

The Faculty as Students

Summer, 1991: faculty from St. Lawrence's African studies program gather in Kenya for a month-long study conference funded by a grant from the Ford Foundation. They discuss curricular matters with the program directors and Kenyan faculty, participate in field sessions similar to those experienced by students in the program, visit areas on the Kenya coast, including Mombasa, and stay with Samburu families in central Kenya. Discussions and workshop sessions take place at the St. Lawrence University Karen Study Center.

Participants turned in reports on the experience after their return. We've excerpted several:

Peter van Lent, *Associate Professor of Modern Languages and Literatures*:

"I feel that I learned a tremendous amount about East African politics, development, environmental concerns, history and anthropology. Sadly, much of what I learned was very sobering. Dealing with adversity with regard to Africa was not unfamiliar to me from my experience with the Sahel region in recent decades. However, the East African situation seems less directly tied to a single environmental crisis such as the drought, but rather is created by a complex interplay of natural, political, economic and other problems.

"The field experiences were less of a novelty to me than to others in the group since I had done similar work with the Dogon people in Mali and in other situations. Nonetheless, this part of the workshop was still a sensory, emotional and intellectual feast for me. The field trip to the coastal Swahili culture was perfectly designed to 'break us into' the African experience and to give us some direct experience with

The African Connection

St. Lawrence's ties with Africa take on many dimensions. Here's a look at five of them:

this part of Kenya. The chance to visit with the Samburu community was an extraordinary opportunity and not one which is easily encountered in this day and age.

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—Associate Professor Peter van Lent

"I found many aspects of East African life and culture which were familiar to me—an ideology based deeply on respect for the human condition and a broad tolerance for diversity within it, a way of life which honors old age and seniority, cherishes family relationships, and seeks to live in harmony, not to exploit, the natural world. The Kenya workshop enabled

me to think more broadly and more penetratingly about Africa. This experience has made differences in my scholarship, my thinking and my soul."

Alice Pomponio,
Associate Professor of Anthropology:

"Since I had been to Kenya before, I had also visited most of the places our group visited. This time, however, I got to ask more in-depth questions and fill in some blanks left from the last visit. In Mombasa, I finally met Richard Wilding, who teaches archaeology for our program and sponsors student internships in archaeology. In addition to teaching me about the history of the Swahili people on the coast, which I touch on in my

own course, Professor Wilding's interpretation sparked a lively discussion on some of my own research in Papua New Guinea. I came away with new questions, to be sure, but also an interesting sense of cross-cultural comparison.

"I learned much from all of our colleagues in different disciplines, especially those in Kenya and regarding important questions in the study of Africa. For the first time we all saw how the variety of courses and experiences offered our students relates to what we do individually and how the combined whole contributes to their wider liberal arts experience.

"The highlights for me were the field experiences we had — in Mombasa, in shorter trips in the Nairobi area, and of course in Samburu. I had visited Samburu, but as an ethnographer, no amount of reading ever substitutes for 'being there.' I had many unanswered questions which I had the opportunity to ask and explore, even in that short time period. The comparison between lowlands and highlands groups is difficult to grasp from reading but glaringly evident

when one is sitting there looking at the surrounding environment. I had never really understood the interrelationships and interdependence, except at the most abstract levels, between those environments and the people who live in them, until I sat there and watched it for myself.

"We also had glimpses of everyday life and life cycle events. I met some young warriors in my manyatta who were very forthcoming about their lives, their body decorations, and so on, which students are always curious about. Contrasting the warriors, we also met some 'bead girls' about 11-13 years old, just about to be married, who were also lively informants and able communicators to our broken Swahili and awkward gesticulations. On the road, we saw a young bride, who had just undergone initiation, on her bridal trek. That became a poignant moment for all of us, as we learned the details of her initiation ritual and what her life would be like in the days and months ahead.

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"Too often our approach to African studies is antiseptic — scholars tend to hide behind their abstract models and theoretical constructs and forget that there are real people under those statistics. I think these experiences were very moving for all of us, as we could not hide behind our seminar table; we had to interact with real people in a situation in which we did not know their rules or their language. This was challenging for all of us, and fascinating for me."

Betsy Cogger Rezelman, Associate Dean for Faculty Affairs and Associate Professor of Fine Arts:

"Making my first trip to Africa was the culmination of a long and



circuitous relationship with the study of African art which began when I was an undergraduate at Cornell University in the late '60s. I believe even more than ever that the Kenya program is by far this University's strongest and could compete with any offered in this country."

Patricia Alden, Associate Professor of English:

"For all the wonder of the human imagination in reaching out to the unfamiliar through words and ideas, there is no substitute for being there, for grasping that issues in books are issues of daily reality and have to be lived by real people as well as forming food for thought in St. Lawrence classrooms."

Celia Nyamweru, Associate Professor of Anthropology:

"There was lots of excellent food, tea, coffee and fruit juice always available — plus lots of carbohydrates to keep our energy level high! Africa does its best to make its presence felt through such things as water shortages and occasional power cuts, but overall the study centre is a very comfortable and privileged environment in terms of Kenyan living conditions.

"Some attempt should be made to expose the students to some more educated Samburu, and to some Samburu women who can communicate with them more easily. I feel some contact with the Kenya government

would help the students put their experiences into the context of modern Kenya. We should consider the Samburu in the context of citizens of modern Kenya, rather than largely as romantic figures dancing under the light of the full moon."

John Barthelme, Associate Professor of Anthropology:

"The Samburu's approach to human-land interaction is fundamentally different from that of the developed world. The critical difference seems to lie in how the Samburu view time. Their economic and social world views time as cyclical and long-term. Answers to human-environmental issues are approached from short-term as well as long-term perspectives. A two-to-three year disastrous drought or the recurrence of pastoralist diseases can indeed be terribly injurious to the Samburu people and their domestic stock, yet they believe (and know for a fact) that such droughts and diseases come to an end. This perspective, that economic and environmental disruptions are part of life, and that 'the rains will come again,' is a fundamentally different way of viewing human-land interactions.

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"During the workshop, I was able to participate in the Samburu field excursion. This opportunity was especially important, as 10 years earlier I was badly injured in Samburu while director of the Kenya program. I was determined one day to return to Samburu, revisit the locality of my injury and complete the field excursion. I did so, and as we left Samburu, I experienced a great sense of personal fulfillment."

Other campus participants were Associate Professor of History David

Lloyd; Associate Professor of Government Ahmed Samatar, who headed the project; and Nazi Kivutha, visiting international fellow in Swahili. Kenya faculty participants were program director and Associate Professor of History Paul Robinson; Associate Director and Assistant Professor of History Howard Brown; Karim Janmohamed, former senior lecturer in history at the University of Nairobi; Njuguna Ng'ethe, director of the Institute of Development Studies, University of Nairobi; and Waveny Olembo, senior lecturer in English at Kenyatta University. Program alumni Edward ("Ned") Breslin '88 and Njeri Marekia '85 also participated in discussions. —Macreena A. Doyle

A Curriculum for the 21st Century

Teachers at all levels and of all subjects look to know what's new in their subject area and to learn better ways to instruct their students. Even in a relatively new discipline there are new scholarly studies to consider, new teaching methods to discuss.

Founded in 1974, the African studies program at St. Lawrence is one of the few in the nation devoted to educating undergraduates. The ground is yet new and fertile for faculty and students who study the history, languages, politics, culture and art of the African continent. Thus, the University will sponsor "African Studies and the Undergraduate Curriculum: New Directions for the 21st Century," a conference to bring together scholars from Africa, Canada and the U.S. on campus in early October.

The culmination of a \$262,000, three-year grant from the Ford Foundation to the University in 1990, the conference aims to strengthen African studies at St. Lawrence and to make a contribution to the development of the field. Organizers David Lloyd, associate professor of history, and Patricia Alden, associate professor of English, hope the conference will allow scholars to consider different African studies programs and courses at

the undergraduate level, introduce their work to one another and discuss the role of African studies in promoting international and multicultural awareness among North American students.

At St. Lawrence, African studies brings together faculty from such areas as government, history, anthropology, English, fine arts and modern languages and literatures. Students study on campus (they can take Kiswahili, one of the most widely spoken languages on the African continent) and augment their work by spending a semester in Kenya. —Lisa M. Cania

Notes on Our Kenyan Alumni

You won't bump into these alumni at Reunion, club events, business conferences or your children's softball tournaments. Yet they live and breathe St. Lawrence as loyally as any graduates do.

This fall marks the 10th anniversary of the University's commitment to cultural exchange with Kenya; two Kenyan students are awarded full scholarships each year. Last year, the college added a new facet to the program—acceptance of Kenyan students into the graduate program.

Twelve Kenyans have received their baccalaureate degrees and one, Nazi Kivutha, graduated in May with her master's degree in counseling. Since their graduations, they have all excelled in graduate work or the professions, all over the world.

Professor Paul Robinson, director of the St. Lawrence Program in Kenya,

provided an update on many Kenya alumni:

Mumbi Kiereini '83, government: Kiereini studied international affairs and development administration at Carleton University and received dual master's degrees in both disciplines. She returned to Kenya and is a management consultant for Price-Waterhouse in Nairobi and London.

Njeri Marekia '85, environmental studies: Marekia continued her studies at York University and took an M.A. in environmental law. As an external student, she is completing her law degree at the University of London. At the same time, Marekia lectures in the department of environmental studies at Kenyatta University and serves as a consultant on pollution and environmental problems with KENGO. She teaches in the Kenya Program on the topic of women, environment and development in Kenya.

Ayda Kimemia '87, economics: Kimemia returned to Kenya after graduation and works in her profession for the First American Bank.

John Segelan '88, economics: Deputy manager of the Kenya Commercial Bank in Marsabit, Kenya, Segelan also hopes to add public service to his portfolio. At press time, he is contesting a parliamentary seat for the Marsabit South District.

Paul Chabeda '89, mathematics and environmental studies: Studying for his graduate degree in architecture at the University of Pennsylvania.

Andrew Dabalan '90, environmental studies and economics: After spending a year studying desertification and arid land use in West Africa under the auspices of the Thomas J. Watson Fellowship Program, Dabalan continues his studies at the University of California at Davis.

Joseph Lekuton '91, economics and government: The second Kenyan to win a Thomas J. Watson Fellowship for postgraduate study, Lekuton is completing his investigation of herd management and marketing techniques in Botswana and Tanzania. —Lisa M. Cania

Watson Fellowship winner Joseph Lekuton '91, center.



A Call to Africa

Twenty-one St. Lawrence graduates, plus 15 friends and relatives, embarked on a two-week journey to Africa last March 6 to see for themselves what St. Lawrence students have seen for more than 20 years. Their experiences were chronicled by Chairman Emeritus of the Board of Trustees Alfred C. Viebranz '42, who shares excerpts of his journal in the following pages:

The Beginning:

The first discussion of a trip to Africa occurred at Camp Canaras in August 1991. Joseph Lekuton '91, a Kenyan student whom I had known since he was a sophomore, was working at the camp. Joseph left on August 6 to return to Kenya. Early that morning he burst into my room. "You have to promise me that you will come to see my country," he said.

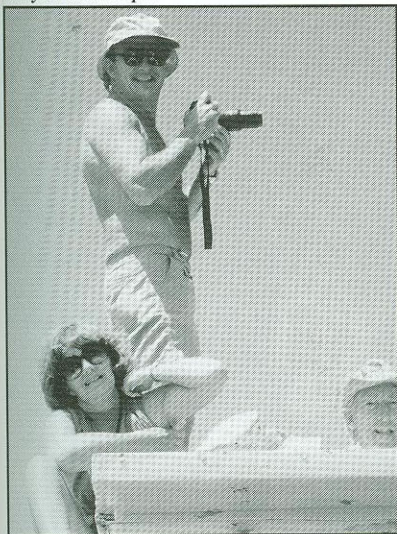
At 6:30 a.m. I'm neither sensible nor conscious. "I'll come," I said, and went back to sleep. But, as Dr. Seuss wrote, "I meant what I said, and I said what I meant." In seven months I was on my way to Africa.

Sunday, March 8:

(After arriving in Nairobi, Kenya via London, the travelers first set out for Ngorogoro Wildlife Lodge. The excerpt below describes the author's observation from the safari vans...)

From the time we'd left Nairobi we had been accompanied by a tele-

Trustees Larry Winston '60 (standing) and Ed Wilson '53, with Sally Winston, survey the Kenyan landscape.



The St. Lawrence colors fly proudly in Kenya, thanks to this group of alumni and parents who visited the country in March. Chronicler Viebranz is standing fifth from the right.

phone line to the right of the road. Its poles were about 10 feet tall and only six inches in diameter on which were mounted thin two-foot crossarms. The telephone line consisted of two lonely strands of wire on tiny ceramic insulators. The fragility of the installation was striking. Inexpensive yet functional, it performed its task and did not intrude on its natural surroundings. It occurred to me then, and it was later confirmed, that this was a laudable characteristic of Africa and Africans.

Tuesday, March 10:

We traveled east to the Olduvai Gorge where the Leakeys made their discoveries of the relics of prehistoric man. Here the remains of both *homo habilis* and *homo erectus* were unearthed. Later, a discovery was made in the vicinity of Lake Baringo in the Rift Valley of Kenya which provided evidence that human ancestors in East Africa made the crucial transition to the larger-brained genus *homo*—which is us. Recent scientific dating of this fossil indicates that the first species on the evolutionary path leading directly to modern humans appeared about 2.5 million years ago.

Nature magazine, in 1986, suggested that everyone alive on Earth today is descended from a small number of men and women who emigrated from Africa not later than 50,000 years ago. Looking into the gorge reminded me of a comment made

during a lecture by Ahmed Samatar, associate professor of government at St. Lawrence: "Even if you have the bluest eyes, the blondest hair, and the whitest skin, you are an African."

From Olduvai Gorge we moved on to Gibbs Farm, a beautiful plantation set in the green, rolling hills of the agricultural country at the edge of the Great Rift Valley.

Thursday, March 12:

We arrived at Mountain Lodge, on the western slopes of Mt. Kenya, in time for a late lunch. The lodge is a large building constructed of native wood which looks like every safari stop that you have seen in the movies. We approached through a walkway that has a high fence on both sides. Along this walk was an enclosure about the size of three telephone booths that said "Man Hide Hut" on the door. This was a refuge to be used if we encountered an animal along the walkway. Naturally, everyone took a picture of someone peeking out the door. Was this a needed safety precaution, or a clever promotional gimmick? There was no lion around to ask.

A large observation porch stretched across the back of the lodge. It overlooked a waterhole and marsh area where the animals and birds gather, having been lured there by salt licks or food. About 4 p.m. (tea time) all hell broke loose, and I looked out to see Sykes monkeys on the railings of



Al Viebranz captioned this photo "Chairman of the Board Bruce Benedict '60 finally does some real work."

the porches and climbing through some of the louvers which had been left open. Many of us scurried around closing doors and windows or trying to grab cameras. Two people returned to their room to find that two monkeys had eaten the food they were carrying in their luggage and were now going through a cosmetic kit. The monkeys stayed about a half hour and then disappeared as quickly as they had come. They appear each afternoon at the same time, their little biological clocks apparently set for tea time.

Sunday, March 15:

(On the way to the Mt. Kenya Safari Club, Viebranz and his fellow travelers visited a Samburu village.)

One disturbing aspect of the trip for me was the American penchant for "doing good." Out of a feeling of charity and compassion, visitors to Africa are turning the younger children into beggars, and slowly undermining the dignity and traditions of tribes like the Maasai and Samburu.

Thursday, March 19:

This was our last day in Nairobi and we were anxious to visit the St. Lawrence Study Center there to meet the American students, to see the facilities for the first time, and to talk with faculty Paul Robinson and Howard Brown. There are normally about 30 students enrolled at the center, about 25 to 50% of whom are from St. Lawrence. The others mainly come from Eastern colleges, although the program has attracted students from such schools as Reed, Stanford, Duke and Northwestern, and has established a national reputation.

After a tour of the facilities we were given an overview of the Kenya program during a one-hour presentation by Paul and Howard. We were convinced that a semester in Kenya is a demanding experience physically, intellectually and emotionally, but the rewards are substantial. How could a person learn more about the perspectives of history, the environment, wildlife, family structures in dissimilar cultures, and the effects of urbanization on an emerging economy, in such a short time span?

Kenya is a wonderful country with warm, intelligent people who treated us with great kindness, but I couldn't depart without concern for the welfare and safety of these same people in the days before the coming election.

Everyone should take a journey to Africa, if just to savor the exhilaration of learning something new, every minute of every day. The animals and birds cannot be duplicated on any other continent. The topography, foliage and flowers are varied and, in most areas, beautiful. The dignity and friendliness of the people are infectious. The trip was physically demanding and, in a few places, lacked the amenities of home. But these liabilities were more than compensated for by intellectual and emotional nourishment. The trip, in short, was a highlight of my 71 years.

Voyages of Self-Discovery

St. Lawrence is a comfortable place. For students, sometimes it's too comfortable. As Adam Osburn '94 puts it, "You can keep busy with your activities and dwell in your own little world."

But those who participate in the Kenya semester say they're glad they traded their campus comforts for the experience of living in a hut, staying in the campus center at Karen and studying African wildlife in their natural habitat.

For example, there's Brian Evans '94. He took part in a two-week field course among the Samburu, in the central part of Kenya, staying with a family in a hut, sleeping on skins at night. The best part?

"On our second-to-last day, there was a big meat feast provided by the local people," Evans says. "They killed two sheep for us. They slice the neck and then everyone drinks the blood. That's part of their diet, but for me, it was quite an unusual experience."

Not exactly a typical day in Dana. But it's the atypical that students who choose the Kenya semester seek.

"You don't just learn about it, you actually go do it," Jennifer Webster '93 says of the homestays. "You can learn

The official University vehicle, Kenya style.



about anything in a book, but we really got to go there.”

Evans agrees. He took part in an internship while in Kenya, studying the feeding behavior of the black rhinoceros.

“It gave me a real understanding of the scientific process,” the biology major says. “It was hands-on, not like a textbook.”

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Jennifer Webster '93

While students report that participation in the program teaches them a lot about environmental, political, cultural and economic conditions in Africa, they also say that their treks are voyages of self-discovery.

“I learned a lot about myself,” Osburn says. “All the stimuli are totally new and you have to process everything all the time. You appreciate the differences in other people. It’s part of becoming a stronger person yourself.”

Among the things the students think about, they say, is how their experience will affect what they do with the remainder of their time at St. Lawrence, as well as what they do with their lives.

“I got interested in a lot of the development issues,” Webster says. “I’m going to try and get more involved as a volunteer in some environmental and sociopolitical issues I’m interested in.”

“I’ve seen that I don’t need a lot of the things I have,” Evans says. “The people there have very little, and they’re content with that. I’m very lucky to have what I have, and I think that will always be on my mind. It’ll be tough to see things as I did before.”

—MAD

Macreena Doyle and Lisa Cania are staff writers for St. Lawrence.

Letters Home

..from Amy Palmer '93,
of Cazenovia, during the time of her
rural homestay in Kenya.

January 20, 1992

Dear Mom and Dad,

I am writing to you from the house of Peter and Mellen Anunda. They have seven children, ranging in age from four to 18, four of which live at home. (The others are at school.) Bitango is 15, and she knows the most English, but it’s still hard to communicate with her. Ebesiva is eight, Isiah is six and Edwin is four.

I haven’t seen another *mzungu* (white person) from our trip in three days, and I’m finding it kind of lonely. I can communicate all the necessary things — i.e., bathroom, I’m full, etc. — but there’s no one to relate to. You can’t be sarcastic here — they just don’t understand it. They’re very sweet people, and they do everything for me (I mean *everything* — it’s getting tiresome), but I miss joking around in that oh-so-American way. I’ve broken away from that visitor-from-America-who-is-supposed-to-be-quiet-and-reserved-because-she-doesn’t-want-to-offend-anyone pattern just a couple of times. So anyway, I miss my own culture — I guess that would make me “homesick.”

We went to the market yesterday. There were so many people there — it was worse than a mall. They *all* stared at me. I think many of them had never seen a *mzungu* before. Little kids followed me, and touched me, and yelled “Mzungu! Mzungu!!” I felt like Meryl Streep in *Out of Africa*.

January 21, 1992

We visited another girl on the program last night. It was great to speak real English. She even understood my jokes! I’m just lonely. It’s a great experience — I keep telling myself that.

Americans are the most anally clean and pest-free people, and I’m

afraid I’ve inherited some characteristics of my culture. I don’t really like taking sponge baths, especially with little kids peeking at the *mzungu*. And every time I try to go to the bathroom, flying insects zoom out of the home we call a “choo.” I suppose I’m being a baby about it; I’ll get used to it soon enough.

January 22, 1992

The way they deal with garbage here is very interesting. They just throw it on the ground. Usually it’s banana peels or mango pits, so the animals eat those. There are chickens and goats and cats and dogs wandering all over the place here. If it’s paper, I suppose it biodegrades, but they don’t have much paper waste. They usually re-use cans, but if they don’t need them anymore, they throw them out behind the hedge. I looked back there and it’s a mini garbage dump, but I suppose “out of sight, out of mind.” They don’t have a tenth of the garbage we have, just because they buy fresh fruit or kill their own chickens. There isn’t any packaging — they don’t need it because there isn’t any refrigeration. They buy food and eat it in the same day.

They’re also very communal as far as food is concerned. Neighbors come over and eat with us all the time without being invited. We have visited many relatives and friends. Whenever you visit — no matter what time — you are fed. They say food is plentiful here, and it’s true. There is fruit growing all over the place, and if you don’t pick it, you can go to the market. It’s very cheap to buy food here. But that might change soon. *All* the land in Kisii is being farmed right now, and Kisii is growing at a rate of four percent a year. Yikes! Kenya’s population is 24 million, and it’s approximately the size of Texas.