

June 2020

Notes from Beneath the Blue Awning

Hello UWF Faculty and Staff-

As most of you are likely aware, UWF has recently announced [Phase 1](#) of its plan to reopen the physical campus location. Of course, almost all of us have continued working remotely over this time to continue the business of the university: teaching, research, and service. It has truly been amazing to see the dedication and creativity of UWF's faculty, staff, and students during this universal pandemic response.



One of the remote activities that I have been doing is participating in the planning and execution of Expertise Systems in Florida Universities, a [statewide symposium](#) on Florida Research Information Management Systems (RIMS). In these newsletters, I've introduced the UWF Researcher Interests and Skills database, a homegrown RIMS setup accessible via Tableau and serviceable via the UWF RAE Service Desk.

UWF also participates in a statewide RIMS project called [ExpertNet](#) that catalogues credentials, research keywords, and projects for researchers across the Florida State University System. If, like me, you have not taken a look at your ExpertNet profile in some time, summer may be a great time for you to review and update your ExpertNet profile: update your keywords, add recent manuscripts, ensure that your project list is accurate, post videos, or link to social media, et al. The core profile information is managed by UWF RAE, so please let us know if something is outdated (my own profile does not reflect my current academic rank, so I need to do this, too!)

RAE remains open for the business of supporting proposals, grants, and contracts. If you are thinking about moving forward with any type of sponsored research project, please let us know preferably via our [Proposal Request Service Desk](#).

Regards and best wishes,

Matthew Schwartz

Professor and AVP of Research Administration

UWF researcher studies coronavirus misinformation in the Congo

By **JEFFREY CASSADY**

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Pensacola – Public health experts have struggled to counter myths and falsehoods about the new coronavirus since the virus began spreading earlier this year.

This is especially true in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where spotty infrastructure and distrust of the government have created additional challenges public health experts must overcome to get timely, accurate information to the public, said [Dr. Daudet Ilunga Tshiswaka](#), assistant professor of public health at the University of West Florida.



In April, Tshiswaka [coauthored a paper](#) on public trust in the Congo during the COVID-19 pandemic. The paper, “Public Trust in the Time of the Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19): The Case of the DR Congo,” was published in the Pan African Medical Journal.

“People in developing countries have their own ways of dealing with this type of situation,” Tshiswaka said. “I wanted to highlight the issue (of COVID-19-related misinformation) and what has been done to address it.”

Tshiswaka analyzed social media posts and internet comments and conducted interviews to identify misconceptions about the new coronavirus. He found that several myths were prevalent in the early days of the pandemic. Such myths included that the virus was a hoax and that African people were

immune.

Tshiswaka also found that the government failed to step in early enough to identify and correct misinformation.

“When the first cases started on March 10, the government moved to correct the information,” Tshiswaka said. “But, by then, it was too little, too late. The public already had a preconceived notion of what the virus was about.”

Decades of mismanagement and corruption have eroded public trust in the Democratic Republic of the Congo’s government, Tshiswaka said. Given that, the government would need help from people and groups in the private sector to counter misinformation.

For instance, international nongovernmental organizations that have assisted with epidemics in the past enjoy a level of trust that the government does not, Tshiswaka said. These organizations played key roles in disseminating accurate information during previous pandemics. Tshiswaka said the government should use its relationships with these groups to spread useful, reliable information about COVID-19.

“These groups operate with government approval,” Tshiswaka said. “They’re really close to the people, and they’re the ones trying to address real issues the people face. They’re the ones the people trust.”

Additionally, the public generally trusts artists and influencers more than they do the government, Tshiswaka said. The government should make sure these celebrities have access to accurate information, he added.

“That way they can spread the information to everybody,” Tshiswaka said.

Tshiswaka said his focus now is on measuring how perceptions have changed since the government started trying to identify and correct misinformation.

Tshiswaka is particularly interested in how public perceptions might influence Congolese people’s willingness to participate in public trials for COVID-19 vaccines, he said.

In the NEWS!

UWF researchers help preserve papers of former US chief justice



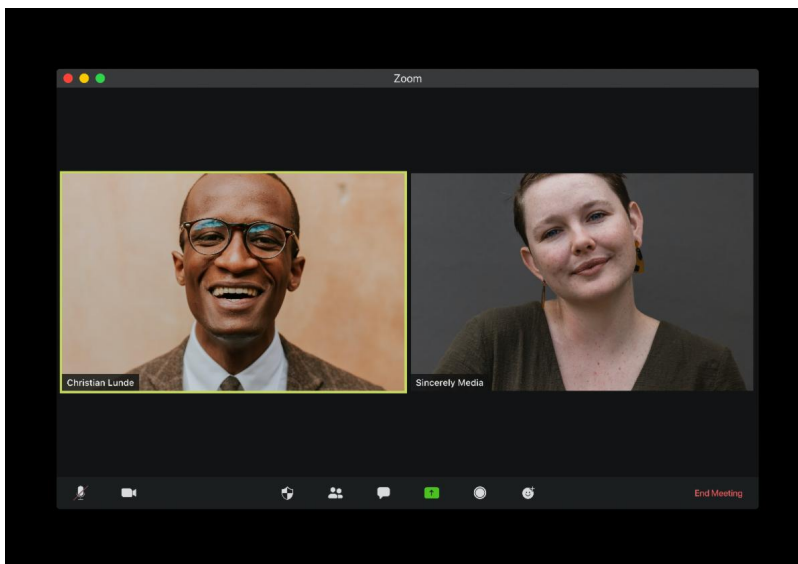


Two University of West Florida researchers have joined a project to preserve and make public letters and other material written by Roger Taney, whose long, controversial career in American politics saw him serve in President Andrew Jackson's...

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Event Highlight

What is the business case for your research?



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Based on the **National Science Foundation's Innovation Corps (I-Corps™)** program, the premiere federally-funded innovation and commercialization training in the U.S., I-Corps provides scientists, clinician scientists and engineers with a new approach to accelerate the translation of discoveries from the lab to the marketplace.

Teams receive this **training free** along with the chance to earn up to **\$2500** to engage in customer discovery and potentially qualify for **\$50,000** to participate in the I-Corps National Program.

Registration Deadline:

Sign your team up by July 7th, 2020

REGISTER NOW!

Funding Opportunities

Watch this space! RAE is currently re-working how we share funding opportunities to our faculty and staff.

In the meantime, feel free to access **GrantForward**—UWF faculty and staff can sign up with their UWF account to create a free profile with this funding search tool! For a step-by-step guide, please refer to our **GrantForward Handout**.

Grant Forward Quick Tip



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