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Proposal for a Study Abroad Program Development Grant

Ethics and Development in Mali

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This proposal is for a site visit to the west African country of Mali in early August 2002 to explore the possibility of a Winter Break Study Abroad Program in Mali that could begin in either 2003-04 or 2004-05.

The Study Abroad Program I have in mind is inter-disciplinary and will appeal to undergraduates, graduate students, and non-traditional students. It will be led by one MSU faculty member, and will involve the participation on a rotating basis of faculty from several colleges, both at Michigan State University and the University of Mali. It will also involve non-academic professionals in Mali who are playing a critical role in development there. The Program will be co-sponsored by the MSU College of Arts & Letters and the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources.

The main idea is to provide students with economic, agricultural, health care, political, historical, and social interests in developing countries an opportunity to study some of the ethical dilemmas and challenges facing development within and especially across these disciplinary boundaries. To list just a few,

- Who will own and benefit from innovations in agricultural bio-technology and how should this be decided politically?
- What ethical restrictions should be placed on research in bio-technology and how should these be determined?
- What are the obstacles to urban provisioning and how should the costs for better transportation and communications systems needed to overcome these obstacles be distributed?
- How can rural economic development improve health care for women and children?
- How should further political decentralization proceed, and how can local political power be fairly distributed?
- How can rural economic development be coordinated with improvements in educational opportunities and health care for children and young adults?
- How can reforms involving the participation of women in economic and political life draw upon religious and other traditional customs within society?
What are the ethical dilemmas facing medical practitioners and how should they be resolved?
What are the competing conceptions of an improved quality of life or standard of living that should guide development in an overall sense, and how should disagreements over these competing conceptions be adjudicated or resolved?

Mali is very good place to study the intersection of ethics and development. It is a relatively stable new democracy in western Africa, with a commitment to agricultural development and social justice. Michigan State University has extensive and growing ties with Mali, primarily through faculty in the MSU College of Agriculture and Natural Resources and the Department of History in the College of Arts & Letters. The Study Abroad program envisioned in this proposal builds directly upon this relationship and other recent projects involving the Department of Political Science and the Matrix project in the College of Arts & Letters.

The MSU Department of Philosophy is in a good position to take advantage of these existing ties and provide the ethical expertise needed to address the questions listed above and others like them. The Department has already been involved in co-teaching HRT/PHL 486 Biotechnology in Agriculture: Applications and Ethical Issues. A new endowed chair in CANR and CAL in environmental ethics and funded by the Kellogg Foundation will be located in the Department of Philosophy. Several members of the University’s Center for Ethics and the Humanities in the Life Sciences have joint appointments in the Department of Philosophy and have interests in biomedical ethics and the ethics of health care, including issues of hunger and malnutrition in developing nations. In addition to its strengths in these areas of applied ethics, the Philosophy Department also has notable strengths in political philosophy (my own area of specialization), with strong faculty participation in the new undergraduate specialization in Peace and Justice Studies and the new graduate specialization in Black and Diasporic Studies. We also expect to play a role in the new Environmental Studies Program that is under consideration. In short, a Study Abroad Program on Ethics and Development in Mali should be of interest to many MSU faculty and students, especially in the Colleges of Arts & Letters and Agriculture and Natural Resources.

During the last decade I have been writing and teaching about transitional democracies, especially in Eastern Europe, and the parallels between these new democracies and so-called consolidated democracies like the United States. My interest in Mali is consistent with this, but of more recent vintage. My wife Christine Worland and I spent two weeks visiting our son in Mali in late 2001 during the beginning of his second year as a Peace Corps volunteer working on water and sanitation projects in rural villages in the Kayes region. We were struck by the dedication and efforts of the Malian people to improve their situation, and we decided at that point that we wanted to become involved ourselves. We had worked in Poland on a Fulbright grant in 1990-91, and that experience had stimulated our research and teaching interests over the last decade. My wife, who is a teacher in the public school system and a member of the MSU College of Education’s LATTICE program, has since worked in South Africa and Romania on shorter cultural exchange and education projects. We imagined a Fulbright year in Mali in which I could do collaborative research and teaching on democratization and the ethics of
development, and she could work with women in education and in the textile industry. As a quilt artist herself, as well as a teacher, and a member of the MSU Museum’s advisory board, she has a strong interest in the working conditions of women artists and textile workers.

The more we discussed our interests in Mali with colleagues already involved there, the more eager we became to test the waters. After conversations with Prof. John Staatz in Agricultural Economics and Prof. Michael Bratton in Political Science, we began to consider ways in which we might begin our work in Mali before embarking on a more long-term Fulbright project. Leading a Winter Break study abroad program seemed like one option worth exploring. By coincidence, my wife and I also have been able to discuss some of our ideas with Malians visiting MSU in recent weeks, and this has encouraged us to take the next step in this process. Through John Staatz, I have met with a delegation of faculty from the College of Agriculture (IPR/IFRA) of the University of Mali. They also suggested that I contact faculty in the College of Law and Economics and the College of Medicine of the University of Mali. Then, my wife and I spoke at length with three visiting Malian women working here with MSU’s Matrix Program to develop Internet web sites for their social and political organizations. Based on these conversations, we are cautiously optimistic about the possibility of the following Ethics and Development Study Abroad Program in Mali.

Here briefly are the "key issues" that need further exploration and that would be addressed through a site visit.

1. Climate strongly suggest that this program be offered during the three-week Winter Break in December-January.

2. The academic setting will be the University of Mali in Bamako and Katibougou. Other training centers in this vicinity may also be used, as well as the resources of the existing CANR project in Bamako.

3. In addition to individual faculty at the various Colleges of the University of Mali mentioned above, professional women from the Collectif des Femmes Du Mali, the Ciwara School, and the Association pour la Promotion du Leadership Feminine will also be involved in curriculum design and implementation.

4. Two years of college French would be useful, but not necessary. Proficiency in Bambara or other Malian languages also should not be necessary. It may be possible to arrange informal tutoring in French and possibly Bambara through the University of Mali for students interested in acquiring or improving conversational language skills.
5. In addition to their classroom work with Malian faculty and professionals, students will travel to local villages to observe agricultural projects, health care, schooling, and political decentralization. They will work collaboratively with Malian faculty and professionals to study the ethical dimensions of these aspects of development and analyze the competing claims and considerations relevant to them. For example, in years in which the Program focuses on textile workers and artists collective, visits to Koulikani, Segou, and Djenne may be arranged.

6. The program will be jointly co-sponsored by the College of Arts & Letters and the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources. This is an especially propitious time for these two colleges to launch a joint project on Ethics and Development. With the new Kellogg Endowed Chair in Environmental Ethics, the likely creation of a new interdisciplinary graduate specialization in Environmental Studies, and the existing, broad interest in applied ethics in the Department of Philosophy and the Center for Ethics in the Humanities and the Life Sciences, there should be strong potential interest in this subject among faculty and graduate students from many units.

Stimulating and sustaining actual interest in this inter-disciplinary project will require an ongoing conversation on campus in which the issues of ethics and development are addressed from a variety of perspectives. This could be an informal lunch hour gathering or, depending upon the particular interests of the Kellogg Endowed Chair and other faculty in Philosophy and CANR, it could be more formal. For example, a new graduate seminar on Ethics and Development could be developed that would be a forum in which greater interest in the Study Abroad Program can be built over time and in which themes and issues encountered in Mali but equally relevant to other countries and regions can be explored in greater depth.

7. The University of Mali and the technical and training schools concerned with women in development are the best institutions in Mali for this inter-disciplinary program. MSU’s historical ties to the University and its new “Linkage Agreement” makes Mali the natural place for a MSU program of this sort to begin.

8. To my knowledge there are no other MSU study abroad programs at this site. Northwestern University and Carleton College appear to have study abroad programs in Mali that focus on culture and history.

9. The primary target audience will be student majors from the academic units mentioned above who have an interest in the general area of development and relevant ethical issues. Another target audience will be undergraduate and graduate students who are involved in the African Studies Center, the Center for Women in Development, the Peace and Justice Specialization, the Black and Diasporic Studies, and eventually Environmental Studies. In addition, non-traditional students such as public school teachers and visiting students will be recruited.
10. If the program is offered every other year, it could be listed as an Independent Study for variable credits (1-2) depending upon the additional preparatory and follow-up work students wish to do in addition to the work done on site. Eventually a more common syllabus could be created for cross-listed a Special Topics: Ethics and Development course for 3 credits.

At this point what I have in mind is a short, relatively small program that will be responsive to the particular research and educational interests of the students who enroll in it from year to year. For example, one year we may concentrate on ethical issues in urban provisioning or agricultural bio-technology, and the participating students may be primarily advanced undergraduates and graduate students in Rural Sociology and Agricultural Economics. Another year we may concentrate on democratic decentralization and the political rights of women, and the participating students may be from Political Science, Women’s Studies, Anthropology, Sociology, and James Madison. A third year might focus on education and health care ethics with students from the College of Education, Lyman Briggs and other pre-med and medical students, and so on. Undergraduate and graduate students in Philosophy with interests in applied ethics and political philosophy may find one or all of these particular topics of interest. No matter what aspect of development in Mali that is emphasized, however, the recurring theme will be its relationship to ethical dilemmas and challenges that Mali and other countries in similar situations now face. The program will be about ethics and development in Mali, but its implications for the relationship for ethics and development generally will also be stressed.

The main tasks of the site visit will be (1) to consult with Malian faculty and professionals about the most important ethical dilemmas and challenges in development that they face, (2) to assess the living and instructional facilities including the possibility of arranging room and board with private families, (3) to assess the costs to MSU students, and (3) to assess the opportunities for and costs of visits to local villages, agricultural projects, and other sites.
Budget

Roundtrip Airfare Lansing-Paris-Bamako $ 1,874
Lodging (10 nights @ $80/day) 800
Per diem (10 days @ $60/day) 600
Local travel 500
Mali visa 50

Total $3,824

Sources of Funding

College of Arts and Letters $ 900
College of Agriculture and Natural Resources 900
Department of Philosophy 300
Office of Study Abroad 1,800

Total $3,800