Urban Cultures, Social Innovation, and the Afro-Chic
AFRS-3500 (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 course involves an immersion into Ghanaian cities as sites for not only countering existing stereotypes of Africa but also for positioning the continent as a global economic, political, and cultural force. Students will be introduced to the intricacies of hiplife, media houses, and institutions across the country to highlight the position of Ghana in a hyper-globalized world. Through these aspects of urban culture, students will understand how the reshaping of continent narratives by local actors has implications for the global flow of information. This seminar brings together concepts connected to hiplife, food, and the Afro-Chic to engage critically with Ghanaian urban cultures.

Students will, through an experiential engagement with African fashion, music, arts, and cuisine, learn how African urban cultures participate in redefining Africa, reshaping cosmopolitanism worldwide, and rethinking globalization. Students will engage in the creative arts scene in Accra, one of the world's most desired destinations; experience a blend of the deeply traditional and contemporary life in Kumasi and Tamale; and visit Cape Coast, a city that embodies the relationship between Africa and its diaspora. Students will participate in music and food festivals to appreciate the resilience of African cities, the entrepreneurial know how of city dwellers, and the variety of urban experiences on the continent. Students will have the chance to engage with the tradi-modern Afro-Chic culture shaped by external forces and manifesting in a fusion of social, political, and even philosophical commentary.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course students should be able to:

- Demonstrate knowledge of the vitality, resilience, and creativity of African urban cultures
- Articulate continuities and discontinuities between African, African American, and Caribbean urban cultures
- Analyze the ways in which urban African voices challenge contemporary understandings of modernity
- Critique the limitations of popular contemporary perspectives on Africa by taking stock of social realities in contemporary Ghana;
- Deconstruct the political and cultural forces that inform quotidian cultural practices related to food and music;
- Reflect on the social intersections that underpin urban Ghanaian society.

Language of Instruction

This course is taught in English, and students will be exposed to vocabulary 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. Students will also engage with Pidgin English in formal and non-formal settings.

Instructional Methods

The SIT teaching and learning philosophy is based on 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 limited to the formal curriculum and takes place through various life experiences in which students are inspired 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: The Mediated Invention of Africa

This module surveys contemporary media portrayal of Africa in international mainstream media with an examination of local modes of communication. The module juxtaposes stories from the New York Times, CNN, and BBC, three of the major international news sources with reports from Ghanaweb, Daily Graphic, and MyJoyOnline to better understand the processes through which narratives are crafted both locally and internationally.

Required reading:

Kiruga, M. (2019). The New York Times shows how not to write an Africa job advert
https://www.theafricareport.com/15078/the-new-york-times-shows-how-to-write-about-an-africa-job-advert/

Moeller, S. (1999). Compassion Fatigue: How the Media Sell Disease, Famine, War and Death. New York, NY: Routledge. Ch 1.

Selected daily news articles from Ghanaweb, Daily Graphic, and MyJoyOnline TBA

Recommended reading:

Sarr, F. (2020). Afrotopia. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press

Module 2: Social Media and The Afro-Chic

This module continues the engagement with the "idea of Africa" through the Afro-Chic movement. The Afro-Chic involves using traditional African creative platforms to create vibrant and bold fashion statements that reflect new African outlooks and images. Fashion in Ghana is exploding through social media portals such as WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter; young entrepreneurs advertise and engage with prospective clients to complement more

traditional catwalk events. In this module, students will attend fashion events, interact with small and large-scale fashion designers in person and via Instagram live sessions, and observe the chain that comprises the fashion industry.

Required reading:
Bowles, L. R. (2016). Dress Politics and Framing Self in Ghana: The Studio Photographs of Felicia Abban. *african arts*, *49*(4), 48-57.
Kauppinen, A. R., & Spronk, R. (2014). Afro-chic: Beauty, ethics, and "Locks without Dread" in Ghana. *Green Consumption: The Global Rise of Eco-Chic*, 117.

Module 3: Urban Cultures I: Music
This module seeks to provide an understanding of the role that music plays in socio-cultural and political terms, with a gesture to the economic implications of urban cultural productions. Students will visit a recording studio, have a session with Prof John Collins, who is the foremost authority on music in Ghana, and engage with hiplife musicians and poets such as Reggie Rockstone, Poetra Asantewa, and Kojo Cue.

Required reading:
Collins, J. (2018). *Highlife Time Vol. 3*. DAkpabli & Associates. Chapters 1 and 3.
Osumare, H. (2012). *The hiplife in Ghana : the West African indigenization of hip-hop*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. Pp. 29-82
Shipley, J. (2019). Aesthetic of the Entrepreneur: Afro-Cosmopolitan Rap and Moral Circulation in Accra, Ghana. *Anthropological Quarterly*. 82.3. p.631-668.

Module 4: Urban Cultures II: Food
This module will continue our reflection and engagement with the idea of Africa through food as a major aspect of Ghanaian urban culture. We will use food to visit Ghanaian history and rethink the narrative between tradition and modernity and the grey spaces in between. This module will allow us to not only revisit the diversity constitutive of Ghanaian and West African cultures but also look at the modernity of African cuisine despite its seemingly traditional aesthetics. This module will equally insist on the economic and cultural aspects of different types of food. Students will attend food festivals such as Jollof Festival, Kenkey Party, and Wabisabi, which emphasize the communal and social value of food.

Required reading:
Phillips, D. (2019). Appetite and Everyday Life in African Literature. In M. Adejunmobi & C. Coetzee (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of African literature*. Routledge.
Neilson, D. (2017). "Top Five Ghanaian foodie Instagram accounts"
https://www.timeout.com/accra/restaurants/top-five-ghanaian-foodie-instagram-accounts

Module 5: Pidgin and Urban Communication
The last module will insist on the development of Pidgin to reflect on the fundamentally hybrid and creole nature of African cities. This will be an occasion to only think of Africa's modernity but to also examine the continuities and discontinuities between African and African descended cultures through a comparative analysis of Pidging, American Vernacular English

and other Creoles in the African diaspora. This careful examination of these black cultural developments will allow us to think of Africanness beyond the limits of roots and modern teleology. Through guest lectures, with Ghanaian youth, and perusals of creative blogs written in pidgin, students will better appreciate the role that language can play in the constant transformation of African cultures.

Required reading:
BBC starts Pidgin Digital Service for West Africa Audiences. Aug 21, 2017.
> https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-40975399

GHOne TV starts Pidgin News broadcast May 6. May 4, 2019.
> https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/entertainment/GHOne-TV-starts-Pidgin-News-broadcast-May-6-743576

Osei-Tutu, K. (2016). The Vocabulary of Student Pidgin: A Preliminary Survey.

Dako, K. and Bonnie, R. 'I go SS I go Vas' 97 Student Pidgin – A Ghanaian Youth Language of Secondary and Tertiary Institutions.

Evaluation and Grading Criteria

Description of Assignments:
1) Reflections on Social Media Perspectives (4) (25%)
This is a 2-page double-spaced paper exploring the way young entrepreneurs use social media portals such as WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook and Twitter to advertise, engage with prospective clients, and participate in the global market. These short papers should problematize the way Ghanaian entrepreneurs and fashion designers challenge traditional understandings of Africa and demonstrate vitality, resilience and creativity.

2) Excursion Reflection Papers (3) (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.

3) Final Paper (40%)
The final paper is a 10-page critical reflection on Ghanaian cities as sites for not only countering existing stereotypes of Africa but also for positioning the continent as a global economic, political, and cultural force. 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:

Reflection on (Social) Media Perspectives (4)	25%
Excursion Reflection Papers (3)	25%
Final Paper	40%
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.