Bienvenue! This past summer, 10 students from Indiana University, the University of Oregon, and Loyola University Chicago moved to Dakar, Senegal, for a 5 week study abroad program. We worked as interns for non-profit organizations, took classes in Wolof and Senegalese society and politics, engaged in experiential learning during excursions to Touba, Kaolack, Gaë, and St. Louis, and spent time exploring Dakar. Whether you are a potential program participant, professor, administrator, or parent, we invite you to share our experiences in this newsletter as we each reflect on a different aspect of Senegalese society and share our favorite trip photos.

Senegalese Cuisine

By Ellie Berry

In Senegal, food is more than just the rice and vegetables on a plate in front of you; it is the whole process of sharing a meal and is tied into the idea of the famous Senegalese “teraanga,” or hospitality. Both in Dakar and when we traveled outside the city, we were invited into many Senegalese homes, and never left hungry. I discovered that my favorite Senegalese dish is yaasa poulet, marinated chicken cooked with onions. And of course, no discussion of Senegalese cuisine would be complete without mentioning ceebu jën, rice served with fish and vegetables. Food is normally served on large platters on the ground. Even though five to six people normally share a platter, we would never finish all the food on the plate. Just when I thought I could not eat one more bite, a heaping plate of fresh mango would appear and I would finish the meal with sticky mango juice on my fingers. However, the meal was not really over until âttaaya had been served. Åttaaya is a very strong, sweet green tea that is served in small glasses. It is poured carefully to create a thin layer of foam in each glass. I did not have enough time in Senegal to learn how to make ceebu jën or properly prepare âttaaya, so I will have to settle with some self-instruction aided by the Google search box. Unfortunately, this will be no comparison to the delicious plates of food, steaming glasses of âttaaya, and smiles that were shared during Senegalese meals.
Cultural Expression through Art

By Tyler Deaton

Cultural expression is conveyed through various art forms in Senegalese society. Clothing and fashion, paintings, and graffiti are all important art forms and aspects of self-expression in Senegal. Although these expressions are communicated through different outlets, each has an important message to convey about Senegalese culture.

Clothing & Fashion

Fashion is one of the most important and immediately noticeable aspects of Senegalese culture. Even though I was informed of how well the Senegalese people dressed, I did not fully understand until I witnessed it. I was surprised and impressed by how well everyone presented themselves. There is an array of fashion found in Senegal. For example, some Senegalese women prefer traditional dresses made out of either solid or multicolored fabric. These dresses cover the upper arms and bust line, as well as extend to the ankles, which is important in predominantly Muslim societies like Senegal. This type of dress, accompanied by a headscarf or wrap, is especially important for religious gatherings and formal events like weddings.

In informal settings, some women choose to still wear traditional clothing, but may not wear the headscarf or covering. Others, often younger women, prefer not to wear traditional clothing outside of religious and formal settings. For example, these women may wear shorter skirts or dresses, more revealing tops, and high heels. Despite their choice not to wear traditional clothing, these women are typically still well-presented and stay within socially acceptable barriers. Scantier Western fashions can be found in bars, lounges, and dance clubs. Women who solicit themselves for sex typically choose this type of attire as well, so in order to avoid this association, most women choose to dress in a socially respectable manner even in informal settings.

Men are also well-presented in Senegalese culture. Some men wear one-piece garments similar to dresses, which cover the arms, legs, and extend to the ankles. Another traditional clothing option is an African style shirt called a ‘sabadoor’ in Wolof, which is typically accompanied by pants.

Traditional clothing is also expected for men in formal settings, but like women, they can also wear other styles in informal settings. Blue jeans are very popular, especially ornate jeans or pre-stressed and bleached ones. Designer labels and logos often adorn casual clothing and accessories. Slacks and button-down shirts are regularly worn as well. In general, Senegalese men do not wear shorts. However, shorts are becoming more common as Western influence continues to affect Senegalese fashions.

Wall, Glass, and Sand Artwork

As I walk down the streets of Dakar, I am amazed to see all of the graffiti on the walls. It is practically everywhere, so it seems to be a pretty popular way for artists to reach people. Some of the walls have phrases written on them. Often, they refer to political leaders, corruption, and general frustrations with society. The corruption of President Abdoulaye Wade’s administration is one of the most popular topics that can be found on the street walls of Dakar.

In addition to phrases and words, images also convey powerful messages. Just outside the FASTEF campus, there is an entire highway overpass painted depicting several important figures in Senegalese society. One of them is Léopold Sédar Senghor, the first president of Senegal. Although (and maybe because) graffiti is illegal, the walls of Dakar serve as important canvases where the youth can express their view of the environment and culture in which they live.

We attended a guest lecture at the home of Senegalese artist Anta Germaine Gaye and learned how to do some reverse glass painting of our own!
Filet Mignon

By Rachel Boehm

Hard as it was to choose a single experience to write about, I thought that being given a cow was at least a little distinctive. This took place on the trip to the Senegal River Valley when we took a short ride outside of the town of Gaé to spend an evening with a semi-nomadic Pulaar herdsman.

The relationship these people have with the land and their animals is hard to show and hard to imagine for me. I was struck by how knit the human and cattle populations were, how interdependent they are on each other. The people follow the cattle as they wander for food, and the cattle are used for milk, meat, and currency. It was also startling to realize that the herders probably knew all of the cattle by sight, how each one was related to the other, and how old they were. To my untrained eye, I saw white cow after white cow. Their way of life may as well be on a different planet for all that Americans can relate to it. It makes me seriously wonder about the kind of things we’re missing.

It was only about twenty minutes after we arrived when we were asked if any of us had a video camera. Tyler and I said we did, so we followed the leader of the community into the herd of cattle, filming him walking around amongst the herd. I got four minutes of video footage, including a huge steer that came up to my shoulder. I caught a few seconds of his wife milking a cow, of calves lounging in the brush, of the children following us like shadows. Finally he turned to me and indicated a calf on the ground.

He was trying to give me a cow and fully expected me to take this cow on the bus back to Dakar with me. I couldn’t believe this was happening. I took a four-minute video, and he wanted to give me a cow? It struck me as another stark difference in cultural conceptions of a “fair trade.” In my cultural norms, taking a four-minute video of somebody walking with his livestock would merit a “thank you” and maybe an invitation to dinner. But in this case, he thought a cow was sufficient. It is an example of how they value a visual representation of someone here. His livelihood is tied up in these animals and each one is valuable. The price of a cow was steep to me but it showed me not only the generosity of this man, but also what that video meant to him in return.

It is almost like we approached each other from opposite ends of a spectrum. On one hand I took my technology for granted, not having the same sense of worth tied up in pushing a button and having something recorded. On the other hand, the Pulaar herdsman saw his cattle differently, and I wouldn’t say he took it for granted, but he had a different set of assumed norms than I do. Giving me a cow was perfectly reasonable to him.

I can’t help but see how this extends to the rest of my time here. I need to not see things through my biased lens. I need to appreciate what people find valuable here. My involvement in this society can be significant if I put aside things I find important or the things I find trivial and learn to appreciate their norms. My cow, whom I have since named Filet Mignon, can be a reminder of this. Filet Mignon is the exact embodiment of the contrasting worlds we come from, and I can never let that go.
LIFE IN SENEGAL

We visited the mosque in Touba, spiritual center of the Mouride Sufi order founded by Ahmadou Bamba during French colonial rule. Over 15,000 Muslims gather here every Friday to pray.

FAST FACTS

84°
The average temperature in Senegal during July

42%
Senegal’s adult literacy rate

Public Transportation

by Aloura DiGiallonardo

There is nothing like the feeling of someone else’s armpit sweat soaking through their shirt and onto your arm in the morning. Public transportation in Senegal can be an adventure unto itself in Senegal. You have many options when wanting to get from point A to point B in Dakar. Here are a few of the most important ones.

Taxis: This is the fastest and also most expensive option. Bargaining (waxaale) is critical with the taximan. Before getting into the cab, be sure to ask the price. They will usually ask for double of what the price should be. Don’t be afraid to look offended and walk away when they don’t accept a reasonable price. Don’t worry; the teller is always hanging out the window so you can simply ask. Be sure to pay attention to your things. People can steal from you if you do not keep a close eye on your bag.

Car Rapid: The cheapest, slowest (which makes the name ironic), most intimidating forms of transportation. My sweat story above took place in a car rapide. These are brightly painted short buses that cost about 75CFA but they won’t give you your change if you don’t demand it. People cram onto these little buses, and there are men that hang off the back hollering at people to get on the bus and banging on the side of the door to signal to the driver when to stop and start. The advice about theft is the same on the car rapides. Since it is so cheap, people will get on in hopes of being able to steal something. It’s not something to stress over, just be prudent and pay attention. Once you get the hang of it it’s not so bad but takes some getting used to. Travel everywhere you want to go! The transportation, though very slow in comparison to the States, is there.

Doing laundry by hand in the house

Aloura and Ellie interned at Manooré, a Dakar radio station that provides programming for women and youth.
Navigating Cultural Differences

By Jessica Johnson

Before boarding my plane for Dakar, Senegal, in 2011, I was warned a thousand times to tread carefully in my cross-cultural relationships. IU’s Getting Started handbook, CIEE’s country specific guide book, and even our pre-departure orientation all told me the same thing: “It may be difficult to make friends with the opposite sex. Be careful about the information you share and monitor your actions around them, as they may be misconstrued as meaning something entirely different.”

I took these warnings to heart in my everyday interactions while living in the city. I was guarded with my conversations and tried as hard as I could to reveal nothing more than necessary in a friendly conversation. For example, on the program’s first excursion to Gorée Island I met a young man at the beach who struck up conversation. We discussed how he had lived on the island his whole life and how I was in country for a month on a study abroad program – and that was it. A week later, he showed up outside the gate of the house, asking if I remembered him. Since the conversation was fairly unremarkable for me, of course I didn’t. Luckily, I had a roommate who had lived in Dakar for five months and she promptly persuaded him that his pursuit was in vain. After this, however, I became even more guarded in everyday interactions and made a conscious effort not to reveal anything personal.

Given that, it was surprising when, two weeks later, a different young man showed up on my doorstep at 11 o’clock at night. Two of the girls in the program had met him on the beach and we had gone to a concert at the French Cultural Center with him and his friends. I’d made sure not to divulge any major details that night so I was completely unnerved by his arrival at my house. After some contemplation, however, I decided that he had probably gleaned my living situation from the photographs I’d posted on Facebook for friends and family back home.

I told you that to tell you this: When you first arrive, the attention you get will be ridiculous and flattering all at the same time. Men will propose to you, hit on you, and chat you up like never before. It’s totally different from how things work back at home and, if you don’t keep that in mind, you might end up in a sticky situation – say, for example, having guys show up at your house four nights in a row or hop on a ferry to come find you. Trust me.

Crime and Security

By Gavin King

Everyone has probably heard the horror stories: Someone goes abroad, has some fun and has their wallet and cellular phone stolen. It does happen and sometimes there is nothing you can do about it but most of the time it is preventable. The first thing you should probably know about this crime is that it is far more common than violent crime. No one who has ever been the victim of a violent crime while participating in the Dakar program. This is not to say that violence does not occur in Dakar, it does. All that you can do to avoid it is to stick to well-populated areas at night and avoid going unfamiliar places without a friend.

There have, however, been several incidents of phones and cameras being stolen during the program. Indeed, my own phone was pickpocketed while I was at an outdoor concert. Here are a few ideas on how you can mitigate petty crime in Senegal.

1. If you are not using your phone from the United States simply leave it locked away in your room.
2. Only leave electronic devices in a room that can be locked by you or someone else on the program.
3. When in a crowded place move slowly and carefully being sure to avoid getting caught up in places where the crowd is pushing and shoving. These are prime locations for pickpockets.
4. When confronted with a more tightly packed crowd I now tend to shove my thumbs in my pockets and keep my hands next over the pants pocket. That or put your hands in your pockets.
5. If your phone from the United States is stolen, have it canceled as soon as possible. In many cases this should be a higher priority than reporting the theft to the police.
6. Remember that your electronic device is easier to replace than your wallet. Be most vigilant regarding your wallet.

While these safety tips are not certain to keep you from being a victim of crime while in Senegal, they are a good start. The most important way to avoid being a victim of crime is to simply remain vigilant.
Can You Yusa?
By Courtney Clark

Pretending to smell your armpits is an excellent way to make friends anywhere in Senegal. Add a few arm waves and hip sways, and soon you might be joined by a swarm of laughing children or enjoy the applause of a group of women sitting nearby.

The Yusa is the national Senegalese dance, known, practiced, and loved by Senegalese of all ages. We first discovered its magic during a beach trip to the Corniche near Ecole Normale when we found ourselves surrounded by young boys and struggling to communicate in French. A few of us started to Yusa, completely unsure if they would know the dance, and the oldest of the group joined in. Soon the whole group was laughing and cheering as he showed off his moves. This trick has worked for us with nearly every group of children we encounter.

Another time we spent an afternoon with children during our stay in the rural village of Gaé. We could not find a universal game to play with them and failed at most of our attempts to teach them American games in French, but we found ourselves in a circle clapping to keep rhythm as each child proudly performed her best Yusa, clearly imitating the flirtatious facial expressions and hip rolls of older siblings and parents.

Dance, like math, is a universal language that can bond people who cannot otherwise communicate. In addition to French and Wolof, shamelessly busting out the Yusa will help you make friends and show your Senegalese hosts that you have taken the time to learn an important part of their culture. And if you can master it, you will have one smooth, sexy, lively dance to add to your repertoire.

Gaé Women’s Fund
By Theresa Meyers

For one of the excursions we traveled to the village of Gaé north of Saint Louis. We spent two days living there, interacting with the community, and learning about the village itself. We had the opportunity to meet with many women of the village who formed a cooperative in 1999 to cultivate rice and tomatoes. These women were given a plot of land on which to grow their crops and then sold these crops at markets. The idea behind this cooperative was to help women generate their own profits. However, it was not that simple. The women needed to purchase equipment such as tractors, and to do so they needed to take out loans from the bank. Unfortunately, their revenue did not exceed their bank payments, and so since starting 12 years ago, they have yet to turn a real profit. Instead, they have been forced to renew their bank loans at what is assumedly a higher interest rate. Once owing upwards of $60,000, they now just need $7,000 more which they are hoping to raise in the next five years.

After hearing this story, we were shocked that these women have not been able to pay back their loans yet. This cooperative seems like such a great idea to help women become more self-sufficient and independent, yet it is failing. Collectively, we decided to help them! As a group, we are planning on raising the $7,000 through fundraisers and donations to give to these women so that they can finally pay off their bank loans. From there, they will be able to generate revenue from their cultivation. We hope that this donation to the women of Gaé will not only serve the women in the cooperative but also be a message of thanks to the community and a continual link between Senegal and our program.

The French Cultural Center downtown often hosts concerts by Senegalese artists. We saw Daara J Family and a concert speaking out against violence against women. Below, Theresa and Quincy pose in front of the Presidential Palace.
The Senegal 2011 program students would like to give a special thanks to the Dakar program faculty, the Senegalese student partners, guest lecturers, excursion host families, and all others who made our experience so memorable. Your kindness, patience, and teachings were and always will be greatly appreciated.

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