

**Global Studies 298: Burkina Faso Study Abroad, May 2012**  
**Professor: Richard Akresh**

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

Rate the instructor's overall teaching effectiveness: 5.00

Rate the overall quality of this course: 5.00

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

**Student 1:** No, I did not go down the list clicking button farthest to the right; I read the question and answered accordingly. This class was worth more than my four semesters at U of I combined, and by "worth more" I mean they were more educational, more intellectually stimulating, more relevant, more engaging, and more meaningful. This isn't to discredit the other classes I have taken at the University of Illinois, but to give credit to this class. The professor was incredibly knowledgeable, helpful, and competent. I still have no idea how he was able to arrange some of the meetings we had with government officials and NGOs, not to mention our trip to the homestay village. At this point, I am wondering why the University of Illinois does not focus more on study abroad trips to the third world; ten years from now, my college experience will be a fleeting memory but I'll vividly remember what I learned on my trip to Burkina Faso and how it positively influenced me to enter into some form of service work before entering the work force. I will in turn positively associate the trip with the University of Illinois and always be grateful for the opportunity the university provided me.

**Student 2:** The instructor established from the beginning that the various backgrounds of each student and what they sought to gain from the trip were all equally valid. This really established a foundation for an atmosphere where students were willing and eager to share opinions and questions with each other and with the instructor. So one of the major strengths of the course was this open and respectful exchange within the group. I also felt the size of the group was perfect and it was small enough so that I could actually get to know and talk to everyone. Personally, my understanding of economic development greatly expanded. A lot of this was due to the diverse topics covered within the course, where I often found myself fascinated with site visits or meetings on issues in which I had very little interest in the classroom setting of U of I. Also as a graduating senior, this class served as a great way to synthesize my academic experiences at U of I and definitely left me inspired and motivated to pursue my graduate studies in a related field.

**Student 3:** I originally chose to take this course because the course content seemed to align with my interests in community development and NGO work. I knew that it would be a great experience and that I would learn a lot, but I did not know that it would change my life the way that it did. Our classes consisted of meeting with various governmental, non-governmental and academic agencies and evaluating economic development projects. Not only did the class get to meet with the people working for the organizations, but also many of the people who were the direct beneficiaries of the organizations' work. Getting the chance to meet the teachers and students who use the facilities at PLAN International's schools, the farmers who grow fair trade organic cotton for Victoria's secret, the Peace Corps volunteers and the people in their villages,

and the college students at University of Ouagadougou was so much more meaningful than watching a documentary or reading a journal article. One of the best things about this class was the way in which the students were encouraged to push their personal boundaries to try new foods, speak a new language, or just do something outside of their comfort zone that they wouldn't normally do. I can't think of any other time during college in which I went through such a drastic personal growth period in such a short period of time. Professor Akresh was also always available and open to answer any and all questions that the students had, and was extremely knowledgeable in the subject matter. Being able to learn about economic development in Africa on the ground in such a small class setting with a professor who has so many good contacts in Africa was something that most people at U of I never get a chance to experience, and was by far the best class I have ever taken in college.

**Student 4:** This course had so many strengths to it. I learned more in this class than any other class I have taken and also learned a lot about myself and different cultures. This class has truly changed my life and gave me a new perspective on the world. I learned so much in just the two short weeks when I was abroad. The instructor was so knowledgeable and was so open to any question I asked. I loved how small the class size was, as most of my classes this first year of college was at least 30 students. I had a lot of one-on-one attention with the instructor. The class became so close, and I became so comfortable with everyone, that it didn't feel like a class. I will remember this class for the rest of my life, and this course is helping me influence what direction I am going to take down the road in my college and post-college careers.

**Student 5:** Great French. Very experienced and familiar with Burkina Faso. Contingent with all kinds of situations. The course is very exciting and interesting. I never regretted taking it and I will definitely recommend all my friends to give it a try too!

**Student 6:** Instructor was intelligent and you could tell that he cared a lot about this trip. He was always available and open. He made sure our needs were met and seemed to go above and beyond to make sure we were satisfied.

**Student 7:** The fact that our professor had lived in Burkina Faso and knew many connections among the NGOs and other government related officials. Not just me but the entire students were able to experience fully. The course itself is very well organized. This course was definitely worth going and life changing experience.

**Student 8:** Professor Akresh, throughout the whole trip, made sure that we were comfortable and aware with what was going out around us. Through the array of site visits and learning experiences, with the group of students Professor Akresh chose, we discussed our different views and shared our thoughts on each visit. I made lasting friendships and I found a new part of myself that I cannot wait to continue exploring. I also cannot wait to get back to Africa at some point in my life and continue learning about the different cultures, traditions, and experiences the continent has to offer.

**Student 9:** Professor Akresh was very well prepared for the trip, but he was also ready to adapt to whatever the students needed. The site visits were opportunities that we could only have because Professor Akresh was leading us (i.e. the embassy, minister of education). The fact that

the course was taught in Burkina Faso was obviously a huge strength; we were able to witness life in a developing country and really interact with its people. Traveling within the country itself was also useful, because it let us see the contrast in standards of living even within the same country.

**Student 10:** Professor Akresh is very knowledgeable about economic development in Burkina Faso. He is very well acquainted with his contacts in Burkina Faso. He is a great leader, facilitator, and listener. During the trip, he was very responsive to students' needs. This course allowed me to see sites both governmental and non-governmental first-hand and ask questions. The course also allowed for a time of reflection via essay writing, which helped form, organize, and solidify my newly formed opinions on economic policies in Burkina Faso. Although the trip itself is physically strenuous, the cultural immersion and the intellectual knowledge obtained from this trip is simply unparalleled.