



CHARLIE HARRIS  
Class of 2014  
Raleigh, NC

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Some people say that every sunset is more beautiful in Africa. I found that entirely true as I sat alone one evening on a paddle board in the middle of the great Nile River thousands of miles from home and watched a bright red sun sink slowly below the horizon. In that moment I genuinely realized the true size of the world, the significance of international communication, and the magnitude of what human beings have accomplished and have left to accomplish.

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# DOCUMENTING THE AFRICAN SPACE RESEARCH PROGRAM IN UGANDA

It is hard to put into words how much Uganda taught me about myself, a completely foreign culture, and how relationships, economics, and society as a whole operate outside of the only home I had ever known. My Burch Fellowship last summer showed me individuals in developing countries without a space program can share the same technological dreams as countries that have photographed galaxies, sent rovers to Mars, and put men on the moon.

My goal was to create a documentary film about the African Space Research Program (ASRP) in Uganda. I found living in Uganda to be an educational



and amazing experience. For most of my trip, I stayed in Kampala, the bustling capital of an absolutely beautiful nation. I visited the ASRP headquarters located in the backyard of the group's founder, Chris Nsamba. ASRP is comprised of a group of men and women of all ages who have interests in astronomy, space science, and space exploration. I loved exchanging news about outer space with them, and was able to use some of my knowledge from studying astronomy at UNC to teach them a little about planets, orbits, and satellites. The ASRP group members have an unfinished high-altitude plane at their headquarters. There, they also held astronomy nights with donated telescopes and weekly meetings to discuss finances and space-related news from around the world. Because of their limited budget, the group was pursuing a smaller glider project in hopes that its success would attract donations

to help finish the first plane. I also stayed in Jinja, a much smaller city east of Kampala where eight of the members were living and working on the glider at a local unused runway.

I got to know the members of the ASRP very well through weekly meetings, watching them work, and hanging out with them outside of the program. They still have a long way to go before completing the engineering aspects necessary to make their projects fly safely. While I found this to be disappointing, I was still able to spend lots of time capturing their passions, methods, and motivations on film. The group was uniquely driven by a thirst for knowledge and a desire to protect humanity's posterity amidst other demanding issues that currently face Uganda.

At this stage, it is hard to tell if the work of the African Space Research Program will someday evolve into a legitimate space program for Uganda. I am proud to say the group is very confident and believes success is their only option. The group is composed of dedicated individuals who are just now getting the long-promised government aid they need. Very recently, the program created a small probe and weather balloon they plan to send beyond Earth's atmosphere with cameras and even a live mouse inside. They have been visited by the Vice President of Uganda several times and have also presented their projects and interests to the country's Prime Minister.

In addition to all I learned about the space research program, the people, and the culture of Uganda, I also got to experience the country's amazing beauty. Citizens proudly know Uganda as the "Pearl of Africa" for its precious wilderness and wildlife. My friends introduced me to the beautiful, green, mountainous eastern part of the country and the breathtaking savannahs of Uganda's famous national parks.



My experiences during my Burch Fellowship exposed me to a whole new culture, but also sharpened the focus of my academic pursuits and potential career. I was able to take the knowledge I collected in Uganda and create a film about the ASRP and its goals, motivations, and progress. This was the longest and most intense video project I had ever worked on, but it taught me so much more about production than I could ever have imagined and enhanced my interest in storytelling and documentary film. I now also know that I want to pursue scientific policy and education so I may spread my passion for space to students in the U.S. and beyond. I believe the global perception of humanity's dependence on space technology will become clearer to the world as efforts like ASRP continue on the continent of Africa and other less developed areas of the globe.

