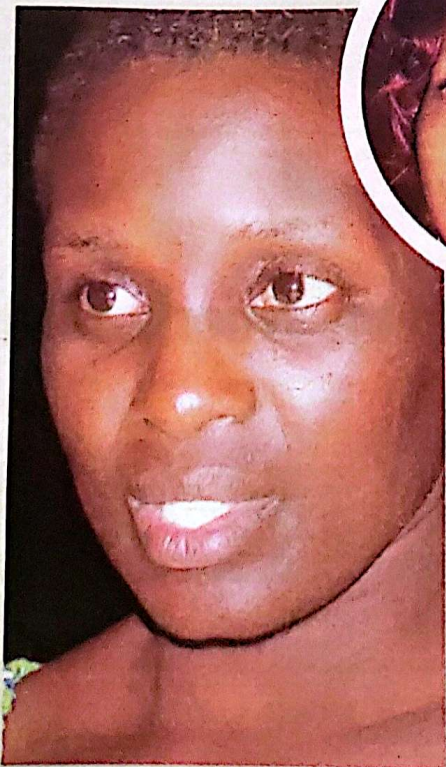
Hassan Bukenya - Diploma in Civil Engineering, Uganda Technical College, Kichwamba

I passed my diploma with a distinction in 2013. After one-and-a-half years of being employed at Mubiru Construction Company, I decided to get into self-employment. I currently build for different people and organisations. I can confidently say the opportunity to get employment, and the people I work for today never ask whether I have a first class or not. They just look at my skills and commitment and it is those that they appreciate. Therefore, having a first class without skills is all in vain because in the real world, one looks at what you can deliver, not your papers.



Rehema Nanyonga - Bachelor's of Computer Science, Computsmart Computer & Managing Training Institute.

I came top of my class in 1998 having studied on a scholarship I had been awarded in 1996 because of scoring Distinction One in my Diploma in Business Studies from National College of Business Studies, Nakawa in 1994. I was later given another scholarship from the Overseas Continuing Education Fund which boosted my qualifications and so I was retained as a computer trainer at the same institute. I am currently a computer trainer and consultant for NGOs and some individuals, but largely, spend most of my time in my bakery. I went back to school and studied a certificate course in bakery and took a dictionary out of my bag for the kitchen. Getting a first class degree really helped me in my day to day big deal.



Mary Nalukwago - Bachelor's in Community Psychology, Makerere University

I graduated with a first class degree in 2017, but having a first class did not change much about my career path. It is true a lot of people congratulated me upon my success, and a number of them praised how big an achievement it was, but no one offered me a job, or asked what I really wanted to do. I like excelling at what I do, and to me, having a first class just satisfied that desire, but it was just icing on the cake. The real cake was that I did Community Psychology, and I liked what I do, and that I have intentions to impact communities. So, having a first class can only attract someone to you, but they will always be looking out at how you deliver. So, first class or no first class, the real cake is what people are interested in. I am currently reaching out to people who need my help - voluntarily.

Juliet Nalwoga Nsamba - Bachelor's of Fine Art, St Lawrence University

I graduated in 2013 and because of the first class, I never had to look for a job because I was immediately given an opportunity to teach at the same university. In addition to this came a few prizes (money) by the university and all the attention and respect a first class degree comes with. Because of my skills, plus the platform/position that it acquired for me, I have been able to travel to different places in the world to showcase my talent. I am currently pursuing a Masters in Creative Fine Art and my work is in a number of art galleries in Kampala. I also teach in three institutions.

Aida Mbwaddo - Bachelor's of Information and Computer Technology, Uganda Martyrs University

In 2010, I graduated with a first class degree and it indeed opened employment opportunities for me and put me in connection with a number of people. However, because I had other responsibilities such as the Islamic school I had started my family, I could not be employed elsewhere. I would like to believe that having a first class degree puts one in a certain position of more opportunities, especially if one is up for it. In 2011, I went back to school to do my Masters in the same university, which I completed in 2013. This gave me more skills and opened ever more opportunities. The university offered to employ me as a trainer, but still I would not take the opportunity. I am currently engaged in developing and managing my primary school. I also went back to do a certificate course in education so I am able to engage in teaching at the school.