

Peace and Post-Conflict Development: Sierra Leone and Liberia

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Abstract:

The aim of this project is to develop a global learning component in the Africana Studies Program (AFST) that focuses on the study of peace and post-conflict development in Africa and the African Diaspora. Using two West African countries, Sierra Leone and Liberia, as case study sites, the proposed program will be two-fold: an annual six-week, stacked upper-level undergraduate and graduate course taught in those two countries by Texas A&M Africana Studies faculty; and international internships with Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) working on sustainable peace and post-war development. The course and internship opportunities will provide students with firsthand insights into the long civil wars in West Africa and other regions of the continent and the innovative and often challenging paths to reconstruction and advancement. Extending beyond simply informing and teaching about Africa, the program will be designed to attain the following broader goals: 1. Provide knowledge and understanding of the interlocking economic, political, military and social processes that create complex and globally interdependent conflicts; 2. Foster civic engagement and social responsibility beyond familiar environments; and 3. Provide opportunities for direct experiences of cultural differences and acquisition of the necessary tools for living in a complex and globally interdependent world.

The topic and sites of study are dynamic and engaging as vital areas for direct exposure to models of peace, development and contemporary pedagogy and scholarship. Envisioned as a long-term component of the Africana Studies curriculum, this global learning initiative will provide AFST with sustainable opportunities for undergraduate research, service learning and study abroad, three high impact educational practices that the Africana Studies Program emphasizes in its Strategic Plan. AFST will promote this initiative as a vital international component of the minor and a valuable option for the Graduate Certificate. Because the proposed program is interdisciplinary, student enrollment will not be based exclusively in Africana Studies. As is already the case with AFST courses, students from other departments and programs will be able to participate in this initiative, benefiting from the opportunity it provides to use African wars and their aftermath to learn about, reflect on, and react to diverse and complex global issues of the twenty first century.