Modernization and Social Change in Cameroon

AFRS-3000 (3 credits / 45 class hours)

SIT Study Abroad Program:
Cameroon: Development and Social Change

PLEASE NOTE: This syllabus represents a recent 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
Modernization and Social Change is an interdisciplinary seminar exploring Cameroon’s complex contemporary cultures and post-colonial national identities in one of the most ethnically and geographically diverse countries on the continent. The course engages Cameroon’s broad cultural and aesthetic-symbolic expressions, providing insight into the importance of social and cultural development in local and national contexts, while deepening our understanding and appreciation for the diversity and complexity of Cameroonian culture and society. In addition to lectures and seminar discussions, the course integrates multiple learning methods including required readings, excursions to relevant sites, group discussions and processing sessions, participatory workshops, student presentations and independent learning. These experiences provide not only an opportunity for cross-cultural understanding, but also provide a cross-section of experiences to draw on when critically considering the politics of identity based on gender, ethnicity, language or regional factors in the face of national integration rhetoric in post-colonial Cameroon.

Learning Outcomes
Upon completion of the seminar, students will be able to:

- Describe Cameroon’s ethnic, geographic and cultural diversity;
- Articulate an expansive understanding of development issues to include artistic, cultural, and social dimensions;
• Demonstrate critical insights on the connections between a modern development agenda, transnational economic realities, and notions of culture;
• Critically examine issues of identity, belonging, and ethnicity in light of post-colonial literature in Africa;
• Analyze the impact of modernization on Cameroon’s traditional cultures and social fabric;
• Identify core features of Cameroon’s cultural landscape and artistic expressions;
• Link and assess course materials with personal observations and experiences from around the country to issues of cultural and social development in Cameroon.

Course Requirements

Language of Instruction
This course is taught in English, but students will be exposed to local vocabulary related to course content through in-country expert lectures and field visits in a wide range of venues and regional locales.

Readings
You are responsible for all the required readings, and should be prepared to bring them to bear on discussions in class. The readings will help you place the classes in their context, to challenge and engage lecturers, to generate questions for class discussions and to deepen your knowledge of particular aspects discussed in class. They are not necessarily tailor-made for each and every class.

Program Calendar

Module 1 - Bamiléké - We will explore the culture, politics, and social organization of the Bamiléké ethnic group, with a specific look at the Batoufam community, while also examining a number of organizations and institutions that operate to keep the values and foster progress in their community. Included among these institutions are the chefferie, tontines (economic and social associations), and health institutions.

Session 1: Understanding the Bamiléké
Session 2: Indigenous development organizations
Session 3: Indigenous systems of savings and credits
Session 4: Cultural associations
Session 5: Visit to the chefferie of Batoufam and meeting with the chief

Required Readings:

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**Module 2 - Bagyeli:** Students examine the social, economic and political transformation of the Bagyeli, an indigenous group commonly called the pygmies. In addition to studying Baka culture, dances, and aesthetic features, we discuss the changes in the community wrought by intensified state-pressures to leave the forest and “modernize,” with a focus on the rhetorics of modernization deployed by the Cameroon government and NGOs.

Session 1: Bagyeli culture  
Session 2: Meeting the modern world  
Session 3: Issues of citizenship and access to education  
Session 4: Outside intervention with foreign companies and the state  
Session 5: National inclusion

**Required Readings:**


**Module 3 - Anglophone national identity and national integration:** Two out of the ten regions of Cameroon are English speaking and were colonized by Britain. How are Anglophones integrated into Cameroon? What are their unique political, language
and cultural features? How do they interact with their fellow Francophone Cameroonians? How do approaches to development differ - or not – in Anglophone areas of Cameroon?

Session 1: Anglophone history and identity  
Session 2: Anglophone and Francophone relations  
Session 3: Political participation  
Session 4: National inclusion  
Session 5: Comparative development in Anglophone and Francophone regions

Required Readings:


Field Visits, Workshops and Educational Excursions

The following is a sample of program activities:

Some of the thematic topics will be presented in workshop formats, such as traditional dances and a Cameroonian/African film series. Participation in workshops, discussions, and lecture sessions is required.

**Western Region - Batoufam.** We will engage with one of Cameroon’s rich traditional cultures: the Bamiléké. This excursion includes a visit to a Bamiléké chief’s palace, experiencing rural community life through homestays with local families, and an excursion to a sacred waterfall. The excursion to Batoufam provides the opportunity to learn about the diverse and rich cultures of Cameroon, its peoples, languages, social organization, dances, and arts. We will also take an in-depth look at a society that strives to preserve its original culture while using modern tools necessary for its development and fulfillment.

**South Region - Kribi.** We will visit the beautiful coastal town of Kribi and trek through the forest to meet the Bagyeli, a community whose livelihood depended primarily on the forest for many centuries. The Bagyeli have recently been forced to move out of their...
primary habitat and their lifestyle, health education and social organization has been dramatically altered by recent dependence on a modern system.

North-West Region - Bamenda. The program spends time in this English speaking region, as students familiarize themselves with issues of national integration and politics in Cameroon. Bamenda is well known as the hotbed of the main opposition party, with a charismatic leader that immensely contributed to democracy with a nonviolent approach. The city’s social and judicial systems are auto-centered and community-based, which is attributed to the indirect rule of British colonization.

**Evaluation and Grading Criteria**

**Modernization and Social Change Assignments**
Timely completion of all assignments is expected and students can submit assignments in either English or French. Late hand-ins will be penalized. All assignments are evaluated according to organization, analytical quality, depth of understanding, argumentation, presentation of evidence, proper citation and clear formatting.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thematic Essay - Bagyeli</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thematic Essay - Bamiléké</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
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</tbody>
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**THE BAGYELI: “From traditions to modernity”**
Drawing from lectures, observation, interviews, class discussions, and excursions, you will write a seven to ten page paper analyzing and discussing the ways the Bagyeli are shifting from traditions to modernity and westernization. Explain elements of traditions the Bagyeli are maintaining and the relevance of their culture to their life and environment. Challenges to their integration in modern Cameroon, as well as actions put in place by the state, western companies and NGOs, should be discussed in the paper.

**THE BAMILÉKÉ**
Drawing from lectures, observation, interviews, class discussions, and excursions, you will write a seven to ten page paper, analyzing and discussing the ways the Bamiléké are shifting from traditions to modernity. Make sure to elaborate on one of the following topics:

1. Bamiléké culture and dynamism in the 21st century;
2. The nation–state issue;
3. Indigenous development structures and their pertinence in contemporary Cameroon.

**Grading Scale:** The grading scale for all classes follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage Range</th>
<th>Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>94-100%</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90-93%</td>
<td>A-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>87-89%</td>
<td>B+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>84-86%</td>
<td>B</td>
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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, attentive listening and active engagement in all discussions, lectures, educational excursions, 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.

Expectations and Policies

Class Participation
Participation in class refers to attendance, punctuality, attentive listening, and active engagement in all course lectures, seminar discussions, educational excursions, and other activities. It also means polite and respectful behavior.

Please refer to the SIT Study Abroad handbook for policies on academic integrity, ethics, warning and probation, diversity and disability, sexual harassment and the academic appeals process. Also, refer to the specific information available in the Student Handbook and the Program Dossier given to you at orientation.