

alliances

AFRICAN STUDIES CENTER • NEWSLETTER 2026



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Message from the Director



U-M President Domenico Grasso and ASC Director Omolade Adunbi.

The 2025–26 academic year has been one of transition, resilience, and renewed purpose for the African Studies Center (ASC). Across the pages of this issue of *Alliances*, you will see the many ways ASC continues to serve as a hub for Africa-related research, teaching, language learning, student engagement, public programming, and collaboration with partners across the African continent.

This year has also reminded us that the work of African studies cannot be taken for granted. As universities across the country continue to navigate uncertainty in federal funding and shifting national priorities, ASC remains committed to the core mission that has guided the center since its founding: to provide strategic guidance and coordination for Africa-related education, research, and training at the University of Michigan (U-M), and to promote meaningful opportunities for collaboration with African partners on the continent.

Many of the stories in this issue demonstrate the breadth and depth of that mission. Our African language instructors represented U-M at the 2026 African Language Teachers Association Conference at Princeton University, where they shared work on Swahili and Yoruba instructional materials and engaged in national conversations on African language pedagogy in the digital age. The Kelly Askew African Language Awards supported students studying Swahili and Yoruba across a wide range of academic fields, reflecting the personal, scholarly, and professional importance of African language learning at U-M.

Our commitment to student engagement is also visible through the work of the African Students Association



(ASA), the African Graduate Students Association (AGSA), and the African Business Club (ABC), all of which created spaces for community, cultural celebration, dialogue, and scholarly exchange. ASA's programming brought students together through cultural conversations, foodways, performance, and its annual Culture Show. AGSA hosted a year of community-building and academic programming, including its inaugural Graduate Students Research Symposium, themed "We Are the Archive," and an End-of-Year Banquet and Cultural Night that celebrated African graduate students and allies at U-M. ABC organized its annual business conference that brought together industry leaders, tech entrepreneurs, policymakers, students, and practitioners to discuss the future of doing business in Africa.

ASC's faculty initiatives continued to support collaborative research between U-M scholars and colleagues based at institutions on the continent. This issue highlights progress from seed grant projects supported through the African Humanities and Heritage Initiative, including Karin Waidley and Jackson John Kitetu's Theatre for Development project in Kenya, which used arts-based engagement to open dialogue around climate change and gender-based violence, and Audrey Bennett, Fatima Cassim, and Adrie Haese's Photovoice project in South Africa, which explored cultural identity, cross-cultural competence, and inclusive design education. These projects reflect the kind of interdisciplinary, community-engaged scholarship ASC is proud to support.

The center also welcomed an outstanding Winter 2026 cohort of U-M African Presidential Scholars (UMAPS)

representing Nigeria, Zambia, Côte d'Ivoire, Tanzania, South Africa, Ethiopia, Ghana, and Rwanda. During their time at U-M, the scholars advanced research across the African Humanities and Heritage Initiative, African Social Research Initiative, STEM-Africa, and affiliated health research partnerships. Their semester included research collaborations with faculty hosts, colloquium presentations, guest lectures, lab and studio work, cultural outings, and community-building activities across campus and Southeast Michigan. The photo collage in this issue offers a glimpse into the vibrancy of their time at U-M and the intellectual community they built together.

Our public programming also continued to foster dialogue on Africa, the diaspora, and global issues. ASC hosted the first-ever African Women Film Festival that showcases the creativity and ingenuity of African women making films. The week-long event featured award-winning filmmakers from Ghana, Kenya, Cameroon, South Africa, Senegal, and Nigeria. ASC also supported film screenings, conferences, student cultural programs, research presentations, and community events that brought together students, faculty, visiting scholars, alumni, and public audiences. These gatherings are central to ASC's role as a connector across disciplines, communities, and geographies.

As we look ahead, ASC is also entering a new phase of institutional planning and fundraising. The future of Title VI funding remains uncertain, and the center is preparing for a 10-year transition period in which U-M will assume sole responsibility for funding the UMAPS program. These realities make philanthropy, partnership, and institu-

tional support more important than ever. The work featured in this issue shows what is possible when students, faculty, staff, alumni, and donors invest in African studies.

I am deeply grateful to the ASC staff whose work makes these programs possible: Marwa Hassan, academic program specialist; Teyei Pam, outreach and program coordinator, Raquel Buckley, communications manager, Nataša Gruden-Alajbegovic, business manager; and Basma Emam, administrative coordinator. Their dedication, creativity, and care are at the heart of the center's daily work. I also thank our associate director, Pam Jagger; our postdoctoral intern, Marlotte DeJong; our faculty associates; student partners; visiting scholars; alumni; donors; and collaborators across Africa and the diaspora for continuing to strengthen ASC's mission.

This issue of *Alliances* is full of stories that remind us why African studies matters. It matters because language opens doors to deeper cultural understanding. It matters because research partnerships can address urgent global challenges. It matters because students need spaces where their histories, identities, and futures are recognized. It matters because Africa and its diasporas are central to the world we study, teach, and inhabit.

Thank you for being part of the African Studies Center community. I hope the stories in this issue inspire you to stay connected, share our work, and support the next chapter of ASC.

Omolade Adunbi, PhD

*Director, African Studies Center
Professor, Anthropology, Afroamerican
and African Studies, and Law*

Thank you for supporting ASC!

This year, the African Studies Center continued to build momentum around philanthropy, donor stewardship, and direct student support. Through Giving Bluesday, weekly donor reporting, and ASC's student funding programs, the center strengthened its ability to expand Africa-focused learning, research, internships, language study, and professional development opportunities for U-M students.

A major highlight of the year was ASC's Giving Bluesday campaign, which exceeded its donor participation goal. With 25 donors contributing, ASC reached 250% of its 10-donor goal and raised \$4,186 in support of the Center's work. This strong showing reflects the continued commitment of ASC's community, including faculty, staff, alumni, students, parents, and friends of the Center.

Donor support helps make ASC's student-centered mission possible. This year, ASC funded 29 student research and internship projects totaling \$31,000. These awards supported undergraduate, master's, doctoral, and professional students pursuing Africa-focused work across a wide range of disciplines, including environmental justice, public

health, anthropology, history, architecture and urban planning, linguistics, nursing, education, and African studies. Funded projects included field research, archival work, public health initiatives, environmental studies, museum and arts internships, community-engaged projects, and global health placements.

ASC-supported student projects took place across Ghana, Uganda, Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal, South Sudan, South Africa, Algeria, Morocco, Madagascar, Cameroon, Rwanda, Lesotho, and other transnational sites. Together, these projects reflect the breadth of student interest in Africa and the importance of flexible funding that allows students to pursue meaningful research, internships, and applied learning opportunities connected to the continent.

Beyond research and internship support, ASC also invested in students through language scholarships, conference travel grants, emergency hardship grants, tuition support, student research funding, and graduate prize awards. These funds help reduce financial barriers for students, support African language learning, enable students to present their work at scholarly conferences, and recognize outstanding

Africa-focused scholarship.

The weekly African Studies gift downloads also show the importance of consistent donor stewardship throughout the year. These reports help ASC track gifts, recognize supporters, and better understand the breadth of its donor community. Together, the weekly donor records, Giving Bluesday results, and student funding outcomes demonstrate that ASC's fundraising success is not limited to a single campaign; it reflects ongoing investment from a growing network of supporters who believe in the Center's role as a hub for Africa-informed scholarship, teaching, and engagement.

ASC is especially grateful to the donors whose generosity strengthens programs that connect U-M with scholars, students, and partners across Africa. Their support advances faculty research, student learning, African language instruction, curriculum development, and multilateral partnerships between U-M and African institutions.

A sincere thank you to our generous donors for their continued support. Without you, our work would not be possible.





Group photo of participants at the first African Wind Band Pedagogy Workshop in Ghana. Organized by Winter 2022 UMAPS alumnus John-Doe Drodzro.



Fall 2025 UMAPS meetup in Rwanda. Left to right: Christian Kwisanga (Rwanda), Folakemi Ogungbe (Nigeria) and Charles Gafita (Rwanda).



ASC Director Omolade Adunbi (middle) with some UMAPS alumni at the 2026 Lagos Studies Association (LSA) conference in Lagos State, Nigeria



A Reflection on the 2025 African Women Film Festival in Ann Arbor, Michigan

The African Women Film Festival is much more than an event for us—it's a reminder of how powerful film can be in bringing forward stories that often go unheard. Our vision for the festival was an event that helps to create space for African women filmmakers to shape their own narratives, push back against one-dimensional portrayals, and build connections that stretch across borders and generations.



Putting together this year's festival was a big task but also an incredibly exciting one. During the three day festival, the following films were screened: *The Burning Field* by Anita Afonu, *Standing on Their Shoulders* by Xoliswa Sithole, *MWEM FO*, *My Queen Mothers Shadow* by Marthe Djilo Kamga and Frieda Ekotto, *Henna* by Sophia Muhammed, *Dark Side of Glory: Death in the Heartlands* by Sarah Ayitso Owendi, *Sista* by Biodun Stephen, *Iromi* by Ronke Odusanya and Money, *Freedom, A Story of CFA Franc* by Katy Léna N'diaye. Selecting the films to be screened meant diving into a growing world of African women's cinema—from well-known directors who have paved the way for a younger generation to newer filmmakers experimenting with bold ideas and approaches. Every film selected wasn't just strong on its own terms; it reflected our commitment to showing the range of African women's lives and perspectives. These stories move between cities and rural areas, negotiate old and new worlds, and resist being reduced to any generic formula.

Alongside the screenings, five panel discussions gave the festival its intellectual backbone. The opening panel, "Women Making Films in Africa: Challenges and Opportunities," moderated by Kelly Askew of the University of Michigan, brought together Xoliswa Sithole, Sarah Ayitso, Anita Afonu, Biodun Stephen, and Ronke Odusanya to discuss the realities of building a filmmaking career on the continent. That same afternoon, "Toxic Circuits: Uncovering the Global Afterlives of E-Waste Through the Lens of Films," moderated by Carina Ray, paired the screening of *The Burning Field* with a guided discussion of e-waste's health and environmental toll in Ghana and beyond, and the community action needed to address it.

Day two opened with "Preserving History: Women's Activism and the Power of Storytelling in African Films," moderated by Henrike Florusbosch with panelists Carmela Garritano, Rejoice Abutsa, Xoliswa Sithole, Eyerusalem Ayele, and Folakemi Ogungbe.

The conversation traced the legacy of women's activism and the ways storytelling preserves history, while also naming the structural and cultural barriers, including distribution challenges and gendered expectations, that women in the industry continue to navigate. That afternoon, "Filmmaking in Africa: The Nollywood Example," moderated by Karen Waidley, turned to the mechanics of the industry itself with panelists Folakemi Ogungbe, Ronke Odusanya, Sophia Muhammed, and Biodun Stephen.

The festival's final day paired two forward-looking conversations. "Building Bridges, Making Movies: Africa Connects to Its Diaspora," moderated by Sheila Murphy, featured Mahen Bonetti, Biodun Stephen, Sophia Muhammed, and Katy Léna N'diaye in a discussion of how African cinema bridges cultures and builds transnational solidarity. And "Technologies, Artificial Intelligence, and the Future of Filmmaking in Africa," moderated by Marlotte De Jong, brought together Vera Otiende, Xoliswa Sithole, Joyojeet



Pal, Sheila Murphy, and Joan Nwatu to consider where emerging technology fits into the future of African storytelling.

One of the most exciting aspects of the festival was the expansive dialogue that happened around the films and panels alike. The discussions after each screening and panel turned the theater and conference rooms into a shared space where students, community members, scholars, and filmmakers sat with vexed questions of power, representation, and storytelling. These conversations rarely ended when we left the room—they continued in hallways, offices, and group chats long after the festival ended.

Having filmmakers present adds something you can't really replicate under other circumstances. Hearing directly about their creative choices, the challenges they face in a diverse and complex field of work, and what drives their work gave us a deeper appreciation of each film. Their presence was also a good reminder that festivals aren't just about showing films—they're also places where filmmakers find support, solidarity, and new collaborators in a field where many work under adverse conditions.

This year's festival also highlighted the ongoing obstacles African women

filmmakers face in getting their work funded, distributed, and taken seriously by mainstream outlets. As organizers, we saw the festival as one small way to push back against those barriers. The African Studies Center is committed to using its platform to help expand the audience for these and other films and to keep advocating for broader structural change to the benefit of African women filmmakers.

Looking forward, we're excited about where the festival is headed. The enthusiastic turnout and the richness of post-screening conversations revealed both the appetite for African women's cinema on campus and the desire for deeper engagement beyond viewing alone. Audience members repeatedly asked about opportunities to connect with the creative process behind filmmaking and to understand the industry landscapes these filmmakers navigate.

In response, we're exploring several directions for the next festival. We envision incorporating a short film showcase to spotlight emerging voices and provide a platform for filmmakers earlier in their careers. We're also strengthening our collaborations with organizations across campus and the wider community—from film studies and African diaspora groups



to women's collectives—to broaden our reach and ensure the festival reflects the diverse interests of the university and broader community. Additionally, we're developing plans for professional development workshops that could cover topics like documentary production, film criticism, distribution pathways, or funding landscapes for African women filmmakers, creating space for aspiring filmmakers and scholars to build practical skills alongside their engagement with the films themselves. We hope that each year brings in a wider mix of attendees and more interest from both scholars and the general public. We're especially grateful to partners like Black Camera, whose dedication to documenting and analyzing Black and African cinema ensures these films receive the thoughtful attention they deserve.

Ultimately, this festival belongs to everyone who made it possible—the filmmakers who trusted us with their work, the audiences who showed up, the scholars and critics who treated these films with care, and the students who left feeling more inspired to tell their own stories. We're honored to help bring this community together and can't wait for the next edition, where new films will push us, move us, and remind us why this work matters. 🌍





Mihalcea and Peterson Named Fellows of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences

Rada Mihalcea and Derek Peterson, University of Michigan faculty members with ties to the African Studies Center, have been elected fellows of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences, one of the most distinguished honors in American scholarly life. They join a 2026 class of 252 fellows drawn from academia, the arts, public policy, journalism, and science, each recognized for exceptional and lasting contributions to society.

Rada Mihalcea is the Janice M. Jenkins Professor of Computer Science and Engineering and director of the Michigan Artificial Intelligence Lab. Her research spans natural language processing, large language models, and computational social science, with particular attention to cross-cultural and cross-lingual models, fairness, interpretability, and the responsible deployment of AI. She leads multiple interdisciplinary initiatives at the intersection of AI, health, education, and social impact, and has developed widely adopted datasets and computational methods used by researchers around the world.

Derek Peterson, the Ali Mazrui Collegiate Professor of History and African Studies, has spent more than fifteen years in immersive engagement with eastern Africa, its histories, its archives,

and its people. A historian by training, he has built a body of work that bridges rigorous scholarship and public purpose, producing more than ten books and edited volumes, including his most recent, *A Popular History of Idi Amin's Uganda*, published in 2025.

Central to Peterson's work, and to his relationship with the African Studies Center, is a long-running archival initiative in Uganda. Working with colleagues over the course of fifteen years, Peterson has salvaged, organized, and digitized endangered government archives that might otherwise have been lost, making them accessible to researchers and citizens across the region and around the world. Peterson's election follows a series of major recognitions: a Guggenheim Fellowship in 2016, election as a Fellow of the British Academy that same year, and a MacArthur Fellowship in 2017.

Moll and Maffioli Receive Promotions

The University of Michigan Board of Regents approved promotions for two African Studies Center associates at its May 21 meeting, recognizing their important scholarly contributions that span anthropology, global health, and the study of Africa and its diaspora.

Yasmin Moll brings to her tenure promotion a body of work that sits at the intersection of religion, media, and poli-

tics in the Middle East and North Africa. Her first book, published by Stanford University Press, traces the social life of Islamic television production in Cairo against the backdrop of the 2011 Tahrir Square uprising — offering a nuanced alternative to conventional “Islamist versus secularist” frameworks for understanding religion and politics in the Arab world. Her current research turns to questions of indigeneity, race, and heritage among Nubians in Egypt. Moll is also an accomplished visual ethnographer; her animated short film *Hanina/Homesick*, which explores Nubian displacement through archival ethnographic photography, was an official selection of the 2024 Annecy, Margaret Mead, and Arab American National Museum film festivals. Professor Moll has been promoted to associate professor of anthropology, with tenure.

Elisa M. Maffioli is an economist whose research addresses the health challenges facing poor households across low-income countries, with a particular focus on Africa and Southeast Asia. Drawing on randomized controlled trials, quasi-experimental methods, and cost-effectiveness analysis, her work examines the impact of public health interventions on infectious disease control and maternal and child health. Professor Maffioli has been promoted to associate professor of health management and policy, with tenure, and associate professor of global public health, without tenure.

ASC Faculty Associate Kelly Askew Advances Clean Water Access in Rural Tanzania

Access to clean water remains a daily challenge for many rural communities in Tanzania, where families may travel long distances to reach reliable water sources. The University of Michigan Tanzania Solar Water Access Project is helping communities address that challenge through solar-powered water systems that bring clean water closer to homes.

The work includes Kelly Askew, an African Studies Center faculty associate and U-M professor of anthropology and Afroamerican and African studies, whose research in Tanzania has long focused on rural energy and water access. Askew has worked in Tanzania and Kenya for more than three decades and has collaborated with Tanzanian researchers and organizations on efforts to better understand how renewable energy can support rural communities.

Solar-powered pumping systems offer an alternative to water systems dependent on diesel fuel or unreliable electrical grids. By using Tanzania’s abundant solar resources, these systems can reduce operating costs while improving access to water for households, agriculture, and livestock. Related renewable-energy initiatives in rural Tanzania have also emphasized local training and

community involvement to help sustain the systems over time.

For communities where collecting water has traditionally required significant time and travel, bringing water closer to home can have effects well beyond convenience. Improved access can reduce the daily burden of water collection and create more time for education, farming, caregiving, and other activities.

The work reflects Askew’s broader commitment to collaborative research that connects renewable energy, rural development, and community priorities in Tanzania.

→ Read the full story at news.umich.edu/in-rural-tanzania-solar-powered-pumps-bring-clean-water-closer-to-home



U-M African Language Instructors Represent ASC at 2026 ALTA Conference

University of Michigan (U-M) African language instructors participated in the 2026 African Language Teachers Association (ALTA) Conference, held April 9–11 at Princeton University in New Jersey. The conference brought together African language educators, scholars, and language resource specialists from universities across the United States and beyond to exchange ideas on teaching, learning, research, and the future of African language pedagogy.

This year's conference theme, "Reimagining African Language Pedagogy in the Digital Age," offered timely opportunities for instructors to reflect on how emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence, are reshaping language teaching and learning. The pre-conference workshop, sponsored by the National African Language Resource Center at Indiana University, focused on artificial intelligence in African languages, with particular attention to the underrepresentation of African languages in new technological tools and the need for African language instructors to engage these tools critically, ethically, and creatively.

U-M was represented by a team of African language instructors, including Gabriel Ayoola, Magdalyne Jakait, Marko Mwipopo, Motunrayo Olajumoke Adesiyun, and Mawazo Silomba. Together, the team delivered a group presentation on their first round of Swahili and Yoruba teaching and learning material development at the University of Michigan. The project, completed during the summer and fall of 2025, focused on developing online instructional materials for beginner-level Swahili and Yoruba. The team plans to make these materials available as Open Educational Resources, expanding access for teachers and learners beyond U-M.

The presentation drew strong attendance and generated meaningful discussion during the question-and-answer session. Audience members, including African language instructors from other institutions, offered constructive feedback and engaged the U-M team in conversation about the design, use, and future potential of the Swahili and Yoruba materials. These exchanges provided valuable insight as the team continues to refine resources that

support effective, accessible, and culturally grounded language instruction.

Gabriel Ayoola also played a highly visible leadership role throughout the conference as president of ALTA. He delivered opening and welcome remarks during the pre-conference workshop and the main conference, welcomed attendees during the awards dinner, and read the citation honoring retired Professor Lioba Moshi, a distinguished scholar of linguistics and African languages. Ayoola also led a panel discussion featuring African language scholars and educators from institutions including Howard University, the University of Georgia, Columbia University, Michigan State University, and the National African Language Resource Center at Indiana University.

For U-M instructors, the conference was also an important space for professional development, networking, and collaboration. Attendees participated in plenary talks, parallel sessions, and discussions on the role of AI and digital technologies in African language instruction. Sessions emphasized the importance of preparing instructors to use new



technologies in materials development, classroom instruction, assessment, and student feedback, while also helping students navigate AI tools responsibly.

The conference featured keynote and plenary speakers working at the forefront of African language advancement, including Caroline Asiimwe, executive secretary of the East African Kiswahili Commission, whose work supports the promotion of Kiswahili across national, regional, Pan-African, and global contexts. Participants also engaged with scholars addressing the future of African language education, including the use of technology and AI in teaching African languages.

The 2026 ALTA Conference offered U-M African language instructors an opportunity to showcase ASC-supported language innovation, strengthen professional networks, and learn from colleagues advancing African language teaching across the field. Their participation reflects ASC's continued commitment to African language engagement, pedagogical innovation, and the development of resources that support students, instructors, and broader communities of African language learners. 🌐

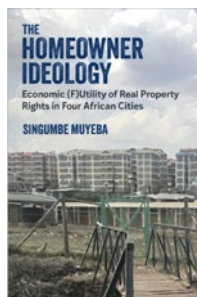


New Titles Published in the African Perspectives Book Series 2025-2026

Published by the University of Michigan Press, the African Perspectives series continues to highlight field-based, interdisciplinary research that challenges conventional Africanist scholarship. It includes work by both established and emerging scholars and spans disciplines such as anthropology, political science, public health, urban studies, and literary criticism. Series editors Kelly Askew (University of Michigan), Laura Fair (Columbia University) and Pamila Gupta (University of the Free State, South Africa) are committed to supporting scholarship that is methodologically rigorous, theoretically grounded and engaged with contemporary issues on the continent.

The Homeowner Ideology: Economic (F)Utility of Real Property Rights in Four African Cities

by Singumbe Muyebe
(March 2025)

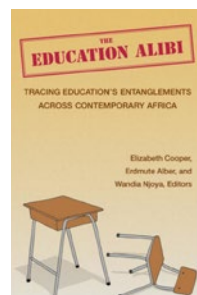


This book challenges the belief that homeownership reduces poverty in sub-Saharan Africa. Drawing on research from Nairobi, Cape Town, Lusaka, and Luanda, Muyebe argues that formal property rights often produce “structured idle capital,” legally held assets with limited financial utility. Rather than empowering the urban poor, these rights can reinforce existing inequalities. The book examines cultural, familial, and state factors that uphold the homeownership model despite its shortcomings. By questioning dominant development frameworks, Muyebe offers a critical perspective on housing policies and their implications for equitable urban development in Africa.

investigates overlooked dimensions of Islamization in Senegambia, focusing on the Middle Casamance region where Senegal, The Gambia, and Guinea-Bissau meet. Dramé argues that historians have long overlooked the contributions of this region and its Mandinka Muslim settlements to the development of Islam, despite centers of Islamic education having existed there centuries before the Sufi and Jihad movements of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Drawing on archival documents, oral history, travelers’ accounts, and the Arabic text Pakao al-Qurano, Dramé reframes debates about the institutionalization of Islam in Senegambia geographically, chronologically, and thematically, showing how religious spaces were negotiated and transformed through intermarriage, Qur’anic education, and jihad. Dramé is Associate Professor of History at Dominican University.

The Education Alibi: Tracing Education's Entanglements Across Contemporary Africa

edited by Elizabeth Cooper, Erdmute Alber, and Wandia Njoya (2025)

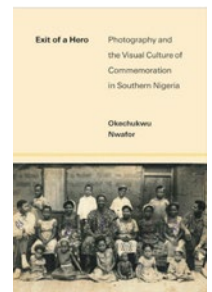


Education is often promoted as the key to Africa’s future in global development discourse, yet this edited volume asks whether, while claiming to do one thing,

education has also been doing another. Drawing on ethnographic research and critical analysis from across the continent, contributors trace how the concept of the “alibi” reveals the ways institutions and actors use education to divert scrutiny from other effects — depoliticizing poverty, responsabilizing communities, and reproducing economic, racialized, gendered, urban-rural, linguistic, and religious inequalities even as they claim to remedy them. Cooper is Associate Professor at the School for International Studies at Simon Fraser University, Alber is Professor and Chair of Social Anthropology at the University of Bayreuth, and Njoya is Associate Professor of Literature at Daystar University in Kenya.

Exit of a Hero: Photography and the Visual Culture of Commemoration in Southern Nigeria

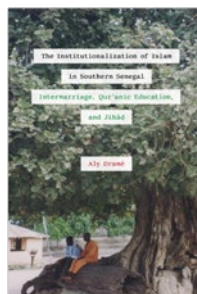
by Okechukwu Nwafor (May 2026)



This book explores the cultural, political and socio-economic significance of photography in commemorative practices in southern Nigeria, from the nineteenth century to today. Through an analysis of funeral posters, memorial booklets and social media posts, Nwafor traces the evolution of the heroic image and its role in Igbo public life. He argues that visual canonization transforms the deceased into saintly

The Institutionalization of Islam in Southern Senegal: Intermarriage, Qur'anic Education, and Jihad

by Aly Dramé
(July 2025)

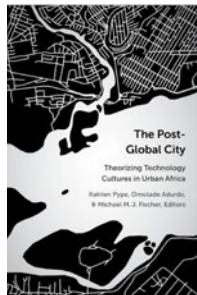


Weaving together oral and written sources, this book

figures who transcend personal flaws. In reclaiming these idealized images, social media helps reconstitute the Igbo public sphere as a space where heroic memory persists. Nwafor reveals how photographic memorialization expresses enduring aspirations and collective imagination.

The Post-Global City: Theorizing Technology Cultures in Urban Africa

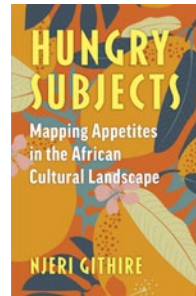
edited by Katrien Pype, Omolade Adunbi, and Michael M.J. Fischer
(March 2026)



This edited volume opens a new field of inquiry into technological developments in urban Africa, examining how city residents build and use technologies and networks to operate around, under, and beyond the state and international order. Countering “Africa rising” narratives that frame the continent’s tech culture as derivative of the Global North, contributors argue that African cities are generative laboratories of contemporary technological and moral life — from megaprojects like geothermal and hydroelectric plants to networked startups run by women vendors and youth-designed platforms that circumvent state and patriarchal hierarchies. Pype is Associate Professor of Social and Cultural Anthropology at KU Leuven, Adunbi is Director of the African Studies Center and Professor of Anthropology and Afroamerican and African Studies at the University of Michigan, and Fischer is Andrew W. Mellon Professor in the Humanities and Professor of Anthropology and Science and Technology Studies at MIT.

Hungry Subjects: Mapping Appetites in the African Cultural Landscape

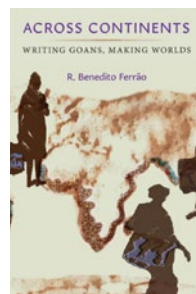
by Njeri Githire
(October 2026)



This book examines how food and eating function as sites of storytelling, resistance, and meaning-making across African and African diasporic literature. Drawing on coming-of-age narratives in English, French, and Portuguese, Githire pushes back against media depictions of Africa defined by hunger and scarcity, situating the continent’s relationship to food within a broader historical and political context. Moving through chapters on subversive appetites, cannibalism as metaphor, and the mapping of national landscapes through cuisine, the book argues that eating and not-eating are never simply personal acts but are bound up with questions of power, belonging, and identity. Githire, Associate Professor of African American & African Studies at the University of Minnesota–Twin Cities, offers a rare interdisciplinary bridge between literary criticism and food scholarship, expanding a field that has largely remained confined to the social sciences.

Across Continents

by R. Benedito Ferrão
(August 2026)



Ferrão’s book uses Goan literary characters and subjectivity as a lens for rethinking the limits of postcolonial theory, particularly its tendency to overlook the afterlives of Portuguese colonialism. Tracing

figures displaced between Asia, Africa, Europe, and North America across a range of novels, the book considers how Portuguese and British colonial histories intersected and diverged, and how Goan characters’ experiences of nation, statecraft, and political upheaval offer a comparative window onto marginalized subjectivity across multiple continents. In doing so, Ferrão puts postcolonial literature into dialogue with Afro-Asian studies, opening new ground for understanding colonial displacement beyond more familiar national or regional frames. Publication of this volume was funded in part by the African Studies Center at the University of Michigan.

Out for Glamour in Africa: A History of Black Urban Femininities in Drum Magazine

by Wanjirũ G. Mbure
(August 2026)



Mbure’s book turns to Drum magazine, one of the most influential publications in Africa during the independence era, to examine how Black women used its pages to construct new visions of urban femininity and political voice. Attending closely to the magazine’s East, West, and South African editions, the book traces what Mbure calls “femme urbAfri-cana,” showing how women shaped Drum’s content as more than passive readers or subjects of the male gaze. Combining detailed archival research with close visual analysis, Mbure reveals glamour as a political and social tool through which Black women navigated colonial and postcolonial history. Mbure is Associate Professor of English and Film & Media Studies and Senior Associate Dean for Academic Culture & Faculty Development at William & Mary.

→ More info on the book series can be found at press.umich.edu/Series/A/African-Perspectives

Theatre for Development Project Builds Dialogue Around Climate Change and Gender-Based Violence in Northern Kenya



With support from the African Humanities and Heritage Initiative Seed Grant, **Karin Waidley** (University of Michigan) and Jackson John Kitetu (Kabarak University) advanced a collaborative project using Theatre for Development to address the compounding effects of climate change on sexual and gender-based violence in northern Kenya.

The project, titled Using Theatre for Development in Rural Kenya to Address Compounding Factors of Climate Change on High Rates of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence, brought together a multidisciplinary team of scholars, artists, students, community organizers, and local advocates in Kenya. Programming took place September 1–7, 2025, across Nairobi, Nakuru, and Lodwar, with central community engagement activities held in Lodwar, Turkana County.

The project built on Waidley's prior work in Lodwar while establishing a new partnership with Kitetu, an environmental science professor at Kabarak University. The team also included U-M student Myah Bridgewater, project coordinator Fedari Oyagi, lead teaching artist Esther Wanjiku Gicheru, media documentarian Lungashi "Biko" Nyongesa, and local Turkana liaison Alice Ekal.

Through Theatre for Development workshops, community dialogue, music, movement, storytelling, and reflective discussion, the project invited women's

collectives and advocates to explore how climate change affects daily life, family relationships, gender norms, and community safety. Participants discussed the ways drought, resource scarcity, long distances traveled for water and fuel, pressures on livestock and employment, and limited recognition of women's local knowledge can intensify existing gender inequities.

"It reminded me how powerfully theatre allows people to share experiences that might otherwise stay unspoken."

Rather than approaching sexual and gender-based violence as a private or isolated issue, the workshops created space for participants to discuss lived experiences collectively and creatively. The arts-based model helped reduce shame and stigma, encouraged social connection, and affirmed women's expertise in navigating climate-related challenges. The team found that theatre offered a particularly effective way to build trust across language and cultural differences while making difficult conversations more accessible.

The project also strengthened scholarly and institutional relationships. Waidley and the Kenyan team visited Kabarak University, where they met with university leadership and engaged colleagues in conversations about environmental justice, climate change, and future collaboration. Kitetu later joined the Lodwar workshops, contributing environmental science expertise while engaging directly with local women and community advocates.

The seed grant helped lay the foundation for future work. The team identified the need for longer-term, more locally sustained programming, especially in rural communities where participants face significant barriers to travel and to being away from domestic responsibilities. Future phases may include training local advocates and artists in Theatre for Development methods, expanding engagement with local leaders and policymakers, and developing more





consistent programming that can support community-driven prevention and intervention strategies.

Reflecting on the project, U-M student Myah Bridgewater noted the power of theatre to center participants' voices: "Each day we opened with theatre games, singing, and dancing. It reminded me how powerfully theatre allows people to share experiences that might otherwise stay unspoken."

For the project team, the work reaffirmed the importance of collaboration, local knowledge, language learning, and joy as core parts of community-engaged research. Even while addressing serious issues, participants built connection through song, dance, meals, shared laughter, and collective imagination. The project demonstrates how humanities-based methods can deepen understanding of climate justice, gender equity, and community resilience in Africa-focused collaborative research. 🌐



Photovoice Project in South Africa Explores Culture, Identity, and Design Education

A collaborative seed grant supported by the African Humanities and Heritage Initiative brought together Audrey Bennett (University of Michigan) and Fatima Cassim and Adrie Haese (University of Pretoria) for a project exploring cultural identity, cross-cultural competence, and inclusive design education in South Africa.

The project, titled *Creating Cross-Cultural Competence: Using Photovoice to Explore Cultural Identity Among Diverse Information Design Students in Pretoria, South Africa*, was developed within the University of Pretoria's BA in information design program. It engaged students in Information Design 200 and Imaging and Visualization 201, taught by Cassim and Haese, with a guest lecture by Bennett.

Using Photovoice as a participatory design methodology, the project invited students to examine their own cultural identities through photography, personal narrative, and dialogue. Students produced a series of five photographs responding to guided prompts and paired each image with written reflections. They also visited the DITSONG National Museum of Cultural History in Pretoria, where they engaged with exhibitions on South Africa's cultural diversity.

The project was grounded in the idea that visual storytelling can serve as both personal testimony and shared inquiry. Through individual reflection and group discussion, students analyzed how culture shapes identity, belonging, creative practice, and relationships across difference. Their photo-narratives opened conversations about family traditions, religious values, aesthetic expression, sensory memory, cultural adaptation, and the complexity of identity in a diverse classroom.

The project also challenged traditional classroom hierarchies by giving students an active voice in conversations about curriculum, design, and cultural competence. Rather than treating students as passive recipients of knowledge, the project positioned them as co-creators of meaning whose lived experiences could inform more inclusive pedagogical practice.

As part of the collaboration, Bennett delivered a virtual guest lecture titled "Interactive Aesthetics: Mitigating Cultural Dissonance in Cross-Culturally Situated Design." Her lecture introduced students to interactive aesthetics, a concept she developed to help designers address cultural dissonance in collaborative and cross-cultural design processes. The lecture connected the students' Photovoice work to broader questions about cultural values, interpretation, visual communication, and design justice.

The broader project expanded beyond Photovoice into two additional design assignments. In one, students reinterpreted their cultural narratives through conceptual illustration, using metaphor, abstraction, and synthesis to express critical perspectives. In another, students developed editorial design manifestos responding to the question: What does a design practice of mutual respect and inclusivity look like? Together, the three projects encouraged students to use design as a tool for reflection, critique, and social change.

The work culminated in a student exhibition at the University of Pretoria's gallery 2-1 from June 6–26, 2025. The exhibition shared students' perspectives with a wider audience and continued the project's central goal of facilitating

dialogue around culture, identity, and cross-cultural understanding.

Student reflections underscored the project's impact. Participants described feeling heard, gaining a deeper sense of belonging, becoming more aware of their peers' experiences, and recognizing the importance of safe spaces for cross-cultural conversation. Several students noted that photography helped them understand culture not as something distant or fixed, but as something embedded in everyday life, relationships, memory, and community.

By bringing together participatory research, design education, and cross-cultural dialogue, the project demonstrates how visual methods can support more inclusive and reflective learning environments. It also highlights the value of U-M and African institutional partnerships in advancing humanities-centered approaches to pedagogy, creativity, and cultural understanding. ✨

Building Research Writing Capacity in Nigeria: The University of Lagos Writing for Publication Project

During his 2023 UMAPS residency at the University of Michigan, **Dr. Sola Edagbami** attended a Writing for Publication seminar taught by Dr. Christine Feak. This experience changed how he thought about research writing support at his home institution, the University of Lagos (UNILAG). Returning to UNILAG, he set out to bring the same opportunity to his colleagues. With support from a STEM-Africa seed grant, he leads developed and delivered an intensive, 20-hour Writing for Publication workshop centered on how to strategically frame arguments, navigate the expectations of highly ranked journals, and position local research for global readerships.

Although the leads had initially discussed an online workshop to maximize participation, they ultimately agreed that online attendance should be an option rather than the format. They believed that bringing scholars together in person would better support discussion, collaboration, and community building. The workshop brought together more than 40 participants from across STEM, the Humanities, and the Social Sciences, ranging from PhD students and Lecturers to Professors, with an additional 15 joining via Zoom. As participants shared writing experiences and disciplinary perspectives, they gained an appreciation for how research writing conventions differ across disciplines.

The workshop took a data-informed genre approach that emphasized building arguments and clarifying the difference between writing a report (knowledge telling) and writing a strong persuasive paper (knowledge creation), a distinction that is rarely explicitly taught but underlies successful research writing. The workshop also emphasized motivating research in the introduc-



tion and moving beyond simple gap statements (e.g., “however, few studies have investigated ...”) to highlighting a tension or puzzle that existing research cannot explain. The final session of the workshop involved workshopping four versions of a paper: a first draft, a third draft, a late pre-submission draft, and the published version. Participants applied the writing strategies discussed throughout the workshop and observed how the argument in a paper evolved through multiple revisions. After the workshop, participants reported a new ability to identify and apply the rhetorical strategies used by successful authors. As one wrote, the guidance would help them “map out a solid plan” for both their PhD and their career beyond it. Another, in a one-on-one meeting, said the workshop had transformed how she thinks about her own writing; she now realized that “her voice belongs in her work.”

The influence of the workshop extended beyond participants’ own research writing. It also introduced many participants to a genre-based approach to teaching writing in which session activities guided them to discover how rhetorical choices shape persuasive research arguments. Several participants commented that they hoped to adopt this discovery approach in their own teaching. To support future research writing workshops and mentoring, participants have access to a comprehensive online repository of workshop materials, available to anyone with the URL. The repository includes slides, research texts for analysis, data-informed

instructional materials, writing activities, and other resources developed specifically for the Nigerian higher education context. By making these materials freely available, the project leaves behind a foundation for research writing at UNILAG while strengthening the institutional partnership with U-M. ✕



2026 Collaborative Faculty Seed Grants

The African Studies Center's disciplinary initiatives, the African Humanities and Heritage Initiative, African Social Research Initiative, and STEM-Africa, annually award seed grants to support research conducted collaboratively between U-M researchers and colleagues from institutions on the continent. For the 2026 academic year, we are supporting three projects that reflect bold, interdisciplinary approaches to surgical capacity-building, cultural heritage preservation, and gender equity across the continent. This year's projects span Ghana, Sudan, Nigeria, and South Africa.

Congratulations to the research teams who secured support for their important work!

STEM-AFRICA INITIATIVE

Minimally Invasive Gynecologic Surgical Capacity-Building among Gynecologic Surgeons in Ghana

MICHIGAN-BASED RESEARCH LEAD:

Dhanalakshmi Thiyagarajan

AFRICA-BASED RESEARCH LEAD:

Stephen Ansa-Asamoah, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), Komfo Anokye Teaching Hospital (KATH)

LOCATION:

Kumasi, Ghana

In Kumasi, Ghana, Dhanalakshmi Thiyagarajan and collaborators are examining the development of minimally invasive gynecologic surgery capacity at Komfo Anokye Teaching Hospital. While minimally invasive surgery is widely available in high-income countries, cost and training barriers continue to limit access in many low- and middle-income settings. This project will use interviews and surgical patient data to evaluate how the KATH surgical team has expanded from intermittently scheduled simple procedures to performing complex cases twice weekly. The study aims to identify key factors that supported this growth and generate lessons for tailoring gynecologic surgical capacity-building models across similar health systems.

AFRICAN HUMANITIES AND HERITAGE INITIATIVE

Archaeology and Cultural Heritage Training in Wartime: University of Michigan and Al Neelain University, Sudan

MICHIGAN-BASED RESEARCH LEAD:

Geoff Emberling

AFRICA-BASED RESEARCH LEAD:

Hamad Mohamed Hamdeen, *Al Neelain University*

LOCATION:

Jebel Barkal, Sudan

In Sudan, Geoff Emberling and Hamad Mohamed Hamdeen are responding to the severe impact of ongoing war on cultural heritage, archaeological training, and student learning. Their project will support a collaborative field training program for approximately 30 undergraduate and graduate archaeology students who remain in the country. Based at Jebel Barkal in northern Sudan, the three-week program will provide instruction in excavation, survey, mapping, GIS, and 3D documentation, while also engaging students in ongoing research, rescue excavation, and community-based heritage work. By combining humanitarian support with academic capacity-building, the project aims to preserve archaeological expertise and strengthen cultural heritage documentation during a period of extraordinary disruption.

AFRICAN SOCIAL RESEARCH INITIATIVE

Formative Study on Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence at Diverse Campuses and University-Affiliated Residence Halls in Ghana, Nigeria, and South Africa

MICHIGAN-BASED RESEARCH LEAD:

Lisa Fedina

AFRICA-BASED RESEARCH LEAD:

Sinegugu Evidence Duma, *University of KwaZulu-Natal*

LOCATION:

Ghana, Nigeria, and South Africa

Across university settings in Ghana, Nigeria, and South Africa, Lisa Fedina and a transnational research team are studying technology-facilitated gender-based violence among undergraduate students. The project responds to a critical gap in data on student experiences of digital harassment, abuse, and harm in sub-Saharan African higher education contexts. Through survey development, pilot testing, and trauma-informed interviews with survivors, the team will examine the prevalence, nature, and impact of technology-facilitated gender-based violence across four university settings. The study will support the development of a region-specific campus climate assessment tool and lay the groundwork for future digital safety interventions, policy reforms, and externally funded research.





WINTER 2026 UMAPS COHORT ON THE DETROIT RIVERWALK

Winter 2026 UMAPS scholars enjoy a sunny outing along the Detroit Riverwalk, taking in the city's waterfront and landmarks including the Detroit Princess riverboat and the Gateway to Freedom monument.



LEARNING BEYOND CAMPUS

The cohort participated in cultural and educational visits across Southeast Michigan, including tours of the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History, the Ford Rouge Factory, and the Henry Ford Museum of American Innovation.

UMAPS Winter 2026 Cohort Research, Community, and Discovery at U-M

The African Studies Center welcomed a dynamic Winter 2026 cohort of U-M African Presidential Scholars representing Nigeria, Côte d'Ivoire, Tanzania, South Africa, Ethiopia, Ghana, and Rwanda. During their time at the University of Michigan, the scholars advanced research across the African Humanities and Heritage Initiative, African Social Research Initiative, STEM-Africa, and affiliated health research partnerships. Their projects connected them with faculty hosts across campus and supported work in fields including public health, engineering, data science, environmental research, architecture, anthropology, gender studies, and the humanities.

Beyond their individual research placements, the cohort built a vibrant scholarly community through shared cultural outings, research exchanges, campus engagements, and informal gatherings. Scholars visited the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American

History, explored the Detroit Riverwalk, toured the Ford Rouge Factory, and spent time at the Henry Ford Museum of American Innovation. These experiences offered opportunities to learn more about Michigan's histories of industry, migration, innovation, and African American cultural life.

Throughout the semester, scholars also shared their expertise with the broader U-M community. The Winter 2026 UMAPS Research Colloquium Series highlighted the range of projects underway across the cohort, while several scholars participated in guest lectures, conferences, poster presentations, and collaborative research activities with their faculty hosts. From laboratory work and design studios to classrooms, museums, and community spaces, the cohort's semester reflected the full scope of UMAPS: rigorous scholarship, cross-cultural exchange, and lasting intellectual partnership.



RESEARCH COLLOQUIUM SERIES

The Winter 2026 UMAPS Research Colloquium Series allowed scholars to share their work, receive feedback, and engage with colleagues across disciplines.



BLACK HISTORY MONTH ENGAGEMENT

UMAPS scholars and the general public participated in ASC's Black History Month screening of *I Am Not Your Negro* and joined ASC Director Professor Omolade Adunbi and Professor Jason Young, Director of the Institute for the Humanities, for a fireside chat following the screening. The campus community reflected on race, history, and public memory.

SCHOLARS IN THE CLASSROOM AND BEYOND

UMAPS scholars extended their impact beyond their host departments through guest lectures, public presentations, and professional engagements. Highlights included Zainab Bello and Nuniyat Abebe guest lecturing at UM-Flint, and Brigitte Irankunda teaching future ob-gyns during a conference in Washington, D.C.



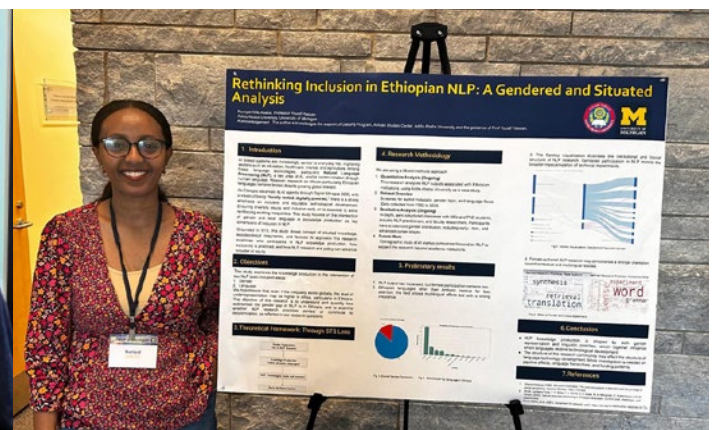


SOCCKER AND COMMUNITY-BUILDING

UMAPS scholars came together for indoor soccer games and informal gatherings throughout the semester, building friendships and community beyond their research appointments.

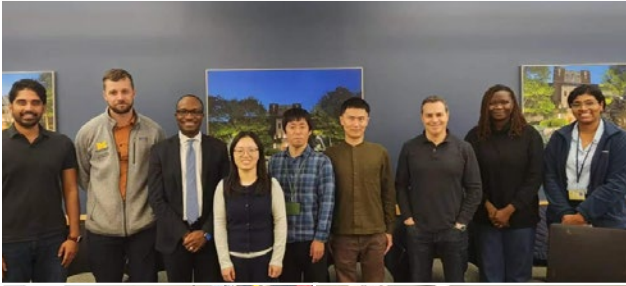
WINTER 2026 UMAPS LUNCH & CAMPUS CONNECTION

Scholars gathered for lunch with Oliwia Bosomtwe, creating space for conversation, reflection, and connection during their semester at U-M.



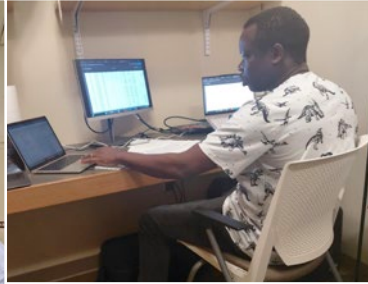
RECOGNIZING SCHOLARLY ACHIEVEMENT

Nuniyat Abebe received Best Poster recognition at NLP @ Michigan Day, reflecting the high caliber of research and engagement represented across the Winter 2026 UMAPS cohort.



RESEARCH IN ACTION

UMAPS scholars advance their research across U-M labs, studios, classrooms, and collaborative workspaces. Pictured moments include Tata Coulibaly with her host, Dr. Simpa Salami's lab team, Vanessa Mokwebo at work in the lab, Yetunde Ajayeoba operating research technology, Kassim Tawiah balancing a busy research schedule, Zainab Bello making use of Taubman College resources, and Bahati Kayaga with her U-M host Kelly Askew.



TAUBMAN AFRICAN ALLIANCE ENGAGEMENT

Zainab Bello took part in the Taubman African Alliance film screening and artist talk, joined by her U-M host Professor Łukasz Stanek in campus conversations about African art, architecture, and cultural production.



ASC UMAPS Visit to President Grasso



The director of the African Studies Center (ASC), Professor Omolade Adunbi, together with ASC staff and the Winter 2026 University of Michigan African Presidential Scholars (UMAPS) cohort, paid a courtesy visit to the office of University of Michigan President Domenico Grasso on Monday, May 4, 2026.

Introducing the ASC team and the Winter 2026 UMAPS cohort, Professor Adunbi thanked President Grasso for taking the time to welcome them and for the unwavering support the president's office has provided to the UMAPS program since its inception in 2009.

President Grasso expressed his delight in welcoming the Winter 2026 UMAPS scholars to the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, and to his office. In his remarks, he reaffirmed the office of the president's enthusiasm for the program and its scholars, noting that he was particularly impressed by the diversity of the cohort and the interdisciplinary nature of the UMAPS program, which he described as foundational to the University of Michigan's mission and values.

"Engaging with international scholars is always enlightening and rewarding. Michigan's ties with faculty from African nations strengthen and broaden disciplinary research and cultural understanding. It was a pleasure to interact with this year's scholars. Forever Go Blue!"

Speaking on behalf of the cohort, Dr. Tata Gniré Safiatou Coulibaly, principal investigator for Côte d'Ivoire for the iCCaRE initiative (Inclusive Cancer Care Equity) Project 5, conveyed deep appreciation to President Grasso and shared reflections on the impact of their fellowship experience:

"It is a privilege to meet with you today, and to express, on behalf of all UMAPS scholars, our sincere thanks for your support for the UMAPS program.

We have spent five months here at the University of Michigan, and it has been a truly meaningful experience for all of us. There is something distinctive about being in a place where questions are welcomed, perspectives are respected, and learning is approached as a shared effort.

This experience has been transformative beyond our research; it has

exposed us to a different academic culture and a broader intellectual and societal context, enriched us, and refined our approach to our work.

We are leaving with more than knowledge. We are leaving with new collaborations, renewed inspiration, and a strong commitment to excellence and innovation.

Please know how grateful we are for the opportunity to be part of the University of Michigan community. Thank you again, President Grasso, and to everyone who made this experience possible."

The visit underscored the strong partnership between the African Studies Center, the UMAPS program, and the Office of the President, and highlighted the university's ongoing commitment to supporting African scholars and fostering global academic collaboration. 🌐



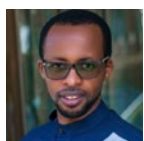
UMAPS Alumni Spotlight

Celebrating recent accomplishments, career moves, and activities of University of Michigan African Presidential Scholars program alumni and their continued contributions to scholarship, leadership, and innovation across the continent and beyond.



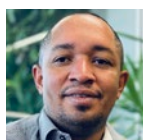
Marie Christine Arlette Bessomo Mvogo, Winter 2025 (Université de Douala, Cameroon) has published two articles

since her fellowship, with three additional articles and a book currently in the publication pipeline. She is in the process of acquiring the rank of Associate Professor. She also serves as a point of contact for scholarship opportunities at the University of Michigan — both at her home university and among the network of West African researchers she belongs to — and supervises the application process for prospective ASC/UMAPS candidates.



Jean Pierre Ngendahayo, UMAPS Winter 2023 (University of Rwanda, Kigali, Rwanda) published “Convergence Analysis

of Iterative Tikhonov Regularization Applied to an Inverse Heat Conduction Problem” in the *International Journal of Applied and Computational Mathematics*. The study provides a rigorous mathematical analysis of an iterative algorithm designed to estimate surface temperatures from interior measurements, a class of problem that is inherently complex to solve due to its instability. His work establishes the conditions under which the algorithm functions as a reliable, convergent method, supported by numerical simulations demonstrating its accuracy and efficiency.



Jean de Dieu Niyigena, Winter 2024 (University of Rwanda, Rwanda) has published two papers on misclassification probability methods for quadratic classifiers in *Sankhya B* and the *Journal of Statistical*

Computation and Simulation (2025), a study on meteorological factors and extreme COVID-19 infection in the *Rwanda Journal of Engineering, Science, Technology and Environment* (2025), and a stochastic modeling analysis of the COVID-19 pandemic in Rwanda in *Mathematics Open* (2024).



Benyin Adah Akande, UMAPS Winter 2024 (University of Calabar, Nigeria), published “Redefining Women’s

Participation in Secessionist Politics: A Study of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) Movement in South-East Nigeria” in the *Journal of Women, Politics and Policy*. Drawing on fieldwork in Aba and Onitsha, the article challenges the assumption that the IPOB movement is male-dominated, documenting the substantive, though largely unrecognized, roles women play within the organization. Akande argues that this invisibility reflects not only patriarchal structures but a deeper epistemological problem rooted in colonial and postcolonial definitions of political participation that have systematically excluded indigenous African frameworks.



Chinasa Abonyi, UMAPS Winter 2024 (University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria) published “Ecofeminist Belonging and Indigenous

Festivals: Women’s Role in Environmental Sustainability in Nsukka Igbo, Nigeria” in *African Identities*. Her study reveals how the decline of indigenous practices has contributed to ecological challenges like erosion and soil depletion, and argues for reclaiming traditional knowledge systems that empower women and promote environmental sustainability.



Marissa Balmith, UMAPS Winter 2023 (University of Pretoria, South Africa) has published widely since her UMAPS

fellowship, with work spanning malaria epidemiology, antimicrobial resistance, neurodegenerative disease, and oncology in journals including the *Journal of Tropical Medicine, Clinical Therapeutics*, and the *South African Pharmaceutical Journal*. She was promoted to Senior Lecturer in the Department of Pharmacology in 2025.



Anatoli Lwassampijja, UMAPS Fall 2024 (Makerere University, Uganda) was awarded a one-year Postdoctoral

Fellowship at the Makerere Institute of Social Research (MISR), beginning in July 2026. He also received a British Institute in Eastern Africa (BIEA) Writing Grant to support the completion of a journal article based on his research on religion and politics in Uganda.



Kassim Tawiah, UMAPS Winter 2026 (University of Energy and Natural Resources, Sunyani, Ghana), was promoted

to the rank of Senior Lecturer. He has published 37 works to date and was selected for the Applied Mathematics Foundations of AI Summer Academy.



Aristedes Narh Hargoe, UMAPS Fall 2022 (Department of Dance Studies, University of Ghana), was promoted to the rank

of Senior Lecturer and now serves as Artistic Director of the Ghana Dance Ensemble at the Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana. He was also named a BECHS-Africa (Andrew Mellon) Scholar at the American University in Cairo, February–August 2026.



Collaboration in Action: Connecting Scholarship, Outreach, and Public Dialogue about Africa



The African Studies Center (ASC) continued to deepen its regional impact through a robust slate of outreach and scholarly programming between January and May 2026. These activities advanced the center's mission of promoting knowledge about Africa across educational levels and public audiences, while strengthening collaborations with partner institutions.

In January, ASC launched its Winter 2026 programming with a public lecture, *Big text analysis in isiXhosa: Religion, politics, and nationhood in the isiXhosa press, 1870–1890*. This event highlighted innovative digital and textual methods for African-language historical research and drew an interdisciplinary audience of faculty, students, and community members interested in religion, media, and nationalism in southern Africa.

ASC continued its long-standing partnership with Michigan State University through the Eye on Africa Series. Winter 2026 featured UMAPS visiting scholars Janet Munakamwe (University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa) and Nuniyat Abebe (Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia), who each delivered public lectures on their current research. These events showcased contemporary African scholarship and strengthened

inter-institutional ties between the University of Michigan and MSU, as well as with African universities.

Collaborating with the Africana Department at the University of Michigan Flint campus, UMAPS scholars supported faculty in presenting talks focused on Africa, expanding access to African Studies beyond the Ann Arbor campus.

The center also invested in curriculum enrichment and K-12 outreach. In collaboration with the Department of Afroamerican and African Studies (DAAS), language instructors led an “African Storytelling” program at Logan Elementary School, introducing elementary students to African languages, oral traditions, and fabrics while modeling age-appropriate, globally engaged pedagogy.

ASC's film and public humanities programming included a screening of *I Am Not Your Negro*, which anchored conversations about race, memory, and diaspora and engaged both campus and local community audiences. In addition, an Africa-focused outreach initiative at Schoolcraft College, featuring UMAPS scholar Nuniyat Abebe, extended ASC's reach to community college students and faculty.

The Winter 2026 UMAPS Research Colloquium Series, held across three sessions in March, provided a platform for nine UMAPS scholars to present their research to the campus community and general public. These colloquia fostered interdisciplinary exchange that sparked the curiosity of its audience while broadening their understanding of African scholarship.

ASC convened forward-looking and high-profile public events. “AI in Africa: A New Agenda for African Languages X AI: Everything, Everywhere, All at Once” brought together participants to consider how artificial intelligence intersects with African languages and knowledge production. The semester concluded with a widely attended fireside chat with Ugandan opposition leader Bobi Wine, led by Assistant Professor Charles Lwanga from the University of Michigan School of Music, Theatre and Dance; the fireside chat offered insights into African politics, governance, and youth activism.

Collectively, these activities demonstrate ASC's sustained leadership as a National Resource Center, advancing cutting-edge scholarship, public engagement, and educational outreach on Africa at local, regional, and national levels. ✨



ASC Events and Activities



Fall 2025 UMAPS and 2025-26 MIDAS African Fellows Picnic and Kayaking at Gallup Park.

The Fall 2025 UMAPS cohort included five scholars from Rwanda, Nigeria, and South Africa who participated in the UMAPS Research Colloquium Series. Under the theme Health and Nutrition in Africa, Molebogeng Bodiba (South Africa) presented “The Ameliorative Benefits of Tulbaghia Violacea on the Hippocampi of Streptozotocin Diabetes-Induced Sprague Dawley Rats,” while Charles Gafita (Rwanda) presented “Understanding the Level and Impact of High Sugar Consumption in Beverages in Rwanda.”

The second group, Reel History, Resource Management, and Political Accountability in Africa, featured Alecia Ndlovu (South Africa), who presented “Political Accountability and Development in Sub-Saharan Africa’s Resource Economies,” Christian Kwisanga (Rwanda), who presented “Analysis of Prevalent Artisanal Small-Scale Mining of Tantalum, Tin, Tungsten (3T), Niobium, and Lithium in Rwanda,” and Folakemi Ogungbe (Nigeria), who presented “Reel History: Exploring Nigerian Historical Films as Windows into the Nation’s Past.”

The cohort also participated in the African Women Film Festival, where Dr. Folakemi Ogungbe, Senior Lecturer at the School of Media and Communication, Pan-Atlantic University, Lagos, contributed to several panels and made a significant contribution to the festival.

In addition, together with MIDAS ASC African Fellows, the Fall 2025 cohort enjoyed kayaking and soccer as a

welcome break from their academic activities. Dr. Alecia Ndlovu, Senior Lecturer at the University of Cape Town, and Charles Gafita, Assistant Lecturer at the University of Rwanda, College of Medicine and Health Sciences, also visited the Department of African Studies at the University of Michigan Flint Campus and delivered presentations there.

During the Winter 2026 semester, the African Studies Center (ASC) hosted a robust series of academic, professional, and community-building activities that not only enriched the scholar experience on campus but contributed to the cultural and intellectual tapestry of the University of Michigan (U-M) and its community.

The semester began with a three-part Winter 2026 (W26) UMAPS Orientation, including sessions on flourishing at Michigan, cultural and professional adjustment, and maximizing the resources of the University of Michigan Libraries. Scholars also enjoyed informal community-building activities such as regular W26 UMAPS check-in meetings.

ASC and its partners offered numerous academic and professional development opportunities. Highlights included a talk by Jonathan Schoots, “Big text analysis in isiXhosa: Religion, politics, and Nationhood in the isiXhosa press, 1870–1890,” and multiple seminars from the Center for Research on Learning and Teaching (CRLT), such as Teaching Foundations: Introduction to Equity-focused Teaching and sessions in the “Critical Conversations on Gener-

ative AI and Higher Education” series. UMAPS scholars also benefited from a recurring Professional Writing Workshop series, designed to strengthen research communication and publication skills.

In addition, the ASC participated in the U-M & Africa AI in Research Collaboration Workshop, held on Wednesday, April 1, 2026. This convening brought together participants from across the University of Michigan and partner institutions in Africa, including the African Academy of Sciences (Kenya), the African Union Development Agency (AUDA-NEPAD), Ahmadu Bello University (Zaria, Nigeria), the Center for Global Health Equity (CGHE), U-M, Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology (Kenya), the Michigan Center for Applied & Interdisciplinary Mathematics (MCAIM), U-M, the William Davidson Institute at the Ross School of Business, U-M, and United States International University-Africa (Kenya). The workshop underscored the ASC’s commitment to fostering collaborative, cross-continental research at the intersection of AI, development, and higher education.

The Winter 2026 UMAPS Research Colloquium Series showcased the innovative work of scholars from across the African continent. Presentations in Group 1 addressed topics such as energy band modulation in advanced materials (Yetunde Ajayeoba, Nigeria), gender and energy access in rural Tanzania (Bahati Kayaga, Tanzania), and the role of artisanal and small-scale mining in a just energy transition (Janet Munakamwe, South Africa). Group 2



Fall 2025 UMAPS scholars show their appreciation to the professional writing workshop facilitator Dr. Christine Feak.

explored advances in health research and quantitative methods, including early prostate cancer detection (Tata Coulibaly, Côte d'Ivoire), models for maternal and child health outcomes (Kassim Tawiah, Ghana), and policy and practice around second-trimester abortion care (Brigitte Irankunda, Rwanda). Group 3 highlighted work on cultural production, the environment, and technology, with talks on textile narratives and Hausa folktales in Northern Nigeria (Zainab Bello, Nigeria), removal of antidepressants from aquatic environments (Vanessa Mokwebo, South Africa), and gender imbalance in AI and related research in Ethiopia (Nuniyat Abebe, Ethiopia).

UMAPS scholars also engaged with wider academic and public audiences through presentations at Michigan State University's Eye on Africa series, U-M Flint and Schoolcraft College presentations, and the Winter 2026 Michigan Press Workshop. Social and cultural enrichment remained central, with ASC Winter 2026 soccer matches, game nights, a potluck, and visits to the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History and The Henry Ford Museum of American Innovation.

The semester also featured a lunch and fireside chat with writer and editor Oliwia Bosomtwe, offering scholars informal insights into her book "Jak biały człowiek. Opowieść o Polakach i innych" (Like a White Man. The Story of Poles and the Others), published in 2024, which dives into the experiences of Black Poles and examines complex race relations in Poland from the 18th

century to the present day. The ASC, in collaboration with the Donia Human Rights Center, also hosted a fireside chat with Honorable Robert Kyagulanyi Ssentamu, widely known as Bobi Wine, a prominent Ugandan Afropop musician and politician. The talk, which was followed by contributions and Q&As from the audience, focused on the future of political leadership in Africa and the role and contributions of the people, especially the youth.

The Winter 2026 semester concluded with the ASC Winter 2026 Farewell Reception, celebrating the accomplishments of the center, UMAPS scholars, and the MIDAS African Fellows, as well as the lasting connections forged during their time at Michigan.

Looking ahead, the ASC welcomes the Fall 2026 UMAPS cohort (August-December) to Ann Arbor. The cohort consists of five scholars from four countries: Bernadette Agbavor (Ghana) from Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), Kumasi; Edwina Ashia-Nikoi (Ghana) from the University of Ghana; Jean Baptiste Mushimiyimana (Rwanda) from the University of Rwanda; Calumet Links (South Africa) from Stellenbosch University; and Simangele Mashazi from Stellenbosch University (South Africa). As always, the ASC looks forward to these scholars sharing their research with the U-M community and the general public. 🌐



Fall 2025 UMAPS and 2025-26 MIDAS African Fellows soccer activity.



Fall 2025 UMAPS Dr. Alecia Ndlovu at the U-M Flint Department of Africana Studies.

African Students Association Strengthens Diaspora Community Through Culture, Dialogue, and Celebration

Throughout the 2025-26 academic year, the African Student Association (ASA) organized a wide range of programs centered on community-building, cultural celebration, and connection across the African diaspora at the University of Michigan (U-M). From discussion-based gatherings to cultural showcases and collaborative social events, ASA created spaces where students could build relationships, share experiences, and celebrate the diversity of African and diasporic identities on campus.

ASA began the year with an introductory meeting that welcomed both new and returning members. The event introduced students to the new executive board and included a discussion-based activity inspired by “BK Chat,” creating an informal space for members to break the ice and connect through lively conversations. This opening gathering helped set the tone for a year of programming grounded in dialogue, belonging, and shared community.

During the fall semester, ASA hosted several culturally centered events that invited students to engage with African traditions while reflecting on the diversity of experiences within the diaspora. One memorable gathering was the “Mystery Meeting,” where members sampled jollof rice from four coun-

tries and voted for their favorite. While conversations about jollof often focus on the friendly rivalry between Ghana and Nigeria, this event expanded the conversation by including jollof from Liberia and Senegal as well. Liberia emerged as the favorite, reminding participants of the richness and variety of food traditions across the continent.

ASA also hosted “Sip and Slander,” a discussion-based event focused on African and diasporic experiences. Members reflected on topics including cultural assimilation, family dynamics, identity, and the different experiences of students born abroad, students who immigrated to the United States, and students raised within the diaspora. The event created space for students to find common ground while also recognizing the diversity of backgrounds and perspectives represented within ASA.

In the winter semester, ASA introduced a new weekend of community programming that included a skating social, a soccer game, and a traditional clothing event. The weekend drew participation from ASA members as well as students from other diaspora-centered organizations, including the East African Student Association. This collaboration reflected one of ASA’s ongoing goals: to strengthen relationships across cultural organizations and build broader connec-

tions among African and diasporic student communities at U-M.

ASA also continued its annual Culture Show, the organization’s largest event of the year. This year’s production centered on an individual’s story while showcasing African cultural attire, music, and dance. The event offered students a platform to celebrate their heritage and share it with the wider campus community. Leading up to the Culture Show, ASA hosted a “Beads and Henna” night, where students engaged in art and cultural traditions in a relaxed and welcoming environment. Held during a busy point in the semester, the gathering gave students an opportunity to unwind while connecting with ASA’s mission in an accessible and creative way.

Across its programming, ASA intentionally created opportunities for students to feel seen, supported, and connected. Through cultural celebration, community dialogue, artistic expression, and collaboration with other student organizations, ASA strengthened its role as an important home for African and diasporic students at the University of Michigan. Looking ahead, ASA remains committed to expanding its reach, deepening partnerships across campus, and continuing to create spaces where African and diasporic cultures, stories, and experiences are celebrated. ✨



because they've earned
their seat at the table."

Wiltz, A. (2023, January 4).
Why we treat black elders
like royalty in our
community. Medium.

African Business Conference 2026

Global Connections, African Opportunities: Empowering the Diaspora and Beyond



On February 6, 2026, the Africa Business Club (ABC) at the University of Michigan Ross School of Business hosted the African Business Conference 2026 under the theme “Global Connections, African Opportunities: Empowering the Diaspora and Beyond.” With support from the African Studies Center (ASC), the conference brought together approximately 150 attendees and 17 speakers, including students, alumni, entrepreneurs, industry leaders, faculty, and members of the broader University of Michigan community.

The conference created a platform for thoughtful conversations on Africa’s business future and the role of the African diaspora in shaping capital, innovation, leadership, and cross-border collaboration. Across the day, attendees engaged with speakers working across energy, technology, cybersecurity, finance, agriculture, consumer goods, storytelling, consulting, and social impact.

The program opened with remarks from Efosa Omoregie, ABC president, and a welcome address from Prof. Omolade Adunbi, director of the African Studies Center. Their remarks framed the conference as an opportunity to move beyond narrow narratives about Africa and instead center the continent’s people, institutions, markets, creativity, and future.

A major highlight of the day was the keynote address by Abimbola Olufore Wycliffe, principal managing partner at Wycliffe Advisory and Consulting and co-founder of the Beyond the Barrel Initiative. Her keynote, “The African Woman’s Lens on Capital and Innovation,” explored how capital, policy, energy systems, and innovation intersect in shaping Africa’s economic future. She challenged attendees to think more expansively about investible opportunities, women’s participation in capital formation, and value creation beyond extractive industries.

The conference also featured two major panels. The first, “Navigating Dual Worlds: Identity, Impact, Influence,” explored how African and diaspora leaders navigate cultural, professional, and geographic identities while building meaningful careers and ventures. The second, “Building Bridges: Capital, Collaboration and Innovation for Africa’s Future,” focused on the partnerships and systems needed to unlock Africa’s next stage of growth. Together, the panels highlighted the importance of storytelling, technology, entrepreneurship, culture, capital, and collaboration in shaping Africa’s global presence.

Beyond the panels, the conference included two fireside chats. The alumni fireside chat, “Reflections on Career, Choices, and Impact,” gave students

practical insight into career decision-making, leadership, and purpose. Later in the day, Wiebe Boer, a businessman and a philanthropist who served as the 12th president of Calvin University in Grand Rapids, Michigan, joined a conversation on “Africa and the Caribbean: Opportunities for Doing Business,” which explored the historical, cultural, and commercial links between Africa and the Caribbean.

The event also included interactive and community-building sessions. During “African Voices,” Elie Mutomb shared a personal reflection titled “14,000 Miles Later,” highlighting resilience, global citizenship, and connection to African roots. The Brand Spotlight session showcased goTeff, an African-inspired food brand built around teff, an ancient Ethiopian grain. The afternoon also featured a practical personal finance workshop on debt, savings, and investing in the United States.

One of the most meaningful outcomes of the conference was the sense of community it created. Students, alumni, speakers, and guests had multiple opportunities to connect through breakfast, lunch, networking breaks, and a closing reception. The Africa Business Club also unveiled its first official merchandise, including the ABC football jersey and varsity jacket, as part of its broader effort to build pride, visibility,

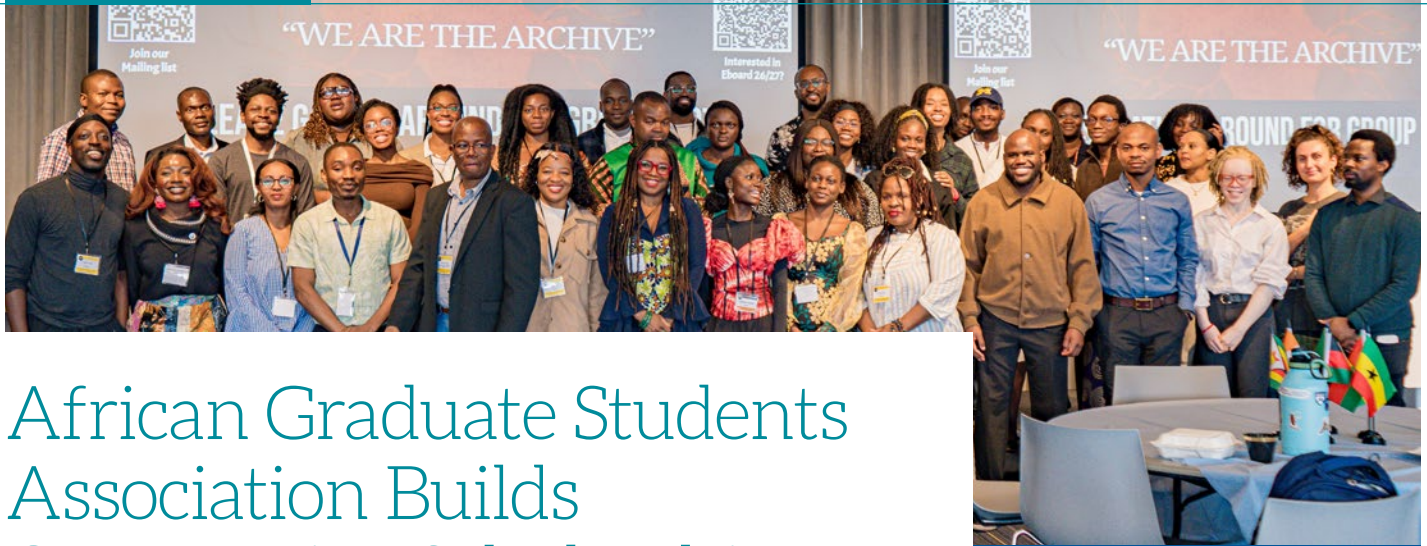


and belonging for African students and allies at Michigan Ross.

The Africa Business Club is deeply grateful to ASC for sponsoring the African Business Conference 2026. The center's support was central to making the event possible and helped create a space where students could engage with Africa's business, cultural, and development landscape in a thoughtful and practical way. We also thank our additional sponsors, including the International Center, the William Davidson Institute, MBA Council, the Office of Multi-Ethnic Student Affairs, and LSA Student Government.

Most importantly, we thank the speakers, panelists, alumni, volunteers, and attendees who made the conference a success. The event reflected the Africa Business Club's mission to build community, elevate African and diaspora voices, and deepen engagement with Africa's opportunities across the University of Michigan. 🌍





AGSA members, presenters, and guests gather for the organization's inaugural Graduate Student Research Symposium, which created a platform for graduate students to share Africa-focused research and engage with invited speakers.

African Graduate Students Association Builds Community, Scholarship, and Cultural Connection

The African Graduate Students Association (AGSA) had an active and meaningful year of programming centered on community-building, academic and professional development, cultural exchange, and support for African graduate students and allies across the University of Michigan (U-M).

AGSA began the fall semester with a potluck and picnic, followed by its first general body meeting, which welcomed new and returning members and introduced students to opportunities for involvement. Throughout the semester, AGSA hosted a monthly book club, beginning with *The Meaning of Freedom* by Angela Davis, as well as a game night, an alumni career advising panel, a Friendsgiving potluck, and a study session. A major highlight of the fall was AGSA Soccer Day, which brought members, visiting scholars, and friends together across departments for an energetic community-building event outside the classroom.

In the winter semester, AGSA continued this momentum with programming that balanced social connection, professional development, academic engagement, and cultural celebration. Events included an Africa Cup of Nations finals viewing party, a general body meeting, book club gatherings, a financial literacy

and investment session for international students in collaboration with the Refugee Garden Initiative, a soccer event, and karaoke and game night.

One of AGSA's most significant accomplishments this year was hosting its inaugural Graduate Student Research Symposium, themed "We Are the Archive." The symposium brought together invited speakers, graduate student presenters, and participants from across the University of Michigan community for interdisciplinary conversations on Africa-focused scholarship. The event created a platform for graduate students to share their research, engage with faculty and peers, and reflect on the role of African and African diasporic knowledge production across disciplines.

AGSA concluded the year with an End-of-Year Banquet and Cultural Night, a celebratory gathering that recognized the achievements, resilience, and community spirit of African graduate students and allies at U-M. Together, AGSA's events strengthened the organization's role as a bridge between African graduate students, the broader university community, and Africa-focused academic and cultural programming on campus.

Looking ahead, AGSA is excited to continue deepening its partnership with the African Studies Center, including through the ongoing process of transitioning into a sponsored student organization. This transition will help sustain and expand AGSA's impact in the years to come. 🌍



AGSA symposium organizers gather with the African Studies Center director and invited speakers.

Professor Nwando Achebe leads a learning lab during AGSA's inaugural Graduate Student Research Symposium, one of the organization's major academic initiatives of the year.



Professor Kuukuwa Manful and graduate student presenters helped make AGSA's inaugural symposium a space for interdisciplinary exchange and Africa-focused scholarship.



AGSA members, visiting scholars, and friends come together for Soccer Day, a community-building event that included friendly competition, games, and time for connection.



AGSA members and visiting scholars gather for a potluck-style Friendsgiving celebration, where conversations about food, recipes, and cultural traditions fostered community and camaraderie.



AGSA members and allies celebrate the close of the academic year at the End-of-Year Banquet and Cultural Night.



Amala dancers perform during AGSA's End-of-Year Banquet and Cultural Night, which highlighted community, cultural celebration, and the achievements of African graduate students and friends at the University of Michigan.

Kehinde Sowunmi and Hanae Soma Receive the 2026 Lester P. Monts Award

The Lester P. Monts Award for Outstanding Graduate Student Research on Africa was established in 2014 to recognize the excellence of the African Studies Center's (ASC) students. This award is given in honor of Lester P. Monts, Distinguished Professor of Ethnomusicology and former senior vice provost for academic affairs, for his unfailing support of Michigan's engagement with Africa.

This year's award goes to **Hanae Soma**, a PhD candidate in urban and regional planning at Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning, and **Kehinde Sowunmi**, a PhD candidate in the Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures. Both are African Studies Graduate certificate students in the Department of Afroamerican and African Studies. Jacob Caponi, a PhD candidate in the Department of Sociology, received an honorable mention.

Hanae Soma received the Lester P. Monts Award for her paper, "Colonial Legacies and Urban Planning: Planning Institutions, Processes, and Informality in Ghana," which she wrote while taking Professor Omolade Adunbi's AAS 600 Pro-Seminar on Interdisciplinary Approaches to African Studies during Fall 2025. Her research focuses on gendered land tenure in urban Ghana through a feminist reading of colonial histories, legal pluralism, and informality. In the paper, Hanae explores the history of urban planning under colonial rule and the colonial legacies embedded

in planning law, institutions, and urban development processes to understand the ongoing challenges of urban planning in contemporary Ghana.

The questions that drove Soma's paper focused on colonial inheritances embedded in planning laws, institutions, and frameworks that continue to hinder urban planning processes, with particular attention to governance in urban informal settlements. These questions were further informed by her preliminary fieldwork in Accra in the summer of 2025. With the support of several grants at the University of Michigan, including the SAIO Research Grant, Global Individual Grant, and ASC Funding for Research or Internship Support in Africa, Soma spent the summer learning about contemporary planning challenges through conversations with planners, examining tenure relations and everyday governance through discussions with residents of informal settlements, and exploring archival materials at the Public Records and Archives Administration Department in Ghana.



Kehinde Sowunmi



Hanae Soma

As she learned more about the different ways residents claimed legitimacy or secured their sense of tenure security in informal settlements, Soma became increasingly curious about how legal pluralism and the complex land tenure system play out in the context of self-organizing urban life and informality in Ghana. This paper begins to explore a line of inquiry she will continue to grapple with in her dissertation research.

Soma lived in Ghana during her childhood, and it has been with immense joy and gratitude that she has had the opportunity to return more than two decades later to conduct research and receive recognition for the work. From reconnecting with old family friends to building new friendships and learning from remarkable mentors in her childhood home city, the experience has enriched her in ways that extend far beyond graduate school. She is only at the beginning of this journey and looks forward to continuing to explore, learn, be challenged, get confused, and embrace all the excitement and uncertainty that come with pursuing a PhD.

Soma expressed gratitude to the many friends, colleagues, and mentors who supported this project and continue to shape her growth as a scholar, including Omolade Adunbi; Scott D. Campbell, her cohort member Maina Wachira, her classmates in AAS 600, and her dissertation committee members: Ana Paula Pimentel Walker, Martin Murray, Nana Yaw-Andoh, Brandon Marc Finn, and Yasminah Beebeejaun. She also thanked the many friends and colleagues in Ghana who made this work possible and from whom she continues to learn.

Kehinde Sowunmi's winning paper, titled "Beyond Nepo and Lapo Babies: Humanitarian Privilege in the African Continent," explores the relationship between African diasporic migrants and Afro-Germans as they narrate and

navigate belonging, identity, and Heimat in Germany through the intertwined work of memory, archive, and community formation. The paper begins with theoretical attention to "slang terms" of inequality in popular African discourse: "nepo babies," who inherit access and opportunity through family connections, and "lapo babies," an acronym for "Little Access to Privilege and Opportunities," who must struggle for survival with limited resources and minimal support. From this contrast, Sowunmi develops the concept of humanitarian privilege to think about a different kind of advantage, one that is not inherited through family or earned through individual struggle, but produced through humanitarian selection.

To explore this tension, Sowunmi turns to Lucia Engombe's memoir *Child No. 95*, which recounts Engombe's experience as one of the Namibian children evacuated from refugee camps in Angola and Zambia in 1979 to the German Democratic Republic during Namibia's liberation struggle. Through Engombe's story, the paper examines the central contradiction within humanitarianism: rescue is necessary and often life-saving, but it can also become a political structure that determines whose lives are made visible, valuable, and worthy of investment. The project is less concerned with the moment of rescue itself than with what happens after rescue: how rescued subjects navigate gratitude, indebtedness, estrangement, and reintegration into communities from which they have become culturally, emotionally, or politically distanced.

The project was inspired by personal, scholarly, and historical encounters. One important starting point was an event organized by Sowunmi's department on Germany's colonial history in Namibia, where Mary Rodena-Krasan introduced Sowunmi to keynote speaker Kavena

Hambira, who was directly connected to this history and was himself a beneficiary of the East Germany-Namibia collaboration in the 1970s. Hambira recommended Engombe's memoir, which became the entry point for Sowunmi's thinking about the afterlife of humanitarian rescue. At the same time, Sowunmi was enrolled in Professor Omolade Adunbi's interdisciplinary African Studies graduate seminar, where humanitarianism was one of the central themes.

Sowunmi's work shifts humanitarianism away from abstract narratives of aid and toward the intellectual life of those who have been rescued. By reading Engombe's *Child No. 95* as a form of African thought, the paper shows that recipients of rescue are not simply statistics, beneficiaries, or symbols of humanitarian success; they are interpreters of history who make sense of displacement, return, gratitude, and power from within lived experience. In tracing connections across German colonialism, Cold War solidarity, migration, and post-independence return, the project deepens our understanding of Africa's global entanglements and challenges the humanitarian gaze that too often frames the African continent through crisis rather than through African subjects' own interpretations of their histories and afterlives.

*"Rescue, here, does
not just preserve
life; it reroutes it."*

For Sowunmi, the most rewarding part of completing this work was realizing that the project was helping to carry Lucia Engombe's legacy forward.



Jacob Caponi

Although Sowunmi never had the chance to speak with Engombe before her passing, there was comfort in knowing that her legacy lives on through her writing, and that this project contributes, in a small way, to ensuring that her story continues to be read, remembered, and taken seriously as African thought.

Lester Monts Graduate Award 2026 Honorable Mention: Jacob Caponi

Jacob Caponi received an honorable mention for his manuscript, “Social Cohesion Governance: Legal Aid Strategies in Rwanda.” Caponi is a PhD candidate in the Department of Sociology at the University of Michigan. His work is broadly interested in how societies respond to atrocities and crises, with a focus on gender, violence, law, and culture.

Caponi’s paper uses the case of legal aid in post-genocide Rwanda to provide insight into how legal aid providers manage cases in the context of overburdened courts and the state’s prioritization of reconciliation. After collective violence, states often work to rebuild and repair the social fabric by promoting legal institutions and fostering peaceful relationships. While there is a great deal of research on Rwanda’s gacaca courts, less research examines the access to justice clinics for ordinary conflict that expanded throughout the country as gacaca courts ended.

This study relies on ethnographic and interview data with legal aid providers at legal aid centers throughout Rwanda to show how legal aid providers communicate the state’s moral vision of social cohesion to manage an overburdened

court system through two strategies. First, legal aid providers orient people to moral beliefs about ways of being through community awareness-raising initiatives and extra-legal obligations that promote peaceful relations. Second, legal aid providers stall cases from going to court by counseling through narratives of forgiveness and reconciliation. These strategies prevent cases from reaching the courts by managing emotional expectations about the law’s limitations and reminding people of their societal obligations.

Caponi’s findings highlight how social actors charged with interacting with vulnerable people creatively navigate the lasting ramifications of collective violence in everyday dispute resolution and conflict mediation. The paper also reveals that transitional justice mechanisms continue to shape rule-of-law programming for everyday conflict in the decades after their closure.

The paper is currently under review at *Law & Society Review*, and an adapted version will serve as a chapter on how alternative dispute resolution is used to manage relationship conflict in Caponi’s dissertation on marriage and family promotion in post-genocide Rwanda. The project was supported by the National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship Program and the University of Michigan’s African Studies Center, International Institute, and Rackham Graduate School.

“Building on the law and culture literature, these findings highlight how social actors charged with interacting with vulnerable people creatively navigate the lasting ramifications of collective violence in everyday dispute resolution and conflict mediation.” 🌐

Meet ASC's Incoming MIRS Students

Kay Allen

Kay Allen joins the MIRS African Studies specialization with a B.A. in political science from Vanderbilt University, where she graduated magna cum laude. Her research training includes work with Vanderbilt's Research on Conflict and Collective Action (ROCCA) Lab, where she contributed to projects on political violence, military capabilities, refugee attitudes, nuclear threats, and race riots. Her work included database development on global weapons systems with an emphasis on Sub-Saharan African nations, as well as analysis of perspective-taking and refugee attitudes in Uganda. At U-M, Allen plans to build on her interests in political behavior, political development, conflict, and misinformation while broadening her regional training through African studies.

Shelby Dennhardt

Shelby Dennhardt joins the MIRS African Studies specialization with a background in communications, military service, and international development. He earned his B.A. in communications management from the University of Dayton, where he also served as president of the Student Veterans Association. His academic interests focus on post-apartheid South Africa, reconciliation, land reform, and the relationship between political transformation and lived experience in divided communities. At U-M, Dennhardt plans to strengthen his regional and language training, including continued study of Afrikaans and isiZulu. He hopes to pursue a career in the foreign service, with a focus on consular work in Africa and Southern Africa in particular.

Ramatoulaye Diarra

Ramatoulaye Diarra joins the MIRS African Studies specialization after earning her B.A. in sociology from The City College of New York, where she was a Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellow and Racial Justice Fellow. Her research interests center on Senegal, gender performance, media, marriage, Islam, colonialism, and the production of gendered knowledge. Her prior research examined food systems, community gardens, race, space, and neighborhood change in Brooklyn, building a foundation in ethnography, oral history, and community-based research. At U-M, Diarra plans to deepen her work in African studies, gender studies, and Black studies, with long-term goals in academia and public scholarship.

Olamide Blessing Falaye

Heleniak-Carstarphen Graduate Student Scholar

Olamide Blessing Falaye joins the MIRS program after earning her bachelor's degree in English education from the University of Abuja, Nigeria. Falaye's interest in African Studies grew out of her experience as a teacher and research assistant. While teaching English and literature, she observed that students frequently understood and described leadership, discipline, and community values through their religious and cultural backgrounds rather than through formal civic education concepts, which led her to ask deeper questions about how people understand authority and social order in everyday life. Her subsequent work on heritage and archaeological projects in southwestern Nigeria further shaped this interest, revealing how history, belief systems, and institutions are closely connected

in shaping how communities function today. Over time, her focus shifted from teaching methods specifically to the broader question of how language, religion, and culture shape society, particularly in West Africa and Nigeria.

Falaye chose the MIRS program for the opportunity to study these questions in a more structured, interdisciplinary way. As the incoming Heleniak-Carstarphen Fellow, she is particularly interested in how religious institutions influence leadership and moral authority, and looks forward to learning from scholars whose work connects politics, culture, and everyday life. The fellowship will give her the time, mentorship, and resources to transition from personal observations and classroom experiences to more in-depth academic research on how religion influences governance and social life across West Africa. This work will be informed by her own experiences with students and communities in Nigeria. Looking ahead, she hopes to work in research or development spaces where she can contribute to understanding how African societies are shaped by both history and present-day institutions.

ASC Awards \$31K to 29 Students for Africa-Focused Research or Internship Support in Africa

In the 2025–2026 academic year, the African Studies Center (ASC) awarded a total of \$31,000 to 29 students through the Global Research & Internship Opportunities program within the International Institute. These competitive grants help fund student research, internships, and combined research-internship experiences connected to Africa and the African diaspora.

This year's funded students represented eight U-M schools and colleges, including Literature, Science, and the Arts; Environment and Sustainability; Public Health; Architecture and Urban Planning; Education; Nursing; Music, Theatre & Dance; and Information. Their projects reflected a wide range of Africa-focused research and professional interests, including environmental justice, public health, anthropology, history, linguistics,

urban planning, nursing, museum studies, dance, information studies, and African studies.

Projects were based in or connected to Ghana, Uganda, Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal, South Sudan, South Africa, Algeria, Morocco, Madagascar, Cameroon, Rwanda, Lesotho, and several transnational or diasporic research sites. The funded projects are as follows:

Shaylee Warner

PhD Pre-Candidate: Environment and Sustainability, Environmental Justice

- *Breathing Risk: Embodied Air Pollution and Mercury Exposure in Ghana's Artisanal and Small-Scale Gold Mining Communities*

Laston Manja

PhD Pre-Candidate: LSA Economics

- *Sustaining Community Shared Toilets in Kampala: A Video-Based Social Learning Pilot*

Ariza Nanji

Master's Student: Environment and Sustainability, Environmental Justice

- *SEAS Practicum on Aga Khan Foundation Kenya and Community Leadership for Nature-Based Solutions*

Dennis Simiyu

PhD Pre-Candidate: LSA History

- *Sacred Borders and the Politics of Identity: Dini ya Msambwa, Kenya-Uganda Border Contestation and Cosmopolitanism, 1920 to 1992*

Tanya Dhulipudi

Master's Student: Public Health

- *Implementation and Treatment Outcomes Associated with Neonatal Jaundice Screening in Ghana*

Olawale Akingbade

PhD Candidate: LSA Linguistics

- *Documenting the Agreement System of Akuku, an Understudied North-Western Edoid Language*

Inhae Yap

PhD Pre-Candidate: LSA Anthropology

- *Embodied Futures: Rural-Urban Migration and the Moral Economy in Ugandan Taekwondo*

Marthe Djilo Kamga

PhD Candidate: LSA Romance

Languages and Literatures – French

- *The Museum as Colonial Wound: Embodied Memory, Curatorial Practice, and Decolonial Repair*

Nyankoor Timothy

Master's Student: International &

Regional Studies, African Studies

- *If Not Us, Then Who? The Potential of Diasporic Mobilization in South Sudan*

Madison Leads

Undergraduate Student: LSA Psychology

- *The Trauma Centre of Cape Town Internship*

Dana Salama

PhD Pre-Candidate: Architecture &

Urban Planning

- *Future Ruin: Completing a Site Diagnostic of Michel Luyckx's Adrar Hospital*

Jalen Smith

Master's Student: Public Health

- *Health and Awareness Beyond the Margin: Uplifting Kenyan Sexually Diverse Minority Serving Organizations*

Olivia Humphrey

Undergraduate Student: LSA International

Studies; Political Science; Anthropology

- *Rabat Social Sciences Institute*

Hanae Soma

PhD Pre-Candidate: Architecture &

Urban Planning

- *Colonial Legacies, Land Politics, and Gendered Dynamics in Informal Settlements of Urban Ghana*

Kenneth Tagoe

PhD Pre-Candidate: LSA History

- *"Boxing Still the Savior": Nation-Building and Pan-African Identity in Ghana*

Aine Beale

Master's Student: Education

- *Education Team at the Iziko National Art Gallery*

Elinor Artsy Navon

Master's Student: Public Health

- *From Reefs to Resilience: Evaluating the Impact of Marine Ecosystem Health on Human Nutritional Outcomes in Madagascar*

Shreya Srihari

Undergraduate Student: LSA Molecular,

Cellular, and Developmental Biology

- *Improving Access to MIGS Training in Ghana*

Bola Okpue

Professional Doctoral Student: Nursing

- *Developing and Evaluating an Occupational Health and Stress-Management Training Program to Improve Job Satisfaction and Quality of Work-Life Among Midwives in Cameroon*

Dominic Mayo

PhD Candidate: LSA Anthropology

- *Social Resource Competition Among Female Mountain Gorillas*

Timilehin Ayelagb

PhD Candidate: LSA Anthropology

- *Resilience, Governance, and Community Reorganization within the Udo Moat, Southern Nigeria*

Clayton Van Woerkom

PhD Pre-Candidate: LSA Anthropology

- *Moralities on the Move: Multilingualism and Moral Striving in French Muslim Return Migration to Morocco*

Ying Cui

PhD Candidate: LSA Anthropology

- *Mountaineers in the Making: Last Interglacial Behavioral Strategies in Highland Lesotho*

Talitha Pam

PhD Candidate: LSA Anthropology & History

- *Negotiating Boundaries: Exploring Insecurity, Identity and Media Influence Among Northern Nigerian Diasporic Communities*

Alana Howard

Master's Student: Music, Theatre & Dance

- *Dance for Healing: An Ethnographic Study of Asante Healing Dances in Kumasi, Ghana*

Anam Noor

Undergraduate Student: LSA Neurosci-
ence; Creative Writing and Literature

- *University of Cape Town Global Surgery Elective Program Internship*

Amna Khan

Undergraduate Student: Public Health

- *MAAYGO Internship in Kisumu, Kenya*

Nneka Udeagbala

PhD Pre-Candidate: Information

- *Interrogating Visibility Practices and Transnational Negotiation Around "Green" Waste Management in Nigeria*

Ogochukwu Ononiwu

Master's Student: Environment and
Sustainability

- *Resilient Forest Resilient Families*



Conference Travel Grant

ASC is proud to support students as they share their Africa-related research with broader audiences across the country and around the world. This year, ASC awarded \$6,700 to 11 students through the Conference Travel Grant program. These awards supported students presenting work across a range of disciplines and fields, including linguistics, history, public policy, environmental studies, engineering education, nursing, and African studies.

Funded students presented research on topics such as African language systems, memory and archives, health and peacebuilding in Northern Nigeria, musical archives in Kenya, political ecology in the Global South, injury mortality in Kenya, Maasai land dispossession, and African diasporic and transnational experiences. Students attended conferences in the United States and internationally, including Cape Verde, Spain, Germany, Belgium, Botswana, and other professional meeting sites.

Here are some outcomes shared by those students:

Dennis Simiyu, a PhD student in history, attended the African Studies Association Conference in Atlanta, where he presented his paper, "When Drum Talks: Musical Archives as Intellectual Platforms for Wananchi in Kenya." With support from ASC, Simiyu was able to travel to the conference, present his work, and take part in a broader scholarly community focused on African history. He shared that the presentation gave him "exposure to new ideas through panel feedback," while also creating opportunities to connect with other scholars working in related fields.

For Simiyu, the conference was not only a chance to share his own research, but also to listen, learn, and situate his work within larger conversations in

African studies. Attending other panels, he noted, enhanced his understanding of topics central to African history and helped him engage with scholars from other institutions. His report included photos from his presentation as well as a moment with fellow scholars after attending a panel, reflecting the professional connections and community-building made possible through conference travel support.

Zakaria Bulus attended the Conflict Research Network of West Africa Conference in Abuja, Nigeria, where he presented a paper on a century of faith-based preventive health interventions in Northern Nigeria from 1923 to 2023. His work examined the role of regional governance, community engagement, and cross-border collaboration in responding to health challenges shaped by climate change, urbanization, migration, and brain drain. Reflecting on the experience, Bulus emphasized that his presentation connected historical research to urgent contemporary questions of health equity, preventive medicine, peacebuilding, and sustainable development.

Bulus's report described the conference as a meaningful academic and professional development opportunity. He presented during a panel on extremism, faith-based intervention, and peacebuilding, where he responded to questions about the Church of the Brethren's historical medical mission in Nigeria, the importance of preventive medicine, and the relevance of health interventions in communities with limited access to resources. He explained that many communities in northern Nigeria depend on farming and may not have the resources to address health crises after they arise, making prevention especially important.

Beyond his presentation, Bulus attended panels and keynote sessions focused



on ECOWAS at 50, conflict resolution, governance, health in humanitarian response, and development policy in West Africa. He shared that the experience gave him opportunities for “professional networking with many researchers and policy professionals,” including faculty, research institutes, and civil society organizations. He also noted that the conference opened conversations about future research collaborations, including publication opportunities, conference panels, and policy-oriented projects aligned with his long-term academic and career goals.

Most importantly, Bulus reflected that presenting at the conference strengthened his confidence as an emerging scholar. The questions and feedback he received helped him refine his argument, clarify the policy implications of his research, and improve how he communicates complex findings to diverse audiences. “The skills, insights, and professional relationships gained at the conference will continue to shape my academic work and public service career,” he wrote. He also encouraged future students to pursue similar opportunities, prepare thoroughly, participate actively, and maintain the professional connections made through conference engagement.

Theresa Norpeli Lanyo, a PhD candidate in the School of Nursing, attended the FIGO World Congress for Gynecology and Obstetrics in Cape Town, South Africa. In her reflection, she described the experience as “truly transformative,” noting that the conference exposed her to innovative studies and groundbreaking work in maternal and reproductive health from around the world. As a scholar committed to improving maternal and reproductive health outcomes, Lanyo found the conference especially valuable for learning about research methods, collaborative approaches, and interventions

designed to address individual needs while advancing global health goals.

The conference also deepened Lanyo’s understanding of the importance of multi-level collaboration in health research. She reflected that effective work in maternal and reproductive health must include women, families, communities, healthcare providers, and researchers in order to create meaningful change. This broader perspective reinforced her commitment to producing research that not only generates evidence, but also informs policies and interventions that improve the health and well-being of women, children, and communities.

Lanyo also highlighted the importance of the professional connections she made while in Cape Town. She had the opportunity to meet leading researchers, potential collaborators, and mentors whose work has shaped her own academic path. These conversations offered practical guidance as she continues to navigate her career as an international student and early-career researcher. Attending sessions, networking with accomplished professionals, and seeing diverse career trajectories helped her envision her own future in maternal and child health research.

Reflecting on ASC’s support, Lanyo wrote that the center’s investment in her professional development helped lessen the financial burden of attending the conference and supported her growth as a researcher. She shared that the experience will help shape her into a scholar committed to “generating evidence” and informing policy interventions that contribute to global health targets. Her reflection demonstrates how conference travel funding can support not only one professional milestone, but also a student’s long-term research identity, scholarly confidence, and commitment to public impact. 🌐

Theresa Norpeli Lanyo



Kelly Askew African Language Awards Recipients

The African Studies Center (ASC) is pleased to recognize this year's recipients of the Kelly Askew African Language Awards. These awards support University of Michigan (U-M) students pursuing African language study and reflect ASC's continued commitment to strengthening African language learning, cultural engagement, and global education.

This year's recipients are studying Swahili and Yoruba across a wide range of academic fields, including public policy, business, public health, environmental studies, anthropology, biology, pharmaceutical sciences, astronomy and interdisciplinary physics, African and African American studies, biomolecular science, and international and regional studies. Together, their applications reflect the many ways African language study deepens students' academic work, strengthens cultural connection, and prepares them for meaningful engagement with African communities on campus and beyond.

For many recipients, language study is closely tied to family, heritage, and identity. Students studying Yoruba described the importance of reconnecting with Nigerian and West African cultural roots, communicating more fully with family members, and preserving language across generations. Recipients studying

Swahili similarly emphasized the role of language in building belonging, connecting to East African communities, and engaging African histories and cultures beyond colonial-language frameworks.

Other students connected their language study to research, public service, and future professional goals. Swahili recipients described plans to use the language in archival research, oral history, community engagement, policy communication, ethnographic fieldwork, and sustainability-focused work in East Africa. Yoruba recipients described interests in public health, business, anthropology, cultural preservation, and cross-cultural understanding. Across both languages, students emphasized that learning an African language is not only an academic pursuit, but also a meaningful form of cultural respect, community building, and long-term engagement.

SWAHILI AWARD RECIPIENTS

- Annissa Kebede**
Graduate student, Masters in International and Regional Studies: African Studies Specialization and Master of Public Policy
- Dillon Foster**
Graduate student, MS in Environment and Sustainability, Sustainability and Development
- Elizabeth Mugo**
Graduate student, Master of Public Policy
- Kameron Roberson-Brantley**
Undergraduate student, Biology, Health, and Society
- Madison Harvest**
Undergraduate student, Biology, Health, and Society
- Olivia Limera**
Undergraduate student, Pharmaceutical Sciences
- Saron Mechale**
Graduate student, MBA and Master of Sustainability
- Shauntel Calhoun**
Undergraduate student, Afroamerican and African Studies
- Sohair Holman**
Undergraduate student, Biomolecular Science
- Yajie Xu**
Graduate student, Masters in International and Regional Studies: Chinese Studies Specialization

YORUBA AWARD RECIPIENTS

- Adeola Ojo**
Undergraduate student, Public Health
- Brianna Atemnkeng**
Undergraduate student, Undeclared Psychology
- Covenant Akinremi**
Undergraduate student, Neuroscience
- Cynthia Adebayo**
Doctoral student, Environmental Health Sciences
- Deborah Abodunrin**
Undergraduate student, Business Administration
- Iftikhaar Alli-Balogun**
Undergraduate student, Anthropology
- Oluwatosin Oyelade**
Undergraduate student, Business, Ross School of Business
- Ugochi Okeke**
Undergraduate student, Astronomy and Interdisciplinary Physics

The African Studies Center congratulates all recipients of the Kelly Askew African Language Awards. Their commitments demonstrate the continued importance of African language instruction at U-M and the many ways language learning can support scholarship, cultural connection, professional development, and community engagement.





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Alliances is produced annually by the African Studies Center (ASC). It features ASC's activities from the previous year, news about the center's initiatives, ASC associates and their research, ASC-funded student projects and internships, and collaborative partnerships connecting Africa and Michigan.

If you wish to receive a printed copy, please send a request to asc-contact@umich.edu.

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