



Professor shares about building first Rwandan library

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This post was written by Hatchet reporter Kulsoom Jafri.

When professor Zachary Kaufman traveled to Rwanda in 2000, just six years after the country's civil war, he found a country rocked by high tensions and lacking a national identity.

Kaufman, who teaches part-time in the Elliott School of International Affairs, was most struck by the scarcity of books in the country where 65 percent of citizens were illiterate.

He founded the American Friends of the Kigali Public Library in 2001 to help combat that literacy crisis.

The library offers books, he said, that “preserves the past and showcases shared experiences. The two Rwandan groups, Tutsi and Hutu, can come together to literally build a better future.”



Elliott School professor Zachary Kaufman shared his experience helping construct a library in war-torn Rwanda. Nicholas Russell | Hatchet Photographer



Just a decade ago, there were no public libraries in the Rwandan nation. With Kaufman's help, this three-story library has a total of 45,000 books in English, French and Kinyarwanda.

The Yale University graduate said Rwandas are used to their government-run media and his library is a new outlet for readers to experience things they were previously barred access to.

“They will also have a chance at learning new business skills,” Kaufman said, adding that he hopes his project will promote individual entrepreneurship within the Rwandan community.

He urges future social entrepreneurs at GW to “have purpose, commitment, creativity, risk-acceptance, and time.”

He warned that people trying to make a difference in the world may face challenges like a lack of resources as well as criticism from all sides of the spectrum, but urged students not to give up.

“Do your homework before arriving in the developing country,” he said. “The more you know, the more effective and accepted you will be.”