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News from the Africa Institute

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News from the Africa Institute

Cover Page Footnote

Acknowledging Raksha Sule, program coordinator of Global MINDS, and program coordinator of Africa Institute Western University

News From the Africa Institute

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The Africa Institute's goal to be a world-class institute that serves as a transdisciplinary incubator for translational and transformative scholarship on issues dealing with various aspects of African society. The Africa Institute is founded on the 17 2015-2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which guide its research and training direction.

Over the years, the AI has engaged faculty, undergraduate and graduate students, postdoctoral fellows and staff from across campus. Most recently, on November 22nd 2016, the AI hosted a Luncheon for AI faculty to share with one another the research work they have completed and/or are currently pursuing as it relates to the SDGs, as well as to discuss next steps to help support the visionary direction for the AI. Over a dozen faculty attended from various departments, including Sociology, Biology, Anthropology, French Literature and the Medical Sciences. Diverse areas of research work related to the SDGs that were shared included: forest management and wetland restoration (Dr. Irena Creed), population based studies on chronic disease burden in African settings (Dr. Saverio Stranges), empowering women to produce highly nutritious food in Africa (Dr. Gregor Reid), literature and drama for Africa to capture and address issues related to education, gender equality and colonialism (Dr. Nandi Bhatia), studying the evolution of Francophonie (government, summits, literature in French academia) towards economic exchanges and conservation of minority cultures and languages (Dr. Servanne Woodward), and deepening skills for entrepreneurship and problem solving to enable employment (Dr. Nicole Haggerty). The Luncheon was successful in demonstrating that the AI members are building sustainable collaborations and partnerships with Africans to foster initiatives that address some of the most pressing issues facing the African continent. An added and important success of the Luncheon was the engagement of faculty from the Arts and Humanities. These contributors described that the arts are as much a catalyst for social survival and change as the sciences. Arts and Humanities correspond to free creative expression among international peers, or memories of arts and ideas, all necessary to intellectual life which is not *sui generi* but part of long cultural threads – long term goals apparently immaterial yet generally necessary to humanity's "progress" as well. Thus, moving forward, the AI aims to further support the worthy goals and admirable projects of the Arts and Humanities' fields, and to be a leading voice that celebrates the rich potentials offered by all faculty at the university.

Beyond research, the faculty associated with the AI have also created some of the most enriching learning opportunities for students at Western University. Of note, in the realm of Francophone Studies, is Professor Henri Boyi of the French Studies Department, who developed an experiential learning course called "Rwanda: Culture, Society and Reconstruction". The course gives Western students an opportunity to learn about Rwandan society and about themselves, by serving in an international social and cultural setting through service learning activities and volunteer placements. Before their trip to Rwanda, students are introduced in a classroom setting to the country's history, politics, judicial system, education, health and, evidently, the 1994 genocide, as well as the efforts being made to reconstruct the fabric of the country after this tragic event. These classroom activities prepare them for a five-week trip to Rwanda, where they are first acquainted with the reality of the life in the capital Kigali, after which small groups are placed in different community organizations in and around the capital.

With these community partners, students contribute to community development projects related to education, healthcare, child welfare and women's rights. In 2012, this fruitful activity joined to other engagements earned Prof Boyi the honorific title of Western Humanitarian Award Winner and the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal, following the 2008 London's Mayor's New Year's Honor List for Humanitarianism, and the Black History Month Appreciation Award in Recognition of Outstanding Leadership and Devotion to his Community in 2005.

Moreover, a direct training initiative of the AI are two newly developed graduate programs in Global Health Systems (GHS): (1) a Collaborative degree in GHS, and (2) a Professional Masters in GHS. A key objective of both programs is to develop leaders who will help solve complex global health challenges. The Collaborative graduate program combines a student's discipline-based degree program and the transdisciplinary training in the GHS thematic area by completing specific GHS courses. These students will receive a notation on their diploma indicating that they have completed the program, and will have had a value-added academic opportunity. The Professional Masters of Management of Applied Sciences (MMASc) in GHS is a 12-month, comprehensive degree program where students enrol in their Specialty Field (GHS), and complete core courses of the MMASc such as management and communication. After course work, students attend a three-week intensive field school in an African country (Uganda for the 2016-2017 cohort), and complete a 12-week internship or major research project.

The Africa Institute is pleased to also host distinguished scholars in the Visiting University Scholar Program. The 2015 Visiting University Scholar for the Africa Institute was Dr. Francis Wegulo from Egerton University, Kenya co-hosted by the AI and the Department of Geography. The 2016 Visiting University Scholars are: Professor Judith A. Kinnaird from the University of Witwatersrand, South Africa, co-hosted by the Faculty of Science; Dr. Janet O. Adekannbi from the University of Ibadan, Nigeria, co-hosted by the Faculty of Information and Media Students; and Justice James Ogoola, from the International Law Institute, Uganda, co-hosted by the Faculty of Social Sciences.