Sankofa: Cultural Legacies and Afro-Futures
AFRS 3000 (3 credits)

Ghana: Globalization, Cultural Legacies, and the Afro-Chic

This syllabus is representative of a typical semester. Because courses develop and change over time to take advantage of unique learning opportunities, actual course content varies from semester to semester.

Course Description

This seminar revolves around a central question: how are visions of the present and future of Africa crafted through a thoughtful interrogation of its past? The central motif that undergirds this seminar is Sankofa, a Ghanaian concept that encourages a strong engagement with the past in order to ensure informed and sustained progress into the future. Sankofa is often associated with the proverb, "Se wo were fi na wosankofa a yenkyi" ("It is not wrong to go back for that which you have forgotten.") After framing an African epistemological relation to Africa's multiple presents and futures in light of the concept of Sankofa (Module 1), we will revisit our the complex political history of Ghanat in order to create a framework for understanding the cultural, socio-political, and economic particularities of Africa, Africans, and diasporic Africans (module 2). Students will, subsequently, rethink the political particularities of Ghana and the continent in light of the concept of Sankofa (module 3). In the concluding module, we will use the concept of Sankofa to engage with one of the most timely frameworks for thinking Africa today: Afrofuturism.

Students will explore the cultural hybridity, socio-political vitality, and economic dynamism of Ghana in light of indigenous cultural particularities, negotiations with Western modernity, and contemporary cultural creolization. Throughout the course students will ask an important question: How can a better engagement with Ghanaian cultures, its encounter with Western modernity, and the development of its tradi-modern cultures help us apprehend our understanding of Africa in more elaborate ways? These questions will allow us to develop a more informed understanding of Africa beyond the pervasive limits of Western modernity and its corollary, the relegation of the continent in the dark abyss of pre-modernity. We will, thus, develop a more complex understanding of the economic, social, and political successes and failures of the continent. To ensure a meaningful engagement with Sankofa, students will undertake practical and experiential modules to understand the past as a mesh of competing factors that are not always easily distinguished from the present. The future on the other hand will be viewed through the creative productions of contemporary artists in order to better understand the ways in which its imagination can stretch beyond the conventional notions that are forced upon the continent by foreign voices. Ultimately, the past as recalled through oral traditions, the present as processed via written forms, and the future as envisioned through creative works will relate on a complex continuum that function as a result of the processes that inform their creation.

Learning Outcomes
By the end of the course students should be able to:
- Understand the role and place of Ghana within a larger diasporic African vision;
- Examine notions of representation to present an understanding of the ways in which popular media and development discourses have conceptualized social realities in Africa;
- Interrogate western notions of Africa through interactions with local actors;
- Apply the notion of Sankofa in different contexts and timeframes;
- Critique sites of memory that curate cultural heritage in Ghana.

Language of Instruction
This course is taught in English, and students will be exposed to vocabulary in local languages related to course content as well as the nuances of economic change and development through in-country expert lectures and field visits in a wide range of venues and regional locales.

Instructional Methods
SIT's teaching and learning philosophy is grounded in the experiential learning theory developed by Kolb (1984; 2015) and informed by various scholars, such as Dewey, Piaget, Lewin, among others. Experiential learning theory recognizes that learning is an active process that is not confined to the formal curriculum; "knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (Kolb, 2015, p. 49). Learning involves both content and process. Learning is holistic and happens through various life experiences upon which students draw to generate new ways of knowing and being. Learning involves a community and is a lifelong endeavor. Learning is transformational. The suggested four step-cycle of a *concrete experience*, *reflective observation*, *abstract conceptualization*, and *active experimentation* embedded in the experiential learning model is not linear and might not always happen in that specific order, as any learning is highly context dependent. These stages of taking part in a shared experience; reflecting on that experience by describing and interpreting it; challenging their own assumptions and beliefs to generate new knowledge; and ultimately applying new knowledge, awareness, skills, and attitudes in a variety of situations and contexts are important for students to engage in to become empowered lifelong learners.

Course Schedule

Module 1: Sankofa: Framing the discourse on Africa
By advocating a return to the past in order to better understand the present so as to prepare for the future, Sankofa is a concept that interrogates temporal relationships and informs many African world-views. This complex belief is sometimes unfortunately misunderstood as a discourse on tradition and change that juxtaposes African cultural forms with non-African (mainly Western) equivalents. This positioning ultimately freezes Africa in an ancient mold while freeing western influences as modern. This module critiques the implications of this misunderstanding by viewing the notion of a return through pan-African and local lenses to better understand the role of Africa in shaping global conversations.

Students will have an interactive session with Dr Obadele Kambon. This guest lecturer will take the class through the philosophy of Sankofa in tandem with an African diaspora vision. Having moved from America to naturalize and work in Ghana, Dr Kambon promotes African-centered learning while helping diasporic Africans return to live and settle on the continent. Kambon will share his perspectives and take students through practical exercises that situate Sankofa within its proper context.

Required Reading:
Kambon, Ọ., & Yeboah, R. M. (2019). What Afrikan names may (or may not) tell us about the state of pan-Afrikanism. *Journal of Black Studies*, *50*(6), 569-601.
Kambon, Ọ. (2015). Legacies and the impact of Trans-Atlantic enslavement on the Diaspora. *Journal of Pan African Studies*, *8*(7), 41.

Module 2: Castles, Memories, and the Political Economy of Slavery
Sankofa involves, as stated, a sustained engagement with aspects of the past such as slavery and the Atlantic slave trades that are not always easy to confront. Slavery is not always addressed directly in Ghana, even though different parts of the country played key roles in the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, notwithstanding the continued importance of its aftermath locally and globally. A careful engagement with the history of slavery will allow us to think critically about topics that are timely in Ghana, in Africa, in the United States and in African diasporic places namely, the naming of monuments, streets, and government buildings and the contemporary political and economic consequences of the slave trade. This engagement with Sankofa will not only allow us to revisit our difficult pasts but also better understand political, economic, and social implications of the history of slavery and exploitation. This module will allow us to re-envision continuities and discontinuities between Africa and its diaspora, reconsider the pervasiveness of white supremacy, and better understand the limits of Western modernity as an epistemic tool to understand our contemporary world.

During this module, we will visit, the Elmina Castle. The Elmina Castle is the oldest slave castle in the world. A visit to this site will be preceded by a lecture that touches on the relationship between Africa and its diaspora and followed by a debriefing session that attempts to understand the social construction of race.

Required reading:
Apter, A. (2017). History in the dungeon: Atlantic slavery and the spirit of capitalism in Cape Coast Castle, Ghana. *The American Historical Review*, *122*(1), 23-54.
Araujo, A. L. (2018). Tourism and Heritage Sites of the Atlantic Slave Trade and Slavery. *A Companion to Public History*, 277-88.
Hartman, S. (2008). *Lose your mother: A journey along the Atlantic slave route*. Macmillan.

Module 3: Beyond Western Democracy: Sankofa, chieftaincy, and the political future of Ghana
Postcolonial Africa has been plagued with political turmoil. Even the arguably most democratic African countries often face uncertainties. Yet, Ghana is frequently hailed as an exception that has in the past two decades succeeded in developing a strong democratic system inclusive of traditional political systems. In this module, students will attempt to understand the limits of the

idea of democracy from the lens of local ruling systems and attempt to understand how an alternative African model can be developed at the crux of individual liberty and communal balance. Students will visit the village of Akwamu Adumasa to participate in a *durbar* where they will experience first-hand the traditions that underpin authority and relationships. The visit to Akwamu Adumasa will be followed by an interactive session where the chief and queen-mother will field questions and observations related to prior readings and the experience in-the-moment. Students will also visit Parliament House and the University of Ghana's political science department to compare and contrast the contemporary political system and traditional modes of governance. This will allow us to better understand the way the concept of Sankofa can help us imagine the political future of Africa in a more inclusive and less Eurocentric way.

Required reading:
Steegstra, M. (2009). Krobo queen mothers: gender, power, and contemporary female traditional authority in Ghana. *Africa Today*, 105-123.
Ray, D. I. (2003). Chiefs in their millennium sandals: traditional authority in Ghana—relevance, challenges and prospects. *Critical Perspectives in Political and Socioeconomic Development in Ghana. African Social Studies Series*, 6, 241-271.
Patrick, Y., Gyimah, E., & Jacob, I. (2020). A Qualitative Study of the Perception of the People of Akyem Abuakwa Traditional Area on the Usefulness of the Chieftaincy Institution in Ghana. *Social Education Research*, 151-158.
Crook, R. (2005) The role of Traditional Institutions in Political Change and Development. CDD/ODI Policy Brief No 4, *Ghana Center for Democratic Development*, 1-4.

Module 4: Sankofa: Looking Forward in our own Terms
After framing an African epistemological relations to our present and our future in our own terms (Module 1), revisiting our painful past to create the framework of understanding our cultural, socio-political, and economic particularities on the continent and the diaspora (module 2), and rethinking the political particularities of Ghana and the continent in light of the concept of Sankofa (module 3), the concluding module uses the concept of Sankofa to engage with one of the most timely framework for thinking Africa today: Afrofuturism. This model will focus on ways in which contemporary Ghanaian practitioners, artists, activists, and social media influencers use the concept of Sankofa to transform their diverse presents and imagine their futures. While even in their most radical ways (postcolonialism, decoloniality, ethnophilosophy, etc), African futures are typically constructed through foreign lenses we will ask: what do local visions of the future, rooted in an understanding of time that is not based on a western teleology separating "past," "present," and "future" look like in Africa? How does Sankofa allow us to better apprehend our present and our future?

Students will get the chance to analyze short stories, music, and art pieces with Afro-future themes and engage with lecturer, DJ, and social critic Kobby Graham in a seminar on Afro-futuristic transformations. Graham's session will conclude with a visit to the Afro Future Carnival. Students will also have the chance to engage with political cartoonists, poster artists, and other creators of popular culture that challenge, critique, and extend representations of Africa through their engagement with art. A site visit to the Center for African Popular Culture will illuminate these practices and help complicate notions that stem from responding to and attempting to shape discourses related to Africa both internally and outward in an international sense. The

founder Dr. Oduro-Frimpong will explore and critically examine the contested meanings that bring out the curated work at his center, as well as their material implications for the construction of "Africanness".

Required reading:
Summers, B. T. (2019). Post-Apocalyptic Shine in the Afro-Future. *ASAP/Journal*, *4*(2), 317-320.
Ampofo, A. A. (2016). Re-viewing Studies on Africa,# Black Lives Matter, and Envisioning the Future of African Studies. *African Studies Review*, *59*(2), 7-29.
Oduro-Frimpong, J. (2018). Glocalization and Popular Media: The Case of Akosua Political Cartoons. In Jolanta A Drzewieckaand Thomas K Nakayama, (eds.), *Global Dialectics in Intercultural Communication: Case Studies*(pp. 143-160). Peter Lang Publishers.
Oduro-Frimpong, J. (2018). "This Cartoon is a Satire": Cartoons as Critical Entertainment and Resistance in Ghana's Fourth Republic. In Peter Limb and Tejumola Olaniyan (eds.), *Taking African Cartoons Seriously: Politics, Satire and Culture* (133-160). Michigan State University Press.

Evaluation and Grading Criteria

Description of Assignments:
1) Excursion Reflection Papers (4) (25%)
Students are expected to write short reflection papers or creative projects connecting their readings to the site visits or weekend trips for that week. Each reflection should include a discussion of the main argument from the reading, a development of the student's point of view, and connection to field activities. The papers should be the length of two double-spaced pages.

2) Reading Responses (3) (25%)
Students are expected to write a short response papers to the weekly assigned readings. Each reflection should include a discussion of the main argument from the reading, a development of your point of view, and connection to field activities. The papers should be the length of two double-spaced pages.

3) Final Research Paper (40%)
The final paper is a 10-page critical research paper using the concept of Sankofa to revisit one of the main topics discussed in the course. Each student will be asked to formulate their own research topic with the guidance of the instructor. More details about the structure of the paper will be provided before the due date.

4) Attendance and Participation (10%)
Due to the nature of SIT Study Abroad programs, and the importance of student and instructor contributions in each and every class session, attendance at all classes and for all program excursions is required. Criteria for evaluation of student performance include attendance and participation in program activities. Students must fully participate in all program components

and courses. Students may not voluntarily opt out of required program activities. Valid reasons for absence – such as illness – must be discussed with the academic director or other designated staff person. Absences impact academic performance, may impact grades, and could result in dismissal from the program.

Assessment:

Excursion Reflection Papers (4)	25%
Reading responses (3)	25%
Final Research Paper	40%
Attendance and Participation	10%

Late Assignments

SIT Study Abroad programs integrate traditional classroom lectures and discussion with field-based experiences, site visits and debriefs. The curriculum is designed to build on itself and progress to the culmination (projects, ISP, case studies, internship, etc.). It is critical that students complete assignments in a timely manner to continue to benefit from the sequences in assignments, reflections and experiences throughout the program.
Students may request a justified extension for one paper/assignment during the semester. Requests must be made in writing and at least 12 hours before the posted due date and time. If reason for request is accepted, an extension of up to one week may be granted at that time. Any further requests for extensions will not be granted. Students who fail to submit the assignment within the extension period will receive an 'F' for the assignment.

Grading Scale

94-100%	A	Excellent
90-93%	A-	
87-89%	B+	
84-86%	B	Above Average
80-83%	B-	
77-79%	C+	
74-76%	C	Average
70-73%	C-	
67-69%	D+	
64-66%	D	Below Average
Below 64	F	Fail

Grading Criteria

An "A" grade for an assignment entails superior (not just "very good") performance in terms of structure and organization of assignments, analysis, logical argumentation and consistency, and the provision of factual, numerical and/or historical evidence. In terms of class participation, an "A" grade refers to full attendance, punctuality, evidence of having completed assigned readings, attentive listening and active engagement in all lectures, discussions, field visits and other

activities. It also means polite and respectful behavior. The level, frequency, and quality of the students` participation will be monitored and taken into account

Program Expectations
- Show up prepared. Be on time, have your readings completed and points in mind for discussion or clarification. Complying with these elements raises the level of class discussion for everyone.
- Have assignments completed on schedule, printed, and done accordingly to the specified requirements. This will help ensure that your assignments are returned in a timely manner.
- Ask questions in class. Engage the lecturer. These are often very busy professionals who are doing us an honor by coming to speak.
- Comply with academic integrity policies (no plagiarism or cheating, nothing unethical).
- Respect differences of opinion (classmates', lecturers, local constituents engaged with on the visits). You are not expected to agree with everything you hear, but you are expected to listen across difference and consider other perspectives with respect.
- Storing Your Work: Keep several copies of your work as back up and keep one copy accessible to you through an online forum, such as an attachment in your email, the course learning management system, or cloud-based storage. This way your work will always be available to despite technical issues. Lost files, deleted drives, or computer crashes are not excuses for late, missing work.
- Personal Technology Use: Cell phones and other personal electronics can be used for taking notes and other class activities. Off-task usage is not acceptable. You may be marked as absent for habitually using them for something other than classroom activities.
- Course Communication: Course documents and assignments will be posted on the learning management system, Canvas. Although the course calendar provides a broad overview and the general sequence of work and assignments for the course, what we accomplish in class will vary, and revisions to the calendar will be posted at the course site. You will need to check the course site regularly. You are responsible for letting me know about any network-related problems that prevent you from accessing or submitting assignments.
- Content Considerations: Some texts and activities you will encounter in this course delve into sensitive topics that may be emotionally and intellectually challenging. Our classroom is a space where we can engage with challenging ideas, question assumptions, and navigate difficult topics with respect and maturity. As possible, I will flag content and activities that are especially graphic or intense, so we are prepared to address them soberly and sensitively. If you are struggling to keep up with the work or participate in the course because of the nature of the content and activities, you should speak with me and/or seek help from counseling services.
- Classroom recording policy: To ensure the free and open discussion of ideas, students may not record classroom lectures, discussion and/or activities without the advance written permission of the instructor, and any such recording properly approved in advance can be used solely for the student's own private use.

SIT Policies and Resources
Please refer to the SIT Study Abroad Handbook and the Policies section of the SIT website for all academic and student affairs policies. Students are accountable for complying with all published policies. Of particular relevance to this course are the policies regarding: academic integrity, Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), research and ethics in field study and internships, late assignments, academic status, academic appeals, diversity and disability, sexual harassment and misconduct, and the student code of conduct.

Please refer to the SIT Study Abroad Handbook and SIT website for information on important resources and services provided through our central administration in Vermont, such as Library resources and research support, Disability Services, Counseling Services, Title IX information, and Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion resources.