

African Cultural Traditions

A Living and Learning Center 2011-2012 Program Proposal

ABSTRACT

The Africa House 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 issues; of particular interest will be issues addressing environmental, agricultural, health, technological political and cultural realities of African nations; and (3) to serve as a resource for students who might be exploring the possibility of enhancing their educational experience at UVM by attending a program of cultural immersion in an African country. Through its residential component, the program offers students shared experiences and an opportunity for participation in the exploration of Africa's incredibly rich and diverse cultures. The program promotes interactions between participating students and Africans or Africanist scholars in the UVM and greater Burlington communities.

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A Statement on Efforts Toward an Early Identification of a Student Program Co-Director:

In terms of identifying a Student Co-Director for our program as we plan for next year's offerings, we have initiated conversations with Shamiso Madzivire, a first year pre-med student from Zimbabwe. While Bijoux has been an outstanding leader this year, she has had a great opportunity to apply into the McNair Scholars' Program. Should she be accepted into it (it's most likely that she will), she will no longer be able to serve as our Student Leader. Our hope for her is that she gets the McNair Scholarship. This is because she and her family came to Vermont through the Refugee Resettlement Program. The systematic mentorship that is available to McNair Scholars is something that we believe would be most beneficial to this up-and-coming young leader. We hope to hear about Ms. Madzivire's decision in the near future.

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 souls. 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. When properly planned and implemented in the future, the study abroad program will further enrich such an experience.

The fullest exploration and exposure of the African experience in an educational environment occurs when the academic and cultural dimensions of that experience are systematically linked. Africa House and Seminar Program brings 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. The interdisciplinary nature of the program offers a panoramic view of Africa rather than a fragmented approach to the subject.

II. LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. To offer students a sense of the richness and variety of African 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 in the local theaters and other local artistic venues. With the involvement of the current student program director in a West African Dance Theater (Jeh Kulu), Africa House students attended a dance class together as a group off campus in the Burlington area. This is one of the many ways students connect with the Burlington African community.

Africa has a growing indigenous film industry to which students are exposed. Students are also encouraged to expose themselves to non-African film productions that deal with African issues. With the assistance of the student program director, students gathered in their living area to watch a variety of films addressing current African issues. The films include, Hotel Rwanda, Invictus, The Gods Must Be Crazy and more.

For centuries, African cuisine and culinary practices have influenced the food culture in America. Students explore the food cultures of Africa and prepare African dishes. For instance, this past semester the Africa in the World Today, in collaboration with German and Italian House, organized a Wednesday Night Gathering—"The Taste of *Samosa* & A Night of Games". SamosaMan, a well known Congolese refugee with his *samosa* making business that is based out of Montpelier, Vermont, came and spoke to the Living/Learning and larger UVM community about his personal journey with his business and the history of *samosa* in his native country, how the culture he grew up in adapted the *samosa*, a traditional Indian dish, to its own culinary tastes, mixing spices from India with Congolese spices and other ingredients to produce an international dish.

Program and Global Village participants in this event had a chance to interact with Mr. SamosaMan, learn how to prepare the *samosas* and ate the ones they prepared themselves. It was a phenomenally successful event because it involved a hands-on activity that got the students excited to learn something new.

2. To provide an introduction to different topics in African Studies.

ACTION STEPS

A number of African scholars and artists, who are already in the United States, will be invited to participate in some spring / fall lectures and discussions to expose students to up-to-date developments in African issues.

3. To encourage students' initiatives in the exploration of Africa's diverse environments and cultures.

ACTION STEPS

Students, working closely with the program's Students Director, in consultation with the program's Faculty Co-Directors, play a major role in planning and in making necessary arrangements for the year-long extracurricular activities of the program.

In September, all members of the Africa in the World Today program join in organizing events focusing on African issues and Africa's heritage, including public lectures, videos and films, symposia, exhibitions, performances, African dinner and dance, for example.

This year we would like, as our outreach effort, to make a special exploration of the possibility of hosting a Vermont African Community Gathering in December, allowing the refugee community as well as others to celebrate the holidays together here at the Living and Learning Center.

III. STUDENT RECRUITMENT PLANS

A Flyer will be also distributed with their letters of admission to all incoming students. Whenever possible, the Directors participate in the Summer Orientation Programs at L&L.

Students beyond their first year are made aware of the existence of the Africa in the World Today Program at the Living/Learning Program Fair and online through the L/L Website during the spring, by the Program Directors and by other UVM faculty in classes across campus.

Students enrolled for the African Studies Minor and in courses with an African components are made aware of the existence of the program, during pre-registration. Our members also recruit their friends and acquaintances by word of mouth.

VI. DISSEMINATION PLANS

Program activities will be advertised on poster displays; in the Living and Learning Center Weekly information media; the ALANA student newsletter, the newsletter of the International Educational Offices, the Plant and Soil Science Department bi-weekly newsletter; the International Studies Office information flyers on international lectures and events; classes for courses with related content; the UVM campus newspapers.

V. COMMUNITY SERVICE

Africa House will encourage participation in some community service projects related to Africa. In the past, Africa House 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; etc. We are continuing to look for such opportunities for our members. This year we will continue exploring ways of helping to facilitate a quick integration of African immigrants in the larger Vermont community.

VI. PROGRAM SUITES AND OTHER SPACE NEEDS

The program requests residential space for 15 students and an apartment for one of the Faculty Program Directors. Other facilities required by the program include: (1) a classroom or lounge for bi-monthly program meetings and special in-house / Global Village activities, including program dinners and Wednesday Night Gathering events; (2) occasional use of the Commons Fireplace Lounge for public lectures by guest speakers, film shows, and dance performances.

VI. EVALUATION

For the evaluation of our program, we will rely on the Living and Learning Center's system of evaluating its programs; we will also constantly monitor our own progress throughout the year, adjusting or improving on areas of weakness while maintaining areas of strength.

VIII. INTEGRATING AFRICA HOUSE PROGRAM INTO THE GLOBAL VILLAGE

As we have done in the past, we **collaborate** with various Global Village and other L/L Programs that have an African component to them or whenever our objectives dovetail. In the past, we have collaborated with French House, German House, Caribbean House, Exploring Culture through Tea; and with the ALANA Program.