

## **Global Studies 298: Burkina Faso Study Abroad Winter Break 2008/09**

### **Professor: Richard Akresh**

#### **ICES Evaluation Results Summary (1=exceptionally low; 5=exceptionally high):**

Rate the instructor's overall teaching effectiveness: 4.94

Rate the overall quality of this course: 4.94

#### **Unedited, Uncut Direct Quotes of ICES Online Evaluation Responses from ALL Students to: "What are the major strengths of the instructor/course?"**

**Student 1:** Professor Akresh (Rich) was an amazing and knowledgeable instructor as to not only course matter, but human matters as well. I have never met someone with such balance of compassion, wisdom, academic and street-smart prowess. Dealing with such a large class in such a unique environment as Burkina Faso is difficult beyond understanding on so many levels, but Richard proved adept and kept us all safe, well-fed, and constantly learning. The course itself was amazing. I cannot in words describe how much I learned and experienced on an emotional and physical level. Richard was great in facilitating discussion of events and talks and helping us digest/understand it after. One thing about a course to Burkina Faso or any place in Africa is that you can easily take it to be a 2 week fest of uncomfortable, sub-par conditions if one does not confront how we live/think in America and how excessively wasteful or misguided we may be. Richard encouraged dialogue, listened to our thoughts, complaints, and conflicted emotions and put up with our ungratefulness. The strength of the program is the rareness of the experience. Though we may not have enjoyed 5-star hotels or enjoyed the luxury of buffets or exotic foods, Richard's relationships and connections in Burkina Faso and the consequent curriculum was uniquely one of a kind, hard to replicate like any old trip to London or Paris. I am wholly grateful for this experience-- it was amazing!

**Student 2:** This course was the most interesting and influential course that I have taken through the University of Illinois. Professor Richard Akresh, with the help of Emily Bagby, made the trip to Burkina Faso an immeasurably valuable experience leaving me with new perspectives and directions of my academic and professional future. The amount of effort that Professor Akresh went through to set up this trip before departure and throughout the two weeks in Burkina, in combination with the contacts he has in Burkina which made our appointments possible provided for a unique and profound learning experience that I can not imagine anyone else being able to organize. Before we left, the group meetings and discussions, readings, and group projects provided a solid foundation for the course material and what we were to see in Burkina Faso. By the time we landed in Ouagadougou, it was well understood what was expected of us as individuals and a group. Professor Akresh established himself as very approachable, willing to help us in any way possible, and a knowledgeable expert in Burkinabé culture and issues of economic development. As a result, we were able to have an experience in Burkina Faso with a friendly group that became close knit and the guidance of a Professor working to make our experiences as enriched as possible. From the village home stay in Bereba, to the interactive meetings with the Peace Corps, CRS, Plan International and the US Ambassador, to falling asleep under the open sky in the desert, this course exceeded my high expectations and left me with memories to cherish, friendships to develop, and experiences to help guide my future. I can

only hope that Professor Akresh might lead this trip again so that the next group of excited young students can be blown away by the trip of a lifetime.

**Student 3:** The course changed my life - reading about Africa and being in Africa seeing the processes that you read just do not compare. The professor always had intellectual stimulating things to tell us, and he arranged meetings with people I never would have imagined talking with (i.e. the U.S. Ambassador to Burkina Faso). Everything we did in the course taught us something huge about how Africa works, and really gave us perspective.

**Student 4:** I think this is probably the most worthwhile class I have taken at U of I. It offered an unmatched opportunity to learn about and experience a new country and culture at the same time as gaining understanding of economic development in one of the countries that needs it most. The instructors were both excellent guides and teachers and the entire trip was exceptionally well planned. I doubt we would be able to see all the things we saw or meet with all the people we met with on any other trip to Burkina Faso. This trip also provided a wonderful opportunity to meet many like-minded people and make many new friends whom I probably never would have met or gotten to know in any other class or setting. This course was truly unique and incredibly worthwhile.

**Student 5:** One of the most incredible courses I've taken at the university. The professor was an excellent leader and organizer, and used his strong background in the field to help us understand and think critically about the situations in Burkina. I highly recommend this course to anybody.

**Student 6:** This course was an incredibly worthwhile experience to participate in. The greatest strength of the course was the location where we studied abroad, Burkina Faso. This atypical site provided a unique learning experience that I don't think could be rivaled by any of the other locations offered in the global studies winter abroad program. The site visits in which we participated were very stimulating and I enjoyed learning from them throughout the trip. They greatly increased my understanding of economic development in countries like Burkina Faso. The particular country that we visited during this course immersed us all in a completely different culture than what we are used to. It was very fun and interesting to learn about and experience this new culture throughout the trip abroad. Professor Akresh conducted the entire course very well. The pre-departure classes were all very informative and the actual trip went very smoothly the whole time we were abroad. I greatly enjoyed this course and I would highly recommend it to anyone who would be interested in it.

**Student 7:** The instructor has had many meaningful experiences that he shared with us throughout the trip. His first hand experiences made the focus of the trip much more tangible and concrete. The course as a whole completely shifted my mindset on the world. Because of this course, I really wish I would have had more time to look into economic courses prior to my graduation. There are a lot of really interesting topics that I was exposed to on this trip, and I really hope that I can continue to learn more about them in the coming years. I cannot express how incredible this trip was - not only did it open my eyes to a completely different world, but it also allowed me to learn a great deal about myself and who I want to become.

**Student 8:** The instructor was very knowledgeable and easy to approach. He was very good about explaining things in non-technical and real-world terms that aided in my understanding. He was also very organized and efficient (or as efficient as one can be in West Africa). He was also open to new ideas and group input which led to a more tailored experience. The course was absolutely incredible. I learned more in the 2 weeks in Burkina Faso than I have learned in many semester long courses. The site visits were very interesting and the variety of site visits was great. Everyone was interested in different things, and I think the diversity of meetings was helpful to everyone. I have a much better understanding of the lifestyles in the developing world, West African culture, and the role of NGOs in development.

**Student 9:** This course was an action packed two weeks. There was never a dull moment with interesting site visits, outstanding cultural activities and endless discussion about the day's events and how they applied to development. The professor was amazing and was the only reason that the trip was even possible. His experience in Burkina, connections and expertise in the field made the course extremely rewarding.

**Student 10:** The course is a very immersing course. We were able to experience a variety of things that, in comparison to how we live in the United States, are so different. Professor Akresh really prepared us before we landed that we were going to need to be flexible and open to a very different way of living. I think that really helped us acclimate to our surroundings a lot better and get in the groove of living there a lot sooner than if he hadn't stressed the big differences before leaving. The course was also very diverse and gave a really good understanding of how diverse the country is among the people and how they live, but also their needs as people who are living in poverty.

**Student 11:** The instructor was able to communicate with his students as well as the individuals we met in Burkina Faso because he speaks English and French. He translated meetings for us and he helped out his students whenever help was needed. The course was great because we were able to communicate with individuals from a developing country. I think this trip was the only one which showed us how some people are living in the developing world. Where were able to see how these students care about education and how they wish they had more opportunities.

**Student 12:** Both Richard and Emilie were very attentive to student needs and questions, and shared their knowledge and experience. - The amount of planning and organizing required before and during the trip is obviously strenuous, yet Richard and Emilie were diligent and tireless. - Everyone we met with seemed to understand our purpose and behavior in asking an unbelievable amount of questions. I was so impressed with the fact that women at a health center or in a microfinance group were completely willing to answer questions that, if I were asked, might actually seem a little invasive - but they were more than happy to answer. Furthermore, the majority of excursions were pretty much on time and ran smoothly, which is all the more impressive considering the context. - It was good to have two instructors for the amount of students, and one of each gender. Furthermore, it did help to have Antonio and Ferdinand for translation and general logistics - it seemed be one more way to help things run smoothly. - Living accommodations were fine - they did require adjustment, but by the end of the day, a cool bucket shower was almost welcome. Furthermore, it is only two weeks, and how often are we in

Burkina? - The field trips/excursions were brilliant. The breadth of exposure and the amount of questions we could ask was great.

**Student 13:** The range of experiences packed into 2 weeks was impressive: living with a local family in a small African village, speaking with the US Ambassador, visiting all manner of development project sites, etc.

**Student 14:** The professor is very clear in his instruction

**Student 15:** Richard is a great professor and he is very knowledgeable. I recommend this course to anyone that is interested in economic development due to the fact that Richard has many friends and connections in Burkina Faso allowing for an immense amount of exposure into the world of development economics. The course also allowed for the formation of friendships and positive interaction between students. Richard was also easily accessible when any questions or problems arose, and he worked to solve them quickly.

**Student 16:** The way in which he was able to present the material in a way that challenged our class to think about the issue more in depth. He also encouraged us to discuss the issues that were confusing amongst our group.

**Student 17:** This course was such a great learning experience. The site visits were all very interesting and essential to the trip. The instructor was easy to talk to and knew a lot about the material and site visits.

**Student 18:** Richard was a great professor, he is incredibly knowledgeable regarding Burkina and development as a subject. He's the perfect person to lead this course. The course gave us an opportunity to see many different aspects of how development is carried out, and the realities of life in an undeveloped country. Obviously, the best part of the course was being on site and in country for two weeks, it allowed us to see first hand many of the things we had read about and were discussing in our initial meetings. Being able to meet many different Burkinabé and talk with them about their lives, ambitions and plans was one of the most valuable parts of the trip, something absolutely unique to it. I found that it really changed many of my ideas about developing Africa and Africans as a whole.