Ghana Study Abroad Tour Reflections

This summer, our first group of Illinois students traveled across Ghana with HDFS professor Dr. Christy Lleras and graduate student LaKisha David. During their time in Ghana, students traveled along the routes where communities were targeted for the Transatlantic Slave Trade. Students interacted with local people who spoke about their family histories and experiences during the slave trade.

To prepare for the trip, students took a course to better understand the history and people of Ghana. Americans often make assumptions about Africa and the people who live there. One of the goals of this pre-departure course was to prepare each student to recognize these assumptions and biases. Ideally, addressing these assumptions will help students be sensitive to the diverse experiences and needs of individuals and families.

Dr. Lleras and LaKisha both agreed that, “We want our students to learn from the people in Ghana. Ghanaians can teach us so much about families, putting children at the center, about the way they problem solve, about how they view race relations, and about the way they’ve dealt with their own histories and complexities. There is so much we can learn from them and we want to go in with the assumption that we are not here to teach you, we are here to learn from you.”

Rosianna Alexander, an HDFS junior who went on the tour this summer, describes her time in Ghana as an “enriching learning experience.” Hearing stories passed down from someone’s great-great grandfather impacted not only her sense of self but also reaffirmed the strength of African people.

Responsive Feeding in the CDL

The Child Development Laboratory’s (CDL) mission is to provide teaching, research, and service opportunities for student and teachers. There are several classrooms dedicated to nurturing children ages six weeks to five years old. Bethany Jackson has been the head teacher for the Infant 1 classroom for six years. She says she enjoys watching a child grow during their first year of life and she “can be part of setting those first foundations.” Currently, research is being done in her classroom on how children transition from breast/formula milk to solid foods. Specifically, the researchers want to learn how to help children self-regulate food intake. The transition to solid food can be difficult and it’s a time when children can start to overeat.

For Bethany, feeding each child is different and it takes time to get to know them and their individual needs. Some babies need to eat more often than others, and as they grow older their feeding times become more routine. It can be challenging to know when a child is developmentally ready to start solid foods when we hold regimented expectations of when children “should” eat solid food. To add to the complexity, parents may be transitioning to solids at home, but the infants may not be adjusting well in the classroom so it is important to pay attention to when and how it is best for that child to feed. “It’s really about being patient,” Bethany says. “The first few feedings won’t help them get any real nutrition, but it helps them learn that there is another way of eating.”

Bethany looks forward to the results of the research on infant feeding. “I have an idea about what responsive feeding should look like, and I don’t think it always works well here,” she says. In the classroom, there are multiple children who need attention at the same time. Teachers often get distracted when feeding infants and may not be as quick to respond to the child’s cues. Bethany wants to know what they are doing right and how they can improve when it comes to responsive feeding. How can the environment or equipment be improved to help infants make a smoother transition to solids?

“That’s the beauty of being here. We get to participate in some of that and it’s not just ‘this is how you do it.’ It’s ‘this is what we’re doing and this is how we can do it better.'"
**Graduate Student Spotlight**

Cagla Giray, a graduate student in HDFS, received her Bachelor’s degree in Psychology from Bilkent University in Turkey in 2015. She chose to pursue higher education in HDFS at UIUC because she came across Dr. Gail Ferguson’s video about research on the psychological impacts of globalization and remote acculturation (i.e., engaging with new cultures from afar using globalization avenues) on families. Cagla is now the lab manager for the Culture and Family Life lab and she says it has been one of the most rewarding experiences she has ever had. The lab focuses on understanding and promoting the resilience of youth and parents experiencing remote acculturation. Cagla specifically focuses on researching the gaps in divorced parents’ remote acculturation, co-parenting dynamics, and their adjustment in urban Turkey to “shed light on the negotiation processes between parents and children’s adjustment in the context of globalization and divorce.”

Last summer, Cagla completed an internship at Save the Children, an international non-profit humanitarian organization in Washington, D.C and was invited back to be a part of an analysis study in East Africa. She says, “My international experience, meeting and working with diverse, multicultural teams were invaluable. It raised my cultural awareness and guided my career path.” Cagla has also volunteered at the East Central Refugee Mutual Assistance Center (ECIRMAC) and served as the Graduate Co-President of the Illinois Student Council Family Relations in 2016.

Recently, Cagla received the International Research Grant from the College of ACES Office of International Programs which allowed her to implement her research in Turkey and be recognized as a scholar. After completing her PhD, Cagla plans to move to D.C. and will be “aiming to pursue a career in international development in a supranational organization or a policy-focused research institute/think tank.”

Cagla says that being a part of the HDFS graduate program has been a life changing experience. She is grateful for all of the opportunities that she has had and for the guidance and support of the HDFS faculty.

We wish the best for Cagla on her move to DC! We know she will make us proud.

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**Health Professions Summer Internship**

Anja Kizer, a sophomore in HDFS, had the opportunity to participate in a free, 6-week long program called SHPEP, Summer Health Professions Education Program, at the University of Iowa. The program is specifically for Freshmen and Sophomores interested in a medical career. During this internship, Anja learned about different career paths in the medical field, met with doctors, learned how to suture, examined different bodies and took various field trips around Iowa. Participants in SHPEP chose one basic science course to take to help further their interests and knowledge in the medical field. They can select between Anatomy/ Physiology, Physics, and Organic Chemistry. Anja opted to take Anatomy and Physiology and told us, “the anatomy course load was difficult but it was worth it to learn more about careers.” She added, “My favorite part about this program was learning how to suture, and volunteering at the children’s hospital because I was given a chance to play with all of the children.” Anja wants to be a pediatrician in the future and SHPEP allowed her gain more knowledge, hands on experience, and connections. Anja said that her internship related well to HDFS because she “learned a lot about public health and giving back to low income families and that is what HDFS is all about.”

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**HDFS Alumni Honored**

Dr. Lynne Borden is an outstanding University of Illinois alumni, who recently won the 2018 Alumni Career Achievement Award for her extraordinary accomplishments and meaningful contributions to society. Dr. Borden earned her PhD in Human Resources and Family Studies at the University of Illinois in 1997. Since then, she has gone on to make exceptional professional achievements. She started her career as an elementary school teacher and also worked as a middle school counselor. “I have always believed that to make a difference in lives of children and their families we must work collectively together, as no child nor family should be isolated,” she said. She went on to be a State Leader for 4-H Youth Development and became the principal investigator for the Military Research and Outreach to Support Military Families program. The goals of this program were to provide research information to those who developed programs and policies, and to create training materials for those who work directly with children and youth. Dr. Borden is a Professor of Family Social Sciences at the University of Minnesota.

“My experience at the University of Illinois changed my career trajectory,” says Dr. Borden. She had the chance to work with Extension Faculty that offered her a new way to see how research was applied in a way that impacted individuals. What she finds most memorable about her career is the opportunity to do research that can improve policies and programs that are made for children and their families. This work offers an opportunity to create a context where children, youth, and their families have the support and opportunities needed to thrive. She encourages current students interested in a similar field to take advantage of their time at the University of Illinois, to learn as much as they can about family systems and child development. The theoretical grounding gained in this field will be useful in future careers. She also recommends working with extension faculty to learn about and understand how research is put into practice. Congratulations Dr. Borden! We look forward to seeing how you will continue to help children and their families to succeed.

Private support of the Department of Human Development and Family Studies (HDFS) ensures that we can continue to address contemporary social issues that affect children, youth, adults, and families through high quality research, teaching, and outreach programs. To learn more about the department’s activities, attributes, and accomplishments; and how to support them, visit www.hdfs.illinois.edu