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THE KENYA MODEL: DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF AN OVERSEAS STUDY COURSE ON AFRICAN WILDLIFE ECOLOGY AND MANAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT: The brochure declares: “What better place to study a diversity of wildlife species and ecosystems than Kenya’s spectacular National Parks and Conservation Areas?” Enticing! Exhilarating! A once in a life time experience! *African Wildlife Ecology and Management in Kenya* is an intensive two and a half week overseas study program offered by Michigan State University’s (MSU) Department of Fisheries and Wildlife. Through this hands-on experience, students apply wildlife management principles to issues in Kenya’s National Parks and Conservation Areas.

Planning and coordination of this course requires a year’s worth of thoughtful preparation in order to provide students with a dynamic yet placid in-country experience. To better aid other educators and coordinators in development and implementation of similar courses, we present a detailed account of the history and evolution of *African Wildlife Ecology and Management in Kenya*. How was this course conceived? How was support garnered from the University? What is required for developing such a course?

Furthermore, we present information on why different sites within Kenya were selected and how the order of visitation to these sites allows for a logical progression and increasingly more elaborate acquisition of knowledge of course material. Finally, we describe the various projects assigned to students and the rationale for assigning them; the basis for using student groups throughout the in-country experience; the use of alternative forms of assessment to evaluate student learning; assigned readings and course packet development and contents; and implications of limited time and lack of technology while in-country.

INTRODUCTION

“Deciding to study abroad is the first step in changing your life. It is an enriching experience both academically and personally. The lessons you learn abroad cannot be duplicated on any campus in the United States.” (Michigan State University’s Study Abroad Program Pamphlet, 1997 - 1998)

At Michigan State University (MSU) a continuing commitment to expanding international perspectives in academia, research, and outreach is at its pinnacle. Under the direction of the President of the United States and the President of MSU, the importance of international exchange for students at MSU has been amplified. A formidable goal has been set attempting to provide all students with at least one

international experience in their educational career. Opportunities to reach this goal abound at MSU. Currently, MSU provides over 90 overseas study programs to such places as Australia, the Bahamas, China, England, Ireland, Kenya, Nepal, Portugal, Sweden, and Zimbabwe. While the number of programs may be numerous, few have strong science-based curriculums.

One such course that has answered this call is a program developed by MSU’s Department of Fisheries and Wildlife. This class focuses on wildlife management issues in Kenya, Africa. It is appropriately titled *African Wildlife Ecology and Management in Kenya*. Since its inception in 1995, the course has been oversubscribed and stands in high demand by undergraduate and graduate students from MSU and other institutions.

The purpose of this paper is to provide educators and coordinators with a detailed account of the history and evolution of MSU's *African Wildlife Ecology and Management in Kenya*. It is our aim to address the following issues. How was this course conceived? How was support garnered from the University? We also will discuss the logistics required for developing such a course. We will present information on why different sites within Kenya were selected and how the order of visitation to these sites allows for a logical progression and increasingly more elaborate acquisition of knowledge of course material. Finally, we will describe the various projects assigned to students and the rationale for assigning them; the basis for using student groups throughout the in-country experience; the use of alternative forms of assessment to evaluate student learning; assigned readings and course packet development and contents; and implications of limited time and lack of technology while in-country. It is our intent to afford fellow educators with a framework with which to develop overseas programs at their home universities.

PROGRAM HISTORY AND PLANNING

The concept for teaching *African Wildlife Ecology and Management in Kenya* came into being in 1994. After plans were made by two MSU instructors to visit Kenya and Tanzania to investigate progress of a field research project, the possibilities and opportunities for developing an overseas study program in Kenya and Tanzania were also considered. University administrators enthusiastically supported this venture because this promoted the University president's goal of involving students in at least one international exchange program during their educational career. So, in addition to investigating research activities, time was spent learning about socioeconomic and ecological issues in the country; inquiring about lodging facilities, modes of transportation, and travel arrangements; meeting prospective guest speakers for this course; and obtaining estimates for course expenses.

We discovered that an initial faculty-only visit to a country of interest is crucial for designing an academically rigorous, safe, efficient, and enjoyable overseas study course. Visiting a country without students will allow you to learn about socioeconomic and natural resource management issues associated with the country before introducing course material. Imagine teaching a hands-on course if your preparation was merely reading a textbook related to the course. Your first exposure to the dynamics of the site would be with the students, thereby causing you to experience the site and material at the same time as the students potentially disabling you in being an effective instructor or group leader. We have experienced such a dilemma. Colleagues of ours who did not have the opportunity to visit a country prior to working with students found recruiting and teaching problematic.

One issue that arises when attempting to plan an initial site visit, however, is funding. Our initial site visit was funded by a grant received from the MSU Overseas Study Program, the College of Agricultural and Natural Resources, the Department of Fisheries and Wildlife, and various funding sources in Kenya provided by Dr. Perez Olindo and Ms. Chiaki Nakamura. Potential sponsors, other than universities, that may provide funding for faculty to teach internationally include the U.S. Department of Education (i.e., Higher Education Education Grants, International Grants), U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (i.e., Environmental Education Grants), and Rotary International.

Due to the dynamic nature of air travel, another element must be addressed. Traveling with a group of students overseas can be challenging - after all very few of us experience traveling to professional meetings and conferences with 15 to 20 people "in-tow." We advise, when planning class travel arrangements, that every effort be made to have the fewest number of layovers as possible. When layovers are inevitable, it is highly recommended that layovers are of substantial length so all members of a large group can make connecting flights. Please note: To ensure that flight arrangements for students were as expeditious as possible, instructors making a preliminary site visit traveled on an airline itinerary that most closely followed the one that the students would eventually travel the following year.

We felt the course should begin in early June - allowing instructors two weeks of final preparation time after courses ended on the MSU campus. This would also assure better weather conditions for a field-oriented course (early June is the beginning of the dry season in Kenya). The initial faculty-only site visit was also held at this time so we could experience comparable weather conditions, tourism intensity, animal distributions, and habitat conditions. Knowledge of these parameters was essential for informing students of the types of equipment to bring and what they might expect to see during the course, and allowed us to plan the course itinerary, activities, and assignments.

Upon arrival in Nairobi, Kenya, instructors identified the need for the first two days in-country to be relatively restful days for students. Starting the course slowly (introducing students to the course and the Nairobi area) would allow students to acclimate to the time change and recuperate from the nearly 18 hour flight.

A major goal of the initial site visit is to investigate where students should be taken during the course to provide them with a diversity of experiences. We visited eight national parks and reserves in Kenya and Tanzania as well as the Kenyan National Marine and Fisheries Research Institute and Lake Victoria. During this trip we stayed at and/or visited 11 lodges in 11 days. In addition, we were also able to talk to many of the national park wardens, rangers, and researchers associated with wildlife services in Kenya and Tanzania.

Through our efforts, we established contacts who were interested in talking and working with students the following year.

Visiting numerous sites on this trip was insightful for realizing that covering such a vast geographic area in a few days would not be practical with students. Participants in an overseas study course need time at each location to learn and reflect upon the ecology of the parks and the species in them, as well as learning about the socioeconomic issues surrounding the parks. Having students engage in activities and assignments related to these topics are crucial for developing a rigorous academic experience for students. This eliminates the potential for their travels to be “photo safari” in nature.

Therefore, we have learned that:

- Students require time to adapt to cultural changes and time changes before working on academic activities.
- A number of areas should be visited to facilitate the planning of where students will travel and what types of academic exercises work best at those locations.
- It is important for instructors to make a faculty-only visit to learn about the area and possible subjects they will teach.
- Traveling through customs of some countries with a large group may be problematic. Make sure that you, as instructor, have traveled through all the customs in your faculty-only trip. You will be better prepared when visiting with students.
- Make contacts with professionals and local people you may want to visit with the class. These contacts will serve two functions: As instructor - to learn more about the park and issues in specific geographic regions and to potentially act as guest speakers for the class. For those individuals you want to talk to the class - contact them periodically prior to the course offering to facilitate scheduling a time and place for their guest lecture.
- Traveling with students will be much more complicated and slower than when traveling with your peers. Take into account the number of students in your group, whether they have traveled out of their own country, let alone their own state, and also consider their reactions to new cultures.
- What medical information and preparedness is necessary for a safe, healthy trip? What immunizations are needed? What types of medical facilities are available in the countries they will visit? What medical documents do they need to carry with them on the trip? What is the medical history of each program participant? Having answers to these and other questions will be helpful for students and their families. It will also help prepare you as an instructor for any medical emergencies that may arise.
- Student safety is paramount. Where can you take students during this course so their safety is not jeopardized?
- While traveling in-country, some people often have adverse reactions to new food and/or different water. Students and staff should be aware of how to deal with this possibility. First, how to cope with this medically is necessary. Secondly, the course should be developed so that the course can still proceed

should an individual, (staff or student), become sick or injured.

- Purchase literature from the country you are visiting. Some of the literature (i.e., books, maps, local publications or writings) that you might want for course development and/or assigned readings may not be available in the United States. It is also possible that the literature available in the host country may give you a more in-depth view of ecological topics, management techniques, and cultural issues.
- Take a plethora of slides, especially of lodging and dining facilities and places the class will be visiting. These will be useful for recruiting students and reassuring their parents in subsequent years.

NOW THAT YOU HAVE THE IDEA, HOW DO YOU MAKE IT WORK?

After the initial faculty-only visit to Kenya, it was obvious that *African Wildlife Ecology and Management in Kenya* was warranted. In this section we will address budget development, the most critical component for ensuring success of a program. Later, we will discuss our in-country visitation itinerary and the topics we cover in the class.

Important to be noted is that budget development will provide you with figures which will fall into three categories: Program Costs, Tuition Fees, and Airfare. Students will be responsible for covering the fees in these three categories.

In order to begin developing a budget, it was necessary to decide upon the locations for visitation and the number of days at each site. This task was expedited through the assistance of our in-country contact, Dr. Perez Olindo. Many costs arise when planning such an intense field experience and every effort should be made to identify these costs early on so you do not find yourselves “short of change” when in-country. When possible, we suggest that you overestimate your costs to allow for a financial cushion in the event that an emergency arises. If this extra money is not needed, it can be refunded to students at the close of the trip.

PROGRAM COSTS: Below is a list of the items which will incur costs and are viewed as necessary expenses falling under the umbrella of Program Costs. We present them to provide you with an idea of the variety and variability of different program costs. Please be aware that the total amount of the program costs will be divided equally among the number of students you take with you on your overseas study program.

- Transportation: This includes travel for instructors to and from the United States’ international airport, instructors airfare and in-country travel. (Students are responsible for their own transportation to and from the airport in the United States and associated airfare).

When we arrived at Kenya’s airport, tour vans picked us up and served as the method of transportation

throughout our stay. A tour company provided and arranged the vehicles for us. Using this type of travel not only relieved instructors from the responsibility of locating safe and properly functioning vehicles but was also beneficial because van drivers were included in the vehicle package cost. These resident drivers were an added bonus because they were familiar with the country and the locations we were visiting. In addition to the tour vans, we covered the expenses of one four-wheel drive field vehicle. The purpose of including this type of vehicle in our transportation needs was to carry baggage and to be available in the event of poor road conditions (i.e., pulling vans out of mud holes).

- **Per Diem:** As with all travel, an instructor per diem for travel days between the United States and the host country was included.
- **Entrance Fees:** The bulk of our course is spent in national parks and national reserves. While we have often been able to negotiate a reduced entrance fee or no fee at all due to our education group status, we have never been sure of this expense until arriving at the park or reserve gate. We encourage you to budget full-rate entrance fees, as the actual fee will remain an uncertainty until you arrive at each destination. Being prepared for full-fee entrance rates is crucial because there is no guarantee that prearranged reduced rates will be honored.

One such situation occurred at a national reserve. Reduced rates had been previously arranged for our group, but upon arrival, we found out that a lack of communication among park officials made a reduced fee for our entire stay within the reserve boundaries unrealizable, regardless of our negotiation efforts. Although this is an isolated case and we have been fortunate in avoiding full-rate fees for the majority of our site visits, we highly advise you to be prepared for any mishaps.

- **Lodging:** Most of this class is supported and enhanced by visits to national parks and reserves. Because many of the lodges are located within the boundaries of the national parks and reserves, the availability for lodging is limited; sometimes leaving only one or two possibilities. We strongly recommend reserving spaces early to ensure accommodation of large groups. Often times, meals are included in the overall lodging fee. This needs to be investigated, however, for each lodge. If you can arrange lodging at different sites with the same company that provides transportation it saves time and effort expended when paying bills. Additionally, wiring of funds to secure lodging also becomes less cumbersome.
- **Meals:** While most meals are covered with lodging arrangements, the cost of some meals, especially while in transit from one area to another, will need to be taken into consideration. For our trip, this was a relatively minimal

expense as most of our meals were provided by lodging facilities.

- **Miscellaneous:** These expenses include all other costs (tips, immunizations for instructors, exit taxes, instructor VISA's and passports, course packet binding, incidental expenses of instructors, water, and wiring of funds). These costs will vary depending on the country to be visited.

TUITION FEES: In addition to program costs (i.e., in-country travel, instructors expenses, lodging, meals) and airfare, students also pay course credit to participate in the class. Costs for course credits are set by the University and generally are considered separate from other program costs and are not a part of the operating budget. We deemed six credit hours necessary for this course. The number of credit hours for a class such as this is based on the amount of academic work required of the students and number of contact hours with the instructors as well as the need to cover costs associated with class development, Office of Study Abroad overhead, and the instructional budget, (i.e., faculty salaries, honorarium). These items are detailed below.

- **Instructor Salaries:** For those on a 12-month appointment, overload pay may be appropriate. The same consideration might also be given to accompanying graduate teaching assistants. Depending on the level of involvement of the teaching assistant, we allotted up to \$1,000 for an individual's participation.

This amount, \$1,000, is appropriate when a teaching assistant is instrumental in promoting and contributing to the program's success. An example of how we justified such an award arose from a unique situation. One of our teaching assistants for the class was performing research in Kenya and had lived there for eight years. This person arranged many of our guest speakers, faxed messages back to the United States, gave presentations, and ensured an adequate water supply for the class participants. This teaching assistant's efforts allowed instructors to focus their attention on their primary task of class delivery.

- **Honorarium:** For guest speakers a nominal fee, for example \$40, was paid to recognize their contribution to the program. If our guest speaker shared a meal with us, we covered that cost as well. Conversation during these meals provided an added bonus. Often times we could secure their participation in our program for subsequent years. Resident experts, who may not be included on the guest speaker roster, can add dimension to the country visit, as well. These experts, at times, accompanied us on excursions. During their stay with us, we covered honorarium, lodging and food costs. Their presence awarded us with cultural information which, may or may not have been relevant to the course, but enhanced the overall experience the students had while in Africa.

- Administrative Expenses: This includes costs associated with brochure production, advertisement, telephoning and faxing, and overhead charged from the Office of Study Abroad. If you are not working with a Study Abroad Office, costs associated with overhead may not be realized.

AIRFARE: The final cost for which students will be responsible is their own airfare. We highly recommend working with an experienced travel agent when purchasing tickets. Although students on this program can arrange their own flights, we also worked with a travel agent to obtain consolidator tickets. Because this reserves a section of tickets, fares are lower than if booking individually. We encouraged students to purchase these consolidated tickets because of the lower fees, and in securing these tickets students were able to travel together with instructors. This, therefore, relieved some of the anxiety of students and parents on departure day. We encourage you to book your flights as early as possible and to verify with the students that their tickets are in order. When traveling to Kenya you must also obtain a VISA to enter the country. A travel itinerary is necessary to process this paperwork, thus it behooves you and the students to obtain tickets as early as possible to avoid any unnecessary last minute worries.

In keeping with the financial arrangements of the program, wiring of funds before traveling is an issue which we feel necessary to address. Because no funds were wired in advance the first year we traveled, we were forced to find creative ways to carry substantial amounts of money. Obviously this caused unnecessary stress. This stress was compounded at the end of the trip because almost an entire day was needed to pay bills. This cut into class time and removed some of the instructors from contact with students.

If at all possible we recommend wiring funds in advance not only to secure lodging and vehicles, but to reduce the anxiety associated with carrying thousands of dollars "on person." We recommend that prior to wiring funds that you verify that a procedure exists with your school to allow this easy transfer of money. Miscommunications among different units in a university can cause discrepancies in how and when funds get wired and may potentially impact the efficiency of the class.

Impacting the final cost of traveling abroad is the number of students participating in the program. In most cases, the greater the number of students participating in the program, the lower the program cost is per student. However, when there is a greater number of students, there is a chance for less group adherence and less individual attention for students from instructors. Often times, larger groups make it more difficult to transmit and share information thus reducing the quality of the overall experience.

We debated about the number of students that could participate in an educationally stimulating and enjoyable program. For the first three years of the program, 16 or 17 students participated per year. Based on comments from the

students, this class size proved most effective. However, to accommodate the growing demands of this program, our Office of Study Abroad asked us to increase the number of students we admitted to the class. Maximum number for our program now stands at 20 students. This number addresses the request of our Office of Study Abroad, assures quality of the educational experience, and also makes securing accommodations and transportation feasible. With an increase in size of the class, we were also able to include an additional teaching assistant for our instructors.

WHO GETS TO GO AND WHY?

For our first year, we depended on "word of mouth" and informal recruiting meetings to promote this course. As the program grew in popularity, "word of mouth" still proved to be our best method of advertisement. However, we continue to offer recruitment meetings, (approximately one per semester), publish brochures, (sent to a variety of other institutions and new students entering our Department of Fisheries and Wildlife), and enlist students through the Office of Study Abroad recruiting fairs and supporting documents (i.e., advertisements in the University paper).

Deciding which students qualify for participation in your program can be tenuous. In the first year of our program, all students who applied to the program were admitted. Students educational backgrounds covered a wide range, from fisheries and wildlife to art history. The diversity of this group proved exhausting at times because students with a strong science background often felt as if they were required to "carry" their fellow students who did not come from a science-based program. Instructors were often required to bring non-science based students "up-to-speed" to allow for a smooth flow of program material.

This class is science based in nature. Initially, applicants were only required to have an introductory biology or ecology course during their undergraduate studies to be considered for the program. Currently, however, we require a more advanced general ecology course or it's equivalent in order to be considered for the program. A minimum grade point average of a 2.0 is also imperative for admission to the program.

To help "weed" out students who are more interested in a vacation abroad than a study opportunity, students must submit a one-page letter of intent or interest stating their reasons for wanting to take the course. These letters also assist in determining which students have a good grasp of science-related topics. When reviewing files, we also take into account a student's level in school (i.e., junior, senior). Generally, we attempt to accommodate those students who are further along in their course of study as this may be their last chance to participate in an overseas study program.

In our class we must also take into account the ratio of males to females. In Kenya, it is generally not accepted that unmarried males and females share common sleeping space. We also cannot make the assumption that this practice is acceptable to all participants of the class. Because we house two students to a room we must have even numbers of males and females in the program.

After the selection process, we have a minimum of two pre-departure meetings in the semester preceding the overseas course. In the first pre-departure meeting, at which we also invite parents, we concentrate on logistical information. We review the class schedule with the students and discuss passports, VISA's, airline tickets, and general health and the wellness issues students should be aware of prior to traveling to a different country. In addition, we discuss customs of the host country and basic etiquette by which we expect students to abide.

Although health and wellness issues are covered mainly in the first pre-departure meeting, at both pre-departure meetings we highlight and remind students of issues related to sex, alcohol and drug use. Our Office of Study Abroad covers issues related to sex, drug and alcohol use, and provides a variety of supporting literature related to these topics. While it may seem unnecessary to discuss these topics, we have found it invaluable to remind students that these issues are of grave importance to their health and well being, as well as being important to the success of the program. Students MUST also be reminded that in the event they are found breaking the law in the host country, we, as instructors, have little recourse or authority to assist them.

Being straightforward about our expectations of students is crucial. Reminding them that this is a full-fledged course requiring the active participation of every student is important. Although students will experience the culture and beauty of the host country, the first and foremost reason for being in this course is for educational gains. It is at that time that we encourage those students who do not feel they are able to work and participate under these expectations to remove themselves from the program. We also remind students that if we, as instructors, feel that their behavior on the course is detrimental to the program as a whole, we reserve the right to remove them from the program and send them back to the United States at any time.

Our second pre-departure meeting serves two functions: First, to check to see that students are moving along with acquiring passports, VISA's, and airline tickets, and second, to distribute the first assignments for the class. (These assignments are discussed in detail in the next section.) During this meeting, we also have a formal lecture period to discuss basic principles of wildlife management so that all participants have the same core background. Because we get students from a variety of science backgrounds, (biology, zoology, fisheries and wildlife), we found that this second

meeting and formal lecture were beneficial. Valuable time in the host-country was not taken up covering basic topics of wildlife management. Students were also ready to "dive in" to their in-country assignments immediately after arriving in Kenya.

THE COURSE IN-COUNTRY

At this point, all of the details have been covered that are relevant to getting you ready to travel. Although left to the last section of this document, the course material is obviously one of, if not the most important feature of *African Wildlife Ecology and Management in Kenya*. What students should take away with them at the end of the course are highlighted next.

By the end of the course students should be able to:

- discuss the dynamic nature of Kenya's ecosystems and the human-wildlife conflicts which exist within them
- plan and develop wildlife management plans to achieve multiple use objectives for Kenya's wildlife resources
- explain how habitat components and characteristics impact populations of selected species in Kenya
- describe various population analytical approaches and apply them to monitor population trends of selected wildlife species
- describe various types of human impacts and their effects on wildlife habitat, populations, and local economies
- discuss approaches to maintain Kenya's biological diversity.

To meet these objectives, the course was structured around visits to four National Parks and one National Reserve (see Table 1 for schedule). Financial constraints on the students and time constraints on the faculty necessitate offering the class as an abbreviated course of approximately three weeks in duration. Because this is an intense six-credit course, we opted to restrict our visits to fewer areas for extended periods of time. We believe that this provides the student with a more in-depth understanding of the conservation and management issues because more time can be spent investigating issues and pondering ideas. Additionally, by restricting the course to a few selected parks we can minimize travel time and maximize educational opportunities. The order in which the parks and reserve are visited was selected to expose the students to increasingly more complex conservation issues and a variety of ecosystems.

Within the travel schedule, every day maintains a schedule of its own. Some mornings and afternoons are reserved for lectures or particular cultural events (e.g., a visit to the Birikini Women's Cooperative Group) or trips to selected areas in the park (e.g., the Rhino Sanctuary in Tsavo West).

During mornings and afternoons when a lecture or other event is not scheduled, the group participates in "game drives." Vans in which we travel become rolling classrooms. Each van holds four to eight students, an instructor and usually a Kenya

Wildlife Service (KWS) researcher or warden. During game drives students collect data they need to complete their assignments. Instructors and accompanying guest serve as guides of the areas visited. Presentation is fairly informal which allows for easy dialogue between the students and faculty. It is the responsibility of the students to engage in discussion and pose questions to the “guides” to gather the needed information to enhance their projects.

Evenings are reserved for guest speakers, lectures, and free time for students to write in their journals and/or work on group assignments. All daily schedules are flexible and adjustments for inclement weather and broken down vehicles are invariably required. Because a typical day lasts from sunrise until 10:00 or 11:00 p.m., free time is scheduled at regular intervals as part of the agenda. This free time is usually in lieu of an afternoon game drive. This gives students some down-time to socialize and relax. We do, however, schedule an optional game drive during this afternoon free time period.

Table 1. Itinerary for 1998 Overseas Study Trip

| | |
|-----------------|--|
| May 15 - 16 | Travel: Detroit - Nairobi |
| May 17 | Nairobi National Park |
| May 18 - 21 | Tsavo East National Park |
| May 22 - 24 | Tsavo West National Park |
| | <i>Tsavo East Management Plan Presentations</i> |
| | <i>Student Journals Due</i> |
| May 25 - 28 | Lake Nakuru National Park |
| | <i>Lake Nakuru Research Proposal Presentations</i> |
| May 29 - June 2 | Maasai Mara National Reserve |
| | <i>Maasai Mara Management Plan Presentations</i> |
| June 3 | Nairobi |
| | <i>Shopping at the Central Market</i> |
| | <i>Course Review/ Student Evaluations</i> |
| | <i>Student Journals Due</i> |
| June 4 - 5 | Travel: Nairobi - Detroit |

Assignments and the grading policy are detailed in the syllabus, discussed during orientation meetings and included in the course packet. Grades in the course are determined by performance on seven assignments. Prior to leaving for Kenya, each student is required to prepare two one-page review papers (each worth 5% of the final grade). The first paper is a *Species Habitat Description* that requires the student to become the class “expert” on a selected wildlife species by becoming familiar with the habitat requirements of that species. The second paper is an *Africa/Kenya Topic Paper* and requires the student to become the class “expert” on a social, economic or conservation issue (i.e., *Overview of Kenya’s Demographics, Ecotourism in Kenya, Maasai Culture, The Role of Zoos in Conservation*). Students are allowed to pick their own species and topic from a list

prepared by the instructors. All review papers must be submitted to the instructors at least one week prior to departure and are all included in the course packet. Failure to submit either paper forfeits a student’s right to participate in the course.

Throughout the course, students are required to keep a journal of their observations, experiences and thoughts (worth 10% of the final grade). Journals are collected twice during the course and are read by the instructors. Ten percent of the course grade is based upon participation. Students are expected to participate in all class discussions and discussions with invited speakers (i.e., area wardens, research biologists).

The three primary assignments are done in-country and are structured to increase in complexity in concert with the knowledge students are accumulating. Each of these assignments is tied to the issues at a particular park or reserve and each is done as a group project. Student groups are assigned by the instructors and group membership is changed for each assignment. For each assignment, each group must submit a written report and present an oral report of their findings to the class and guests (i.e., the area or park warden). All group members must participate in the oral presentation by giving a portion of the report.

All of the in-country assignments are group assignments and each member of the group receives the same grade for the assignment. One of our primary reasons for having group and not individual assignments is the time available for grading. Once we are in-country there is very little “free time” available for class preparation and grading. It would be physically impossible to grade three individual assignments from each of 16 - 20 students. More importantly, however, we believe that having to work in groups enhances the student’s experience. Group membership is assigned by the instructors to ensure a mix of academic majors and skill levels. Students bring different academic and social skills to the course. The group learning environment allows students with stronger skills in one area to assist those with less experience. As with on-campus courses, some students enjoy working in groups and others detest being dependent upon anyone else for their grade. We believe that the group assignments also help foster the camaraderie needed for a successful course.

On their first full day in Kenya, students visit Nairobi National Park to become familiar with some of the wildlife, habitat types and Kenya’s conservation history, particularly relative to controlling poaching. This also provides an excellent and much needed opportunity for the students (and instructors) to get some of the initial awe and excitement “out of their systems.”

At Tsavo East National Park in southeastern Kenya each group of four students is required to prepare a species-specific management plan (worth 20% of the final grade). For the Tsavo East assignment, students are only responsible for a

habitat and population management plan for their assigned species - they are under no obligation to consider any other species including humans. The students have about five days to complete the assignment. They do not have access to computers or a library. Because we must pack light, students are essentially limited to a calculator, human resources, data they collect in the field, and their course packet.

The lack of technical support and severe time restriction causes considerable stress in some students. All written reports must by necessity be hand written and visual aids for oral presentations are limited to colored magic markers and large sheets of paper. Despite repeated assurance by the instructors that while we expect high quality work, we do not expect the same level of performance that would be required back on campus for semester-long projects, few students believe this. We must be prepared to spend considerable time with each group helping them deal with the lack of technology and time.

Following a short visit to Tsavo West National Park, the second major assignment is given upon arrival at Lake Nakuru National Park. Lake Nakuru National Park is a relatively small park that is completely fenced, presenting a variety of unique management problems. Lake Nakuru National Park is completely bordered by farms and the town of Nakuru. For this assignment (25% of the total grade) each group must prepare and present a research proposal that focuses on a problem facing the entire Lake Nakuru ecosystem. Each proposal must include a statement of research objectives, methods of analysis, management implications, and a budget. Instructors grade the oral and written presentations, but KWS personnel are invited to the oral presentations and are asked to rank the proposals in terms of relevance, interest and "likelihood of funding".

The final assignment (25% of the final grade) is given at the Maasai Mara National Reserve and requires the students to incorporate the entirety of information they have received in the course. They must draw upon the lecture material presented by us, material presented by guest lecturers, informal discussions with KWS wardens and researchers and their own experiences. This assignment requires each group to develop a comprehensive management plan considering attributes of Maasai Mara's wildlife populations and habitat and socioeconomic values of the ecosystem. In short, they must consider all of the animals, all of the habitats, the tourists, and the local peoples.

Due to a lack of reference material in-country, we developed a course packet that serves as the student's primary written

reference for the course. It is made available to the students prior to departure for Kenya and is required reading. It contains:

- the syllabus and travel itinerary
- a detailed packing list of what to bring and what to leave behind
- notes on collecting data and recording observations
- lists of the avian and mammalian species most likely to be observed
- descriptions of all of the course assignments
- copies of each student's *Species Habitat Description* and *Africa/Kenya Topic* papers
- readings (book chapters, thesis summaries, papers from the primary literature).

Grades are given on a straight percentage scale. The class is structured as an in-country experience and as such, all assignments are completed before we leave Kenya. Students usually receive their grades on the flight out of Kenya. The advantages of this are that we do not have to track down students in the United States for assignments and it provides students with immediate feedback. The 18 hour flight provides ample time to discuss grades.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

While we coordinate many of our efforts for developing an overseas study program with our Office of Study Abroad, we believe that similar courses can be developed and implemented in the absence of a main Study Abroad Office. For our program, we primarily rely on our Office of Study Abroad to produce brochures, accept applications, maintain student records, and wire funds. The remainder of coordination efforts are handled through the lead instructors of the course.

As a final note on the course - be prepared to return exhausted. We have found that taking a group of students to a foreign country is a uniquely rewarding experience. However, conducting an overseas study course must be viewed as a labor of love. When we are in-country, we are essentially with the students every waking hour. It is difficult to find time to grade assignments, much less steal a little free time to simply relax. We must assume the role of teacher, tour guide and parent. Being responsible for a group of adventurous young adults for three weeks in a foreign country is extremely challenging. However, there are few times when a teacher has the opportunity to witness a student realize that his/her life has been forever changed by what they have experienced. An overseas study course provides such opportunities.