



## NEWSLETTER JUNE 2019

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### THINKING ABOUT UWC: Editorial by Harold Boël

We often communicate on why UWC is important to the world, and why the values, principles and culture UWC represents are relevant to the times we live in. However, institutions, communities exist only as abstraction, what is real are the individuals, the human beings that compose them. And so, allow me to focus this editorial on our students, our alumni, and the UWC staff, which make UWC what it is.

UWC Belgium exists because year after year, a large number of former IB students, former participants to the short courses, most of them Belgian -- but not all, volunteer their precious time to the cause. UWC Belgium also exists, because every year there is a rising number of youths who decide that they would like to include a UWC experience into their life project. UWC Belgium also continues to exist because donors, such as the National Lottery and the Fondation Inbev Baillet Latour, inspired by the stories we tell, are convinced that UWC Belgium's realizations help them to attain their own philanthropic goals.

The numbers involved are significant, around 100 young Belgians showed interest for the UWC IB course last fall, and some 20 young Belgians will attend the short course – already the third edition!! -- this summer in Marcourt. To run all this, the numbers of helpers do not change much year to year, and each year, around 70 volunteers help by dedicating their time and efforts. The amount of money is not trivial either, the total fees that we pay and the financial support we collect runs in the hundreds of thousands of euros.

I believe it is in the nature of the UWC project to attract youngsters. The candidates we meet all recognize that this endeavour -- education in and out of the classroom moved by the greater purpose of building peace and a sustainable future -- resonates with them. The UWC project provides a link, creates a feeling and sensitivity for issues the students tie to projects they see and participate in, and often, later, launch themselves. More specifically, UWC answers some of the questions our students have: "where is my place in the world and how do I find it?" and "I am starting to sense right from

wrong; how can I do anything about the inequalities and injustices and support the rights I see in the world?”. It is a powerful feeling to see how the world opens up beyond the realities known to our students during their UWC experience and to see them search for the answers to the questions their mind suddenly is confronted with. As parent, witnessing this awakening first hand, and in turn, feel that connection, is one of life’s secret joys.

The founders of UWC certainly had the right intuition: Not only is UWC a powerful magnet for youngsters but it challenges them in a unique way to address the questions they seek to answer. UWC is about intense proximity to others and the explicit opportunity to work together on these questions, not in a vague theoretical way, but in a practical manner: UWC is also about giving students a first experience of agency -- being the main actor of one’s unfolding life. Kurt Hahn believed the youth could be given much more responsibility than is the practice in traditional education and that their learning experience would be all the greater for it. Such an experience leaves no one indifferent; for many, emotions at UWC are like a ride on a roller coaster, from exhilaration to despondency and back. The fact of having gone through these two years with others adds to the strength of the experience. In this sense, there is no difference between the two years of the IB course or two weeks of the Short Course, besides the time span. Living that roller coaster together and bonding across nationality, culture, religion, political inclination, also whispers in one’s ears that these dimensions are less relevant than is the essentially human experience of coming of age. It is hard or even nearly impossible to graduate from UWC harbouring prejudice towards any culture or creed.

We always say it is coming back from UWC which is the hardest. Any extraordinary situation to which we are exposed for a long enough period will end up feeling ordinary, and it is therefore the return to normality which will feel so unsettling, and all the more than returning students are separated from their soulmates, whom have often become their family. This something we always say, but frankly, it is hard to prepare for this. Learning is about coping with challenges, not avoiding what cannot be avoided. Maybe the silver lining in the challenges of returning, the darker cloud in UWC’s sky, is that UWC also offers a way of giving sense to one’s experience by remaining involved with the project; UWC Belgium exists also because many follow that route.

Graduating students, returning short course participants, find themselves all at once on the other side of the mirror, like exiting Plato’s cave or stepping out of the Matrix. After having lived and been part of the UWC experience, from the inside, now they have the chance to see how it all comes to pass. UWC does not begin to exist the moment one starts the IB course in a faraway country, or while walking through the gates of the CIRAC in Marcourt. The UWC experience begins the day of the info session, throughout the selection procedure, the winter Saturdays and Sundays at KBS, etc, ... and interacting with the many alumni volunteers present on those days.

Seeing all the work at National Committee level that goes into creating this experience from day one could be, I believe, for returnees both a revelation and a second magnet. Staying involved creates a UWC capsule that travels with us wherever we go. Being involved with the National Committee is a way of having the UWC experience grow inside us, with us, and so continue to find meaning in our UWC experience through our life and our projects after UWC. Life does not end after the short course, nor indeed, when discovering one’s IB’s results online, and nor should the UWC voice inside our head go silent after those moments. That UWC voice, part of who we are, it shapes our choices and our world view for good. Being involved in the UWC project even after graduation is an essential way for UWC participants to remain part of the movement and the movement remaining part of them.

UWC Belgium is blessed and lucky to have so many talented and dedicated volunteers that help select, support and fund the rising number of young Belgians attracted to UWC; these will in the coming years, I hope, take charge of UWC Belgium and do likewise with the next generation of students.

## Our new Students – Cohort 2019-2021



Hello! My name is Noor-Anne, I'm Belgian, French and have Algerian heritage. I am currently finishing my 5<sup>th</sup> grade at the « Athénée Royal d'Arlon ». I study science and maths even though I want to do a career as specialist in Human Rights. This is one of the reasons why I am a member of Oxfam, an NGO that fights inequality and injustice.

I applied to UWC to meet amazing people from around the globe and to learn more about their cultures. UWC has the chance to greet youth from many countries and as Nate Berkus said: "You will enrich your life incommensurably if you approach it with a sense of wonder and discovery, and always challenge yourself to try new things." I am also passionate about arts and practice regularly theater, drawing, painting as well as dancing and I play the piano.

I will be attending UWC Atlantic College in early September and I can't express how enthusiastic I am. I am so grateful to the Belgian National Committee for giving me this amazing and unique chance! I would also like to congratulate all the other selected students! Meeting them was such a great time and I wish them a lot of happiness in their college!

Hi, my name is Adélaïde and I'm 16 years old. I'm from Belgium but my father is from Congo. At the moment, I'm studying at Institut Saint-Laurent in Marche-en-Famenne. Sport is one of the most important things in my life. I did 13 years of gymnastic and now I'm doing athletics. I particularly love sports and shot put. I also play the piano, I started playing it 7 years ago and I play in a jazz band too. I would like to start learning the saxophone. My other passions are scouts and reading.

I love meeting new people and I'm very excited to discover other cultures and other passions and I especially look forward to knowing more things about the different countries and cultures of the world. Next year I have the chance to go to UWC Adriatic! I'm very grateful and I'm very motivated to spend happy times in the beautiful country of Italy with great people and great projects! Thank you so much for letting me contribute to this great and unique opportunity.



Hi there! My name is Merveille, I'm sixteen years old and I live in Assenede. I am currently in my fifth year at College O.-L.-V.-Ten Doorn in Eeklo. My passion, simple as it may sound, is caring. Caring for our environment and for others. I volunteer regularly in the elderly home in my hometown. Every Wednesday, we organise activities with the residents and the gratitude volunteers receive is amazing. At my home, we have a lot of pets, most of them were rescued. We used to have a disabled chicken living in our kitchen. He couldn't walk, so I carried him around the garden every day. This is why, later on, I want to study medicine. Last year in December, I helped organise

a walk for charity. With a group of seventy people, we walked from Eeklo to Wachtebeke, that's thirty kilometres! It was a sponsored walk and we collected €8500! It was an amazing experience and I am very proud of doing this. I also love reading and being with friends. I'll be attending UWC Costa Rica from next year on! I am really looking forward to meeting so many diverse people, exploring their cultures and making friends for life... and a bit of studying, of course 😊

Hello everybody! My name is Anna and I'm 15 years old. I'm half Argentinian and half Belgian, my dad is from Argentina and my mom is from Belgium. My parents were true travelers in their twenties and their stories made me very interested in the world and its people. That is why I believe that UWC is a very special community that makes my multi-cultural dream reality. I already am excited to meet my fellow students at UWC Maastricht!

I now go to D'Hek in Landen, a little dot in Flemish-Brabant. I study Latin-Maths and I love it. The culture of the Romans just really intrigues me, especially their luxurious healthcare habits and lifestyle. They knew that



sports and being social was very important to be happy. So, I try to incorporate this in my life too. I ride the bike to school every day, try to jog every weekend and go swimming weekly. Other hobbies of mine are dancing and scouting. I want to share a quote from Marcus Aurelius, a Roman emperor that was known as the emperor-philosopher: "Very little is needed to make a happy life; it is all within yourself, in your way of thinking". I saw this quote in my Latin book and I agreed with it immediately. I think you have to make yourself happy by having the right mindset.



My name is Selma, I am 17 years old and I am studying at "l'Institut Saint-Boniface Parnasse" in Brussels. Born in Brussels, I am Belgian, Italian and French and I lived in Buenos Aires, Argentina, for 2 years when I was 6.

The activity in which I am most engaged in, both mentally and physically, is dance since I was 3. I also found a passion for student voice and I often represented my class. I was moderator at debates and I am committed to pursue helping people with communication difficulties.

Interested in politics and international relations, I have been appointed "Junior Ambassador" of the European Parliament Ambassador School Program' (EPAS) and followed trainings on European politics and institutions. I like travelling and discovering new cultures, people and environments and I am interested in global

challenges such as education, environment, demography and pollution.

By attending UWC-USA in August, I will have the privilege to be emerged in a community where values and empathy are fully shared. I believe that this experience will change me for the rest of my life, and I am fully committed to make the most of it.



Hello everyone, I am Ahmed Guirassy and I come from Guinea in West Africa. I have been living in Belgium for almost 4 years.

I am a refugee here. I am someone very passionate about sports and video games and I like meeting people to discuss and to forget about our problems and our differences.

I took part in two short courses in Belgium and it was one of the best experiences I have had. I hope that next year at college we will enjoy all of this. Also, I was about to forget, I like to party when it is necessary.

Hello everyone! My name is Amanda, I'm 15 years old and have Belgian and Nigerian origin. I live in Knokke-Heist with my mom, dad, and twin sister. I was born in Switzerland, where I lived until I was five years old and I spent a large part of my childhood in Lagos, Nigeria. This experience has ignited my passion for travel and other cultures and my dream to attend a UWC. In August, I'll be standing on Indian soil at the footsteps of a new adventure: two incredible years at UWC Mahindra College with countless ups and downs, new adventures and friendships. I'm extremely excited to embark on this journey and to call a country with such a fascinating culture, so different from mine, my home.



I am in my fourth year of secondary school at Sint-Jozef Humaniora in Bruges, studying Greek-Latin Maths. I enjoy many hobbies, such as taekwondo, swimming, reading writing and I am very interested in global politics and the world around me. Therefore, I aspire to become a journalist. Storytelling is definitely one of my passions and I hope to be able to affect people's perception of the world we live in with my work. I'd love to say: "Thank you for giving me the chance to have this amazing experience!"



Hello! I'm Hannah, I'm 16 years old and I'm currently finishing my 5th year at Saint-Boniface, Ixelles. I'm studying Latin-Greeks that I love because I'm really interested in history and philosophy. Next year I'm going to UWC Maastricht and I can't wait for it! I'm so happy to have the chance to discover other cultures, the UWC world and to meet other students.

My interest about discovering and understanding others started during a journey to Benin last summer with an NGO. I've learned so much things about me, others and the world and I think that openness to new cultures and experiences can change the way you see the world and push you to change the world.

I became a vegetarian to make a positive impact in the world and I've discovered a passion for cooking. I also help during *The Global Strike for Future Brussels* and I've coordinated an activity to plant trees, learning how

to organize an event with external organisations and politicians. I also regularly run in the woods, ideally early in the morning, to clear my mind. I have run my first 20k last year to support an NGO, it was difficult but so great! I also love reading, my favourite subjects are feminism, economics, nutrition and history. Reading inspires me and helps me to express my artistic parts into collages. Therefore, I collect all kind of paper, material and sentences. I'm so glad to have been selected for this incredible opportunity which will change my life and my way to see the future.

Hi! My name is Isabella Stratta and I am 16 years old. I was born in Argentina but grew up in Belgium. I also have Italian, American and British origins. I am currently a student at the Lycée Français of Brussels, finishing my 5th year of secondary school. My favorite subjects are economics, math and languages. Participating in Model United Nations conferences and debating events developed my interest in international relations and global politics and attending the UWC short course Action for Peace in Spain was an incredible experience that enlightened me about the power of mediation to approach different points of view and enlarge perspectives. Music has always been a big part in my life as I was raised in a musical household (my grandfather was a conductor and pianist). I play the piano for over ten years. Tennis, sewing and cooking are my other hobbies. I am also involved in afterschool support and other community service to many issues I am concerned about like the environment.



In August I will be joining the Li Po Chun UWC in Hong Kong. I couldn't be more excited! I love learning new languages: and I have been studying Dutch, Italian and Mandarin, which is another reason why I am really happy to move to Hong Kong. I cannot wait to immerse myself in a different culture and develop, personally and academically, outside of my comfort zone while hopefully being a good representative of Belgian culture and values.



Hi! My name is Jeanne Gheeraerds, I am fifteen years old, living in Belgium for the past seven years. In August I will be attending UWC Changshu China. From 2008-2012 I had the opportunity to live in Beijing (China) which only makes me more excited to be able to revisit this region for the next two years.

In my spare time I like to play tennis, write and travel. My favourite subjects are history, Dutch and English, but I am looking forward to learning Chinese and studying global politics. I am about to finish my fourth year of secondary school at the Royal Athenium of Etterbeek (KAE) where I have been studying Latin and modern languages for the past year. Even though my time at KAE was short lived, I learned so much in one year thanks to how open minded the school is and therefore, I can't wait to see how much I will learn, grow and blossom

in China. I am certain that amongst other things, this adventure will widen my horizons and my comfort bubble so that I can be a part of every challenge that is waiting for me in Changshu and around the globe. I am looking forward to being a part of a school with such a great mindset and values.



My name is Tiana Gutenberg, I'm 17 years old and I'm very excited to go to UWCRC. I'm someone who has lived in Brussels, Paris and Nosy-be (Madagascar). I'm someone with Madagascan and French nationality.

I'm someone who has grown up in two different environments: one Western and the other African. I'm someone who studied Latin and Greek at St Boniface. I'm someone who enjoys theatre and tap dance. I'm someone who loves to read book and to watch series-tv. I'm someone who has been involved in different movements like the JM-Oxfam and the project Eleanor. I'm someone who has met a lot of great people. I'm someone who, last year, did a training in global and solidary citizenship. I'm someone who feels deeply concerned about global issues. I'm someone who has a lot of questions about myself and the world. I'm someone who hasn't yet found exactly what I want to do. (But) I'm someone who tries to be engaged and passionate in every single thing I do.

I don't think we can just describe people with words. I think people are too complex to be categorize. In fact, I'm just the result of every meeting,

things, actions, decisions and events that I had experienced.

Hi, My name is Ernest. I was born in Belgium, lived in Italy and Luxemburg. Now I am looking forward to go to Armenia. I am 16 years old and am going to the European School of Luxemborg. I am interested in many subjects ranging from physics to philosophy. I am very curious and always eager to learn new things.

I started playing violin when I was five. A year ago, I started jazz improvisation and I find it very rewarding and enjoyable. It is this kind of experience I also hope to find at UWC. In my free time I like to play board and card games with friends, family or anyone who dares to challenge me. What I most appreciate in this hobby is that it brings people together around a table and makes them connect and get to know each other.

I'd like to end this with a quote from William Shakespeare: "We know what we are but know not what we may be." I believe we can become better than we are and will try my best to reach this ideal.



Hi! I'm Elliott and I'm a Belgian student living in Brussels. I feel very privileged to attend UWC. I know that the expectations are high, but I will try to correspond to them the best I can.

I am studying Ancient Greek and sciences at the GO! Atheneum Etterbeek. I love challenges, so these were the subjects I was the most attracted to. I like the fact that the Greek language is so rich and full of mysteries. Sciences have always been something I was interested in because they allow you to understand the world better and see it from different angles. Outside of school I love to sport. I skateboard, swim and run regularly because it helps me to free my mind and to feel better. It also teaches me to surpass myself and to get a sense of achievement. I ride my bike everywhere, I'm fond of street art and I'm a scout.

In September, I will attend Montezuma. I believe that if you come in contact with people from different cultures and socio-cultural backgrounds, you can widen your point of view and see the world from different perspectives. It enables you

to understand the world better and thus to find solutions to its issues. I am ready more than ever for this life-changing experience. After finishing UWC, I'd like to study engineering and architecture. My dream is to design new buildings that would work on renewable energy.

## UWC Bonding Day in Belgium

This year at the end of March, almost all the 14 newly selected students and their parents or other relatives gathered in my garden on a sunny Saturday afternoon in March.

The students engaged in several fun bonding activities, organized by 2 alumni, Leone and Gabriel, to get to know each other better, to ask questions, raise concerns and to share excitement regarding the upcoming new adventure of UWC life abroad. Part of the exercises was that each student writes a letter to her/himself, which is to be opened in two years' time when the students have completed their stay abroad, grown intellectually, have engaged in the intercultural UWC lifestyle and shaped their personality according to what they have experienced.



The 5 parents present shared their experiences as UWC parents during a Q&A session. A wide range of topics were discussed such as the number of suitcases to be brought, how to cope with the absence of the kids, how frequently to communicate, how the college prepares the students for studies afterwards, who takes care of the visas, what happens in case of medical issues, how colleges cope with mental health, any many other issues. It was a lively and warm discussion that was highly appreciated by the new parents. Students and parents ended the day bonding over drinks and wonderful food brought by all the participants. Everybody left happy, exited and ready to start this new life changing UWC journey.

It was a pleasure to host such a wonderful group of people!

Written by Sarah De Greef, mother of two UWC students and the host of this bonding day.

## Belgian UWC Short Course 2019: 13- 27 July

The Belgian UWC short course team has been working on creating the best experience for the participants. We started off with a team meeting weekend in Brussels, where we were taught facilitation methods, and we got the opportunity to learn about each other a little bit more, which is not always easy when we all come from different countries. A few Alumni's from last year's short course joined us to help us figure out any improvements we could bring to the short course itself. In April, the Belgium located facilitators took care of the selections of the participants. The facilitators and alumni organised some activities to give the participants an overview of the short course whilst the other members of the team were giving interviews. The purpose of the interviews is to get to know the participants and to allocate the best suited short courses to each of them. Once the participants were selected, we started to work on the organisation of the short course. All of May was dedicated to building relevant yet interesting content of the workshops and activities.

***This year's short course will be held on 13- 27 July. We expect about 45 participants to take part in this life changing experience.*** Seeing that many young people around a workshop is heart-warming. It makes us believe that all together if we help each other can achieve a lot! What's the most beautiful about the short course is that people get a brand-new family at the end. Living experiences, learning new things and sharing feelings 24/7 for two weeks creates bonds that can't be created that fast otherwise. We are running our third edition of the Belgian short course this summer and all our alumni agree on saying that the short course has given them a lot. We facilitators give our best to provide as amazing workshops as we can and as a good course as we can. Our mission is all about transmission but saying that it's not a growth opportunity for us too would be a lie. ***The short course is a true eye-opening journey for all those who live one. Eye-opening about the self, the other, the communities we live in, the issues we daily face in our world and many other life topics.*** We are all looking forward to build and cross bridges this summer again!

- Written by Salima Karmous

## Special moments at UWC Costa Rica

When I was asked to describe a moment at UWC, at least ten different ones came to mind; I could describe the moment I first walked into campus, how overwhelmed I was and how different everything seemed from the way it seems now. Or I could describe the moment I had to say goodbye to my second years at the very end of my first year, how much I cried and realized that the bonds that I had formed were so special. Maybe I could write about my participation in the school musical and all of the new skills I learned. But the more I think about my big milestones here at UWC Costa Rica, the more I realize that those were not the ones that mattered.

The question reminded me of one of my university applications essays, in which I was asked to describe what makes me happy. I was conflicted, because I came to realize that there were two possible answers: home and UWC, two widely different things. I was confused: why was I happy at UWC? Was I not happy at home? Before leaving, many people asked me why I would make such a drastic change in my life. I understood their question, because I had doubts as well. Life at home was nice, it was comfortable and easy. Why would I want to change that?

After a while of thinking and re-thinking, I realized that these two words - 'comfortable' and 'easy' - kept coming up. I was not wondering whether this decision to move so far away would make me happy; rather, I was considering whether it would be a comfortable change. But does being comfortable equal being happy? After being in UWC for two years, I have concluded that it does not. In the beginning, I was all but comfortable with the rapid change: I knew no one, had to communicate in English and shared my room with three other people. However, this did not mean I wasn't happy. I supported the decision I had made to be a part of UWC, even though I had not yet had the time to settle. My happiness did not come from a sense of familiarity, but from one of adventure and discovery.



***What my time at UWC Costa Rica has taught me, is that there is no set list of things I need in order to be happy. I think happiness can be found in the adventure of exploring and discovering new things and in the people you encounter on the way.***

So, when someone asks me to 'describe a moment at UWC', I now think of the instants in which I felt most happy with my UWC experience, the small moments that remind me of the adventure that is out there. Instead of writing about big milestones, I could write about a late-night walk under the stars with my friends, or about watching the sunset through the trees of the rainforest or performing together with the ukulele orchestra on a candle-lit night. We all come to UWC to do great things and make big changes, but sometimes, it's the small things that make us happy and, in that way, create the biggest change of all.

Written by Renske Kerkhofs, UWC Costa Rica

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