

Global Cal Poly Pomona 2007-2008
Study Abroad: Ghana Study Abroad Students Experience
Cultural Rewards and Personal Enlightenment
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The 2007 Ghana Study Abroad trip (June 21-July 3) proved to be a comprehensive academic experience for the 27 participating students. They were immersed in various activities that revolved around cross-cultural analysis, field research, and political economy and business practices. The PLS 499 course, Ghanaian Culture and Society, that students took as a prerequisite in the spring exposed them to the history, politics, and culture of Ghana. The group did exceptionally well in this course. Ghanaian lecturers and tour coordinators were impressed with how knowledgeable CPP students were about Ghanaian history, politics, and culture, demonstrating how seriously they clearly took their preparation for the trip.

The Ghana Study Tour included four major components. First, students performed content analysis of eight articles on Ghanaian culture and business practices. Second, they kept an academic journal that comprehensively demonstrated what they had learned in lectures and during site visits in Ghana. The third component included visits to various historical and cultural sites. And finally, as part of the field research component, students were required to conduct interviews on two different subjects with Ghanaians.

The cross-cultural analysis aspect of the trip involved the examination of critical areas of American and Ghanaian culture, providing insights into and understanding of the comparative differences of these two nations from both historical and contemporary perspectives. Students analyzed language, music, art, media, pop culture, folklore, and religion from a comparative perspective. A major component of this experience involved field research regarding the impact of American culture on Ghanaian society. On the first field research day students conducted interviews with six Ghanaians, between the ages of 18 and 29, about the Americanization of Ghanaian society. On the second field research day students interviewed three Ghanaian and three non-Ghanaian entrepreneurs about issues dealing with the political economy and business practices in Ghana. Academic lectures and site visits carefully focused on the themes and objectives of the courses. Our Ghanaian group leader stated that the CPP itinerary was the most comprehensive he had seen in his three years working as a tour coordinator.

All 27 students proved superb cultural ambassadors for the United States and for Cal Poly Pomona. They were noble and classy in all ways. It was a life-changing experience for all of these students. They had the opportunity to observe and examine the way people in the southern hemisphere live. Africa, long known as the “Dark Continent,” has mostly been described in negative terms. Before arriving in Ghana, many students possessed stereotypes and misconceptions of Africa and Africans. Nearly all of these misconceptions were effectively challenged at some point during this trip.

Celebrating 50 years of Independence

Slightly smaller than Oregon, Ghana is a country of 23 million people sitting on the Gulf of Guinea to the south and lodged between the Cote d’Ivoire, Burkina Faso, and Togo. Ghana has been long recognized for embracing democracy and political stability. In 1957, Ghana was the

first Sub-Saharan nation in Africa to declare its independence from colonial rule. CPP students felt fortunate to be visiting during the 50th Anniversary of Ghanaian independence as it put our discussions of the nation's independence movement into perspective.

On this trip students heard lectures and presentations on a variety of subjects. Among other things, they visited the W.E.B. DuBois Center. DuBois was the great African-American scholar who founded the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). He is also known as the father of pan-Africanism. He traveled to Ghana in 1961 at the request of Ghanaian president Kwame Nkrumah to write the Encyclopedia Britannica. Denied a passport to return to the U.S., he consequently received Ghanaian citizenship. DuBois died at the age of 95 in 1963 and is buried in the country's capital, Accra.

Students also learned about the World Bank (WB) and International Monetary Fund's (IMF) relationship with Ghana and the controversial structural adjustment program. Ghana is often heralded as the model of economic reform in Africa by institutions such as the IMF. Far from being a model of success, Ghana is rather a model of economic exploitation. The IMF dangled \$3 billion in loans to Ghana, but to qualify for this aid the Ghanaian government had to agree to abide by strict guidelines. These painful requirements forced the Ghanaian government to take its hands off its primary export, cocoa, a significant part of the Ghanaian identity. This scheme, referred to as liberalization, compels countries such as Ghana to privatize their economy, allowing multinational corporations to come in and control the country's raw resources. Other IMF requirements called for Ghana to devalue its currency, making the price of bread more expensive. This devaluation process also made Ghanaian exports less expensive and imports more expensive. Finally, the government was required to cut spending; this led to substantial cuts in investments in education and health care, the two crucial areas to sustained development. Instead of aiding the development of the Ghanaian economy and society, the IMF crippled the country while stripping away pieces of its identity.

CPP students listened to lectures about the Kwame Nkrumah, the founder and first president of independent Ghana. After studying in the U.S., at Lincoln in Pennsylvania, he returned to Ghana to lead the independence movement and to promote pan-Africanism. He was a visionary leader responsible for building much of the infrastructure that exists in the country today. Unfortunately, his vision and presidency was undermined by a CIA-assisted coup.

At one time Ghana was the world's leading producer of cocoa. It accounted for 80 percent of exports and 70 percent of revenues. Over the past decade, the dramatic decrease in the production of cocoa has negatively impacted the Ghanaian economy.

One of our visits was to the bustling cargo port of Tema. Nkrumah built this city in 1960 as a manmade harbor. Today, it is Ghana's industrial center and the most important trading port in the country. As a populated city, Tema is the closest to the crossing of the Prime Meridian and the equator, a special treat for our three geography majors. The visit to the Aburi Gardens was also breathtaking. The Botanical Gardens, opened in 1890, overlook the Accra coastal plain and contain exotic plants from every corner of the world. The Ashanti museum displays artifacts from a historical period that shaped Ghanaian identity. The Ashanti, or Asante, are the predominant ethnic group in Ghana known for putting up fierce resistance to British rule.

Kumasi is the cultural epicenter of Ghana. It is the capital of the Ashanti region and Ghana's second largest city. In Kumasi, students had the opportunity to visit the biggest open market in West Africa. As students snaked through the incredible maze of shops, Ghanaian warmth and hospitality were on display. Shoppers and shop owners clapped, waved, smiled, and said 'Akwaaba', 'welcome' in Twi, the most spoken language in the country. As CPP students explored the famous market they commented that they felt like "rock stars." They also visited a village in Kumasi where the colorful kente cloth is made.

A somber step into African history

Our most intense experience was the trip to Slave River and the Elmina Slave Castle. Slave River was the last opportunity slaves had to bathe before they were shipped to the Americas. The visit to the Elmina Slave Castle was especially intense for the students. Elmina was the oldest and biggest slave trading post in Sub-Saharan Africa. Students entered the actual dungeons where slaves were held for months at a time before exiting through the "Door of No Return" and being shipped to the Americas. This experience gave students a first-hand account of the gruesome inhumanity of slavery.

The canopy walk in the Kakum National Park was exciting for the students because they had a chance to encourage each other to overcome their fears and walk over seven connected (rickety) wooden bridges. Fear and intimidation immediately became collective joy and celebration as each student completed the walk over one of the world's most beautiful places. On the last day, students toured East Legon Elementary School. CPP students brought supplies to give to the teachers and students. Our students also jumped rope, played soccer, and interacted with the students during their recess.

I have been teaching at CPP for eleven years and, I can say, this was my most rewarding academic experience. I had the opportunity to see students grow, mature, and transform into conscientious global citizens. The students bonded as a group, which had an extremely important impact on the overall experience. There was also a nice balance of academic work, site visits, field research, and fun.

The trip clearly met the objectives and goals set for the course. American students have a lot to learn from other cultures. In this case, students learned that every nation should be valued for its human resources and cultural contributions. This worthwhile project is thus a model for the positive elements that can result from international academic cooperation and collaboration. I strongly believe that this experience will enable me to continue to internationalize my courses. I am thoroughly grateful to Dean Barbara Way and the CPP International Center for giving me the opportunity to have such a uniquely rich academic experience.

Ghana 2007 Students Comment on their experience

"Looking back on this trip, it has literally changed my life. It gave me new perspectives on my life and this world. As I reread my journal I noticed that I had a new life changing experience everyday that I was in Ghana."

– Julie Tarasi, Business Administration

"This was the trip of a lifetime and I'm glad I had the opportunity to be a part of it. This was my first time traveling outside of the country and on a plane. I can say that Ghana was the beginning

of my travel endeavors. I learned so much about Ghana and I look forward to learning about other cultures.”

– Nancy Perez, Psychology

“There were several components of the trip that I enjoyed. The Kumasi Open Market was intense; the canopy walk was exciting; and the slave castle was emotional and chilling. I am happy to have interacted, talked, and made friends with so many people.”

– Edmundo Yopez, Political Science

“I learned so much about myself while we were there and I’m ready to take on the challenges that life throws with a new perspective. I had an absolutely amazing time and had so many powerful and moving experiences in Ghana and I feel like everybody should experience what we all experienced. This trip was a once-in-a-lifetime experience that I will never forget.”

– Jordan Warlick, Psychology

“My trip to Ghana has changed my views, thoughts, and beliefs. I feel more tolerant, cultured, and possess a yearning to travel again and soon to interact with the surrounding nations to be able to benefit from others.”

– Sean Chavez, Political Science