

ILANGA: Newsletter of the African Studies Center

From the Director's Desk:



Our new series of African Studies Newsletters will introduce students to some of the exciting programs and activities which are available through the African Studies Center (ASC) at Penn and in our wider African Studies Consortium (Penn, Bryn Mawr, Haverford, and Swarthmore).

Public and policy-making interest in Africa has never been higher. In fields ranging from global health and economic development to energy and environment, from international security and human rights to world music and cinema, Africa's 53 countries are increasingly in the news. As a result, our mission as a Title VI National Resource Center for Africa continues to expand. New courses, research projects, and opportunities for study and service abroad attract more students every year, and increasing numbers of our alumni are using their knowledge to pursue Africa-related careers throughout the U.S. and overseas, in both the public and private sectors.

This issue of *Ilanga* features essays by students who have spent part of the past year studying, working, and traveling in Africa. Some are African Studies major or minors, others are working toward degrees in Anthropology, Biology, History, Music, Romance Languages, Sociology, etc.; in interdisciplinary programs like Health and Societies or International Relations; or in pre-professional programs in Business, Engineering, and Nursing. All have chosen to enrich their educations by taking the opportunity to experience life and work—and Africa's proverbial hospitality—on a continent that always seems to be full of surprises.

Ilanga also seeks to profile our Consortium's outstanding faculty. In this issue, Dr. Tsitsi Jaji (English and Africana Studies at Penn) and Dr. Susanna Wing (Political Science at Haverford) talk about their research and teaching, while introducing issues that every educated citizen should be aware of when they think of Africa.

Future issues of the newsletter will highlight some of Penn's partnerships in southern Africa, our nationally-recognized African Languages Program, and reports from African Studies alumni on careers they have pursued since graduating from Penn.

We hope the features you read here will prompt you to explore further. Come and visit the African Studies Center on the 6th floor of Williams Hall, or go to our website [www.africa.upenn.edu] for further information on courses, African internship opportunities, and upcoming campus events.

NAIROBI EXCHANGE PROGRAM

Sahro Vedder C'11

I had never questioned the choice of studying abroad; the only difficulty I had was picking where. I chose Kenya because I wanted to work on my Swahili, had family members there, and had always been interested in African politics and culture.

I arrived at the Jomo Kenyatta airport in the evening. As I waited at immigration, I thought I looked like the typical American with sweater and jeans until the customs official asked me if I could help an older Somali lady fill out her visitors application. It took me a while to explain to him that while I looked exactly like a Somali, I had grown up in the U.S. and really could not speak the language, though I would try to help. So my first 30 minutes in Kenya was spent translating, using the 10 words of Somali I knew along with hand gestures and acting out until the application was complete.

My host family in Nairobi lived about 10 minutes away from the University but it usually took me 15 to 20 minutes to get there because the endless streams of cars never seemed to stop for the traffic lights. I had to wait until a crowd of pedestrians decided to cross and then stick as close as possible to them. I honestly didn't cross the street by myself until I was there for two months!

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International Development Summer Institute: Ghana

An Ode to IDSI 2010

Anastasia Shown



Calire Le Guen, Cindy Ocran, & KNUST student Hikmat Baba Dua

Closing remarks from Anastasia Shown to Penn's first International Development Summer Institute (IDSI) class. Shown is the Assistant Director of the African Studies Center and coordinated a group of 21 students in Ghana this summer.

How exciting it was to see your arrival in Accra
Excitement turned to worry as the road to Kumasi became farther than far.

Excitement again assigning you to your new Ghanaian roommates
And after day one, hearing your to and from project tro-tro fates.

Its such a pleasure to hear your appreciations of each other.
From religious debates, to long rides with riddles, from Ashanti-land to Tamale, we are sisters, we are brothers.

You stayed in good spirits despite unpaved roads, project adjustments and sick days.
You respected your mentors and expressed passionately in your journals your thoughts about development ways.

Let this be the start of something bigger.
Let's move beyond development facts and figures.

Go forward with memories of women wanting loans, families needing water, patients seeking care and students looking for support in school.

Go forward with the continued curiosity and as the proverb declares, "A child who asks questions does not become a fool."

In the 118th minute of the game, when everything had converged into one penalty kick, when 23 million Ghanaian hearts were missing beats Gyan, the Ghanaian center forward kicked the ball a millimeter too high. Ghana lost the match...but hidden under this loss, there was something more substantial that it achieved. When Ghana lost, it wasn't only the Ghanaians who were traumatized; there were a billion more Africans who subbed in the Ghanaian sorrow. Such is the Ghanaian soft power.

For the four weeks that we, the member of IDSI, were in Ghana, we felt the intensity of the soft power that lies within their deep sub-tropical villages, their primary schools, their orphanages, their factories and most consequentially, the amity of its citizens. Today, I can confidently assert that there were a few more souls who were also down in the dumps after the great loss; a couple in India, one each in Malaysia, Canada and South Africa, a few in Pennsylvania and many more around the USA.

For me, the IDSI was a unique experience. The program was not limited to long classroom lecturers, nor was it confined to manual labor in the villages.

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Ghanaian Soft Power By Pratham Mittal



Joyce Mankata, Pratham Mittal, and Aditya Khosla make ceramic filters with a mentor

International Development Summer Institute: Ghana

Pratham Continued...

It was neither like one of those typical study abroad programs nor was it like a Peace Corps experience. The program overarched all these and provided us with a comprehensive experiential learning that no single program has provided in the past. We had our dance and music lectures but we also witnessed live forms of both. We sat through the political economy class and we also visited the political seat of the old Ashante empire and met with a minister. We twisted our tongues to Twi, not only with the professor but also while haggling with the local hawker.

The central elements of the program were the development projects that we were involved in. While some of us were interviewing village women on their micro-loans, others were busy transforming bamboo trees into bamboo bicycles. Further, when my group was collecting cow dung to ignite our biogas cylinders, a few others were teaching French and IT at school. This is what we had planned for the weekdays...the work.

But the picture goes much beyond the weekdays. The weekends took us to far off national parks where we saw what 'Timon and Pumba' actually were and wrestled with waves on the beaches. We toured the choking chambers and crossed the

"door of no return" in an old British slave castle. We showered under intimidating waterfalls and followed a herd of antelopes with steps sedate. There were a few unplanned events as well; like the encounter with the reknowned Ghanaian author, Ama Ata Aidoo, the visit to the orphanage, teaching lifesaving to lifeguards, playing field hockey with the KNUST team and many more.

Well...the program ended and I was home in India after almost a year. Quite counter-intuitively, I felt nostalgic. The contentment of home was not absolute. There was lingering feeling that perhaps I might not get to eat 'Fufu' ever again, that I might not get to meet my friends- the 'Kofis' and 'Kojuos' ever again, that I might not get to dance on 'Yori yori' ever again. But then I consoled myself, "There is IDSI 2011."

Such is the Ghanaian soft power...

Pratham Mittal is a sophomore majoring in Systems Engineering and International Relations and is interested in Political theory and South Asian politics.

What is IDSI?

IDSI stands for International Development Summer Institute, a program at Penn coordinated by the School of Engineering and the African Studies Center. IDSI provides undergraduate students with the opportunity to have an applied learning and cultural experience abroad. The program consists of pre and post preparation and research at Penn and a 4-week long training program on the campus of Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) in Kumasi, Ghana. Cooperating with KNUST and several Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), IDSI gives students the chance to apply classroom learning in the field and gain an insight into the world of international development. IDSI-AP seeks to serve as a point of entry for novice undergraduates who desire to gain knowledge of and experience in Africa (West Africa in particular), and in working on problems of the developing world. Students reach a greater understanding and appreciation of the impact that culture, society, politics, economic institutions, and appropriate technologies have on improving the health, education, and quality of life for communities living in the developing world. IDSI provides students with 2 CU of credit, one in African Studies, and one through SEAS for the field practicum.



Penn student Xiang Li Lim & KNUST student Ibrahim Doe collect data from a woman for their microfinance report for the Yonso Project.

To learn more about IDSI, please contact:

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Ballack

Aaron Ross C'11

"Ayyy Ballack!" the cries rang out as the ball arrived at my feet. I didn't quite see the resemblance between myself and the hulking, six-foot-four star of the German national soccer team, but I figured it was an improvement over my first designation upon joining the pickup game: "White guy." We played on the cricket field at Wits University in Johannesburg, the adjacent soccer stadium hosting a training session for South Africa's Bafana Bafana as they prepared for the World Cup. Between the two sets of players on campus that evening there was a total of two white guys—me and Matt Booth, the towering center-back over on the next field.

I was at Wits for the last two weeks of May, nominally to do research for my history thesis, but I travel few places without finding a game. Usually, my initial effort to communicate my intentions involves some awkward combination of hand signals and disjointed, loudly-spoken English phrases—something along the lines of, "Me...Play...With you?" In South Africa, normal English did the job just fine, although I soon became lost amid the lightning-paced chorus of Zulu, Sesotho, Afrikaans, English and a few other local languages. Only when I got the ball and an open teammate belted out "Ballaaack!!" did I momentarily understand the message.

It seems to me that there are two surefire ways to make yourself at home in a new culture. You can be extremely proactive about getting to know people. Or you can play soccer. Not being the biggest extrovert, I tend to rely on the latter approach. After my first game in South Africa, one of my teammates studied me for a second before observing, with evident surprise, "You're a good player, Ballack." I wasn't sure if his surprise owed to my being a white person playing what remains in South Africa an

"There are two surefire ways to make yourself at home in a new culture: you can be extremely proactive about getting to know people, or you can play soccer."

overwhelmingly black sport or my appearance that night from seemingly nowhere. Either way, I was greeted enthusiastically the next day by cries of, "Hey Ballack, what's up brother?" In the two weeks that followed, I played almost every night and quickly became friends with the other players. They ranged from university students to street kids from the local neighborhood, who'd moved to Jo'burg from Limpopo for a shot at playing pro, but they all welcomed me with open arms. They wanted to know how I liked South Africa and how it compared to America. They told me where to go and where not to go; how they felt about politics, race relations and the upcoming World Cup; and perhaps most importantly, how to shake hands like a cool South African young person.

I met a lot of extraordinary people during my too-brief stay, but when I heard TV commentators during the World Cup marvel at the spirit and hospitality of their South African hosts, I thought first back to those guys on the cricket field, who for two weeks in May took a kid called Ballack and made him a full-fledged member of their nightly ritual.

Aaron Ross is a senior History Major who is writing his honors thesis on the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission's inquiry into the Soweto uprising of 1976. He is also a member of the Penn soccer team and a freelance writer whose work has appeared in *The Nation* and *Ambassadors Quarterly*.



African languages & FLAS at Penn!

The African Studies Center is offering the following African languages: Amharic, Igbo, Swahili, Tigrinya, Twi, Wolof, Yoruba, and Zulu. These languages are offered from elementary through advanced (third year) or superior (fourth year) levels. They can be taken to fulfill a language requirement, towards a minor/major in African Studies, and to prepare for research or study abroad in Africa. Eligible graduate students and undergrads who have completed at least a year of an African language can apply for the Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) fellowship for advanced language training, in both academic year and summer courses.

For more information on African Languages offerings and FLAS fellowships please contact the Director of the African Language Program, Dr. Audrey N Mbeje at mbeje@sas.upenn.edu or can 215.898.4299.

The Real Lions of Teranga

Anne Sherman C'11

At sunrise on the third morning of our journey from one corner of Senegal to the other, our two beat-up vans were hours into a long drive. We had visited Niokolokoba Park and a friend had offered to lead us down the unmarked dirt paths to the exit. Unfortunately we were running late—a reality we had come to accept as the way of life here—and our guide had left without us.

After a few wrong turns, we finally emerged from the bush, no longer lost among the wild animals of one of Senegal's most famous parks. Our Senegalese friends assured us the rest of the drive would be easy, "Inchallah!"

Only a short while later, our vans came to a quick halt. In the road were two families of baboons and a large mammal crossing just behind them. We watched the lion stroll nonchalantly across the road, leaving the park where tourists come for exotic African safaris, hoping to spot Africa's iconic inhabitants. The lion paused and looked at

all, my Senegalese host family members in Dakar have never seen a hippopotamus or lion. Their life is surrounded by traffic jams of colorful public buses (kaar rapides and ndiagne ndiayes) and constant calls to prayer from the mosques. Furthermore,

we would not have come across the lion and baboons if it were not for our slow-moving Senegalese drivers and the absolute lack of maps, street signs, or paved roads that caused us to become lost and take a different route. That was more Senegalese to me than lions roaming in the savannah.

This question of realness and the idea of the 'true face' of Senegal and Africa, remained

ous neighbors, "Asalaa Malekum! Na nga def?" We finished the Wolof salutations and noticed that a candlelight Senegalese dinner was being prepared for us. Ibrahima repeated, "I want you to see the real Senegal tonight." Surely, we had seen the



Anne at the Grand Mosque of Touba

us as if it knew that we had not been lucky enough to see a lion during our safari the day before. Now, finally off the animal park grounds; we were so close to the real thing.

When the Université Gaston Berger (in Saint-Louis, Senegal) planned the safari trip for its American exchange students, surely the professors knew we were searching for "traditional" African experiences to write home about. But was the Jeep ride the previous afternoon a good representation of Senegalese land, culture, or life? After

the responsibilities of women and men in society. So, was this the real Senegal?

It was my time with my Senegalese classmates and friends that I felt I understood the true face of the country the best. Early on, three other Penn students and I had taken a trip to visit Lac Rose, a famous, salt-filled lake that glows red. We were determined not to be taken advantage of as "toubab" (White) tourists, so we made friends using the Wolof words we had learned home and were greeted by vari-

ous neighbors, "Asalaa Malekum! Na nga def?" We finished the Wolof salutations and noticed that a candlelight Senegalese dinner was being prepared for us. Ibrahima repeated, "I want you to see the real Senegal tonight." Surely, we had seen the

Western tourist resorts, the street vendors and Talibé children who begged, the busy capital: Dakar, and the controversial new monument. But, Ibrahima wanted to be the true ambassador for his country: accepting, hospitable, a guarder of traditions yet informed and modern in many senses: he was in touch with current news and politics and even had a Facebook account! Eating with our hands from a large bowl with Ibrahima's entire family, we spoke in more than 4 languages to people who hardly knew us but welcomed us in a way we had never experienced. This was the first time we truly understood Senegalese "teranga" (hospitality) and the Senegalese mascot: the Lions of Teranga.

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ASC Staff (left to right): Lee Cassanelli, Faye Patterson, Dame Diene, Audrey Mbeje, Ali Ali-Dinar, and Anastasia Shown

To learn more about the African Studies Center at Penn, visit us in 647 Williams Hall or go to our website at africa.upenn.edu!

Sahro continued...

A second cultural surprise was learning that almost everyone in Nairobi speaks some English (as well as Swahili) and getting around was easier than I expected. Most people travel by using matatus, vans which seat six to twelve people and are decorated with everything from American pop art to proverbs from the bible. Each matatu is unique in its wild decorations or the type of music blasting from inside.

Kenya is a great example of Africa's diversity, with more than 30 local languages and a wide range of cultures. I am grateful that I was able to experience two of those cultures in depth. My host family consisted of Mama Caroline and her son Kelvin who was about my age; they lived in a style similar to what I was used to in America, except for the addition of a maid. Urban youth culture in Kenya was very similar to UPenn's: weekend nights we spent going out to clubs, which played a lot of US 90s music.

I also got to travel to Eastleigh, a bustling Somali enclave in Nairobi, and to the dusty rural town of Garissa—six hours by bus from Nairobi—where I visited family members. Those two districts are very culturally Somalian so I had to put on the traditional dress and scarf when I visited them. Adjusting to my Somalian family's way of life and beliefs and spending weekends in Garissa without indoor plumbing or modern appliance were among the most challenging things I experienced during my semester abroad.

Studying at the University of Nairobi posed its own challenges. Finding out when papers were due or how to use the library took time. Most Kenyan professors don't follow a traditional syllabus, and classes often don't even meet on the scheduled days. I also got to see the stereotypes Kenyan professors had about the U.S. During the second week of my "Comparative Foreign Policies" course, the professor started discussing the tools that foreign countries use to exert their influence. He said with a straight face that exchange students are one of the many ways the U.S spies on other countries. I didn't speak in class for several weeks after that so he wouldn't hear my American accent, and it was much later before he realized I was an American exchange student.

My Kenyan education went well beyond the classroom. As an African studies major at Penn, I had taken a few African history and politics classes, which mostly dealt with colonialism and independence. However, I had no idea that Kenya was going through a constitutional referendum, and so residing in Kenya became a crash course on modern-day governmental reform. After nearly a year of public debate, the majority of Kenyans approved the new constitution on August 4th.

In the end, I decided that studying abroad is about forcing yourself out of your comfort zone and seeing what your strengths are.