

DUKEENGAGE IN TOGO

Enhancing youth culture and stemming youth flight in remote areas

Dates: June 11-August 6, 2019

(Dates subject to change up until the point of departure.)

Service Themes

- Community development/outreach
- Children/youth services
- Health/human services
- Education and Literacy
- Technology and Media

Program Focus

Working with local community organizations to enhance youth culture and stem youth flight from remote villages in northern Togo, West Africa, to the plantations of Nigeria and Benin. Students teach computer classes (in two cyber cafés built by former students and in an elementary school), give out small microfinance loans to teens, run a writers' collective, and evaluate a health insurance system, among other projects.

Curricular Connections: While all students are welcome to apply, this program may be of particular interest to students studying International Comparative Studies, Global Health, Public Policy, Cultural Anthropology, African and African American Studies, Engineering, or French. (See below for additional details about connecting this program to your academic work.)

Program Leader

Charlie Piot, Professor, Department of Cultural Anthropology & Department of African and African American Studies, Duke University. Piot conducts research in Togo on globalization (and its effects on local societies), on changes in politics and culture since the 1990s, and on Togolese who apply for the US Green Card Lottery; he teaches courses on African politics and culture, Development in Africa, and anthropological theory.

Program Overview

Building on projects begun by DukeEngage-Togo students six summers ago, a small team of students, the program director and a graduate assistant will spend eight weeks in two villages of northern Togo to address the pressing issue of youth migration. We will interview teens who leave for Benin and Nigeria (to find adventure and make money) and continue to develop projects that cater to youth need, by providing support for two cyber cafés built by Duke students, financing alternative sources of income for youth, evaluating and improving a local health insurance system, continuing a writer's collective, and working on a range of more technical (engineering) initiatives.

The program director has conducted anthropological research in northern Togo for three decades and has partnered with local community organizations over the past six years in bringing DukeEngage students to carry out service projects in the area. Coming to terms with migration in one of the world's poorest regions — through engaging the intimacies and everyday lives of teens themselves — is a transformative experience for students.

Student Learning Objectives/Outcomes

This program is deeply immersive. Students live with local families and experience daily life, as well as ceremonial practice, in the villages of this culture-rich area. They also acquire up-close exposure to development in practice, with all its promises and frustrations.

Partnership Opportunities

Projects will be developed throughout the academic year and will match student skills to community needs. There is substantial room for creativity and innovation on the part of volunteers. Potential partners include:

- Affaires Sociales Farendé, a community service organization with a focus on youth
- Centre Liberté, a youth center in Farendé with a cyber café
- Case de Santé Kuwdé, a health clinic in the mountain village of Farendé
- Noar Foundation, a community service NGO that funds school and computer projects

Projects might include:

- Working in a cyber café to make it more user-friendly — teaching typing and internet skills, creating personal relationships with students at Duke, providing technical support for staff, teaching programming and website development;
- Working with a microfinance initiative for teens first established by a DukeEngage student in summer 2013;
- Continuing to work with a local Writer's Society established by a DukeEngage student in summer 2013 and continued each summer since. The aim of the workshop is to produce online-publishable works, both fiction and non-fiction, by local teens (see <http://www.farendewriterssociety.com/> and <http://ecrivainsdefarende.wix.com/cljf-2014>);
- Exploring ways of enhancing local library and school resources, including collecting and digitizing the writings of local scholars about Kabre history, language, folklore, culture;
- Other potential projects: students interested in health might evaluate a local health insurance system established by Duke students or focus on the effects of migration on health (e.g., the spread of HIV); students interested in archiving local culture can continue the project of a 2016 DukeEngage student who began collecting folktales in this folktale-rich area; students with backgrounds in the biological sciences and human-animal relations might explore ways of mitigating the ravages of monkeys on village fields (which makes farming ever more risky, and further drives youth away); engineering students might work on a nut sheller that will have revolutionary impact on the work of women in the community, or continue to work on a latrine sanitation project (created by Pratt students in 2013 and 2014), which produces biogas and algae for a fish pond.

Program Requirements

Language: Advanced beginner or intermediate French is required. Students will be encouraged to take French classes and/or attend language labs during the semester prior to departure.

Coursework: Students are encouraged to take an independent study in spring 2019 with Professor Piot, in which they will read background material — about life in West African villages, about the politics and history of the area, about youth migration — and brainstorm their projects. A second independent study will be offered after returning, for those who might be interested in shaping their summer work into publishable form.

Personal Qualities: Students must be adventurous and willing to live without the usual comforts (electricity, running water).

Curricular Connections

An Independent Study class on Togo and West Africa in spring 2019. There are also opportunities to take an Independent Study class with the Program Director upon return — to write up and possibly publish the results of student projects.

Program Details

Description of Community: Students will be based in villages about ten hours from the nation's capital. While strikingly beautiful — the villages are located in a small tropical mountain range, lined with terraces — over-worked soils and mountain habitat allow little more than subsistence farming (hence, youth's desire to leave) and amenities are minimal. The area is culturally rich and students will have the opportunity to witness initiation and funeral ceremonies during their stay. Each Wednesday, students will visit a market town an hour away to buy supplies. On Saturdays, students attend a large regional market in Farendé. These markets are the lifeblood of the villages, sites of vigorous commerce and sociality.

Housing and Meals: Students live with families in mud compounds, where they'll be surrounded by children and animals, and within short walking distance of the other students in the program. The families are gracious to a fault — they treat visitors like royalty — and Duke students have had nothing but praise for their homestay experiences. Amenities are scarce, with kerosene lanterns and flashlights, bucket showers and latrines the norm. Each student will have their own room and key. Families are protective and respectful of students' need for privacy.

Families will provide food at noon and in the evening, with students feeding themselves breakfast. If you do not eat certain types of food for cultural, religious or personal reasons, please contact the DukeEngage office, dukeengage@duke.edu, to discuss whether or not your dietary needs can be reasonably accommodated at this program site.

Transportation: DukeEngage provides transportation to and from all scheduled program activities. Students will use taxis in the capital and may use large Greyhound-type buses to get to and from the north. The program director also owns a car in the region, and uses a hired driver (in going to market to buy supplies, for example). When in the villages, all transportation is on foot.

Communication: Students will be provided with a basic local cell phone for program-related and emergency communication. Internet access is normally available intermittently in the villages, thanks to two internet cafés installed by Duke students.

Local Safety and Security; Cultural Norms, Mores and Practices: DukeEngage strongly advises all applicants to familiarize themselves with the challenges travelers commonly encounter at this program site in order to make an informed application decision. We recommend starting with these two resources:

- The International SOS (ISOS) portal for up-to-the-minute travel, health and security advice ([Log in to the Duke ISOS portal](#) with your Duke NetID)
- The [Diversity, Identity and Global Travel](#) section of the DukeEngage website

Opportunities for Reflection: All students will keep daily journals – one personal, the other work-related. Twice each week the entire group will convene over a meal to discuss the week's work, brainstorm their projects, and learn about local language and culture. These meals are attended by the program director and the site coordinator, who will take turns leading discussions. A group blog will be kept, with each student making four entries during the summer (about their projects and everyday life in the villages).

Other Opportunities: When not working on their projects, students are free to be with their host families, to attend local events (workgroup sessions, ceremonies, church services), or to spend time together. Open water swimming is not a sponsored activity in any DukeEngage program.

More Information

Charles Piot, ed. *Doing Development in West Africa: A Reader By and For Undergraduates*; Charles Piot, *Remotely Global: Village Modernity in West Africa*; Charles Piot, *Nostalgia For the Future: West Africa After the Cold War*.