



# Africa in the World Today

## Program Directors:

Lokangaka Losambe, Ph.D. (originally from the Congo),  
UVM Professor of English

Isabella (Matsikidze) Jeso, Ph.D. (originally from Zimbabwe),  
UVM Lecturer in English

## **ABSTRACT (PROGRAM OVERVIEW):**

The Africa in the World Today Program's participation in the life of the Global Village and the Living / Learning Center has three main goals: (1) to offer students a sense of the richness and variety of African cultures, (2) to provide an introduction to different topics in current African affairs, while also highlighting historical antecedents that have shaped present African realities; of particular interest will be issues addressing environmental, agricultural, health, technological, political and cultural priorities in Africa nations; and (3) our planning for the 2009-2010 Program focuses on creating program-directed situations where students from different racial and cultural or experiential backgrounds would feel empowered to participate as valued members of the global community that makes up both Africa in the World Today and the Global Village. The program offers students shared experiences and an opportunity for participation in the exploration of Africa's incredibly rich ancient history. Furthermore, the program promotes interactions between participating students and Africans, as well as with Africanist scholars in the UVM and greater Burlington communities.

## **I. DESCRIPTION OF STUDENTS' NEEDS:**

An important aim of education is to refine the empathetic responses of students. This can be achieved through immersion in and appreciation of cultures different from their own. Such a comparative dimension as contact with another culture provides means for the students' critical re-evaluation of the assumptions and prejudices by which they live; contact with other cultures can serve to provide a window into their own essences as individuals. Students from monocultural backgrounds, as in most Western technological societies, need to acquire some degree of cultural diversity as well as an education for global awareness. The Living and Learning Center provides an environment and opportunity for such intellectual growth and the experience of a communal way of life. With this in mind, the directors of the L/L Global Village Africa Program view it as an

important opportunity for students to improve their knowledge of international diverse cultures, benefiting, not only Western students but also both African-born students and those students born of African exiles; and who may themselves never have had an opportunity to visit the African continent. Our belief as program directors is that university students are the professionals of tomorrow. Because of this, we feel that students should have a vested interest in experiences that encourage them to think and act in culturally inclusive ways. For, the fullest exploration of, and exposure to, the African experience in an educational environment such as the Global Village Residential Learning Community, occurs when the academic and cultural dimensions of that experience are systematically linked.

Therefore, we plan, in particular, to involve UVM professors who specialize in African studies; and also other Africanists from local colleges. Thus the Africa Program will bring together professors and students of African origin and Americans under the tutelage of leading Africanists, who themselves spring from a variety of cultural and academic backgrounds. Consequently, our approach is interdisciplinary in nature; and it offers a panoramic view of Africa rather than a fragmented exploration of the subject.

Additionally, the scholarly dimension of the program's foci is intended to complement its cultural aspect. This cultural tangent includes students' exposure to African arts through the Flynn Center for the Performing Arts, the Lane Series and the Fleming Museum. We will also have contact with the Vermont African community, made up of primarily African refugees in Burlington and the surrounding towns. Students will further enhance their experience and knowledge of the African world through **reading** and **writing** about it; as well as **speaking** about their insights during group discussions.

## II. LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

1. To offer students a sense of the richness and variety of African history and culture.

### ACTION STEPS:

- Africa has an elegant performance tradition of poetry, story-telling, music, dance, and theatre. A few workshops on each of these and other areas are planned. Students are also encouraged to attend African performances.
- Africa has a growing indigenous film industry to which students are exposed. We will watch and critiques such African films as Xala, Neria and The Gods Must Be Crazy. Students are also encouraged to expose themselves to non-African film productions that deal with African issues. Example here might include the environmentally-focused documentary, Kilimanjaro: to the Roof of Africa, the politically oriented Out of Africa.
- For centuries, African cuisine and culinary practices have influenced the food culture in America. Students will explore the food cultures of Africa and prepare African dishes. In this regard, the University Marche will be resourced in our preparation of its phenomenally savory African gumbo, as will of course, be the program directors.

2. To provide an introduction to key issues that Africans are facing today.

#### ACTION STEPS:

- Students will be expected to read (mostly on the internet) around the following topics: biographies of major African political figures such as Nelson Mandela (South Africa) and Robert Mugabe (Zimbabwe); read biographies and the short stories of major African writers such as Chinua Achebe (Nigeria) and Bessie Head (South Africa); read about outstanding African environmentalists such as Matai Wangari (Kenya); read on women and development; etc.
- Students will be required to keep journals where they write their reflections on the reading of the week. We will meet bi-weekly and discuss our insights into African issues, using the readings and writing as our launch pads for speaking about Africa and its current affairs, its position in the global context, its ancient history. Ideally, students would also utilize a “blog” as they develop their own thinking, writing and speaking about Africa, so that their comments could be shared more readily among the group. We believe that the learning could be so much richer. However, this idea is still being explored and its future implementation is something we hope will soon be realized.
- Students will each be asked to select an African country of interest and do an online research about that country’s geography, its natural resources, its ethnic groups, its health care and education systems, or other topics of the student’s choice. They will then take turns making presentations to program members and to the Global Village / L & L communities.
- Local scholarly experts on Africa will be invited to give lectures on selected topics of the students’ and directors’ choices.

3. To provide opportunities for students’ exploration of, and exposure to, Africa’s diverse cultures.

#### ACTION STEPS:

- Students will research simple African recipes and learn how to prepare African foods, following their own recipe selections. In order to give everyone an opportunity to do so, we will prepare African snacks or dinners once a month.
- Students will view cultural / political African films such as *Xala* (Senegal) and *Neria* (Zimbabwe); they will as well view films on Africa by film makers from other continents. Possible films and documentaries include *Out of Africa*, *Kilimanjaro: The Roof of Africa*, *The Constant Gardener*, *Nowhere in Africa* and *Hotel Rwanda*. Discussions either led by student discussants or by one of the faculty program directors will follow each viewing.

- Students will enjoy a presentation by local African refugees. Presenters will be Rwandan refugees. This presentation will follow our viewing of *Hotel Rwanda*.
- Students will attend African performances at the Flynn Arts Center and here on campus through the Lane Series; they will also visit the Fleming Museum's African exhibit.

### **III. INTEGRATING AFRICA IN THE WORLD TODAY PROGRAM INTO THE GLOBAL VILLAGE**

The Africa in the World Today program will collaborate with other Global Village programs as well as with programs in the Art Initiative Residential Learning Community. In the past, our program has co-hosted events with the French House, with the German House, with Canada House, to name some of our collaborative partners. For the coming academic year, 2009-2010, we envision inviting the above named programs for collaborative hosting of events such as a scholarly roundtable discussions of issues in Africa along the lines of the well-received Democracy in Africa event that we co-hosted here in L& L with the French House in the spring of 2007. It might be an issue of common interest such as something like "Africa and the Transitioning of Government through Coups." Additional collaborative events might be co-hosted with Exploring Culture through Tea. This is because, for example, in Zimbabwe, at 10:00 a.m. businesses generally release employees for tea time. This came into Zimbabwean contemporary culture through its colonization by Britain. Clearly tea here might be seen to have served as a mediator in the introduction of a new cultural preference.

An event that students proposed this year but that has not yet been presented; and one that we hope to explore for next year is about African cultural silences on sexual orientation. We would want to co-sponsor this or a similar event with the No Boundaries Program. Additionally, given the prevalence of beads as an aspect of traditional beauty culture in Kenya and South Africa, for example, our hope is to collaborate on a bead-making presentation for all of L/L with the Arts Initiative's Jewelry Making Program. As demonstrated by the above examples, there are significant possibilities for integrating Africa Program into both the Global Village and into L/L.

### **IV. TIMELINE OF PLANNED EVENTS:**

This year there will be a focus on presenting a sustained cultural exposure of Africa to our various communities: Africa in the World Today, the Global Village; and the Living and Learning Center as a whole. Every week, the program will either present or sponsor an event. These include lectures and discussions; African dinners, film; attending performing arts events, trips to the museum; and a session on West African Dance by the Shidaa Cultural Troupe. Our insistence on having weekly gatherings around the activities listed above or others like them stems in that in years when program members have spend an entire month without engaging in a shared event, they generally lose touch with one another. This makes it difficult to sustain the program's community; it lends itself to a lack luster program overall. We want to keep up a high energy level, with enthusiastic program members more consistently bringing their interest in Africa to the Global

Village and to the L/L community.

## V. COMMUNITY SERVICE:

Africa in the World Today will encourage participation in some community service projects related to Africa. In the past, the Program has participated in various community-based activities which included (1) guest teaching on Africa in middle and high schools around the state; (2) teach-in for Vermont teachers on Somalia; (3) guest-lecturing for a Summer Institute on Africa sponsored by the Vermont Council for the Humanities; Summer Institute for Burlington High School / UVM Upward Bound Program. This year we will continue to look into ways of forging a more sustained connection with African immigrants in the larger Vermont community.



### About the Global Village

This program is part of the Global Village Residential Learning Community (RLC). For UVM students interested in exploring other cultures, studying abroad, or pursuing lives and careers in an increasingly interconnected world, the Global Village may be just the place for you! Drawing on the resources of the Living/Learning Center and its dynamic network of student- and faculty-led programs, the community of learners that make up the Global Village will be engaged in coursework, lectures, concerts, exhibits, faculty and peer mentoring, social connections with international students, group meals, and trips that:

- Explore the many connections among language, art and culture at regional, national, and international scales.
- Share disciplinary expertise within an environment that values a holistic approach to “living and learning.”
- Encourage formal and informal contacts among students, faculty, and staff within the Global Village, the Living/Learning Center, the other Residential Learning Communities, and the university as a whole.
- Aim to be a complement to existing international and cross-cultural programs at UVM.
- “Think globally and act locally” by outreach to the international community at UVM and within the greater Burlington area.

More information about the Global Village RLC can be found at: <http://www.uvm.edu/globalvillage>

### GRS 095/096: The Global Village Seminar

GRS 095/096: The Global Village Seminar is a largely self-paced, one-credit course designed to help you get the most out of your experience as a citizen of the Global Village Residential Learning Community. All new Global Village residents **must** enroll in GRS 095 for one credit during the fall semester or GRS 096 for the spring semester. (Returning Global Village students who have not yet satisfactorily completed the class must enroll in GRS 095 during the fall semester.) This course will be graded on a “Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory” basis. The course will be

partly comprised of a series of “Common Hour” community gatherings held on Thursday afternoons. The primary purpose of the Common Hour meetings is to build a stronger sense of community among the members of the many Global Village houses and programs. As well, the Common Hour gatherings will help Global Village citizens build a common knowledge and skill set, including such topics as intercultural communication, globalization, etc. A variety of program offerings will take place during Common Hour meetings, such as special guest lectures, interactive dialogue and social gatherings. During weeks when the Common Hours are not held, you are expected to participate in one educational event or activity with a global cultural theme. We’ll provide you with a list of suggested events and activities, or you can identify other events/activities with a global cultural theme; you choose which ones you wish to attend.

We’ll provide you with a Global Village Passport; use it to keep track of your activities and explorations. In addition to documenting participation in Common Hours and the educational events/activities, you will need to do reflective writing in the form of five short journal entries on the cultural/educational events that you participated in, along with a lengthier essay looking back on your most meaningful experience of the semester within the Global Village.

Returning Global Village students are also invited (but not required) to enroll in GRS 095 during the fall semester. Enrollment in GRS 096 for one credit during the spring semester is optional and encouraged for all students.

If you anticipate a problem with fulfilling this course expectation (such as if you will already be enrolled in 18 credits), please contact Prof. Joseph Acquisto, Faculty Director of the Global Village, at [Joseph.Acquisto@uvm.edu](mailto:Joseph.Acquisto@uvm.edu)

For more details about this course, visit: <http://www.uvm.edu/~gvrlc/passport/GRS095096.pdf>