



Interdisciplinary Teaching in the Field and Classroom as a Mechanism for the Development of an International Research and Education Consortium

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We describe two interdisciplinary courses that are designed to introduce non-specialist students to issues surrounding international research and study. Collaborative integrated teaching is used for both a southern African summer study abroad program as well as an intensive January term course on ethics, protocols and practices of international research. An additional benefit of the development and implementation of these courses is the strengthening of the Southern African Virginia Networks and Associations (SAVANA) consortium, an international collaborative network of institutions of higher learning.

The objective of the summer study abroad program is to provide undergraduate students from both the U.S. and southern Africa with firsthand experience of the environmental and social complexity of southern Africa. Participants have the unique opportunity to gain insight into the role the environment plays in shaping the people and culture of southern Africa. Undergraduate students receive 3 hours of credit each in both Environmental Science and Anthropology for the “People, Culture and Environment of Southern Africa” University of Virginia study abroad program. The program is an intensive introduction to the physical geography, history and culture of

the region and involves an intensive blend of in-class lectures (mornings) and field trips (afternoons) with daily debriefing discussions (evenings). Over the duration of the one month program, students are exposed to elements of geology, ecology, hydrology and atmospheric science and how the interconnectedness of these different aspects of the physical environment help to shape the history of the people and their culture of the region. Information about logistics and course development as well as to how this program has contributed to the development and expansion of the Southern Africa Virginia Networks and Associations (SAVANA) consortium will be detailed.

The study abroad program builds upon more than 14 years of relationships between UVA faculty and their southern African colleagues developed during the course of several regional scale research programs with the most recent being the Southern African Regional Science Initiative – SAFARI 2000. Participants operate out of four major locations: Johannesburg, Gauteng Province, South Africa (University of the Witwatersrand); Thohoyondou, Limpopo Province, South Africa (University of Venda); Maputo, Mozambique (University of Eduardo Mondlane); and Acornhoek, Limpopo Province, South Africa (University of the Witwatersrand – Rural Facility). Class size is limited to 15 students from UVA and about 6 African students from the SAVANA consortium. This pairing with SAVANA students provides a unique, ‘round-the clock’ learning experience for both U.S. and southern African students.

As the result of increased student interest in these southern African activities, an intensive course entitled “Ethics, Protocols and Practices of International Research” was developed to provide a proper introduction to issues related to working internationally, in general, and in southern Africa, particularly. This collaboratively taught course will be discussed briefly as well as its role in helping to develop the SAVANA consortium.

Participants in these classes have come from a variety of undergraduate majors and student backgrounds. Among course alumni are majors in: Anthropology, African American Affairs, Architecture, Biology, English, Environmental Thought and Practice, Environmental Science, History, International Relations, Political Science, Psychology, Sociology and Women’s Studies. Former participants not only have gone on to join Peace Corps, Teach for America, Americorps as well as to volunteer in South Africa and domestically, but have pursued graduate degrees often related to various aspects of their experience.