

S P R I N G 2 0 1 0

The Griot

The Africana Studies Department Newsletter

Welcome to the team!

This spring, we have two wonderful new additions to our editorial board, Brittany-Rae Gregory '12 and Michelle Corkrum '12. Brittany-Rae is an English major with a concentration in Creative Writing and a passion for fashion, and Michelle is a Neuroscience and Spanish double major who loves to travel.

-Alexandria Barnes, Editor



Michelle, Alexandria and Brittany-Rae

Featured Articles

Our Spring Newsletter's focus is to inform our readers of the many people and programs our department has to offer. This edition features many interviews of people like: Chinua Achebe, the award-winning author of *Things Fall Apart* and many other novels; Kwadwo Osei-Nyame, a professor at University of London, School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS); our very own Filomina Steady, past Department chair; and our newest professor, Donna Patterson.

Events!

Open House

April 5, 2010

Students had a chance to meet the faculty, ask questions about courses, and eat!

Colloquium Series

April 6-8th, 2010

Featured: Kwadwo Osei-Nyame discussing "African Literature and World History"

Faculty Lunches

April 1st, 6th & 8th

Africana faculty met with students in Stone Davis, Bates and Tower



One on One with Chinua Achebe

Alexandria Barnes, Griot Editor

On Friday, March 20th, I had the honor of interviewing Chinua Achebe. Achebe is the author of many great novels and is most famous for *Things Fall Apart*, the story of a Nigerian village and how it deals with the changes that come about with colonization, especially the culture conflict.

I asked him many questions and found him to be an incredible, honest, and humble man. He said, for

example, that he hadn't realized how famous he was until someone told him that students all over the world – “even South Korea!”- were reading his books. A soft-spoken man, he answered my many questions - about his younger years, his inspirations for writing, and his wisdom for current undergraduates - with thoughtfulness and authenticity.

As a young man, Achebe won a full scholarship to study science in college, but after his first year he decided to switch to a humanities major. He did this because he wanted to study what he enjoyed. He began to write because he saw that there was a gap in the types of literature being published. No one was telling *his* people's story, colonized people's story; he knew he had to take the initiative to do that.

Today, we are all grateful to him for being that trailblazer. Those of us who are Africana Studies majors have a special appreciation for his view of our discipline. For Achebe, it is critically important that world citizens know about all parts of the world, and Africa and Africana people (which includes all people in the African Diaspora) are “in the world and [have] influenced the world” immensely.

Achebe's wisdom for today's undergraduates grows out of his experiences. Just as he switched from sciences to humanities because he enjoyed the latter more, he encourages young people to follow their hearts and do the work they love. And he admonishes undergraduates to do whatever work they chose to do *well*. “Always do professional work,” he said. “Give yourself enough time to make sure whatever

you turn in is done to your best abilities.” And finally, Achebe exhorts us to to fight for what we want in life.

Achebe has fought with his ideas and his pen. Such a struggle takes no less courage than one with weapons. In fact, his words *are* his weapons. And his struggles have brought a personal price, including his house being bombed during the 1960s civil war in Nigeria, the revocation of his passport by his government, and the vitriolic reaction by many Western writers of his 1975 lecture criticizing Joseph

Conrad and his *Heart of Darkness* as “bloody racist.” Nevertheless, his courage and caring have not been lessened. We at Wellesley College have the deepest appreciation that Chinua Achebe, a gentle,



Diamond Sharp '11 Shares Her Experience in South Africa

This fall, I spent my semester at the University of Cape Town in South Africa. I decided to go to South Africa because I have always had an interest in the country and its culture. Furthermore, it was the perfect place to connect my Peace and Justice Studies major and Africana Studies minor.

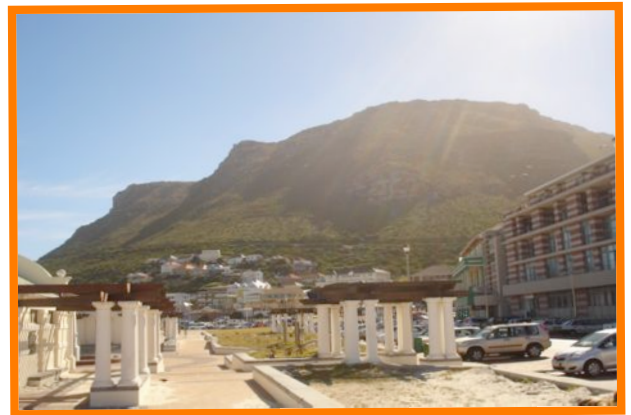
South Africa has a history of gross crimes against humanity, particularly with the Apartheid system that lasted from 1948 to 1990. The National Party created a caste system in which the indigenous South Africans were at the bottom. They were subjugated and disenfranchised by every action of the state. The first free elections in South Africa took place in 1994 and, for the last fifteen years, the country has been in a state of reconciliation.

In South Africa, I was able to study the history of the Apartheid era Black Resistance struggle. I had the opportunity to travel to Johannesburg and to visit the Apartheid Museum, Constitutional Hall, and the neighborhoods of Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu.

Other notable travels in Cape Town included: a tour of Robben Island to visit Mandela's jail cell, a safari, and a hike up Table Mountain (pictured).

I highly encourage other Africana majors and minors to study abroad in Africa. I loved my experience in South Africa and I believe that it was a life-changing experience.

-Diamond Sharp '11



Racquel Armstrong '10



What has been your favorite experience over your four years at Wellesley? My favorite experiences have been with my Ethos sisters. We have partied together, studied together, laughed together and cried together, and these experiences have made my time at Wellesley really enjoyable. There isn't really one experience or a few experiences that I can put my finger on and say they were the most enjoyable, but overall, my time with my Ethos sisters has been nothing but great.

What will you miss the most about Wellesley once you graduate? I will miss family dinners in Bates as well as random times in Harambee House. The House has served as a haven for me and my sisters and has been critical in my growth here at Wellesley. Though I am graduating, the House and the people in it will always be in my heart.

Do you plan to return to Cleveland after graduation? Eventually. Upon graduation, I will be completing my M.Ed. at the University of Pennsylvania. Upon completion, I will be teaching in Atlanta through Teach for America as well as fulfilling my service requirements for my WW-RBF [Woodrow Wilson- Rockefeller Brothers Foundation] and Truman scholarships. After teaching for a few years, I plan to return to graduate school to earn my JD/MPA. After that, hopefully, Cleveland will be back on my radar, as I do miss home.

Why did you feel the need to create your own major, Urban Studies, and what does the major encompass? I wanted to make sure that I got all I wanted to get out of my Wellesley education. I am really interested in politics, but my heart is in education. However, you cannot study either and not have a sound foundation in economics. So I combined those three disciplines with a little bit of sociology and created my version of the Urban Studies major.

You have accomplished so much while here at Wellesley. What has been your motivation? Honestly, I am a public servant and as such whatever it takes to find the solutions to the injustices of the world, I am going to give it a try. The academics gave me an arena to explore and learn about the theoretical side of problems, while service in the local community as well as my own personal exploration gave me an arena to put those theories into practice. My accomplishments are a direct result of the sense of obligation I feel to my community. There are many problems that deserve our attention domestically and internationally, but we are called to service in different ways. My attention just happens to be focused on grassroots work on the injustices in the field of education. Other than that, I can't really say what motivates me.

How do you plan to utilize the Harry Truman Scholarship in order to fulfill your aspirations? The Truman Scholarship allows me an opportunity to finance a graduate program that I wouldn't ordinarily be able to do as a public servant. The Truman network, however, is what truly gets utilized as Truman Scholars from all years come together to share resources and help each other better serve the public. I would like to help the restructuring of education in the state of Ohio in hopes that it would help the major cities regain prominence. My fellow Truman scholars can help me do this as they range from backgrounds in law to healthcare to education.

How do you plan to utilize the Wilson Fellowship in order to achieve your goals in the educational field? My WW-RBF fellowship will help me achieve my goals in the field of education because it provides the basic structure of support that new teachers like myself will need. The turnover rate of teachers is huge in high need schools; however, the WW-RB Foundation guides new teachers through these treacherous waters and hopefully convinces new teachers to stay in the field. As for me, the Foundation makes me feel confident that I will be able to succeed as a teacher because I have a huge network to help me develop innovative teaching methods as well as further develop curriculum ideas.

Please tell us about your foundation, Unity Enterprises, and how its inception has affected you. Currently, my foundation is still in the small stages. We have been building a scholarship fund as well as a mentoring program between the Cleveland Metropolitan School District, some large companies, and some smaller non-profits and community agencies. I would like to expand my non-profit to eventually give out 25 annual scholarships as well open a community center. Starting my non-profit has only pushed me to work harder in my local community as I see all of the ways that we can effect change. I have worked with local government, for-profits, non-profits, community leaders, and everyday citizens to try to revitalize the city of Cleveland. And every opportunity that I have to go home to speak and work with people, I am convinced that the work that I do will positively impact future generations.

Do you have any last words or words of encouragement for your fellow Wellesley sisters? Stay balanced and follow your passions. Oftentimes we give in to the pressure to always fight for the A in a class or apply for the job that makes the most money. If you are not doing something that you love, then it isn't worth doing.

-Brittany-Rae Gregory '12

Swahili At Wellesley:

In the fall of 2008, Africana Studies began offering Swahili. This was the first time an African language has been offered at the College. The success of this two-semester introductory course has led to the creation of an advanced Swahili course, which will begin next September. We are proud to introduce the courses' professor and some basic information about the language itself, the seventh most commonly spoken in the world.

The Professor:

Professor Lusike C. Wabuyele was born and raised in Kenya, a country that takes pride in the spoken and written Swahili language. She is a graduate of Kenyatta University, Nairobi, Kenya and Ohio University, Athens, Ohio. She holds a Bachelors of Education, a Masters in Human and Consumer Sciences and a Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction. She has published articles on health and nutritional issues, and on technology and computer uses in Africa. Her present work involves using instructional technology to enhance language teaching. Professor Wabuyele is passionate about teaching Swahili at Wellesley College because the Africana Studies Department recognizes the importance of offering an African language to its students.



The Language:

Swahili is an African language of Bantu origin with Persian and Arabic influences. It is the seventh most commonly spoken language in the world. Swahili is

spoken by 120 million people as of beginning of 2009. Of these, about five to ten million speak it as their native language. It is spoken in more than eight African countries, mainly by the people of eastern and central Africa, where it is the lingua franca or trade language. In Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and Congo, it is an official or national language.

Besides being used as an official language in these countries, it is also the only language of African origin among the official working languages of the African Union.

Why Am I An Africana Studies Major?

Selenia Caravero '12

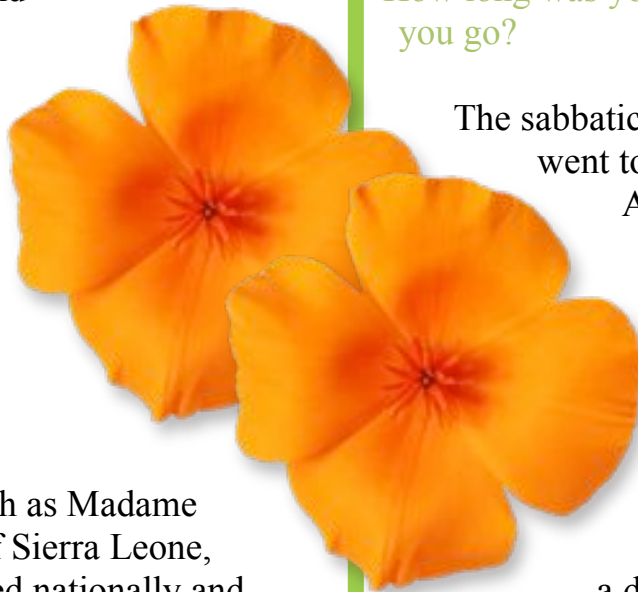
Wellesley College's Africana Studies program is unique in that it acknowledges the diversity and richness of Black culture. It provides majors and minors with a great selection of courses that encompass many aspects of the African Diaspora, rather than merely focusing on one particular group in a given geographical region. Being an Africana Studies major has allowed me learn about my Black identity. I have benefited from many courses that address various issues within the Black community. By doing so, I have explored the relevancy between the Black struggle in the United States and elsewhere in the world. The Department's unique curriculum has enabled me to relate Africana people through literature, history, and current events. This unique way of studying the African Diaspora has allowed me to affirm my Black identity, while accepting the uniqueness of everyone belonging to the African Diaspora.

An Insight into Sabbaticals: Q and A with Professor Filomina Steady

Why did you decide to go on sabbatical?

To conduct research on women and leadership in West Africa. This is a topic that has interested me for a long time because Africa has a long history of women in leadership positions, including executive positions. The legacy of women leaders as monarchs, paramount chiefs and so forth dates back over 1000 years. Among the best-known historical legends are Queen Amina of Kano, Nigeria, Queen Zinga of Angola and Congo, and Queen Candace of Meroe. Asante Queen Mothers such as Yaa Asantewaa of Edweso in Ghana and Madam Yoko of Sierra Leone were legends in their time and challenged colonial rule. In contemporary times, paramount chiefs, such as Madame Ella Koblo Gulama of Sierra Leone, have become renowned nationally and internationally for several pioneering achievements as political figures and educators.

At the international level, Madame Jeanne Cisse of Guinea became the first woman to serve as president of the Security Council of the United Nations and Ms. Angie Brooks was the first woman to chair the General Assembly of the United Nations. We are also witnessing major history-making achievements in countries like



Liberia, which elected the first woman head of state in Africa. In Rwanda, almost half of the representatives in government are women, which is a world record. In all, thirteen countries in Africa have had women serving as presidents, deputy presidents, acting presidents or prime ministers. These are Liberia, Rwanda, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Mozambique, Central Africa Republic, Uganda, Burundi, Lesotho, South Africa, Zimbabwe, the Gambia and Guinea Bissau.

How long was your sabbatical and where did you go?

The sabbatical was for one semester and I went to three countries in West Africa - Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone - that belong to the Mano River Union sub-region. All three countries have long-standing traditions of indigenous female leadership. This sub-region has also been affected by civil war for over a decade and women played important leadership roles in bringing about peace in Liberia and Sierra Leone. The Mano River Women's Peace Network (MARWOPNET) played a leading and effective role in peace building and conflict resolution.

What are your two fondest memories from your experiences?

My first fond memory is interviewing President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the first woman to be

Q&A Continued

elected president of a country in Africa. I went with two Liberian students, who were my research assistants, and we took turns in asking her questions about her autobiography, *This Child Will Be Great: Memoir of a Remarkable Life by Africa's First Woman President*, and about her work as president. She was down to earth and spoke in a soft voice, reflecting on her successful campaign, the challenges of being a woman, and the pressures to move ahead in rehabilitating a country emerging from war.



President Sirleaf, Professor Steady, and her two research assistants

My second fond memory is of making friends with many of the women I interviewed and enjoying their hospitality and that of their families. I learned a lot from them about their societies, their views on gender relations, their ambitions for their children, and their love for their countries.

How did your experiences influence your teaching philosophy?

I feel that doing fieldwork is a learning experience in itself. Some of the most illuminating discoveries do not come from books but from interviewing people, many of whom have their own theories and views about life, etc. Much of what I have gained in interviewing these women leaders from three countries has already influenced my teaching philosophy, which is geared towards participatory research with a view towards influencing policy. Many of the women interviewed play an important role in social movements that help promote change, and I use their experiences in my classes. Fortunately, I am teaching a seminar on “African Women, Social Transformation and Empowerment” this semester, which provides a good opportunity to discuss some of my research and findings with a motivated and dynamic group of students.

-Michelle Corkrum '12

From Nursing to Researching: Q and A with Donna Patterson

How long have you been a professor at Wellesley and what has been your favorite aspect of teaching here?

I joined the faculty at Wellesley College in January 2008. I especially enjoy observing the trajectory of student knowledge during the course of a semester. Students raise many interesting and informed threads during our class discussions and, by the end of the semester, they are able to connect course themes to larger global and transnational issues. Outside of the classroom, I also like attending student events as time permits.

What are you currently working on?

I recently finished a book proposal for my manuscript in progress, *Expanding Professional Horizons: Pharmacy, Gender, and Entrepreneurship in 20th Century Senegal*, and I continue work on the manuscript. I have one article being published this spring and another currently under review. In addition, I have been conceptualizing several future articles on comparative pharmacy, rural Texas, and historical political analyses from Francophone Africa.



In January, I presented a paper on "Public Health in Africa: Existing and Emerging Trends in Care" for the inaugural session of the College's Madeleine Korbel Albright Institute. The lecture highlighted the brain drain from South Africa, pharmacists in Senegal, and reproductive health in Chad. I am also scheduled to present on "Africa's Role in Global Health Security" for the Northern New Jersey Chapter of Wellesley College Alumnae Association in May. In 2011, I will participate in the American Historical Association meeting and attend the Berkshire Conference on the History of Women.

Do you have any words of wisdom for current undergrads, looking to pursue a career like yours?

Becoming a professor is best pursued by those with a passion for life-long learning, love of books, and who enjoy sharing knowledge with others. Educators are paid less than those in the corporate world, so I think that the passion is key. As a student I read assigned books, extra material, attended lectures by visiting scholars, attended academic conferences, and was very respectful of my professors during my undergraduate years.

What was the first class that you ever taught? What did you learn from that experience?

The first two classes (same semester) I completely designed and taught alone were “Introduction to African World Studies” and “World History (I)”. My first semester taught me how to improve course management. The courses were very different in content and scope. Ancient history (Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece, Rome, China, etc.) was beyond my graduate training, so I had to revisit certain events and themes in order to share them with the class. Class preparation was more time consuming than I had ever imagined.

What was your major as an undergrad and why did you choose that to be your major?

My major was History with an international focus and my minor was African American Studies. I chose history because I had been drawn to the discipline starting with a world history course in high school. I started studying African-American history as a hobby in high school because none was taught in school. By college, I progressed to global history exchanges and decided that, after I completed my B.A., I would specialize in the study of Francophone Africa.

What type of music do you listen to?

I listen to everything from *mbalax* to jazz and rap (mostly vintage), to reggae to post-punk and most everything in between.

What is your favorite thing to do in your free time?

Being an assistant professor, I have very little free time these days. However, ideally, I enjoy swimming, visiting friends, and traveling.

Where is your favorite place to travel to and why?

Dakar, Senegal. This is a difficult choice because I truly like a few other places. I believe that I like Dakar so much because I know it as intimately as almost any other place. In fact, outside of select U.S. cities, I know Dakar best. It is a wonderful mix of Senegambian culture infused with elements from France, Morocco but also from Islam and the United States. I am drawn to the city's social and visual vibrancy. It is very global with ease in travel to most major cities and it is near the ocean. I grew up along the Texas coast and I am drawn to places that border oceans. Dakar is actually a peninsula and includes numerous beaches and also adjacent islands with beaches. My favorites are Ngor Island and Yoff beach. All of the beaches are different and the water at them ranges between pale blue and turquoise. Additionally, the food is great, wonderful dishes like *thieboujenn* (rice and fish in a tomato base similar to – in form though not flavor – Moroccan couscous), *lakh* (a fabulous millet porridge accompanied with a yogurt sauce), home made guava juice, and all the fresh mangoes one can eat!

Can you tell us something random about yourself?

My original undergraduate major was nursing.

-Alexandria Barnes

Q&A with Kwadwo Osei-Nyame

Dr. Osei-Nyame is a professor at the University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS). He came to Wellesley this Spring and gave a lecture titled, "African Literature and World History: Correcting Ignorance." He also was a guest speaker at the Department's Spring Colloquium.

What are a couple of your fondest memories from your career?

My job interview for SOAS is one of my most fond memories. I was extremely excited about the possibility of working with individuals that had similar passions. Another fond memory was the publication of my first set of articles, which included, "Chinua Achebe Writing Culture: Representations of Gender and Tradition in *Things Fall Apart*." [*Research in African Literatures*. 30.2. (1999): 148-164]

Why do you think that it is important to take classes on Africa?

These classes have the ability to open up Africa to you through lectures, discussion and research. It is vital that individuals that aim to be world citizens learn more about Africa and the continent's relationship to the rest of the world in terms of globalization.

If you could recommend any book regarding African literature to students, what would it be?

I recommend *God's Bits of Wood* by Sembene Ousmane. This book explores societal impacts of the revolution in French Africa. This book illustrates the importance of men and women working together to achieve a common goal in their society.

What are some advantages to learning a language other than your native tongue and why do you think learning Swahili is important?

The acquisition of a new language allows one to explore a new culture and expand one's views on life. Language is a means of communication; therefore, if you learn a new language you can communicate with many people in the world. Language fosters human relationships and integration. It also allows communication across different cultures, races and geographical landscapes. Each language has an inherent beauty. Languages provide you with the ability to adapt to many different situations and cultures. For example, Swahili is one of the most widely spoken languages in the world. The attainment of this language allows one to enter many different cultural spaces and locales.

What did you enjoy most about the lecture you gave at Wellesley?

I enjoyed the presence of students and the discussions that followed the lectures. I believe that the message that was delivered was an important one: One should look at the world critically with Africa at the center. This examination will provide a deeper understanding of the world system because world relations are constantly changing.

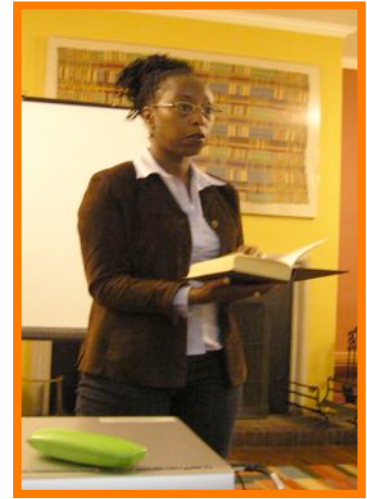
Fall 2009

Colloquium Series

Last fall the Africana Studies Department had its first Colloquium. The Department discussed Barack Obama's book, *Dreams From My Father*. For the first colloquium, the Department had Professor Wilbur Rich from Wellesley's Political Science Department and Professor Rhonda Frederick from Boston College's English Department facilitate the discussion.



Professor Obeng introduces Professor Rich



Professor Frederick



Ms. Faye Alibocus



An Evening of Sacred Music with Faye Alibocus

Faye Alibocus, a soprano classical singer, came to Wellesley College's Harambee House this past December to sing seasonal, spiritual music. She did a beautiful and moving performance. We are looking forward to having her again in the Fall of 2010!

-Alexandria Barnes



Department Chair, Selwyn Cudjoe, introduces Faye Alibocus

Have a GREAT Summer!

The Africana Studies Department
has many great things in store for
this fall. Be on the look out for
information about our fall
colloquium and our
Wintersession trip to
—Ghana!

Enjoy your break!

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