

Outside the Davidson bubble: Junior explores Uganda

Denton Baird '14 describes the challenges and triumphs of his semester in Africa

Denton Baird

Guest Contributor

The following is an excerpt from Denton's travel blog as he describes his research and life abroad based in Uganda.

For the past year or two, I've been intensely interested in conflict studies. It's an infinitely complex, desperately needed, constantly evolving field that boils down to a few questions: 1. How do we stop people from fighting with each other? 2. How do we help them recover from fighting with each other? 3. How can we prevent them from fighting in the future?

My program deals explicitly with the second question. Uganda and Rwanda have had their fair share of conflict—during the peak of the Rwandan genocide, over 1,000 people were killed every twenty minutes, mostly with machetes. It's an immensely sobering statistic, but for the people of Rwanda, it isn't just a statistic; it's a father or a sister or a friend. After such an inhumane experience, how do you go back to work or to school? It's nearly beyond comprehension, but it has to be done. On my program in Uganda, I will be studying how Rwanda and Uganda have tried to help their people recover, and what lessons we can take from them into the future.

I'm also learning the local language, Kisuho/Luo, a language that is only spoken in an area of a hundred or so square kilometers. At the end of the program, I'll be doing a month-long independent study project, most likely on border governance and its effect on regional stability. What-

ever happens, it'll be an adventure.

This week we traveled to Kitgum, a small town two hours northeast of Gulu, Uganda. After a crowded, bumpy, hair-raising drive during which we forded a river and saw two separate giant tour buses power slide through corners, we finally made it to Kitgum. Much to our surprise we found our hotel undergoing renovations that were supposed to have been completed in time for us. Instead, we had to stay at the nicest hotel in town—the only hotel with a gate, mosquito nets, and enough space for everyone to have his or her own bed. (It was appropriately named "Little Palace Hotel".)

It's easily the nicest hotel we've stayed at thus far on our adventures, because it is the only one we've stayed at in Uganda with real showers and hot water! At most hotels, the water heating systems are badly wired and puts a mild electric current through the plumbing. And by that, I mean you get a nice jolt of electricity when you turn the handle without using a bag or towel.

Quickly we found out that not everyone could stay at the main hotel, which comprised of ten rooms. Six people would have to stay at the annex. The hotel claimed it was only a half-kilometer away, but it was really more like three-to four kilometers. The annex had the same amenities as the main hotel, only to a lesser degree. Showers, but no hot water; one TV station instead of two; two dead bolts on the door instead of four—you get the picture.

After a couple of nights in Gulu, we stayed with families in a local village. Nothing screams globalization quite like entering a rural African grass hut for the first time only to hear "Call Me Maybe" come on over the radio. Carly Rae is apparently harder to get away from than mosquitoes. Gulu is covered in mosquitoes right



Denton Baird (far left) is studying abroad this semester in Uganda. As described by his blog, his experience has been one of contrasts and extremes. Photo by Denton Baird

now. I'd almost agree to sleep in a hut and not have electricity again in exchange for being mosquito free. Almost.

The most exciting part of the rural homestay experience was our first opportunity at field research. Kirsten and I mapped our village's local resources and conducted a focus group on how those resources affect the community. I facilitated the discussion while Kirsten took notes. We had a local born-again pastor translate my questions to the group of a dozen older widowed mothers that assembled to help us. We went for about an hour and a half and talked about everything from Museveni to maize. It was really enjoyable although now we have to transcribe verbatim all of the English conversation—quite the tedious process.

After three nights the rural homestays were over and we departed from extremely sad families back to our hotel in Kitgum for a recuperation night before heading

back to Gulu.

When we got back to Gulu we had lunch at a restaurant that served real American food: pizza and burgers! I split a BBQ chicken, pepper, and pineapple pizza. It wasn't too bad, and it was also the second time I've had dairy in Uganda!

My family has a joke from my childhood days. Whenever I asked, "What's for dinner?" the standard response was "liver and onions." Now after eating liver and onions several times, it really isn't that bad. My eight-year-old self would never believe it.

We are leaving for Kampala on Sunday. Kampala is the largest city and the capital of Uganda. We are going to visit the Baha'i temple on Wednesday. I'm excited because it is the only Baha'i temple on the continent. I'm finally earning that high school Baha'i club membership I put on my college application.

Proposal for Africana Studies major bolstered this semester

Students become frustrated after proposal for an Africana Studies major was denied.

Cidney Holliday

Staff Writer

Amherst College, Bates College, Bowdoin College, Carleton College, Claremont McKenna College, Colby College, Colgate College, Pomona College, Swarthmore College, Vassar College, Washington and Lee University, Wesleyan University, Williams College.

These schools are a few of the 21 sister institutions to Davidson. They vary in location across the US, and all have an Africana, African-American, or Black studies program, most of the programs dating back to the civil rights movements at institutions of higher learning.

With the exception of Furman College, Middlebury College, Grinnell College and Davidson College these schools have an established major for students to study the African Diaspora (or spread of African ancestry and heritage).

Last semester, Africana Studies was proposed as an official major to add to Davidson's course offering. The proposal, however, was not initially approved by the Educational Policy Committee (EPC). Since that time, faculty have worked to revise and bolster the proposal with the aim of it becoming an official major in the future. In the mean time, students may still choose to study within the field of Africana Studies through the Center for Interdisciplinary Studies.

Joi Spaulding '14, who is an Africana Studies major through the Center, was disappointed by the EPC's decision last semester not to recommend Africana Studies as a major at that time. "I was banking on, [the proposal] passing...I was upset after knowing the school asked them to do it, and how good of a job they did, and then to know that it didn't get passed." Upon learning that the proposal was not approved, Spaulding began the lengthy process of declaring Africana Studies through the Center.

She initially became interested in Africana Studies after taking a course with Dr. LaKisha Simmons, a visiting history professor.

"She opened my eyes to a lot of different things... not only black people but also other marginalized groups and history through their eyes," Spaulding explains. "It has to start somewhere, why not in the 2012-2013 school year?"

Dr. Daniel Aldridge, Professor of History, worked with the group of professors that wrote the proposal to make Africana Studies a major. Aldridge explained that forming a major requires 11 courses and the group has been writing to ensure that they can reach this major outline.

"We have a group of supporters for the Africana Studies project, 15 people or so. We had a meeting to talk about what structure the major would require, introductory course capstone and distribution requirements." He mentioned how one of their main focuses is the design of the introductory course that may be offered in Fall of 2013, but this cannot be for sure, "the process of creating a major is one that's difficult."

Dr. Clark Ross, Vice President of Academic Affairs and Dean of Faculty, coordinates with the Educational Policy Committee when reviewing a proposed major. He outlined that the process for creating a major as follows: "Interested faculty provide a proposal to me to bring to the Educational Policy Committee. The EPC typically meets with the group, and provides feedback. Then the group would rework the proposal, in light of the feedback. In the past, proposals have undergone several iterations before receiving a recommendation from the EPC...Only the faculty, by majority vote, can approve a major."

Ross explained that much has changed in the time since the initial proposal, including the addition of two visiting professors who are able to strengthen Davidson's course offerings in the area of Africana Studies. "With our new faculty, we have several new courses in history and art history."

Ross said, "While we still have a ways to go, I am pleased with the courses added this year." These additions to the course options at Davidson College allow for students to continue supporting the major approval process.

Aldridge said that students interested in showing support for the addition of the major should "take courses that are in Africana studies now, and show interest by enrolling." Should ample interest in these classes be demonstrated by students, there is a greater chance that Africana Studies could become a major in the future.

Spaulding feels that this process must happen sooner rather than later. "It's 2012 and we don't have anything, when others

schools offered programs in the 60s...something needs to be done about this, because the effort can't just die out."

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