

Community and National

ABROAD FOCUS: THE ST. LAWRENCE KENYA PROGRAM

By Emily Adriance

The Kenya Program, despite its wide variety of courses and adventures, is plagued with an image that prevents interested students from applying, said Peter van Lent, campus coordinator for the program.

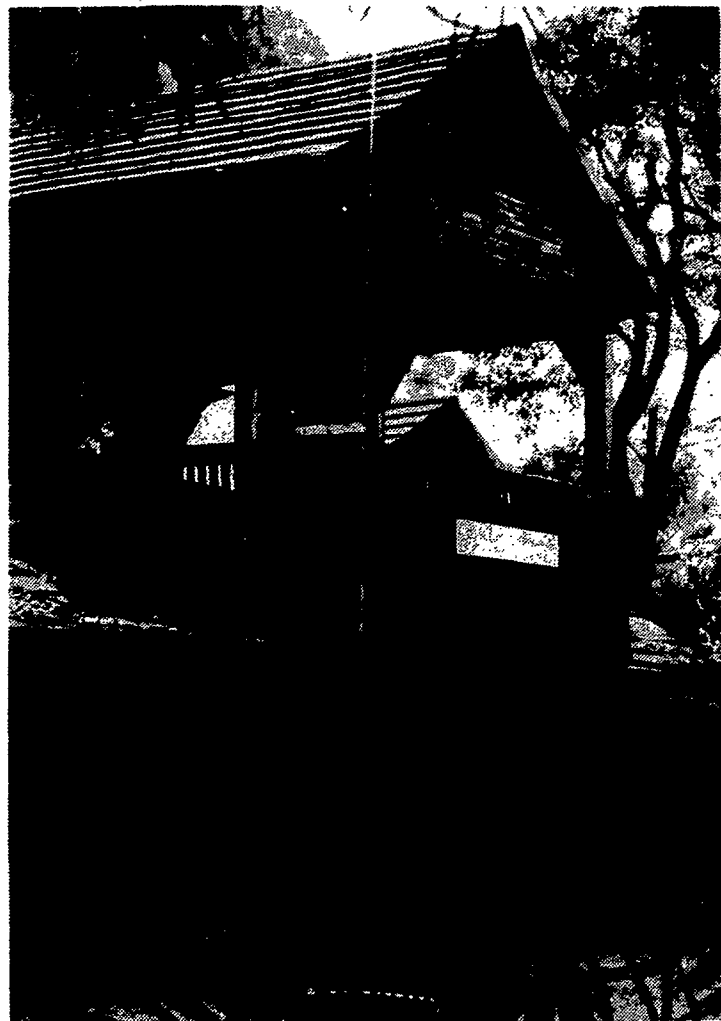
In previous years when students applied to the program they had to have an interview with a member of the African Studies Committee. Van Lent said that these interviews had a reputation of being very traumatic.

"[The interview] is now an honest interaction to determine the individual's experiences and how well they adapt to new situations," said van Lent. He added that the interviews are used to get to know the students rather than intimidate them.

"I want to stress that whoever is qualified academically is welcome," said van Lent. "A lot of students don't apply because they think the program only offers courses in the social sciences. However, it does offer courses in the natural sciences and many other disciplines as well."

Howard Brown, associate director of the program in Kenya, explained that, although classroom instruction lasts only about seven weeks each semester, students also have the opportunity to do internships. In past years students have worked for women's movements, local newspaper publishers, churches and many other organizations.

Despite van Lent's desire to change the image of the program for prospective students, Brown said he and the program's director, Paul



The Student Center houses a kitchen, dormitories, and various other study rooms. Photo by Emily Adriance

Robinson, want to keep the central focus of the program the same. He said they want to challenge students' Western ways of thinking by removing them from their cultural securities and placing them in completely different settings.

One way the program accomplishes this is by minimizing the time spent in classrooms. "Classroom courses on Africa can be taught anywhere in the world," said Brown. "Only in Africa can students experience the culture hands on."

During a semester a student will stay with at least three African families. Brown explained that the first

homestay is with members of a Western tribe in Kenya called the Kisiji. They live with this family for a week and help them carry water, cook, harvest the tribe's crops, and wash clothes. Often if the homestay father is a teacher, a student will help by teaching for a couple of days.

"The homestay is done during the first two weeks of the program, before the newness of the African culture has diminished," said Brown. "I don't think they'd get nearly as much out of it if they had their classes first."

In addition to these rural homestays, the students stay with families in urban homes



The St. Lawrence University safari truck waits to tackle the plains of Kenya. Photo by Emily Adriance

'...the students now spend two weeks on safari in Tanzania...'

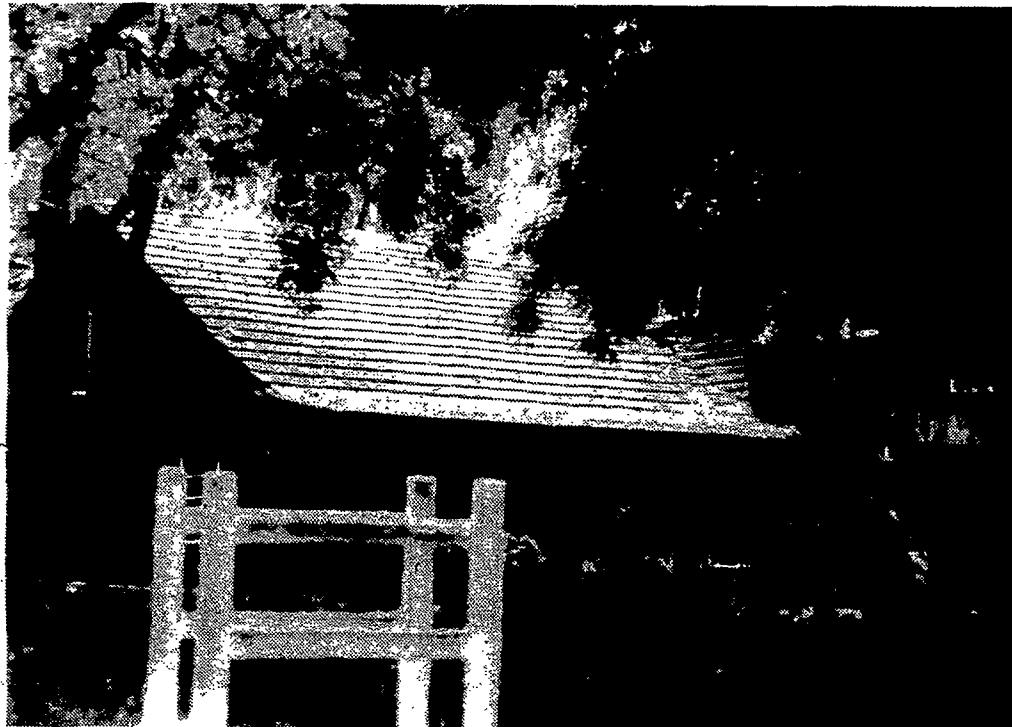


Howard Brown, associate director of the Kenya Program, and his wife enjoy a sunny day in Nairobi. Photo by Emily Adriance

while they take classes in Nairobi. A third homestay towards the end of the semester lasts two or three days and takes place in the pastoral community of the Samburu tribe.

dents' experiences even more, the students now spend two weeks on safari in Tanzania as well. They stay in tents and hear lectures from game wardens and other local officials.

In order to expand the stu-



The S.L.U. Study Center in Nairobi is an invaluable asset to the program. Photo by Emily Adriance

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