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# Female Physicists in Ugandan Universities

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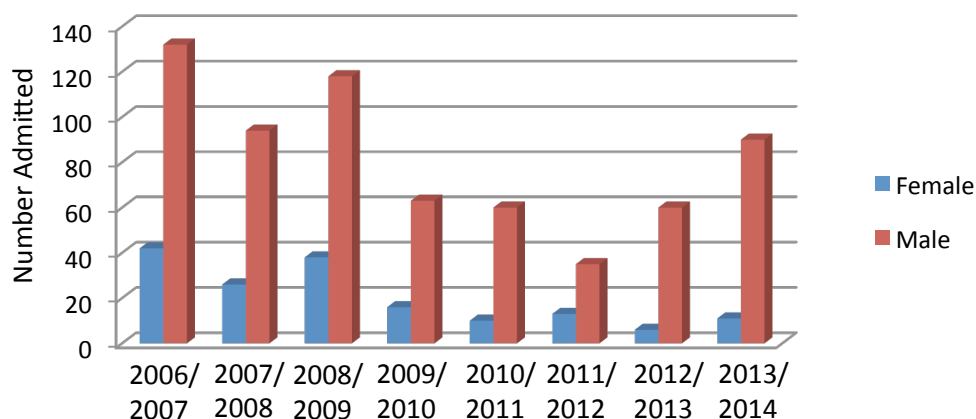
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**Abstract.** For a long time, only one public university in Uganda had a department of physics. Several women graduated from this department, but not many showed much interest in pursuing higher degrees in physics. Currently, there are five public universities in Uganda with departments of physics, and there has been an increase in the number of female graduates in physics. At the same time, the number of women pursuing higher degrees in physics has increased, and the universities have registered an increase in female physics lecturers.

Makerere University was established in 1922 as a men's technical college; female students were first admitted in 1945. Since then, the number of female students admitted at the university has been much lower than that of their male counterparts. To increase the number of female students enrolled, the university introduced the 1.5 points scheme in 1990, where female university entrants were awarded a bonus of 1.5 points on top of their individual examination scores. The 1.5 scheme resulted in an increase in the percentage of female students enrolled at Makerere University from 23.9% in 1989/1990 to 45.8% in 2003/2004 [1]. Despite this increase in female entrants, the number of science female students, especially in physical sciences (physics included), was still very low. To address this problem, the university introduced a female scholarship initiative scheme [2] in 2001, which was supported by the Carnegie Corporation of New York. This targeted rural girls who could not afford university education even when they were admitted to the university using the 1.5 points scheme. Under this scheme, 25 women were given scholarships annually to study science and technology courses. This scheme, however, was not able to enhance gender equity further [3].

The number of female students taking physics has also followed the trend outlined above. Figure 1 shows the number of students admitted to the Department of Physics at Makerere University for the years 2006/2007 to 2013/2014. In 2000, four more public universities were created in the country, leading to an urgent need of having graduate courses in physics to cater for the demand for lecturers at these universities. This demand led to an increase in the number of female students taking up physics graduate courses. Table 1 shows the current (in 2014) number of female staff members teaching physics at Ugandan universities. This is indeed a tremendous increase, given the fact that for a long time, up to about five years ago, there was only one woman teaching physics at the university level in the whole country.

In conclusion, one can say that the number of female physicists at Ugandan universities has increased, though getting that far has not been easy for these women. The authors would like to recommend that there is a need to sensitize communities to accept that girls and women can pursue physics successfully. Second, we recommend that scholarships for women be extended to students well over 40 years of age. After this age, women will already have had families, are more settled, and can perform much better because they are not pressured by the ticking of the "biological clock."



**FIGURE 1.** Number of students admitted to Department of Physics, Makerere University, over a period of eight years, broken down by gender.

**TABLE 1.** Female physicists at Ugandan universities.

Public Universities in Uganda	Staff Members		Staff Who Are Students	
	PhD Holders	MSc Holders	PhD	MSc
Makerere University	1	2	1	1
Mbarara Univ. of Science & Technology	–	1	1	–
Busitema University	–	3*	1	1
Gulu University	–	–	–	1
Kyambogo University	–	2*	–	–

\* Staff looking for PhD sponsorship.

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