

**Newsletter
of the
African
Politics
Conference
Group**

Contact

africanpoliticsgroup@gmail.com

Chair

Anne Pitcher
University of Michigan
pitchera@umich.edu

Vice Chair

Leonardo Arriola
University of California,
Berkeley
larriola@berkeley.edu

Secretary

Danielle Resnick
UNU-WIDER
resnick@wider.unu.edu

Treasurer

Gina Lambright
George Washington
University
gina.lambright@gmail.com

Newsletter Editor

Michael Nelson
Wesleyan University
mbnelson@wesleyan.edu

Website Manager

Zach Warner
University of Wisconsin,
Madison
zwarner@wisc.edu



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Chair's Report

Anne Pitcher, University of Michigan

As I announced at the APCG business meeting in Chicago, we are now officially an organized section of the American Political Science Association! For those of you who may not be familiar with the significance of that designation, for the last ten years, APCG has been a related group of the APSA and also a coordinate organization of the African Studies Association. Last spring, we approached the APSA to discuss a change of status and with the association's enthusiastic support, we petitioned APSA members to endorse such a change. The steering committee learned last June that the petition was successful.

Our advancement to "organized section" status within the APSA is an acknowledgment of the collective and individual contributions to APCG made by many of its members. For more than a decade, our members have organized and participated on APCG panels at the APSA, the ASA, MPSA, and ISA. They have edited and contributed to the newsletter or managed our website. Since 2008, many members have hosted the APSA's Africa Workshops. They have served on committees, attended our business meetings and social hours and participated in many of the other tasks that are part of creating a strong and highly visible scholarly organization. Our status as a section recognizes our hard work and our dedication and we should all celebrate!

**Symposium:
Teaching African
Politics**

Features contributions from
**Warigia Bowman,
Kevin S. Fridy,
Timothy Longman,
Michael Byron Nelson,
Robin L. Turner, and
Beth Elise Whitaker.**

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Symposium: Teaching African Politics

The following contributions were solicited from APCG members who had participated in recent panels on teaching at the African Studies Association. The first set of contributions provide refreshing takes on relatively traditional approaches to teaching African politics, using novels, debates, and research paper assignments. The second set of contributions focuses on the use of technology in teaching, including videos, wikis, and Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) that can connect American students with Africans.

From the beginning, APCG members have used each other as resources for teaching African politics. Besides the contributions included here I encourage you to consider making contributions to the list of syllabi and “innovative assignments” we have on our website. Contact our website manager (Zach Warner) or myself if you are interested in doing so.

- Editor

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Teaching African Politics with Novels

Timothy Longman, Boston University

During my first year of graduate school at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, I took African Politics with Crawford Young. Along with a variety of serious political science texts, Professor Young assigned two novels: *The Emperor* by Ryszard Kapuchinski, a somewhat fictionalized account of the last days of Haile Selassie’s regime, and *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, Ayi Kwei Armah’s story of the pervasiveness of corruption in the life of Ghanaians. In many ways, I found that these texts offered important insights on the reality of African politics that the straight-forward prose in traditional social science texts simply could not express. Having up to that point never traveled to Africa, for me the descriptions and imagery in these books made life in Africa more real and understandable and gave depth and texture to the practice of African politics.

After encountering novels, short stories, and other alternative sources in a few other graduate courses (most notably

Ed Friedman’s Chinese Politics, which included writings by political prisoners as well as several works of fiction), I adopted the practice of including novels in my own courses and have since used them in almost every class that I teach. I find that fictional works can complement social science texts in a variety of important ways that help to enrich student learning:

Accessibility

In exploring political issues through stories, novels provide an approach to Africa that is more accessible to many students, particularly those who are not political science majors. For example, I have commonly assigned Chinua Achebe’s *Anhills of the Savannah* in my African Politics course. The novel tells the story of a military regime from the perspective of several friends of the president who have become increasingly disillusioned with his rule. While we





Teaching African Politics with Novels (Longman), *continued from page 2*

study authoritarian regimes and military coups, this book provides insight in a way that students can easily grasp into why people support coups and why coups usually fail to make conditions better.

Context and Texture

My own academic interests have focused less on the mechanics of government than on how governments interact with their societies. I find that novels often provide wonderful insight into the societies within which African governments function and how those governments affect their populations. V.Y. Mudimbe's *Before the Birth of the Moon* (published in French as *Le Bel Immonde*), sheds penetrating light onto corruption and decay in Mobutu's Zaire, following the story of a young woman who becomes the mistress of a government minister who ultimately sacrifices her to advance his career. Tsitsi Dangaremba's *Nervous Conditions*, provides fantastic insight into issues of race and gender in Zimbabwe. Novels can provide important context and texture even when they are set in imaginary locations, like the Republic of Aburiria, where Ngugi wa Thiong'o sets *The Wizard of the Crow*. The corruption of politicians and suffering of the people in the book fit much of Africa, but Ngugi's Kenyan homeland seems particularly illuminated by the text.

Views from Below

One of the great advantages of fictional works is that they often show how average people experience government and political events. One of my favorite novels to assign is Niq Mhlongo's *After Tears*. It is a bawdy comedy about a young man in post-apartheid South Africa who fails out of law school but pretends to be a lawyer anyway. Without ever directly discussing politics, the book provides a great window into the alienating experience of trying to succeed in today's South Africa, and it offers the best critique of corruption in the country that I've read. South Africa has a particularly rich literary culture, with a number of novels published each year. They range from comedies, like Nape 'a Montana's *Fanie Fourie's Lobola*, about a traditional Afrikaner who falls in love with a Zulu girl, to dark tragedies like Phaswane Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*, about the hardships of life in Johannesburg in the era of HIV/AIDS, or Zakes Mda's *Ways of Dying*, that focuses on the violence and tragedy of the transition period.

Providing a Human Face to Politics

In teaching about topics like ethnic violence and human rights violations, it is easy for students to lose sight of the human faces behind the various tragedies that we study. I find that fiction can help to move beyond the bleak statistics to show the real people who are affected by political events. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*, for example, which tells the story of one family's experience during the Biafra war, effectively brings home the tragedy of war. Dave Eggers' *What is the What*, a fictionalized account of the experience of one of Sudan's "Lost Boys," provides a great window into how Sudan's long tragedy affected individuals.

African Voices

In selecting novels for courses, I have generally favored African writers. The majority of us who write about African politics do so as outside observers. Even African social scientists generally adopt the tone and methods of Western social science that encourages detachment and objectivity. Fictional works, I find, provide greater understanding of how Africans themselves view their own lives and the politics in their countries. African voices are particularly important on topics such as the impact of colonialism. Books such as Cheikh Hamidou Kane's *Ambiguous Adventure* or Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* do a much better job than any social science text of demonstrating the devastating impact of colonialism on African societies. Similarly, it is important when discussing gender relations in Africa that women's voices be heard. Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter*, for example, is a great depiction of women's experiences, particularly with polygamy.

Novels are, of course, only one possible alternative source that can complement more traditional social scientific texts. I often use movies in classes, because they expose students to images of African life. (*Quartier Mozart* and *La Vie Est Belle* are my favorites to use in class). I also find that journalistic accounts, such as Michela Wrong's *In the Footsteps of Mister Kurtz*, can also provide texture and human faces that social science prose usually lacks. But novels provide a sort of intimate contact with African societies that I find in no other type source. Not surprisingly, they are usually my students' favorite assignments.





Debating African Politics

Beth Elise Whitaker, UNC Charlotte

In my undergraduate courses on African politics and international relations, I use formal debates to engage students with course material. By researching controversial topics and developing arguments to convince their peers, students learn the complexities of issues they previously might have perceived as simple. The sense of competition raises the intensity of discussion and gives students valuable public speaking experience. Over the years, I have held debates about many policy-relevant topics, including Chinese investment in Africa, the legalization of genetically modified crops, western efforts to eradicate female circumcision, and foreign interventions in Rwanda, Darfur, and Mali.

In a class of approximately 40 students, I hold four debates in a semester with each student participating in one. I divide the class into eight teams (two for each debate) and assign each student to a specific side (for or against the resolution) of a specific debate. Students often complain that they disagree with the position they are being forced to defend, which is exactly the point. (I tell them they are at an advantage because they can better anticipate the other side's arguments.) In most classes at UNC Charlotte, I am fortunate to have African students whom I divide amongst the teams. I also admit to engineering the teams to ensure some balance in terms of gender, race, class year, and public speaking comfort level.

Before the designated period for each debate, all students in the class read an assigned article that is relevant to the resolution. Students participating in the debate also are expected to do background research to prepare their case. Often, teams put together flashy slide shows, bring props, or wear costumes (like the students who wore gaudy fake diamonds in their effort to critique the Kimberly Process). As with any research project, I encourage students to start early, consult reliable sources, and organize their arguments in a coherent way.

The debates follow a pretty standard format, with each side alternating time for an opening statement (2 minutes), case presentation (10 minutes), and rebuttal (5 minutes). I then allow 20 minutes for questions from the class, which is when discussions can get heated. I try to enforce a policy of one voice at a time, but sometimes just have to enjoy the fact that students are speaking so passionately about an Africa-related topic! Eventually, I cut off discussion for short closing statements before moving to a vote among the class observers as to which side they found most

convincing. I also ask the debate students to step out of their roles and explain how they would vote. Interestingly, the most boisterous debaters often are the ones who are least committed to their own side. Finally, we wrap up the activity with a short debriefing, during which I highlight key points and share any additional arguments that were not sufficiently covered (always a risk when relying on students to deliver course material).

One last logistical point: I do NOT assign team grades for the debate. Instead, to avoid the free rider problem, I assign individual grades based on students' performance during the debate and on peer evaluations that I distribute after it ends. These assessment forms provide useful information that helps some students ("Mary did a lot of research and put together the slideshow, but doesn't like speaking in class") and raises questions about others ("George spoke a lot during the debate but didn't come to any of our planning meetings"). Based on this feedback, I assign grades for the debate, which is a low-stakes assignment.

The most important aspect of any academic debate (unlike most political debates!) is the substance. Even when the topic is fascinating, a poorly-drafted resolution can lead to a debate that is more about semantics than issues. Over time, I have learned that it is best to draft a short and simple resolution. If additional guidance is necessary, I contact the team members in advance and suggest useful lines of argument. For example, several years ago, I used the following resolution for an African politics debate:

African governments should issue compulsory licenses for the domestic production of the newest and most effective antiretroviral (ARV) drugs, which are otherwise too expensive for most Africans because of existing patents.

Instead of focusing on compulsory licenses as I had hoped, participants in that debate spent the time arguing about drug prices and patents. When I used the resolution again later, I shortened it:

African governments should issue compulsory licenses for the domestic production of cheaper antiretroviral (ARV) drugs.

This concise resolution forced students to research the technicalities of compulsory licenses and focus on the (often political) advantages and disadvantages of issuing them. Although not perfect, other resolutions I have used recently include:

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The African Politics Research Paper

Michael Byron Nelson, Wesleyan University

Research papers are a common assignment. But what purposes do they serve? Why is it important that students write research papers on African politics? What are some of the challenges that students face when writing an *African* politics research paper (as opposed to a research paper on, say, Europe or the US?) And what are some of the strategies that are available for overcoming those challenges?

Why is it important?

I find that teaching research papers is important for at least four reasons. One is that, learning *skills* may be more important to an individual student than *content*. We want our students to learn how to think critically, to search for and find information to test their own ideas, and to communicate the outcomes of this process for them. Few of our students go on to careers in political science or have an Africa-related career, but they all need these skills and college is the place for them to acquire them. A second is that teaching content is still important and it is important that bad research does not get in the way. One of my key concerns in advising students on their research projects is that they do not end up with a bag of bad ideas about how politics works in their particular case study countries or across the continent. If the connection between argument and evidence is generally important, I would suggest it is even more important in a region that is so little understood by the average American. A third reason is that I think

this can encourage the development of a new generation of Africa scholars. Finally, research papers act as an escape valve for students who have burning questions or passions regarding Africa. I find that I cannot cover all of the subjects that interest some of my students at the level of depth that would satisfy them. So, letting them explore on their own is a fantastic opportunity for them.

Challenges

The African Politics Research Paper does have its own challenges, however. Here I want to discuss two¹ which are core to the experience of writing a research paper on Africa.

Challenge #1: The “Africa is a country” problem.

The first set of challenges are related to students’ lack of familiarity with the African continent. I have seen this problem arise in the research questions students ask, such as:

“How does foreign aid impact Africa?”

“Why is there conflict in Africa?”

¹ In my ASA presentation I mentioned four challenges. The third was the challenge of helping students understand and identify the many informal institutions that are relevant in the African context. The fourth involved theory-building.

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Debating African Politics (Whitaker), *continued from page 4*

The Product (Red)[™] campaign is little more than an advertising strategy that benefits the partner companies more than the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria it claims to support.

The United States should compensate African countries for the revenues their farmers have lost due to American agricultural subsidies.

The conflict mineral provisions of the Dodd-Frank law should be repealed because they are hurting people in target countries such as DR Congo.

Finally, as may be obvious from these resolutions, the main drawback of the debate format is that it forces stu-

dents to take polarized positions on complex issues about which there is actually much middle ground. (One could argue that this is a good lesson for political science more broadly!) Students can get frustrated with this dynamic, and often seek to promote more nuanced positions which we discuss further in the debriefing portion. In the end, though, I find this problem a small price to pay for the energy and enthusiasm generated by the debates. When I hear students leave my classroom arguing about whether the U.S. should suspend aid to Uganda if it passes the Anti-Homosexuality Bill instead of sharing the latest frat party gossip, I know that I have achieved my pedagogical goals.



The African Politics Research Paper (Nelson), *continued from page 5*

“What is US policy towards Africa”

There does not have to be anything wrong about asking such questions. Many of us do that in our own work. But there are at least two real problems that can arise when students ask such questions. First, I find this often masks their ignorance of the diversity that exists within the continent. Second, there is not really much of a chance that they can address such broad questions in a substantive way as part of a course research paper. We cannot expect our students to grasp the entire continent within a single term, and in most cases it just is not a good idea to lump all of these countries together.

Solution: Teach Case Selection

For me, an important solution lies in teaching case selection. Now, I do not necessarily expect all of my students to grasp all of the intricacies of how to select appropriate cases to test the arguments that interest them. But I do try to get them to understand, at a minimum, that there are consequences to selecting some countries and not others for exploring their research questions.²

There are also clear pedagogical reasons for teaching case selection. First, consider the lessons that students take home with them after conducting their research projects. Students on their own, I find, tend to gravitate towards case study designs that focus on “extreme cases” (Sudan or Zimbabwe) rather than “most typical” or “diverse” case-selection choices. Students also tend to over-generalize larger patterns based on weak case selections. So we can end-up with a student having a very one-dimensional image of, say, the role of China in Africa after their paper on “China and Sudan”.

Second, consider the lessons we fail to teach students if we ignore case selection. Research papers can be a fantastic opportunity to teach students the basic elements of research design. What is a natural experiment? (Have them read Posner’s work.)³ How can we apply Mill’s Methods to comparisons between Cote d’Ivoire and Ghana? Can we do experimentation in the social sciences (look at the work that is being done with randomized evaluation in

development economics such as that described in Cohen and Easterly’s recent edited volume)?⁴

Challenge #2: Data

Students face a number of challenges with data, as do all of us. Both the quality and the quantity of data available are often limited. Most of the time, for the purposes of undergraduate research, we can work around those limitations. However, my students and I have occasionally come up with other ideas for solutions to the data challenge.

Solution 2A: Design a study

Not finding data does not have to be a dead-end for an undergraduate research paper. For instance, this can be turned into a teaching opportunity for helping the students understand research methods. Students can be told to use part of their research paper to design a study that would find the data they currently lack. This could include proposing specific survey questions (Is China helping your country?) and target populations (market women in Makola Market) that speak to their specific research interests.

Solution 2B: Use study abroad students

A second solution my students have used is contacting their peers who are currently studying abroad in the countries they are researching. So far, this has been very ad hoc. However, every so often students that are studying abroad have been able to help students in my classroom find data (telecom statistics that are not yet online, for instance) they were looking for.

Final Thoughts

Research papers are a fantastic way for students to discover and engage the aspects of African politics that fascinate them (rather than us!). They also provide a number of teaching opportunities. They help students appreciate the diversity of political life across the continent, improve their research skills and their capacities for deductive and inferential reasoning. If we can accomplish any of that, it is clearly worth it.

² I have some resources (including a slide presentation) available on a website I created for students: <http://govthesis.site.wesleyan.edu/research/collecting-data/sampling-and-case-selection/>.

³ Posner, Daniel N. 2004. The Political Salience of Cultural Difference: Why Chewas and Tumbukas Are Allies in Zambia and Adversaries in Malawi. *The American Political Science Review*, 98 (4), 529-545.

⁴ Cohen, Jessica & William Easterly. 2010. *What works in development? Thinking big and thinking small*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press.



Media Presentations as a Strategy for Teaching African Politics

Robin L. Turner, Butler University

Student media presentations can deepen students' knowledge of African politics, build their critical thinking and communication skills, and highlight the relevance of course material. This article presents the media assignment I have used in two upper-level courses, African Politics and Politics of Gender and Sexuality in Africa, and three examples of student work.

The context

Butler University is a teaching-focused university in Indianapolis, IN whose students are drawn principally from the American Midwest. Upper-level political science courses attract International Studies, Peace and Conflict Studies, and Gender Studies students as well as Political Science majors and minors. Butler undergraduates who take African studies courses often enter with interest but little substantive or experiential knowledge. Therefore, I design my courses to highlight the continent's diversity and to critically engage with popular media representations of Africa. I start each course with an open discussion of students' preconceptions and then present accessible texts such as Binyavanga Wainaina's (2005) "How to Write about Africa," or Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's (2009) "The Danger of a Single Story" that challenge Western representations of Africa before moving onto other topics.

The media presentation assignment builds on this common foundation. In employing a common student strength, their facility with social and web-based media, these presentations also create a relatively safe space for student-driven discussion.

Preparation

I identified several course sessions that are well-suited to presentations as I crafted each syllabus. Each student signed up for a media presentation slot at the start of the semester, and I set aside ten to fifteen minutes of class time for each presentation.

Assignment Instructions

I provide the students with the following instructions:

This assignment has three components.

1. You will locate, present, and facilitate a short discussion of one session-relevant 2-4 minute media clipping (such as a video, a song, a multimedia blog, or newscast). This means that you need to complete the assigned read-

ing well in advance of presentation.

2. You will write a 500-750 word essay discussing your clipping in light of the session reading and turn it in the day you present.

3. After presenting, you will write a second 400-750 word essay that assesses and reflects upon your presentation experience.

Media Presentations and Student Learning

Most students present interesting, current, and relevant material, usually a short video or an excerpt from a longer video, and do a good job facilitating the ensuing discussion. Students have shown clippings discussing the struggles of West African female politicians for a session on clientelistic barriers to women's political empowerment (<http://youtu.be/7l7jPEr32IY>), describing Ben Affleck's advocacy of US involvement in the Democratic Republic of Congo for a session on the DRC (<http://youtu.be/g7-SJ8PnMT4>), and a speech in which Yoweri Museveni called term limits "nonsense" for a session on hybrid regimes (<http://youtu.be/x9eeef51ME8>). Even problematic presentations can be pedagogically useful. When a student presented a speech excerpt that attributed Africa's problems to ethnic tribalism, for example, other students challenged the speaker's assertions in the subsequent discussion and used material from assigned texts to support their critique.

The students' essays also provide strong evidence of learning. The excerpts below present particularly well-written but otherwise representative examples of student work.

Monty Python's The Annoying Peasant (<http://youtu.be/rAaWvVFERVA>).

"The relationship between King Arthur (representing the state) and the peasants (representing community) symbolizes the tension between community and state in Africa... according to Peter Ekeh's perspective. The peasants had no loyalty to the King, just as Africans had "no loyalty to the civil institutions of the state" (Hydén 2006, 52). The clip also illustrates the lack of identification with the state...King Arthur comes parading in claiming that he is "King of the Britains" and that the peasants are all Britains. The problem is the peasants do not even know what "Britain" is. Similarly, state titles were arbitrarily created in Africa and not and not embedded in the local identity..."



Media Presentations... (Turner), *continued from page 7*

The Naked Option trailer (<http://youtu.be/YWuwlsnWdu8>).

“This clip about The Naked Option pertains to the reading about African women’s movements because Tripp and colleagues discuss the use of shaming and cursing tactics in many women’s movements. Tripp and colleagues discuss how naked tactics have been used throughout Africa and how they are usually used as “powerful statement of condemnation also aimed at government authorities and their repression” (Tripp et al. 2009, 31). I think that the Naked Option was definitely a way for the women of these communities to attract attention from the government and make them realize that the issues caused by the oil reserves are important to them and they need to be addressed. ...”

“*What It Means to Be Men and Women in South Africa Today*’ (<http://youtu.be/X0u2Kv7bDn0>) offers the perspective of numerous South African residents of differing races, genders, careers, and to an extent economic class in the form of recorded interviews. ‘*Violence Against Women in South Africa*’ (<http://www.5min.com/Video/Violence-Against-Women-in-South-Africa-516895089>) illustrates the story of an unfortunate South African woman who was attacked and maimed at the hands of her ex-boyfriend and his friends. ... Both videos frame South Africa in a static state denying both the negative and positive aspects that encompass the country. ¶ ... The Gqola (2007) text provides several key points that these videos promote: silence around violence, the

empowerment of only a select group of women by the 1996 constitution, the acknowledgment of feminine tradition, and the ideology of militarism. Both videos display these concepts in a range of contradictory ways....”

I encourage other faculty to use media assignments into undergraduate African politics courses. Well-structured media assignments can motivate students to look closely at course texts, help them to recognize the connection between course material and current events, and allow them to make a creative and compelling contribution to the course.

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Teaching African Politics with Wikis

Warigia Bowman, Clinton School of Public Service, University of Arkansas

One of the things that interests me is finding ways to use technology to become a more effective teacher. This past spring, I taught a master’s level course at the Clinton School of Public Service (University of Arkansas) entitled “The Politics of African Development.” The course was taught in a seminar style. Approximately eight students enrolled. I combined some very traditional pedagogical techniques, with some new, technological teaching techniques.

The traditional techniques that worked well for me were assigning students around sixty pages of reading per class. We had a roundtable discussion of the readings, which I conducted using the Socratic method. In addition to this

daily assignment, I incorporated one presentation by each student using powerpoint on a development issue of interest to them in Africa. I also incorporated a final assignment requiring students to create a “wiki” on a country of interest to them. This was actually an idea I got from my colleagues last year from participating in a teaching panel at the ASA.

The wiki assignment went well. To set up a wiki, simply go to www.wikispaces.com. I personally like to have two wiki accounts, one using my personal email, and one using my work email so I can keep wiki projects separate. There is no cost to set up a wiki, and there are online tutorials for teachers about how to use the technology to one’s best

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Teaching African Politics with Wikis (Bowman), *continued from page 8*

advantage.

Clinton School students all spend their first summer after coursework abroad, usually in a developing country. Our students have gone to countries such as Nicaragua, Nepal, Tibet, and Belize. Many Clinton School students go to Africa, and have conducted research or worked for development organizations and non-governmental organizations in over twenty African countries in North, East, Central, West and Southern Africa. As a result, many of my students developed a wiki on a country that they themselves were actually going to work in the summer following my class.

This spring, my students developed wikis on Zanzibar, Liberia, Morocco, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and Malawi. I asked them to all have pages covering the topics of colonial history, government and politics, arts and letters, language, culture, music, economics, development challenges and opportunities, geography, and nature. I also required student to include an annotated bibliography. I encouraged the students to add in photography and maps (properly attributed of course).

I also asked the students to make sure that each section had at least 250 words of text. As long as they met those requirements, the students could add sections as they saw fit. For example, some students wrote significant sections on public health, or the nature of the elections in their chosen countries. Others focused on music, or gender issues. This was an opportunity for students to immerse themselves in a country they were likely to do work in, and to practice creating a product that was useful to themselves

and others.

The students began working on the wikis early in the semester. Throughout the class, fellow students and I reviewed the work each student was doing on their wiki, and gave constructive and positive suggestions. Here is an example of what the students say to help each other stay on task.

John's wiki is definitely behind but he has built the basic framework and has basic information for each category including some new ones including a new sub-category on the issue of semi-autonomy, which sounds very interesting.... [H]is citations are great and include live links to the actual source so the person can directly be connected to the article for more information- this is a very cool feature. Overall, John's wiki has a lot of promise and what he has so far makes me very interested to see the final product- he just needs more meat on the skeleton right now. But- the skeleton is beautiful thus far!!!

As you can see, the students take the assignment very seriously and actively encourage each other in completing the projects. I was very pleased with the results of the wiki assignment, and I recommend it to other faculty in the field of African politics. All of the wikis that were produced were shareable with other faculty and students. It was my hope that this exercise would be a little more creative than the traditional graduate school term paper, while nonetheless requiring significant research and writing. It was also my hope that this exercise would help students to have a more holistic and less reductionist view of the countries they would be conducting work in.

Kingdom of Morocco

Welcome to The Kingdom of Morocco! للمملكة المغربية

Morocco is a mountainous country in the northwest corner of Africa. While few kingdoms remain on the continent of African, Morocco is the largest remaining kingdom of the three that still exist. Morocco is bordered by Algeria, Mauritania and both the Mediterranean Sea and the North Atlantic Ocean. The legacy of colonial rule still remains as two enclaves, Ceuta and Melilla, exist at the northern tip of Morocco which continue to be ruled by Spain. As of 2011 a total of 32.27 million people populated Morocco.

This wiki will give more extensive information on Morocco's culture, development, economy, health, history, politics, language groups, and the role of women in society.

Search

- All Pages
- home
- Culture, Art, and Literature
- Development Challenges and Opportunities
- Economy
- Education
- Health
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- The Role of Women

Example of a Wiki for Morocco from Warigia Bowman's Students



Using VoIP to Connect Students in the US to People in Africa

Kevin S. Fridy, University of Tampa

One of the courses I teach each spring is on the topic of community-based development projects. The course culminates in a class trip to the villages of Nabdam district in Northern Ghana where, with a budget of US\$200 per student and a week's worth of time, students attempt to bring the projects they designed in the classroom to life. A major objective of this course is to encourage empathy for people my mostly affluent American students are culturally trained to think of as exotic in a number of unflattering ways. Because of this objective I think it is important to bring residents of the affected villages in on the ground floor of development project planning.

Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) is the tool I use to facilitate regular conversations between students and counterparts I select for them in Ghana.¹ I group these conversations into two general categories, each presenting a set of unique problems for someone trying to get students to think critically and empathetically simultaneously. The first group I will call elite interviews and the second mass interviews. These labels convey that the first type of telephone conversation is with someone selected for their particular expertise on the development issue because of some specialized training. The second is with someone who has an expertise on the issue from the vantage point of having lived with a developmental problem but there is no reason to believe their voice is more authoritative than their neighbors living in similar conditions.

With elite interviews there are two important factors contributing to a good VoIP session. The first is careful selection of the interviewee. The second is preparation of the students, especially with regard to the positions interviewees may have taken in debates. Once students seem to be settling on a particular topic for their development project, I call on friends and colleagues who are up-to-date on research in that given topic area and not too wedded to a particular approach. I do not think this type of VoIP session is significantly different from the traditional in-class guest speaker save for the matter of convenience. Undergraduates looking to "have an impact" are not as

critical as their jaded professors might want them to be. They can be swayed dramatically with very little reflection, especially when the interviewee is a charismatic and passionate speaker with an agenda. On a number of occasions I have had students work on a project for months who then want to change it because of an off-handed comment by a guest who they deemed authoritative. It is the professor's job at this point to play the role of wet blanket and push the students to look for evidence of the presenter's claims.

More innovative, and I think quite a bit more difficult to pull off well, are the mass VoIP sessions we do in class. I arrange my class so that we read about a dozen or so community-based development projects that cut across disciplinary and geographical boundaries. While we are going over these in class I bring young people into the conversation from the villages we visit. Since Nabdam was a research site I have been going back to since my dissertation, I know quite a few people who are willing to help out my class. There is unfortunately an abundance of young high school leavers and university graduates with the communication skills necessary to contribute to the conversation but also the time to participate due to un- and underemployment. These conversations work relatively well because they are sustained and happen on a weekly or bi-weekly basis. The students on both sides of the Atlantic get to know each other, and each other's accents, and this made both groups comfortable to begin questioning assumptions of the other.

This problem of treating uncritically every person they spoke with as an expert exerted itself in a very pronounced way when the students had figured out what they wanted to do and I put them in contact with people from the villages who have lived experiences in the project topic area. When students were interested in introducing Vitamin A-rich orange-fleshed sweet potatoes they spoke to a farmer, when they were interested in infant nutrition we called a nurse, and when they thought a basketball court would help encourage youth social activity we talked to the local youth parliament. Though my language abilities limited conversations to English-speakers, accents were a major issue at this point. Rarely could my American students understand my friends from Nabdam, and vice versa, and

¹ I use Skype-to-phone because we (US) have internet in the classroom but in Nabdam the Internet is too slow for the chats. They, unfortunately, have to use their phones.



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I was often left to translate American student English into Nabdams English and back again. Perhaps it was the difficulty of communication that made students latch onto very small fragments of conversations and head off on wild tangents. The primary reason for these calls was to make sure that students did not engage in neo-imperialism and take seriously into account the concerns and ambitions of people in the communities in which they planned a developmental intervention so I did not want to discourage taking what Nabdams said earnestly. After seeing students

flutter from one idea to another based on very tiny kernels of information from one nonrandom resident of Nabdam I realized that the students' strong desire to actually see the "other" was easily side-tracked by their even stronger desire to please the "other" and receive whatever psychological gratification that entailed. This made it my job as the professor to continually follow-up our VoIP conversations with Nabdams with a serious conversation about thinking critically when it came to development. This is a conversation I am still struggling to perfect.



Megan J. Hershey (Whitworth) shares this photo from her field research on the political economy of youth groups in Nairobi's informal settlements. "The photo is of me and several members of the Ghetto Youth Focus Foundation youth group. It was taken outside of their office in Line Saba, Kibera in Nairobi."

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