



For the past 12 years, **Brother Leonard Brito** has been an administrator, IT teacher, and career counselor at Nyanga High, a highly competitive boys Catholic school in Zimbabwe near the Mozambique border. Despite its remote location, Nyanga is renowned for its top national O- and A-Level results, and for excel-

ling in cocurricular activities such as chess, debate, and Math Olympiad. In the past few years, several students at Nyanga have gained admission to top US universities including MIT, Harvard, and UC Berkeley, working through EducationUSA and the USAP program. Witnessing this, Brother Brito led schoolwide changes to support students seeking international higher ed. Remarkably, Brother Brito wrote a grant to the Solon Foundation to digitize the school, which made it possible for students to research universities around the world and access online applications.

Brother Brito has taken students to attend US higher education information sessions in Harare, the capital. His nominator, Rebecca Zeigler Mano at Education Matters said, "It is this passion that makes me believe that Brother Leonard would take full advantage of the opportunity to attend International ACAC and bring that knowledge back to help the talented students at his school and in the Manicaland Province of Zimbabwe." Brother Brito's career demonstrates a long-standing commitment to access, education, and opportunity. He has also worked in the Philippines and Cambodia, where he initiated education rehabilitation programs for disadvantaged street children.



**Rolands Bleks** has taught economics at Riga State Gymnasium No. 2 for over 10 years, during which the school transitioned into the IB Diploma Program. This past year Rolands was named Careers Teacher as part of a new initiative of the Latvian Ministry of Education, allowing him to further build

on the work he began during the IB transition, offering college counseling parent nights, learning more about college/university admissions in the US and UK, and further developing programming for educating the community about possibilities of studying outside of Latvia after graduation. "He is trying to establish a university culture in a place where none has existed before," said nominator Greer Bevel at the International School of Latvia. Currently 20–30 percent of last year's graduating class are attending university outside of Latvia.

Riga State Gymnasium No. 2 is one of the oldest schools in Riga. Currently, studies are offered in both Latvian and English, and the school has recently been ranked second in the country overall (Latvian centralized state results) and in the European "Best in English" contest. They graduated their first IB Diploma class this spring.



**Purev-Ochir Banzar** has worked as vice principal of the Hobby School of Ulaanbaatar in Mongolia for the past six years. The school offers an AP curriculum alongside a national curriculum, as many of the students aspire to attend university in the US. Accredited by the Mongolian

Ministry of Education, Hobby School was the first private school to offer a bilingual curriculum in Mongolia. With a primarily 98 percent Mongolian student body, students have received admission offers to competitive institutions in Mongolia and the US.

Last year, the Mongolian government began implementing a competitive scholarship program for STEM students accepted to universities abroad. Many Hobby School students were able to attend colleges in the US with the support of these government scholarships. Purev has worked diligently to acquaint students and parents with the college application process, and he has hosted universities from the US, China, S. Korea, Japan, and the UK. Without question, the range of universities that Hobby School students attend is a direct result of Purev's efforts. Purev was nominated by Misa Kabashima at Harvey Mudd College.

Due to visa difficulties, Purev will not attend this conference but will be funded to attend an International ACAC Regional Institute in the future.



**Bela Gligorova** first joined Nova International Schools, an independent day school in Macedonia, in October 2000, after she graduated from university with a degree in English and American studies. With Bela's leadership as academic dean, Nova International Schools has seen significant growth, and now offers both

AP classes and a full IB Diploma. The school is home to over 600 students from 40 different ethnicities across Macedonia. Over 40 percent of their students receive aid to help alleviate the cost of attendance. Bela maintains a teaching role, and her current work is focused on creating cross-departmental links, such as the College and Career Guidance department, which she helped build.

Starting with the Class of 2008, Nova International Schools saw its first placements at highly selective universities in the US and UK. The school has begun to focus on helping applicants apply to diverse universities with an increased focus on good matches for their talented students. Elisabeth O'Connell at the University of Pennsylvania said, "Even as an independent school, local resources are such that their families would not be able to afford most US colleges. I was so impressed with how much the counseling team had done with the very little they had." Indeed, 80 percent of last year's graduating class are attending university outside of Macedonia, with 35 percent in the US.



**Umami Kalsum Haji Omar** has been the head of the Pre-University Careers & Higher Learning Department at Sekolah Menengah Sayyidina Ali (SMSA) in Brunei since 2009. SMSA is a magnet school for students in Brunei and serves a diverse group of students, including indigenous races such as Dusun and Iban, as well as Chinese, Malaysian, Indonesian, and Filipino students. As the district's only Sixth Form Center, SMSA serves over 1,000 students, with several receiving prestigious government-funded scholarships to study in the UK, US, France, Germany, and Australia.

Umami has a bachelor of arts in English literature from Cardiff University and a master of arts in teaching from Universiti Brunei Darussalam. Nominator Mayra Robles (EdUSA Brunei) said, "Umami has facilitated talks on Study USA not only for her students but to other schools in the Kuala Belait district. She has been recognized by Brunei's Ministry of Education as one of the country's most innovative and persevering career teachers. As the first and only participant from Brunei, Umami's participation at this conference will have a tremendous positive impact on Brunei's perception of US higher education."



**Maria Fernanda Luna** became both the school counselor (grades 7–12) and the only college counselor at Colegio la Floresta in El Salvador three years ago. Formerly a world history teacher, Maria Fernanda "is an exceptional guidance counselor, looking to provide students with as much exposure to institutions in the US and for ways in which she can enhance her knowledge of US institutions," according to Romelia Widders at Michigan State University. To achieve this goal, Maria organized the first-ever college fair for families, and initiated a college orientation class twice a month for her students. Last year, 20 of the 50 seniors applied and were admitted to universities outside of El Salvador; this year, 40 of the 60 seniors applied internationally.

Colegio la Floresta is a bilingual, all-girls Catholic school, one of the few schools in El Salvador offering the IB Diploma. Currently ranked fifth in the country on national exams, Colegio la Floresta believes in promoting both academic excellence and character development through holistic education. Key to the school's success is a unique one-on-one mentoring system through which each student receives guidance at various stages in their education, encouraging a student community of lifelong learners and global citizens.



**Samantha Moktan Lama** served as an English teacher in several high schools across the Kathmandu Valley region of Nepal after completing her BA in English from Loreto College in India. Now, as guidance counselor and A-Level English teacher at GEMS Institute of Higher Education, Samantha works with a high school population of over 500 students. GEMS offers the Higher Secondary Education Board (or national Plus2) curriculum and GCE A-Level qualifications, and has seen an increasing number of students pursuing studies abroad. This nonprofit school serves mostly middle-income families and provides need and merit-based aid to high-achieving, low-income students across Nepal.

Samantha was awarded the Teachers Excellence Achievement Program Scholarship in 2013, which allowed her to gain professional training in ESL in the US. Upon her return to Nepal, she began helping students apply to universities overseas. Nominator Selena Malla at EducationUSA Nepal said: "Samantha is a dynamic counselor who has conducted workshops and trainings for teachers and counselors in Nepal." Samantha has maintained a close relationship with EducationUSA/USEF-Nepal and the British Council on seeking scholarship opportunities for students.



**Michaelina Quaye** is the guidance counselor at Presbyterian Boys Senior High School, also known as Presec-Legon, a government school in Ghana established in 1938. This boys school, of over 3,000 students, is one of the top in the country. National recognition in academics, sports, and competitions are the norm. It is the only school in the country that has won the national Mathematics and Science Quiz five times. Presec-Legon students are also disproportionately represented in engineering and medical schools in Ghana. Even EducationUSA said, "At one stage, we established a Competitive College Club in Accra and realized that over 60 percent of the members came from Presec-Legon."

Since arriving at Presec-Legon five years ago, Michaelina has been instrumental in establishing a successful Study Abroad Awareness Program (with support from EdUSA office in Accra) for students, so that they can explore educational opportunities worldwide. Nancy Keteku at EducationUSA said, "Michaelina is dynamic, smart, and probably the most effective guidance counselor in Ghana's 800 public school system; she's outstanding." A tireless advocate, Michaelina is a pioneer when it comes to international higher education. Indeed, of last year's graduating class of 842, 40 are attending university outside Ghana, with 25% of those students in the US on full financial aid. Michaelina was nominated by Misa Kabashima at Harvey Mudd College and Bernice Affotey at EdUSA Ghana.



**Agnes Gogo Wizi** is the founder and lead mentor of Klesis Educational Initiative (KEI) in Malawi. This organization mentors secondary school graduates in Malawi and prepares them for transition to higher education. Focusing on academically talented, but financially challenged students, Klesis has mentored over 350

secondary school students, many of whom are attending universities both locally and overseas. Aside from leading the Klesis Educational Initiative, Agnes is also a volunteer teacher at Mpinji Community Day Secondary School and a full-time lecturer at the Catholic University of Malawi.

Agnes founded KEI while she was a student at Durham University, studying social work as a distinguished Ruth First Scholar. Her leadership and mentoring at KEI has already made an impact on many lives; 10 of her students have received fully funded scholarships to study in the US, Canada, and Costa Rica. Over 120 other students mentored by Klesis have also received partial or full scholarship offers at local universities. Agnes has been described by nominator Faith Chitawo (EducationUSA Malawi) as an advocate with “bountiful energy and enthusiasm,” who despite various obstacles, remains “motivated and steadfast to ensure that every single one of her students has access to quality education.”



Having worked in secondary education since 1979 in various roles, **Kubi Witten-Hannah** is currently serving as Head of Careers at Mount Albert Grammar School (MAGS), guiding course selection and further education at the second-largest public school in New Zealand.

With 2,800 students, MAGS is one of the most diverse schools in the country, with a local student body that includes Maori and Pacific Islanders (Polynesians, Micronesians, and Melanesians), as well as immigrants from India, China, and the Philippines. Known for excellence in academics and athletics, MAGS consistently ranks as one of the top 10 schools nationwide in examinations and is also recognized regionally for its outstanding sporting achievements.

Since starting at MAGS two years ago, Kubi has led and developed new careers programs to raise awareness of higher education opportunities overseas, while also serving as a leader within the Auckland careers counselor network. His nominator, Katie Sleeman at EducationUSA New Zealand, said: “Over the last five years, the number of New Zealand students in America has increased by 26 percent. Kubi Witten-Hannah is the right person to participate and absorb knowledge at International ACAC, and then bring that knowledge back to New Zealand where he can have a high impact within his school and the wider Auckland community.”