



QUEENS
COLLEGE

Office of the Dean
Division of the Social Sciences

July 8, 1991

Professor Ahmed Samatar
c/o Marlene Guzman
Director of Corporate and Foundation Relations
St. Lawrence University
Canton, New York 13617

Dear Professor Samatar:

To confirm what we discussed on the phone, I will be pleased to undertake the assignments indicated in your May 28, 1991 letter. It is indeed an honor to be invited for a second time to exchange views with the faculty and students at St. Lawrence University. I have fond memories of my first visit there, and look forward to renewing contact with your colleagues.

I prefer the September 30 - October 4 dates, and request that St. Lawrence cover my travel expenses to and from Washington, D.C., if need be. While on leave in the fall, I may be based in Washington.

To evaluate St. Lawrence's African Studies Program, I would like to review documentation well in advance of my visit to Canton. The purpose of my evaluation, I gather, would be to analyze the current state of the program and where it aspires to be in, say, five years. As such, I should be apprised of needed changes and the resources necessary to make the changes.

The following list notes the kinds of information and analysis that would help in preparation for my trip:

1. A statement of the current state of the resources (human, physical and fiscal) which are available to carry out the program's goals and objectives.
2. A description of the current faculty: their number, teaching and research specializations, publications and participation in the governance of the University. Curriculum vitae would be useful.
3. An overview of recent faculty recruitment activities.
4. A summary of the program's efforts to facilitate faculty development and research.

AFRICAN STUDIES AT ST. LAWRENCE UNIVERSITY

AN EVALUATION

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My Mission

External evaluations often smack of intellectual dilettantism: one or two visitors come to a campus for a few days, unpack their bags, consume a great deal of coffee, read stacks of internal documents, talk to several people, pack their bags, and bug-eyed, write a set of recommendations. One of the challenges in the assignment is to gain an appreciation of a unique intellectual culture as it relates to changing national standards and the frontiers of new knowledge without any attempt to impose agendas, preferences, and selective perceptions. The task of an outside evaluator, as I see it, is to try to understand the local configuration and to etch options on the basis of familiarity with a range of models and initiatives on other campuses. Meant to be suggestive, these options are available for the St. Lawrence University (SLU) community to discuss and tailor to its own needs in an effort to strengthen academic programs.

When invited to evaluate African studies, I called for 17 types of data (see my July 8 letter to Professor Samatar) and received about half of the information requested, the other half not being available. Upon studying the material forwarded to me, it became apparent that I would have to take the liberty of broadening my mandate to include the linkages between African and international studies; an assessment of an areas studies program requires consideration of the structures within which it is located.

The goals of the African studies minor at SLU are noted in the 1990-1992 Catalogue (p.40): (1) to "cultivate a less ethnocentric, more empathetic and more mature awareness of the complexities of the African experience" and (2) "to provide a substantial foundation on which to pursue advanced work in numerous ways in African, Afro-American and international studies."

I must not only ask whether the program is coherent and well-run, but also whether it is actually accomplishing its ambitious aims. After reading many documents, position papers, syllabi, and curriculum vitae, I came to campus for six very busy days of meetings with faculty, administrators, and students. I attended two classes--advanced Kiswahili and introduction to African studies--and inspected facilities, including buildings, library collections, computing, and audio-visual aids. I saw no recorded student evaluations of the African studies program and could only deduce how many students take various sequences of courses. At the outset, I had insufficient information about student experiences, reactions, and performance to provide much more than conjecture. On the other hand, my questions were treated with candor, and the African studies faculty offered the utmost hospitality--an African tradition, I dare say.

Resource Assessment

Nine faculty members offer courses in African studies, two of whom--Professors Lloyd and Samatar--play a central role. By national standards for undergraduate institutions, SLU's coverage of Sub-Saharan Africa merits a very high rating. Against a backdrop of a declining student population at SLU, enrollments in African studies courses have held their own. To meet student demand, the limit in the introductory course has been raised to 40 per semester. Most of the second- and third-year level courses draw 12 to 15 students, and some classes attract more than 30 students. The research seminar enrolls six to 10 students each spring. Also on the revenue side of the budget, income is derived from extramural sources, namely the Ford grant.

To cost the program, one must account for the percentage of faculty time devoted to African studies as a fraction of total workload, the net figure for the Kenya semester, one teaching fellowship for language instruction, eight fellowships granted to Kenyan nationals, the salary of a part-time secretary, a \$5,000 budget line, and overhead. It is important to note that African studies occupies no central space save a single, shared office in International Education. The coordinator of African studies teaches a full load--six courses per year--and does not receive a stipend or course release for spending approximately 60 percent of his time in Africana-related activities.

In the context of university-wide budget reductions, SLU's support for faculty development is superb. The library, with a \$5,000 line per year for African studies, audio-visual equipment, and computer facilities are impressive in size and scope. The combination of language training in Kiswahili and news broadcasts from Kenya six days each week nicely complements the Kenya semester, which by all accounts is a model program. I need not embellish the well deserved praise for this program by returning students, who have indeed had a rare opportunity to gain appreciation for African cultures. In this regard, SLU is in the forefront of helping to meet a critical national need. According to data generated by the Institute of International Education in 1987, the vast majority (76.8 percent) of U.S. study abroad students are concentrated in one region: Western Europe. In comparison, Africa receives only 1.1 percent of the U.S. study abroad population.

Needs Assessment

One cannot determine whether African studies has achieved its stated goals without more evidence than I have of the program's

impact on students. Inferences from course materials and observations of two classes--both of which were outstanding--are an inadequate means for judging coherence from course to course. Clearly, centrifugal forces inevitably operate in any interdisciplinary effort. While students indicated great enthusiasm for African studies, they registered concern for the coherence of course offerings. Prompted by my questions, they expressed need for more information about careers related to their academic preparation, graduate schools, fellowship opportunities, and the continuation of language instruction at St. Lawrence. SLU lacks a center of gravity--an intellectual clubhouse--for activity centered on Africana. Students returning from Kenya are groping for ways to use more effectively their experiential knowledge so that it is diffused for the benefit of the SLU community.

Curricular matters in need of reconsideration, from the standpoint of strengthening international and African studies, are the Freshman Program and SLU's lack of a language requirement. Suffice it to ask, how can a course on "The Human Condition" not include a unit on global problems? And how can one study global problems and be prepared to function as a cosmopolitan, educated citizen of the modern world without knowing at least one foreign language?

Linkages are problematic. In the pursuit of SLU's mission to blend scholarship with a primary commitment to teaching, the leadership needs to articulate a clear vision, including concrete goals, for the university's international programs: What is the contribution of international and area studies to the liberal arts goals of SLU? What is the fit between international/area studies and other programs, majors, and interdisciplinary courses? What is St. Lawrence's niche in international studies? Where does SLU want to be in five years? Would it be appropriate for the administration, faculty, and students to constitute a working group to answer these questions?

Regarding off-campus linkages, SLU needs to concentrate its efforts to achieve selective excellence. Perhaps it is time to revisit the question of links with other universities, especially Carleton's school of international affairs (located as it is in a capital city with vast human and documentary resources) or, more distant, Dalhousie's or Boston's African studies centers. The combination of a rural setting for scholarly reflection and real working relations (e.g., access to seminars, cosponsored events, exchanges) with other institutions could only strengthen SLU's international offerings.

However, the overarching need is to pull together atomized area studies programs which have emerged in a topsy-turvy fashion at SLU. Some of these programs lack a critical mass of faculty, and it is important to open a conversation so that they are not submerged but coalesce better than hertofore.

7. Organize a brown-bag lunch with a speaker once a week and perhaps a faculty development seminar.

8. Concentrate international programs in one building. Provide a common room (lounge) so that there is a focal point for interaction. Equip the space with major journals, post information, and house the coordinators in this building.

9. Elevate the title of coordinator to director, commensurate with the level of responsibility at SLU and the convention on most campuses. In light of their administrative duties, and with the expectation that they provide leadership, release the directors from one course each year.

10. Collect systematic data on the impact of African studies courses on students.

11. Establish postrequisites for students in the Kenya program.

12. For additional staffing, recruit uninitiated SLU faculty and invite them to develop new courses in international studies. Offer released time for faculty to develop cross-disciplinary courses.

In sum, no college or university can afford to stand still when, like other countries, the United States is inextricably drawn into the globalization process; it would be a grave error to allow academic programs to operate in a time warp removed from a changing world order. In seeking an appropriate way to adapt and strengthen the university, the challenge is to arrive at a clear and distinctive concept of international studies, one appropriate for SLU's own intellectual culture. This survey of St. Lawrence's resources and needs suggests that the university can meet the challenge.