

**Canadian Field Studies in Africa**  
**African Field Studies Semester**  
**2015 Context Courses**

comprising

*Research in Society & Development in Africa (GEOG 451)*

*Research in Ecology & Development in Africa (NRSC 451)*

**Coordination:** Timothy Johns; Thomas Meredith

**Contributions:** CFSIA faculty

**Project assistance:** Carol Muriuki, Kirsten Alekseyev, David Barrington Marquis, Sammy Kaburi

*Course Credit: this course is worth 6 credits (3 assigned to each of the above course titles). A single grade is earned for the 6 credits and will appear identically on your transcript twice, once for each of the three credit courses listed above. Because the Context Course counts for twice what your other courses count, assignments discussed below are shown as adding to 200 points.*

**Rationale** Field study in Africa is a unique and valuable experience. Most of the courses taught in the African Field Studies Semester (AFSS) are intensive courses that run for approximately three weeks and address specific topics. Two courses run for the full duration of the field semester and serve as a unifying framework for the full field experience, as a means to ensure all students are exposed to certain themes that are essential to study in Africa, and as a means to introduce students to independent field observation and applied research. The courses are run as a unit and are team taught.

**Content** The course has three goals: students should

- 1) learn about critical issues in East Africa and about on-going research that addresses these issues,
- 2) participate in sustained interdisciplinary team research that exposes them to field research experience and to local conditions related to their research topic, and
- 3) develop powers of observation and independent inquiry essential for field research.

The course consists of one set of activities linked to each of these goals. Each is outlined below. The instructional approaches and learning outcomes for each are presented at the end of each description.

**1) Core Curriculum Modules and Site Reports: (30% of grade or 60 points)**

**Modules -- 20% --** The program works with leaders in various local research and development institutions. Core themes have been identified (Table 1) that allow students to work with McGill instructors and local researchers to study research issues, targets and methods. Selected themes (one or more) will be developed in “modules” that will take place during a defined period as short as one day or as long as a full session (3wks). They will draw on attributes of the sites we are in and the educational resources we have available at those sites. Lead instructors will outline expectations at the start of each session.

Each of the modules will be graded out of 10 marks, with the grade allocation being outlined by the coordinator for that module. Generally about half (5) will come from daily exercises and half (5) from a module assignment that will be completed within the module. The module assignment may be oral or written. Instructional approaches include lectures, field visits, field exercises, debates/discussion, and final write-ups. Learning outcomes include knowledge of the local sites visited as well as knowledge of

- principles related to core themes (see Table 1)
- research priorities, programs and goals related to the theme
- research methods and problems
- research needs and opportunities

Modules will be added, modified or deleted by instructors depending on opportunities and constraints in the field ( this IS an expedition!)

***Site Reports -- 10%***

Introductory Presentation (6%) Site reports are group oral presentations (15 minutes) designed to introduce students to the major sites that are visited during the semester abroad. These site reports are developed by groups of students in the field and presented either just before we depart for new site or immediately after arrival. Each student is responsible for contributing to one site report which, like the modules, will be graded out of 10.

*Blog Contribution (4%)* The same group who made the site report at the beginning of the site is responsible for preparing a one page summary of the educational and activities and learning highlights after we leave the site for submission the day after departure.

Modules and Site Reports will count for 40% of the final Context Course grade (80 points out of 200) regardless of the number assigned (Note that, as the number of modules changes, the net value of each will vary as well (e.g. 6 modules and a site report = 10 points each; 4 modules and a site report = 14 points each; but 9 modules and site report = only 7 points each!! Life in the wild! )

## **2) Student Research: participating in interdisciplinary team activities (40% of grade, 80 points)**

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are an important statement of an international consensus on development priorities and they require integrated solutions drawing on natural and social science. Selected MDGs provide an ideal framework for integrated, interdisciplinary, team research. Six feasible research themes are outlined below (Table 2). Students, working in teams with a staff member as a project mentor will be expected to define manageable topics, develop and adapt repeatable methodologies for collecting data at each site, conduct the research during assigned times at each visit, synthesize the information they collect, and then present a final report on the work. Because this is a field program where the entire group resides and studies together, there is much closer contact between instructors and students, allowing for more informed continual evaluation. Grading of the group project will be based on:

- development of research statement (background, importance, goals)
  - development of methodology and ethics statement
  - preliminary report on execution of methods in the field
  - updated report on execution of methods in the field and progress report
  - preliminary analysis and synthesis of data
  - final presentation of a formal “research in progress” report
  - individual contributions
- (SEE APPENDIX 3)

Instructional approaches include seminars for planning and periodic review, field visits, field data collection, written reports plus a plenary final presentation session. Learning outcomes include knowledge of

- core issues in research subject area
- applied field research practices
- conditions in areas where data are collected
- application of their own findings to on-going research in the subject area.

## **3) Independent inquiry (30% of grade, 60 points)**

Faculty will support active and systematic observation, documentation, integration and analysis of experiences occurring during the program. Students will participate in group activities and “round table” seminars at which those activities are discussed. Each student will keep a field journal that demonstrates systematic recording of and reflection on experiences. Grading is based on participation (10%, 10 points) and the field journals (20%, 40 points). Instructional approaches include group activities, seminars on group activities, individual experience, analysis and interpretation of the individual experience, recording experience and interpretations in field journals. Learning outcomes include development of

- the capacity for independent observation
- the capacity to participate in “round table” seminars of complex issues
- the understanding broad array of African issues that arise in the field
- the discipline of keeping a field journal (SEE APPENDIX 4)

## Grading Summary

Core Activities		30% (60 points)
Core Curriculum Modules	20%	
Site Reports: Oral presentation	6%	
Blog	4%	
Research		40% (80 points)
Session Reports	35%	
Individual contribution	5%	
Independent Inquiry		30% (60 points)
Journals	20%	
Participation overall	10%	

**Reading:** Specific reading will be assigned for the session activities, the sites, and modules by the instructors.

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**Student Integrity:** Ideas are the currency of universities and they must be treated with the appropriate respect. We are now obliged to post the following quote (Article 15) from the Handbook on Student Rights and Responsibilities. *“No student shall, with intent to deceive, represent the work of another person as his or her own in any academic writing, essay, thesis, research report, project or assignment submitted in a course or program of study or represent as his or her own an entire essay or work of another, whether the material so represented constitutes a part or the entirety of the work submitted.”*

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## Appendices

### **Appendix 1: List and descriptions of core curriculum themes.**

- 1 Integrated conservation planning:** Biodiversity conservation and economic/social development are increasingly seen as being closely intertwined, with a history of conflict but a putative potential for compatibility. Drawing on primate ecology, habitat diversity and conservation policy, the management of Kibale Forest vis a vis the surrounding community provide an ideal location to consider integrated conservation planning.
- 2 Health and Nutrition:** Human health in Africa is compromised by two major factors: malnutrition and disease. AIDS and malaria are the most discussed diseases, but GI diseases related to food and hygiene are the most lethal. Food systems must be compatible with local practices and production and technological capabilities, but they must also be environmentally reasonable and economically sound.
- 3 Wildlife management and land tenure:** Closely related to Theme 1, the issue of land tenure and land use conflict is critical in resolving tensions between conservation/tourism interests and the economic aspiration of land owners and land users. The lands around the Serengeti are excellent sites to explore these issues.
- 4 Development:** Rural areas of East Africa are in a process of social transition; traditions are strong and cultural diversity is great, and yet communities have been exposed to common external transformative forces. Aspirations, expectations, capabilities and experiences vary greatly as rural communities deal with the dilemmas of development.
- 5 Food Security and Climate Change:** Climate change has many impacts. Food security is affected by many local conditions ranging from basic environmental capability through to cultural heritage,

technological change and market conditions. Condition in the areas we travel through will allow comparative assessment of current food security and of vulnerability to climate change.

**6 History, Governance and Conflict:** It is the right of every person to know their own history, and it is knowledge of history that informs present and future actions. A knowledge of East African history is thus essential for understanding current problems and for policy making and governance in the region. Student should be familiar with aspects of East African history and the impact of human migrations, notably linked to the slave trade.

**Appendix 2. Millennium Development Goals that can serve as research topics: note that these are broad items requiring many forms of detailed and focused research. Your group is at liberty to take any approach that supports understanding of an MDG theme. Some possible topics will be discussed during the first week in Nairobi and will be referred to by the Research Topic numbers shown below.**

**Goal 1** Eradicate extreme poverty & hunger (Research topic 1)

**Goal 2** Achieve universal primary education (Research topic 2)

**Goal 3** Promote gender equality & empower women (merged with 1 and 2)

**Goal 4** Reduce child mortality (see MDG 5 and 7)

**Goal 5** Improve maternal health (Research topic 3 but focus on health infrastructure and delivery)

**Goal 6** Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria & other diseases (Research topic 4 but focus on malaria)

**Goal 7** Ensure environmental sustainability (Research topics 5 and 6—a broad range of natural science and conservation topics)

**Goal 8** Develop a global partnership for development (General: all should be aware of intuitional partnerships, governance issues and agency resources)

### **Appendix 3: Research Project Guidelines**

*Session 1 Report: 20 Points*

Please complete a 2-page summary that includes the categories listed below: (to be handed in on a USB key)

- File name: “Your group’s topic”
- (Working) Title and group members listed at top of page
- Background
  - o Importance of your general topic
  - o Goal of your research group
- Objective (similar to the goal, but a specific, clear, compact statement of what you will looking for, and attempting to understand. This statement CAN include preliminary hypotheses, but also can be based on questions of discovery.
- Methodology
  - o How are you going to collect your information? (i.e. informal interviews, etc.)
  - o Identify the numbers of people you would ideally interview, the different types of people, genders, etc., (these will all depend on the type of research project you are undertaking)
    - This is if it were an idea situation, where you had a longer amount of time for a full study, recognizing that you are not necessarily going to be able to interview the full amount of people, or equal genders, etc.
  - o Demonstrate how the comparative approach to the study is feasible and appropriate (i.e. that it is a subject that can be studied in all or most sites)
  - o Discuss logistic needs and possible logistic constraints (such as, access, transport equipment, time, security) and show how they have been considered in the planning.
- Ethics
  - o What are the possible ethical dimensions of your project?
  - o How do you intend to address them and ensure that there are no possible adverse effects?
  - o How will you ensure that people you interact with are aware of your role as students?

### **Session 2 Report:** Interim Report 20 Points

Building on your last summary, please update as per staff comments; also to be included is the beginning of your data analysis and collection (to be handed in on a USB key)

- File name: “Your group’s topic, report #2”
- Hand report #1 in again with the changes and amendments needed
- Show the preliminary data you have collected (this can be rough)
- Set up how you are going to visually represent your analysis
  - o i.e. a table is a very useful way to show comparison data (across sites or across age groups, et.)
- define your variables
- define your themes, as you are defining them for the purposes of this research project (the common themes that cut across some/all of your sites)

### **Session 3 Report:** Final Presentation on “work in progress” & Submission 30 Points

This will be done in the last few days of the program and you will be given time to collaborate with your group and put a presentation together.

- Please prepare a **PowerPoint** presentation
- Your presentation should take the audience through the Background, Objective, Methodology, Data Analysis, Findings and Limitations
- Your presentation should include charts, graphs, etc. to convey your data findings
- Get creative but remember to remain clear – write it and present it so that anyone looking at your project can understand it
- You will also be handing in a copy of the PowerPoint presentation and all raw data, to be given to staff on a USB key which they will copy and return to your group

Things to keep in mind for final presentation and report:

- BE AS CLEAR AND CONCISE AS POSSIBLE
- Be specific
  - o Cite your sources (i.e “Respondent 2 said...”, NOT “One respondent said”)
  - o State the number of respondents when discussing findings (do not say “a large number of respondents”... state exactly how many, so “75% of respondents said...”)
- Be very careful about drawing **conclusions** and making conclusive statements. You can talk about things you see in the data, potential themes or trends in your data set should you continue with this research but it is not a good idea to draw conclusions with this size of a data set
- Always use examples to back up statements you make about what is common in your data set
- Not all of the information you collect will end up being relevant to the question your group is answering... Only use the data/information that answers your question
  - o If there is extra data that you find very interesting you can add it at the end of your presentation under the heading “Further Research”

Remember, this is a work in progress. Some of you may want to go on to do graduate work based on your research project on this program. Treat it as an on-going study, that this is the preliminary groundwork. Most of all, have fun and enjoy the process!

## Appendix 4:

### **Canadian Field Studies in Africa** **Journal of Researches** **into the social, cultural, ecological and ??? conditions in the** **Countries Visited during the Voyage of the CSFIA 2014...**

You will recall that part of the grade (20%, 40 points) for the two context courses (6 credits total) comes from the field journal.

*“Independent inquiry ...systematic observation, documentation, integration and analysis of experiences occurring during the program.*

- *the capacity for independent observation*
- *the discipline of keeping a field journal that records your work.*

These are important skills, and, like many others, do not come naturally to most. It takes a bit of focus, discipline and persistence. A good field journal is a sign that the processes of observing, considering, understanding and recording are working well. See over! Note that a field journal is a research tool, and can certainly include subjective personal information (not least because it helps identify “positionality”), but, a research journal is NOT a private entirely subjective introspection. A journal or personal diary like that can be extremely valuable, and you may wish to keep one, but that, alone, is not what the field journal is about.

You have many options for the field note book. Here is one recommendation that could help you hone the skills and produce outstanding work of lasting value (and get a good grade).

**Recommendation:** Accept the 200 page A4, 4 Quire book available to you and treat it as **“the book”** you are writing to recreate this trip.

Lay it out as follows:

Page

Inside cover	map
Blank for title	i
Blank	ii
Your name and contact address	iii
Blank (to fill in later)	iv
<u>Blank for Table of Contents.</u>	<u>v-viii</u>
Start new numbers with...	1. ...and begin your entries.

Write often and stay up to date. You cannot record all that happens and you do not want to lose highlights in a sea of details. Be selective in what you write. Number the pages as you go so you can refer back and forth. Leave half-page blanks every three or four pages for adding comments later (your later impression of first impressions – these are VERY valuable). Include field samples, drawings, extracts from other documents, pictures, anything that will enhance the precision, detail, scope and value of your entries. Note your style of entry: decide early on if you will fill the book and go on to another, OR distill your input to an average of 2 pp per day, in which case, you will stay within the single volume (a reasonable recommendation). Choose some themes to be consistent with throughout your journal: environmental, site, social, community, and/or health conditions; aspects of landscape, biodiversity, cultural, an/or history; attention to particular issues or event—you choose—but that way the volume will have coherence and greater interest as certain themes and comparisons develop. Otherwise it may seem desultory. Once you have the general shape of the contents – a week or two in, start your table of contents.

The size of the book suggests it is not a back-pocket record for things you see in the field. It is intended for sitting under the acacia tree, in the library or tent or (heaven forbid) even in a bar, where you are “developing” the images that have accumulated in the day. Identify your book clearly on the cover (glue something on now and replace it later when you want to have it published). Store it carefully and protect it so that, as its value mounts, you will not risk losing it. When you are done, go back and fill in the blank page iv., as a foreword to posterity. (The program is entitled to 10% of royalties if you become famous).

Grading will be partly based on BEING UP TO DATE, on being thorough and consistent, on presentation, and, of course, on content. This should not be an intimate, confidential, personal, private, journal (keep that for yourself). This is a scientific record of the trip.