



Impact Report

2024 - 2025

LIR204: African Studies and Beyond

Table of Contents

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Our Goals
- 3 Program Design & Study Abroad
- 4 Study Abroad in Senegal
- 5 Transformative Student Impact
- 6 Data Collection & Reporting
- 7 Next Steps



Introduction

LIR204: African Studies and Beyond is a course designed to challenge students' understanding of Africa by offering a academic framework that centers African epistemologies, critical discussions on colonialism and globalization, and the lived experiences of African communities. Developed as part of the Global Justice and Change initiative, LIR204 is an interdisciplinary course that brings together students from diverse academic backgrounds—including Social Work, Criminology, Law, Global Management, and Nursing—to engage with complex global justice issues through African perspectives. The course aims to decenter Eurocentric narratives that dominate mainstream and academic discourse by introducing students to African intellectual traditions, oral histories, and community-based knowledge systems that have been historically marginalized in global conversations.

A defining feature of LIR204 is its study abroad component. For the 2024 cohort, the country focus was Senegal, where students spent two intensive weeks immersed in Senegalese life, culture, and education. The Senegal trip was not an add-on but rather a critical part of the course's learning model, enabling students to connect theoretical classroom discussions with lived experiences. Students engaged directly with Senegalese scholars, community leaders, university students, artists, and activists, facilitating an unparalleled learning opportunity that went beyond traditional academic settings.

One of the primary objectives of the course is to equip students with adaptability, cultural competency, and a nuanced understanding of global justice issues—skills that are essential not only for their academic careers but also for their professional futures. These outcomes are especially significant given that many participants identified as racialized, first-generation, or equity-deserving students who may not otherwise have access to international learning experiences. The course intentionally seeks to break down barriers that limit access to global learning and to ensure that students from all backgrounds have the opportunity to engage meaningfully with African knowledge systems and contemporary challenges.

As this report demonstrates, the impact of LIR204: African Studies and Beyond extends far beyond the duration of the course. Students consistently reported deep personal, academic, and professional transformations, including shifts in their understanding of Africa, their place within global systems, and their career trajectories. Through survey data collected eight months post-program, alongside student testimonials and reflections, this report documents the lasting impact of the program on students' intellectual development, sense of identity, and professional growth. These outcomes highlight not only the success of the 2024 iteration but also underscore the need to sustain and expand this program to benefit future cohorts.

Our Goals

This impact report is designed to demonstrate the academic, personal, and professional outcomes of the LIR204: African Studies and Beyond course. More than just a summary of activities, this report highlights the tangible ways the course has shaped students' learning, worldview, and career paths. It reflects on how experiential learning and international engagement with Senegalese communities contributed to students' growth in areas such as global justice, decolonization, and cross-cultural understanding. By analyzing student feedback and survey data, this report aims to showcase the long-term value and transformative power of study abroad opportunities rooted in African epistemologies.

1

Deliver an Innovative Experiential Learning Program

LIR204 was designed to connect students with African epistemologies, challenge Eurocentric narratives, and immerse them in real-world learning through a fully integrated study abroad component in Senegal. Students engaged directly with Senegalese communities, leaders, and scholars, bringing classroom theory into lived experience.

2

Foster Academic, Personal, and Professional Growth

The course aimed to broaden students' understanding of decolonization, global justice, and African knowledge systems, while also developing critical skills such as adaptability, cross-cultural communication, and community engagement. Students reported gaining confidence, building global networks, and shifting their academic and career trajectories as a result of this experience.

3

Build Sustainable Pathways for Global Justice Education

A key goal of LIR204 is to create accessible and sustainable opportunities for equity-deserving students to engage in global learning. By integrating immersive study abroad experiences, interdisciplinary academic content, and long-term professional development opportunities, the course lays the foundation for ongoing partnerships, alumni engagement, and future international collaborations rooted in justice and equity.

Program Design & Study Abroad

LIR204 was carefully designed to introduce students to African ways of knowing through a multidisciplinary lens. The course combined classroom learning, African scholarship, and cross-cultural dialogue to challenge Western narratives and create meaningful, transformative learning experiences.

OBJECTIVES	OUTCOME
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Developed an interdisciplinary curriculum integrating African epistemologies, colonialism, and decolonization.• Incorporated African oral traditions and diverse intellectual frameworks to challenge dominant narratives about Africa.• Designed experiential learning modules, including a rotating study abroad component to engage students directly with African communities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The course was delivered to a diverse student cohort who engaged in in-depth classroom and field-based learning.• African scholars contributed as guest lecturers, and students engaged in academic exchanges with their peers at Université Cheikh Anta Diop (UCAD).• Student Reflection:<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ “Dr. Gorgui Dieng’s Wolof class fascinated me. I was guided into the mother tongue of Senegalese culture by a qualified scholar, not from an institution of colonial power, but as the Head of African and Post-Colonial Studies!◦ “The lecture on the role of women in Senegalese society made me think deeply about the expectations placed on women in different cultural contexts. The passion and strength in the students’ responses were inspiring.”

Study Abroad in Senegal

As part of LIR204, students traveled to Senegal for a fully immersive, two-week study abroad experience that brought classroom lessons into real-world contexts.

- Direct engagement with Senegalese communities, scholars, and university students (UCAD).
- Participated in cultural exchanges, storytelling, and community-led initiatives.
- Explored historical sites like Goree Island and the African Renaissance Monument to understand Africa's rich history and resilience.
- Developed cross-cultural communication and adaptability skills through hands-on learning.



LIR204 and UCAD students together toured the African Renaissance Monument, exploring history and learning as one community

“

Being at Goree Island was a deeply emotional experience. Walking through the slave trade houses and standing at the Door of No Return made history feel real in a way textbooks never could. It was painful, but also a reminder of resilience.

”

“

The Monument de la Renaissance represents a history that exists outside the Western portrayal of Blackness; one that shows Africans in a different light, evokes the Black imagination, and propels forward open-ended temporalities.

”



Three students set sail to Goree Island—a sacred World Heritage site—to explore and unpack the historical and cultural significance of this landmark.

TRANSFORMATIVE STUDENT IMPACT

Career Development & Professional Growth

- 65% of respondents credited the course for unlocking new professional opportunities.
- Many secured internships, research assistantships, and received prestigious fellowship offers (including law school acceptances).
- The experience fostered robust networking and skill-building in cross-cultural communication.

"I used this experience to strengthen my personal statement, and it was instrumental in my acceptance into several prestigious law schools."

85%

of students reported an increased understanding of decolonization.

70%

noted the course influenced their academic interests and future studies.

"This experience changes the very meaning associated with terms we take for granted in academia."

Personal & Cultural Transformation

- 90% of participants reported enhanced cultural competency and empathy.
- Students deeply reflected on their identities, privilege, and global justice issues.
- The immersive experience reshaped their long-term goals and broadened their worldview.

"Being in Senegal made me ask critical questions about global justice and my own cultural identity."

Students in LIR204 experience a profound transformation—challenging dominant narratives, broadening their perspectives, and forging valuable connections. This immersive journey fosters deep academic inquiry and personal growth, empowering them to rethink their identities and future aspirations.

Data Collection & Reporting: Capturing Student Voices

STUDENT EXPERIENCE SURVEY

Testimonials revealed how firsthand experiences in Senegal shattered preconceived notions and redirected career trajectories—one student used insights from Senegal’s legal framework to strengthen their law school application.

Students reported improved adaptability, cultural competency, and communication skills—a testament to the immersive learning environment. Most students noted that the course boosted their applications for scholarships, graduate programs, and job opportunities, highlighting its practical impact on their futures. Students described how firsthand experiences in Senegal shattered preconceptions and reoriented their academic and career paths.



Student Testimonial:

"At first, this seemed like a resume-builder, but it turned into a life-changing journey that shaped my identity and career path."

This reflection captures the personal and professional growth many students experienced. Beyond gaining academic credit, students walked away with new perspectives, deeper self-awareness, and a renewed sense of purpose that continues to influence their academic and career trajectories today.

This student participated in a drumming workshop in Toubab Dialaw as part of their educational experience, engaging in community-led initiatives and cultural exchanges that explored the rich history and traditions of Senegalese music.

Next Steps

Looking ahead, sustaining and expanding the LIR204 program is critical to maintaining its transformative impact on students. First, future iterations should strengthen cultural and academic partnerships by deepening connections with local universities and expanding collaborative projects that give students continued exposure to African epistemologies. Strengthening career development pathways is also essential. This can be achieved through formalized mentorship programs and post-trip professional workshops, allowing students to translate their experiences into competitive academic and career opportunities.

To make the program accessible to more students, securing long-term funding must be a priority. Partnerships with donors and institutions, alongside an expansion of scholarships, will reduce financial barriers and ensure that equity-deserving students can participate. Additionally, rotating study abroad destinations, as outlined in the course calendar, should remain a key element, allowing students to explore Africa's vast diversity over time. Building an active alumni network and research community would also extend the program's influence, fostering ongoing engagement and providing future participants with a strong support system.

Finally, integrating visual data such as graphs and testimonials in future reports will help communicate the program's measurable outcomes more effectively. These steps will ensure that LIR204 remains a dynamic and impactful learning experience that continues to reshape how students engage with global justice and African epistemologies.