

Summer 2015

Congratulations DAAS 2015 Graduates!

The DAAS 2015 graduation was held on Friday, May 1, 2015 from 3pm – 5pm at the University of Michigan Museum of Art. This year's graduates included 14 majors, 11 minors and one recipient of the DAAS graduate certificate. Led by DAAS Chair Frieda Ekotto and Associate Chair Martha Jones, the proceedings also included awards for this year's winners of the annual Wangari Maathai Essay Competition which were presented by Director of Undergraduate Studies, Karyn Lacy as well as a fabulous performance by the Detroit Academy of Arts and Sciences Elementary Choir (Detroit). The graduation exercise was followed by a full course dinner. Masterfully organized, once again, by DAAS Student Services Coordinator Katherine Weathers, both the ceremony and the dinner were enjoyed by faculty, staff, students, parents, family and friends. Congratulations to our graduates and their families.



DAAS Chair, Frieda Ekotto (far left), with 2015 DAAS graduates.

The 2015 POA Study Abroad: A Student's Perspective by Harleen Kaur



POA Founder and Faculty Member Nesha Haniff (center) with POA Alumni and her 2015 study abroad cohort.

The Pedagogy of Action (POA) Study Abroad was founded by Faculty Member Nesha Haniff in 2000. This year's POA in South Africa culminated in two symposiums in Johannesburg and Durban which included presentations from POA alumni as well as its many South African partners.

Harleen Kaur is a 2015 graduate who majored in English and minored in Community Action and Social Change. This fall, Harleen will be departing for an 8-month solo trip through Asia and South America as a Bonderman Fellow.

As the child of immigrants, I have often pondered the significance of returning to one's roots. Although my parents were raised in India, I have not been to the country since the age of 6. Due to this, my notion of a "homeland" is built upon stories and recollections, rather than my own experiences. In recent years, I have become drawn to returning to the land of my ancestors. I see how critical it is to look back, understanding our history and past, in order to move forward.

When Nesha told me last August that she wanted to return to South Africa one last time, much of it was about reflecting upon the work and partnerships to which she has so passionately dedicated her life. For many of us students, however, it became about how to move POA into the next generation, as we felt ourselves at the cornerstone of its past and its future.

Continued on next page

Throughout our trip, I saw the importance of maintaining past relationships while building new ones. Our first teaching experience at Love Life in Johannesburg allowed the reunion of alumni with a previous POA student Zama who was now leading the Love Life volunteers. Through his instruction, we were able to build valuable partnerships with some of the newer Love Life volunteers and learn about barriers to their critical work in the fight against HIV. Our return to South Africa was in large part due to the insistence of Shavani—a long time partner of POA and primary school teacher in Durban—and it was her kindness that made us feel at home in a school thousands of miles away from our own. Finally, due to our own POA member Zakiyah Sayyed’s hard work as a research fellow, we had the great privilege of working with community members in Vulindlela—an area with one of the highest HIV rates in the world .



POA Founder Nesha Haniff (right)
POA South African Partner Shavani Naidoo (left)

POA 2015 also focused on academic and theoretical reflection through two symposiums held in Johannesburg and Durban. For two days we engaged in dialogue about the impact that POA has had on communities around the world. Even as a first-time POA participant, I could see how my own struggles with the module in Ann Arbor mirrored Mark DeClark’s issue of funding for NGOs, and that we both could have been aided by Rodney A. Brown’s use of dance as a method of understanding. I saw the ways POA has benefitted from both praxis and theory and how by working together across our communities, we could act as support networks and allies in this battle for equity.



POA Alumni (from left)
Rocky Block, Rodney Brown,
Frank Cousin, Raina LaGrand,
Gabriel Peoples and Zakiyah
Sayyed.

The most pivotal moment for my experience was that of performance. At both the symposia and teaching sites, Nesha ensured that we engaged in a process of gratitude. It was important to thank these partners for allowing us into their communities and giving us the power of trust. As POA had seen in its formative years, gratitude in South Africa is frequently shown through song and dance, so we engaged in the same process. After mornings of rigorous teaching, we would return to our B&B for several hour rehearsals, led by our own group members. Despite skill level, we all engaged in learning various types of dance and song, and it was through these performances that I felt that our group truly learned to trust one another.

In POA, much of our work is based on the theories and writings of Paulo Freire. In his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire says, “No one is born fully-formed: it is through self-experience in the world that we become what we are.” I believe that each individual comes to POA through chance; it may be the recommendation of a friend or stumbling upon the class description in the depths of the course guide. Yet, one commonality is that we are all looking for something different, and through that process of searching, we also find ourselves. So to POA and to my new family and friends, thank you for giving me the space and encouraging me to find and become myself.

POA 2015 taught a total of 60 primary school students and community members in Johannesburg and Vulindlela. The two symposia in Johannesburg and Durban involved over a hundred and thirty participants with both US and South African POA alumni returning to give presentations on the impact of POA on their lives and work.



Primary school students.

GIEU 2015 in Tanzania (Team TZ)

By Nyambura Mpesha



This year fourteen undergraduate students and a student fellow traveled to Tanzania with DAAS Faculty Member Nyambura Mpesha to study issues concerning disability. Their on-site study began in Dar es salaam where they spent two days interacting with children who have physical disabilities. In Watoto Kwanza, the home to 14 disabled residents, GIEU students worked with children and young adults as they cleared a kitchen garden of debris and washed and painted walls among other chores. Eating together, playing and dancing created memorable moments. A bus ride of several hours from Dar es salaam to Lushoto took the GIEU group to the main internship sites where they worked in Irete School for the Blind, Irete Rainbow School, and Irete Children's Home.

Anne Pitcher



DAAS Professor Anne Pitcher has been elected as the incoming Vice President of the African Studies Association (ASA), the world's most eminent and established organization focused on Africanist scholarship. This is a three year commitment, during which Professor Pitcher will serve one year as ASA Vice President, one year as President, and one year as Past President.

Professor Pitcher, who also serves as coordinator of the ASC's African Social Research Initiative (ASRI), is an expert on the politics of Lusophone Africa and southern Africa. She is the author of several award-winning books, including *Politics in the Portuguese Empire* (Oxford, 1993), *Transforming Mozambique: The Politics of Privatization, 1975-2000* (Cambridge, 2003), and most recently *Party Politics and Economic Reform in Africa's Democracies* (Cambridge, 2012).

Kwasi Ampene

Kwasi Ampene, Director of the Center for World Performance Studies (CWPS) and Associate Professor in DAAS and the School of Music, Dance, and Theater, has been appointed a Diasporan Fellow in the Department of Music at the University of Ghana under the UG-Carnegie Diaspora Linkage Program for the 2016-2017 academic year.



Professor Ampene is the author of *Discourses in African Musicology: J.H. Kwabena Nketia Festschrift* (University of Michigan Library) and *Engaging Modernity: Asante In the Twenty-First Century* (University Lithoprinters).

Robin Means Coleman Named Chair of Communication Studies



DAAS Professor Robin Means Coleman is the new chair of Communication Studies. Professor Coleman is the author of *Horror Noire: Blacks in American Horror Films from the 1890s to Present* (2011, Routledge) and *African-American Viewers and the Black Situation Comedy: Situating Racial Humor* (2000, Routledge). She is the editor of *Say It Loud! African American Audiences, Media, and Identity* (2002, Routledge) and co-editor of *Fight the Power! The Spike Lee Reader* (2008, Peter Lang). She is also the author of a number of other academic and popular publications. Her research and commentary has been featured in a variety of international and national media outlets. Her current research focuses on the NAACP's participation in media activism.

Happy!



The Detroit Academy of Arts and Sciences Elementary Choir rocked the house during DAAS Graduation. They performed, among other songs, “Happy” by Pharrell Williams.

DAAS Administration

Executive Committee

Chair, Frieda Ekotto

Associate Chair, Martha Jones

Associate Chair of African Studies, Elisha Renne

Director of Undergraduate Studies, Karen Lacy

Director of Graduate Studies, Damani Partridge

Faculty Member, Amal Fadlalla

Faculty Member, Omolade Adunbi

Faculty Member, Sandra Gunning

Coeditors

V. Robin Grice, Elizabeth James, Faye Portis, and Desa Blount

Contributors

Nyambura Mpesha, Harleen Kaur, Danny Park, and Nesha Haniff

Yes, You Can Support DAAS

Gifts to the Department of Afroamerican and African Studies help us support a full range of activities, such as conferences, study abroad, brown bags, exhibitions, and many other special events. Your gift can also help support research, teaching, the Lemuel Johnson Center, and the DAAS Gallery. Finally, the Department helps student organizations, provides graduate and postgraduate fellowships, and sponsors visiting scholars. If you are interested in helping to support the mission of DAAS, please contact the U-M Office of Development at 734 647-6179. Use the address and form below if you'd like to mail a contribution directly to DAAS.

Department of Afroamerican and African Studies

University of Michigan

4700 Haven Hall

505 S. State Street

Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1045

Yes, I Want to Support DAAS!

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip code _____

Enclosed is my contribution of: \$1000 \$500 \$250 \$100 \$ _____

My employer/spouse's employer will match my gift. Form is enclosed.