Namibia is a country in Southern Africa, bordered by Angola to the North, South Africa in the South and Botswana to the East. Namibia is a young country that achieved independence from South Africa in 1990. Its population of 2 million people experience one of the highest HIV/AIDS sero-prevalence rate in Southern Africa, a rate of 21.3% (CIA factbook, 2003). The high prevalence rate is what prompted Medical Anthropologist Dr. Richard B. Lee to investigate the social and cultural determinants of HIV/AIDS in Namibia.

In 1996, the University of Namibia (UNAM) and the University of Toronto (U of T) began a collaborative program in HIV/AIDS research capacity building under the directorship of Dr. Lee. Sponsored by the Medical Science Department at UNAM and Department of Anthropology at U of T, this internship program has supported the learning and development of over 100 Canadian and Namibian students since its conception. With a broad focus on the social and cultural aspects of HIV/AIDS, students
develop their own, more focused research project. Over the years, such projects have followed key events that have taken place in Namibia, such as the anti-retro viral treatment (ARV) rollout by the government of Namibia in 2003.

On July 21st, 2005 students from the University of Toronto and the University of Namibia presented their preliminary findings from their 6 week long research projects. The information put forward to an audience of stakeholders, students and interested parties was the culmination of the collaborative efforts of 16 students under the guidance of their professors, Dr. Richard B. Lee, Dr. Robert Lorway, Dr. Scholastika Iipinge, Dr. Barnabas Otaala and Kathy Hofnie. The presentations were divided into two genres concerning HIV/AIDS: support programs and care for HIV/AIDS infected and affected groups and prevention and education programs targeting groups at risk of infection. Below are summaries of the eight, working research projects that reflect the effort and dedication of both Canadian and Namibian students.

Ayaana Jean-Baptiste, Michael Shirungu and Simon Iilonga presenting their project at the final forum at UNAM

**QUESTIONING FAITH IN A TIME OF HIV/AIDS**

Namibia is a highly religious society with 90% population adhering to Christian beliefs, yet the role of religion in HIV/AIDS remained an unexplored topic by past
interns. This year, Nadia O’Brien and Bonita Hileni Nakanyala looked at the intersection between faith and AIDS by examining how Faith Based Organizations (FBOs) shape AIDS prevention and care programs. They were able to extract key points of interest, such as how faith can act as a motivator for staff and volunteers working in FBOs. They also sought to document how HIV positive people relate to religion and draw upon “faith”: is it a source of strength or does it contribute to further social stigmatization?

**HIV/AIDS and Home-Based Care: Volunteer Experiences and Challenges**

In Namibia, there are no government institutions that cater to the needs of people living at home with long-term illness. Furthermore, hospitals are discharging people earlier than necessary due to a lack of adequate facilities and resources, brought on by the rise in HIV sero-prevalence and other health problems. This shortfall in the health care program inspired Nidhee Jadeja and Eine Sirongo to explore Home-based Care (HBC) programs, initiated by Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) and FBOs. Given that the success of HBC is contingent on their volunteers, they posed the following question: What are their experiences and challenges that volunteers face, and how does this affect the quality of care given?”

**The Impact of HIV/AIDS on Nurses: Staff Shortage, Resignation and Burnout**

A cross-cultural study conducted by Klewer et al. (2001) compared Namibia to two European countries on the perceived HIV transmission risks among health care students. In short, the perceived risk was much higher among Namibian students. Despite similar education, the higher HIV/AIDS prevalence rate in Namibia greatly influenced attitudes among nursing students and registered nurses working in the health sector. This discrepancy propelled Jing Jing Liu and Nashitye Ndjaleka to explore other effects a high HIV/AIDS prevalence rate might have on the attitudes and perceptions of nurses and nursing students. More specifically, what are the attitudes and knowledge of registered and enrolled nurses and nursing students towards their profession in the context of the HIV/AIDS epidemic?

**Psychosocial Support to Orphans and Vulnerable Children: “Love Boxes” and “Hero Books”**

In Namibia, the high sero-prevalence rate among the most productive age group, 25-49, leaves a vulnerable population of children and orphans without financial, social and emotional support. Ilona Kosova and Leevi Komeya attempted to address one of the three – the psychosocial support available to orphans and vulnerable children (OVCs) through various NGOs in Windhoek. They focused their research and analysis on two prominent and controversial psychosocial techniques employed by Namibian organizations, “Love Boxes” and “Hero Books”. Both tend to be viewed in opposition, but by comparing the strengths and weaknesses of the differing techniques, they asked, how may the two methods be used to complement each other?
Leevi Komeya and Ilona Kosova (not shown) with children at the Pashukeni Kindergarten and Orphanage, Windhoek, Namibia.

**COMBATING HIV/AIDS AT TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN NAMIBIA: A CLOSER LOOK AT SERVICES AND STUDENT GROUPS**

Since the HIV/AIDS pandemic significantly affects individuals 15-25 years of age, student attitudes toward HIV/AIDS has been the subject of several social science studies conducted in sub-Saharan Africa which cite gender-related blame, alcohol abuse, lack of confidence in free condoms, and limited HIV/AIDS related activity by student representative councils. To examine if any of these factors influenced students in Windhoek, Namibia, Ayaana Jean-Baptiste, Michael Shirungu and Simon Iilonga examined how HIV/AIDS information is incorporated into tertiary level education. They focused on the availability and utilization of counseling services and the advocacy activities of HIV/AIDS student groups. This research builds on previous collaborative project and asks, has progress been made in the development of HIV/AIDS related services and curricula at the University of Namibia (UNAM), Polytechnic of Namibia (PON) and the International University of Management (IUM)?

**EDUCATION, STIGMATIZATION, IMPLEMENTATION: CHALLENGES TO SEXUAL HEALTH EDUCATION FOR SCHOOL-AGE LEARNERS**
There is a diversity of services and programs available to young people in Namibia, including those offered through NGOs, CBOs, and government ministries concerning sexual health education, HIV/AIDS and youth in Namibia. However, not all programs are created equal and thus, the approach undertaken by Kate Rice and Simon Sikalumbu attempted to evaluate the quality and efficacy of these various programs in order to offer recommendations to those implementing policy through service delivery. Their research helped illuminate important questions such as, is there differential learning patterns and rates of retention between learners from primary schools compared to secondary schools?

Ilona Kosova and Jing Jing Liu presenting a skit written by Kate Rice on sexual health to students at TUCSIN, a school for pre-university students

SPORT, AIDS AND DEVELOPMENT: MORE THAN “FOOLING AROUND”

Sport has already been recognized as a forum for skills building and public health information dissemination. However, it has only recently begun to be used at the community level for physical development and the targeting of youth for HIV/AIDS education. Sport has the unique capability of transcending socio-economic and cultural barriers in reaching the public and is what attracted Alex Teleki and Rachel Mbango to observed and evaluate the implementation of community outreach programs in
Windhoek, Katutura and Ohangwena region. They identified and addressed two main concerns - how to discern between just “fooling around” and using sport as a tool for education and what is the role of girls in sport development?

WALK LIKE A MAN, TALK LIKE A MAN: MEN, Masculinity, and the Transmission of HIV/AIDS

Masculinity is a dynamic concept that carries negative connotations in rural and urban settings. How masculinity is defined, developed, and operated against the backdrop of the HIV/AIDS epidemic was the focus of research for Fotis Kanteres and Job Iyambo through their work with Namibian Men for Change (NAMEC). They examined NAMEC’s role in the following areas: home-based care, HIV positive men’s support, and alcohol use and sexual risk behavior. Significantly, the issue of sexual and gender-based violence is deeply interconnected with the definition of what it means to be a man, to which they asked, how can NAMEC be instrumental in further challenging negative attitudes toward women and sexual practice in Namibian society?

A NAMEC meeting attended by Fotis Kanteres in Aus, Namibia