

“Life Stories and the Politics of Rights in Tanzania”

~ a course in the Art and Practice of Literary Ethnography
and Global Service-Learning ~

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

The course includes an intense, cultural opportunity for students to live in a rural village in northwestern Tanzania, working with Tanzanians committed to grassroots efforts to alleviate the problems and address the challenges particular to the developing world.

In tandem with this hands-on, service-learning experience, students will be challenged to think of themselves as ethnographers, conducting field work in Africa. We will consider the academic and creative challenges of ethnographic writing, including the transfer of experience, story, and knowledge between the student-author and those individuals she encounters. The course will conclude with each student producing an original, substantial work of literary ethnography.

This course will include several weeks of study both before and after our month abroad (this portion of the course will take place on-line and/or on the campus of the University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown [UPJ]).

INSTRUCTOR: Eric Schwerer, PhD, MFA

Creative and Professional Writing

Associate Professor, UPJ

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Developed in partnership with Amizade Global Service-Learning Consortium
(www.amizade.org) and partnered with West Virginia University.

FEATURES:

- full orientation and preparation for the study abroad experience
- guided research and critical and creative reading and writing assignments
- seminar-style lecture and daily reflection, journal writing, and discussion
- completion of a substantial final project with the potential for publication
- guest lectures, field trips, and cultural immersion activities while in Tanzania
- completion of a service-minded project in partnership with community-based Tanzanian organizations. Students will meet and work closely with Tanzanians.

LEARNING OUTCOMES:

Intercultural Learning

Writing:

- Students will explore the craft of literary ethnography (including related concepts in the fields of creative writing, oral history, travel writing, literary journalism, sociology, anthropology, and cultural studies) .
- Through first-hand experience, students will learn of the social, environmental, and health-related issues—as well as the joys and cultural strengths—particular to the rural, non-Western, developing world. Collaborative exchange with our Tanzanian host community will allow students to extend their own research to the practices of global citizenship, civic participation, and social justice.

Critical Reflection:

- Through lecture, essay assignments, readings, discussion, exams, and a final project, students will learn how to present their work to an audience of scholars and interested readers. This should lead to a greater insight into how a student’s academic major could lead to vocations or graduate study in the fields of Creative or Professional Writing.

GRADING:

- 30% Final Project
- 25% Journal Assignments, including ethnographic interviews, lecture and reading notes
- 25% Critical, Reflective Essays and Exams
- 20% Discussion and Participation

GRADE SCALE: 100-90 = A; 89-80 = B; 79-70 = C; 69-60 = D; 59-0=F.

ATTENDANCE and GROUP DYNAMICS:

Students will be part of a community that transcends classroom walls. In Tanzania, class related activities will occur for 6-8 hours every day for 6 days of the week (daily lectures and discussion [2 hours a day]; cultural immersion projects and guest lecturers [4-6 hours a day]).

Enthusiastic attendance is required throughout the entire global service-learning experience, including full engagement of all pre- and post-immersion activities as well as active participation in all of our activities while in Tanzania.

OUTLINE OF TOPICS, ASSIGNMENTS, and COURSE TEXTS:

1. Pre-Immersion / Weeks 1-3

- Introduction to the concepts and practice of literary ethnography and its cross-disciplines (oral history, travel writing, literary journalism, sociology, anthropology, cultural studies).
- First journal assignments (graded).
- First critical, reflective essays due.
- Preparation for traveling abroad (introduction to instructors and students; introduction to our Tanzanian host-community and the various grassroots community organizations with which we will be partnering)

READINGS: pre-immersion:

THE FOLLOWING MATERIALS, SOME IN EXCERPTED FORM, WILL BE PROVIDED IN A TRAVEL-READY COURSE PACK (subject to change):

1. Sunstein, Bonnie Stone and Elizabeth Chiseri-Strater. FieldWorking: Reading and Writing Research
2. Geertz, Clifford. Works and Lives: The Anthropologist as Author
3. Bishop, Wendy. Ethnographic Writing Research: Writing It Down, Writing It Up, and Reading It
4. Fine, Gary Alan. "Ten Lies of Ethnography: Moral Dilemmas of Field Research"
5. "Karagwe District Website (<http://www.tanzania.go.tz/districts/karagwe/karagwef.html>)

2. Study Abroad / Weeks 4-7

- Daily lectures and discussion.
 - Literary ethnography and the American traveler in Africa.
 - Oral history as social justice / Writing as traveling.
- Service-learning project with Tanzanian host community.
- Field trips and guest lecturers.
- Daily journal assignments (graded weekly).
- Writing and workshop discussion towards final project.
- Final Project proposal due.

READINGS: field experience / study broad:

THE FOLLOWING MATERIALS, SOME IN EXCERPTED FORM, WILL BE PROVIDED IN A TRAVEL-READY COURSE PACK (subject to change):

1. Creighton, Colin (Ed.). Gender, Family and Work in Tanzania
2. Brodkey, Linda. "Writing Ethnographic Narratives"
3. DeCaro, Frank (ed.). Folklore Muse: Poetry, Fiction, and Other Reflections by Folklorists
4. Okpewho, Isidore. African Oral Literature: Backgrounds, Character, and Continuity

3. Post-Immersion / Weeks 8-10

- Final journal reflections (graded).
- Final critical, reflective essay due.
- Workshop / peer-critique of a classmate's ethnography-in-progress.
- Final Project (a major work of literary ethnography, 10-20 pages).

READINGS: post-immersion:

THE FOLLOWING MATERIALS, SOME IN EXCERPTED FORM, WILL BE PROVIDED IN A TRAVEL-READY COURSE PACK (subject to change):

1. Chernoff, John. Hustling Is Not Stealing: Stories of an African Bar Girl
2. Barley, Nigel. The Innocent Anthropologist
3. Lugalla, Joe L.P. and Kibassa, Colletta G. Poverty, AIDS, and Street Children in East Africa

Optional books for future study:

EXCEPTIONAL MODELS OF LITERARY ETHNOGRAPHY CONDUCTED IN THE STATES.
EXCERPTS TO BE PROVIDED IN TRIP COURSE PACK:

Agee, James. Let Us Now Praise Famous Men.
LeBlanc, Adrian. Random Family
Mackall, James. Plain Secrets: An Outsider Among the Amish.

REFLECTIONS on GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP:

This course includes consideration of the concept of Global Citizenship, which put simply is the suggestion that every human life is equally valuable and that multiple positions and perspectives that do not fundamentally violate that first principle must be respected. You will need to be flexible in your thinking about global citizenship and how your writing—your work as an ethnographer—relate to people elsewhere in the world.

GRADING CRITERIA:

“A” work is superior student work, demonstrating excellence.

FINAL PROJECTS and CRITICAL, REFLECTIVE ESSAYS will:

1. have strongly developed central ideas or theses and insightful and creative treatments of topics.
2. offer compelling support derived from accurate and original use of primary and secondary materials.
3. have paragraphs with a strong central focus or otherwise exhibit an inspired sense of form.
4. begin by offering a sophisticated context, purpose, and structure.
5. have conclusions that substantiate larger insights.
6. have stylish writing with no errors in grammar, diction, mechanics, or documentation.
7. creatively meet the needs of their rhetorical situation.

“A” work also requires superior PARTICIPATION demonstrated through:

1. participation in class discussion that indicates a committed, deep engagement of the readings, lectures, and cultural immersion activities (including ethnographic interviews and field trips).
2. superior maintenance and thoughtful completion of a journal that indicates an outstanding commitment to the course’s subject matter (including lecture and reading notes).
3. superior, thoughtful participation in peer critiques of classmates’ drafts as well as intensive, critical revision of one’s own drafts.
4. full, enthusiastic participation in all pre- and post-immersion academic work

“B” work is solid student work that approaches excellence:

FINAL PROJECTS and CRITICAL, REFLECTIVE ESSAYS—although falling short of the 7 criteria necessary for an “A” paper—will nonetheless demonstrate above average achievement in those 7 areas.

“B” work also requires a level of PARTICIPATION that—although falling short of the 4 criteria necessary for an “A”—nonetheless demonstrates above average achievement in those 4 areas.

“C” work is average, unremarkable student work:

FINAL PROJECTS and CRITICAL, REFLECTIVE ESSAYS – although falling short of the 7 criteria necessary for a “B” paper – will nonetheless demonstrate average, albeit unremarkable, achievement in those 7 areas.

“C” work also requires a level of PARTICIPATION that—although falling short of the 4 criteria necessary for a “B”— nonetheless demonstrates average, albeit unremarkable, achievement in those 4 areas.

“D” work is inadequate student work on multiple levels:

FINAL PROJECTS and CRITICAL, REFLECTIVE ESSAYS – in addition to falling short of the 7 criteria necessary for a “C” paper – will also:

1. have underdeveloped central ideas or theses and offer little support and/or inaccurate and banal use of primary and secondary materials.
2. have paragraphs that lack central focus or guiding formal principles.
3. have sloppy or ineffective organizational strategies.
4. have excessive errors in grammar, diction, mechanics, and documentation.

“D” work also represents a level of PARTICIPATION that—although clearly inadequate as regards the 4 criteria necessary for a “C”— nonetheless is sufficient to earn a passing grade.

“F” work is work insufficient for a college-level course:

FINAL PROJECTS and CRITICAL, REFLECTIVE ESSAYS – in addition to being inadequate on multiple levels— might also:

1. have egregious errors in grammar, diction, mechanics, and documentation.
2. show no consideration of the assignment.
3. not meet the basic minimum requirements of length, focus, or content.
4. contain plagiarism, including undocumented resource material or other student work.

“F” work also represents an unacceptable level of PARTICIPATION, including but not limited to:

1. failing to keep up with the assignments in a timely fashion.
2. failing to participate in discussions or otherwise participate in the program.
3. failing to turn in a Final Project.

Note: “+” and “-” grades are assigned to work whose strengths or weaknesses place it in the upper or lower end of a specific grade category

SOCIAL JUSTICE STATEMENT

West Virginia University is committed to social justice. Students must concur with that commitment and are expected to maintain a positive learning environment based upon open communication, mutual respect, and non-discrimination. WVU does not discriminate on the basis of race, sex, age, disability, veterans status, religion, sexual orientation, color or national origin. Any suggestions as to how to further such a positive and open environment in this class will be appreciated and given serious consideration.