



# Reading West Africa

PRE-DEPARTURE HANDBOOK

Fall 2010

International Programs Office  
Santa Clara University  
500 El Camino Real  
Santa Clara, CA 95053  
<http://www.scu.edu/studyabroad/burkinafaso>



# WELCOME

Nug bi yend ka wuk d zom yé.  
Une seule main ne ramasse pas la farine.  
You cannot collect flour with one finger.  
*Mossi proverb*

We are happy to congratulate you on being selected as a participant in *Reading West Africa*. The staff at the International Programs Office at Santa Clara University and our onsite staff at the *Reading West Africa* Program are ready to welcome you to your stay in Burkina Faso. This information packet is designed to prepare you for your academic experience in Burkina Faso. Please read through the packet carefully to get a good understanding and awareness of your responsibilities in the coming months before your departure for Burkina Faso. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions or concerns. Welcome!

## Table of Contents

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| <b>WELCOME</b> .....   | <b>2</b>  |
| <i>THINGS TO DO IMMEDIATELY</i> .....                        | 3         |
| <i>MAP OF BURKINA FASO</i> .....                             | 4         |
| <b>MISSION STATEMENT</b> .....                               | <b>5</b>  |
| <b>PROGRAM INFORMATION</b> .....                             | <b>6</b>  |
| <i>PROGRAM TIMELINE</i> .....                                | 6         |
| <i>ORIENTATION</i> .....                                     | 6         |
| <i>COURSE WORK LOGISTICS</i> .....                           | 6         |
| <b>PRACTICAL INFORMATION</b> .....                           | <b>7</b>  |
| <i>TRAVEL DOCUMENTS</i> .....                                | 7         |
| <i>COMMUNICATION</i> .....                                   | 9         |
| <i>EMERGENCY CONTACTS</i> .....                              | 9         |
| <i>WHAT TO BRING</i> .....                                   | 10        |
| <i>MONEY ISSUES AND LOCAL CURRENCY</i> .....                 | 12        |
| <i>READING WEST AFRICA LIVING ARRANGEMENTS</i> .....         | 14        |
| <b>BILLING, PAYMENT, REFUND POLICY</b> .....                 | <b>18</b> |
| <b>HEALTH AND SAFETY</b> .....                               | <b>19</b> |
| <i>HEALTH</i> .....  | 19        |
| <i>SECURITY &amp; SAFETY</i> .....                           | 21        |
| <i>HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPORTANT NUMBERS</i> .....             | 22        |
| <b>RESPONSIBILITIES AND CONDUCT</b> .....                    | <b>22</b> |
| <i>STUDENT CONDUCT CODE</i> .....                            | 24        |
| <i>GUEST POLICY</i> .....                                    | 26        |
| <i>CULTURE SHOCK: NOT ME</i> .....                           | 26        |
| <i>THE FOUR STAGES OF CROSSING A CULTURAL BOUNDARY</i> ..... | 27        |
| <i>MAKING LOCAL "FRIENDS"</i> .....                          | 28        |
| <b>FINAL THOUGHTS &amp; SUMMARY</b> .....                    | <b>28</b> |

### THINGS TO DO IMMEDIATELY:

1. Complete the CONFIRMATION form and send it back to the International Programs office with your \$500 deposit.
2. Set up your eCampus account at Santa Clara University.
3. Read this Pre-Departure Packet thoroughly.
4. Get your physical exam and return the MEDICAL FORM to SCU if you have not already.
5. Read and sign the updated SAFETY COVENANT and return it to SCU.
6. OBTAIN YOUR PASSPORT. Begin the passport process if you have not already (see "Travel Documents" for more info). Get passport photos (six is probably a good idea.)
7. Schedule/begin immunizations (see "CDC Vaccine Recommendations" in this packet).
8. Make housing arrangements for when you return to your home institution.
9. Consult with program directors regarding your air travel to Burkina Faso.
10. Give your parents / guardian the emergency contact numbers before you leave.
11. Plan to obtain your VISA to Burkina Faso about a month before your departure.

# MAP OF BURKINA FASO



# MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the *Reading West Africa* is the promotion of solidarity and global understanding through an intense and meaningful academic immersion experience in Burkina Faso. By integrating rigorous academic study with direct immersion with the villagers of Burkina Faso, the program challenges students to understand and engage the complexity of global and local social institutions that reproduce inequality and poverty.

You are about to embark on a potentially life-changing trip: studying in Ouagadougou and then immersing yourself in a small village and its community library in southwestern Burkina Faso. The region you are going to is one of the poorest in the world. You will be surprised and challenged by what you see. People getting by on almost nothing. Children crowding around to read a book or practice their French, or read a book for the first time in their native language. You will also see how lucky you are to have grown up in a developed country. The comforts and knowledge that you take for granted, you will find absent at every turn. The goal of your stay is to learn and to make a difference. Most likely, this is one of your first experiences abroad. Choosing to go to a very tough environment is a first sign of responsibility. There will be even greater challenges ahead. At Reading West Africa, we want to emphasize your responsibility to be prepared to the fullest extent possible. The more you know about Burkina Faso, the more benefit you will get from your semester abroad. The more you understand the dangers of travel in the Third World- particularly health hazards, but also regarding personal safety- the more effective you will be as a learner and a volunteer. So please read this manual and other material we suggest very carefully. Ask lots of questions. Talk with friends who have traveled in Third World countries. Read websites devoted to Burkina Faso and West Africa in general. Read travel guides, especially the health sections. We recommend the [Bradt guide to Burkina Faso](#) (by Katrina Manson and James Knight) and the [Lonely Planet Guide to West Africa](#). Both are available at Amazon.com, for example. Also take a look at the terrain and geography of Burkina Faso using Google Earth.

We invite you to immerse yourself in the "classroom" of the people of Burkina Faso. Dedicated to fostering "men and women for others," *Reading West Africa* is a unique living and learning environment. Here you can develop your intellectual potential, strengthen your ethical and spiritual values, and learn to become a socially responsible global citizen.

## THE CORE VALUES AND APPROACH OF THE PROGRAM INCLUDE:

### **Integrating Arts and Social Science:**

We choose to appreciate how artistic production, interpretation and appreciation complement intellectual understandings of social processes: what makes people "most human" is how they transform the material environment of their lives into transcendent, powerful, and emotional meaning.

### **Exploring Language:**

We choose to recognize that language is what makes us the complex beings that we are, and that fluency in different languages offers possibilities for translation and synthesis of profound insights into the human condition.

### **Focus on Learning with an Emphasis on Justice:**

We choose to integrate rigorous academic study with the experience of the marginalized of Burkina Faso in the hopes of committing ourselves in the world to justice.

### **Cultural Sensitivity:**

We choose to live in the context of another culture and context, learning from Burkinabè whom we are visiting.

### **Living Simply:**

We choose a simple lifestyle, willingly foregoing many luxuries, to gain perspective on how to be in solidarity with the marginalized of our world.

*Students are constantly invited to reflect on these components as the experience evolves. Regular gatherings are an essential part of the program and provide space to reflect in an intentional and ongoing manner.*

# PROGRAM INFORMATION

## PROGRAM TIMELINE

The following is the broad timeline for the program. Program Directors will communicate and post online a detailed day-to-day program of classes and activities in July, and communicate any changes to any dates by email.

### Pre-departure coursework:

(in order to make effective use of time in Ouagadougou, three of the essential readings for the development and civic engagement classes should be completed during the summer prior to arrival in Burkina Faso: Paul Collier's The Bottom Billion, Edward Miguel and Ray Fisman's Economic Gangsters, and Greg Mortenson's Three Cups of Tea. Also, students should order and read (in English or French, according to ability), the graphic novel Aya, by Marguerite Aboutet and illustrated by Clement Oubrerie. These books should be purchased by the student (they can be ordered online from a variety of sources; the French version of Aya is obtainable through amazon.ca, the Canada affiliate, at: <http://www.amazon.ca/AYA-YOPOUGON-T01-MARGUERITE-ABOUE/dep/2070573117>)

Arrival: September 2-3

Orientation: September 4

Classes begin: September 6

Week-long village immersion: Sept. 17-26

Excursion to Pobe-Mengao: Oct. 10-12

Village immersion: Oct. 19-Nov 16

Excursion to Bobo-Dioulasso: Nov. 7-11

Return to Ouagadougou: Nov. 16

Travel to Dogon country: Nov. 21-27

Farewell dinner: Dec 7

Departure: December 8-9

Some students might choose to travel in West Africa, Morocco, or Europe before returning to the United States. Note that the program officially will end on Dec. 9, and lodging in Ouagadougou after that date will be subject to extra charges.

## ORIENTATION

This packet is intended to assist you as you prepare for your academic experience in Burkina Faso. There will be a more thorough orientation upon your arrival. We will spend the first days addressing issues such as: safety and health, program policies, community norms and expectations, academic expectations, program schedule, cultural sensitivity, community development, language assessment, tours of Ouagadougou, etc. During this time, students will begin creating their living and learning community.

At the conclusion of the experience there will be an intensive debriefing for all participants. During this time, the group will address such things as culture shock, how to keep in contact with Burkina Faso, building systems of support once returning to the United States, and evaluation of the program.

## COURSE WORK LOGISTICS

### Course content and readings

Preliminary course syllabi are available on the web site. At this time, there is no need to purchase any materials for courses other than those mentioned above. Reading West Africa directors will be in touch with you regarding required readings for the courses. Information about the Civic Engagement course, where students will be working with community libraries during their immersion period, will be provided over the summer.

### Credits / Units

Credit is issued through Santa Clara University and an official transcript will be issued following completion of the *Reading West Africa* program. All courses are designed to be equivalent to 5-credit course for the Santa Clara University quarter system. This will translate into different semester hours. University of San Francisco students,

who are on semester system, had on their student transcripts 5 classes with 5 quarter units, which gave them 16.5 semester units. Most abroad semester classes are only 3 units, so a regular program would have given them 15 units. Your home institution may accept the Santa Clara transcript, grant credit itself for the courses, or utilize other procedures based upon school policy. Be sure to contact your campus study abroad office to obtain approval for participation in the *Reading West Africa* and acceptance of course credit prior to enrolling. Transfer credit policies differ significantly from school to school and you need to make sure that your home institution will accept your course work at the *Casa*. As a further backup, you should retain course descriptions, assignments, tests, papers, and other documentation from your *Reading West Africa* classes to assist your home institutions in awarding academic credit.

### **Tuition**

Students are responsible for paying the program costs (tuition, room & board) before arriving in Burkina Faso unless their home university has arranged for a direct billing agreement with Santa Clara University. Please check with your Study Abroad Office if such billing contract has been arranged. All program costs are published on the Santa Clara University International Programs Office website. Please be aware that some universities may charge a different cost. All students are billed via their e-campus accounts; no paper invoice will be sent to students' home address, but students can download or forward a PDF bill to a third party if they wish.

### **Course load / Withdrawal from Classes**

*Semester Program:* Reading West Africa students must take the Civic Engagement, Digital Photography, African Economic Development classes, and one or both French classes. Each class counts for 5 quarter units. This is a set curriculum. Withdrawal from a course is not permitted. The *Reading West Africa* program is an integrated academic / experiential learning endeavor involving a community-based approach to education.

### **Pass / No Pass Option**

Students may take courses on a Pass / No Pass basis depending upon the regulations of their home institution.

### **The Land of Honest Men**

I am eternally thankful to those Santa Clara professors and administrators who made this study abroad program possible. They successfully merged a highly academic curriculum with an enriching personal experience. We were not just living in a village community; our local guides helped us to be constantly learning and growing in that community. Through the photography class we developed the skills to translate the beauty of daily life in Burkina Faso into art. By working in the FAVL libraries we got first hand experience on the daily operations of an NGO. The Burkinabè provide an encouraging environment to practice French, and reading West African authors in our French Literature class strengthened our cultural understanding. Putting together the photo books was the culmination of everything we had learned and worked on throughout the semester. This project was important to me because it was our opportunity to leave something behind in the community that gave us so much. This program was truly a once in a lifetime experience and I look forward to returning to Burkina Faso, the land of honest men.

Meghan O'Connell – Reading West Africa Participant '09

## **PRACTICAL INFORMATION**

### **TRAVEL DOCUMENTS**

The following applies to US citizens. For other nationalities, verify with a Burkinabè Embassy.

### **Passport**

A valid passport is required. Make sure you begin this process AT LEAST 3 MONTHS before your departure date as the process can be a lengthy one (you can do a rush, but it is much more costly). Your passport is your primary source of identification. Your passport must be valid for the length of time you plan to stay abroad plus six months (180 days) beyond the estimated period

### **Applying for a U.S. Passport:**

The following is a list of items you will need to apply for your US passport (if you haven't already done so)

1. Completed passport application form
2. Proof of US citizenship (previous passport, birth certificate, naturalization papers, or Dept. of State Affidavit)
3. Two standard photos. These must have been taken in the last six months, must be 2@ x 2@, must be identical, and signed on the reverse. Passport photos can be obtained through copy centers such as Kinko's.
4. Proof of identity in the form of valid document with your signature and picture (previous passport or driver's license) *Passport & Processing fee: if you are over 18 years costs \$65.00*

If you already have a passport and it is close to expiring (less than a year), you must apply for a new one immediately.

- Where to apply (for US citizens): You can get passport applications at the post office or on-line at: <http://travel.state.gov>.
- Non-US Citizens: Non-residents of the US who plan to study abroad should contact the nearest consulate of their country of citizenship for passport information.

### **Burkina Faso Visa**

A visa for Burkina Faso costs \$100, and is usually delivered in 3-5 working days. The visa form is available at the website of the Burkina Faso embassy in Washington, DC. Go to <http://www.burkina-usa.org/> and click on the link for "Visas" in the "Consular Affairs" section. There you will find a link to the form for the visa. When filling out the form, use the FAVL address as the address in Burkina Faso ( s/c SARE Elisee, Amis des Bibliothèques de Villages Africains, 09 BP 938, Ouagadougou 09 and give the phone number for Sare Elisee 226-78011752). On the question "Purpose of journey" Check "Other" and then write in "Study abroad and volunteer in community libraries." If you think you will likely be returning to Burkina Faso, write on the application that you would like the five year multiple entry visa for \$100. Your visa will then be valid for five years, allowing multiple entry. You will need to photocopy the form, photocopy your yellow card vaccination form (showing that you have had a yellow fever vaccination) and submit two passport photos.

Send your passport and documentation and \$100 postal money order (made out to "Embassy of Burkina Faso") to the Burkina embassy through Fedex or UPS or Expressmail. Keep the tracking number. Include in the envelope a prepaid Fedex or UPS or Expressmail envelope and mailing label for the Embassy to use to send you back your passport. The clerk should be able to help you do that. It costs about \$15 to send each way via express service (so you need about \$30 total). **MAKE SURE YOU WRITE DOWN THE TRACKING NUMBER OF THE MAILING LABEL YOU INCLUDE IN THE ENVELOPE FOR THE RETURN!!!!** If you are in the U.S. during the summer you can request the visa in July. If you are traveling in the summer it may be better to get your visa earlier. When you receive your visa, make sure that it will be valid when you enter the country, early September. The Burkina embassy in our experience is extremely efficient in processing visas, and you will receive it back within 5-7 working days. Make sure you track it on the tracking website to make sure it arrives at the Embassy. You do not need to use a "Visa Processing" company.

### ***Important Reminders:***

- Allow yourself plenty of time for the passport processes, as it can take up to 6 weeks or more! **YOU CANNOT TRAVEL TO BURKINA FASO WITHOUT IT!!**
- Retain copies of original documents sent for processing.
- Register all mail containing passports and documents.

### ***For additional Help:***

- State Department Website at <http://travel.state.gov> (This organization can answer any questions about the document process, as well as specific questions you may have about your destination.)
- National Passport Information Center (NPIC)

## COMMUNICATION

### **By Phone**

Students will be given cell phones for use during the period of their stay. Students will post a non-refundable \$50 damage or loss deposit for the cell phones. Phone cards are available throughout the country; international calls are expensive, but receiving calls is free. The typical phone number is eight digits, and to call from the U.S. a person would dial

011-226-XXXXXXX. Depending on the time of year, Burkina Faso is 7-8 hours ahead of Pacific Standard Time. Typing in “Ouagadougou time” into Google will give websites with the exact time in Burkina Faso. Unlike the U.S., few people in Burkina Faso sleep late (the roosters crow, the donkeys bray, and it is very embarrassing to be sleeping after 7am). Some villages have cell phone coverage, but some do not. All students will be in town with cell phone coverage at least once a week during the village immersion portion of the program.

### **By Mail**

Mail can take from 2-3 weeks. Packages can be sent either PRIORITY MAIL or AIRMAIL. Priority mail usually takes about 7-10 days and air mail about two weeks. If someone is mailing a package, be sure all food is sealed; heat, moisture, postal employees, and insects can spoil contents. We do not advise sending anything valuable. Books, reprinted articles or cassette tapes qualify for an airmail printed matter rate - which is considerably lower than general airmail. Keep in mind that shipping packages is a lengthy process that can be insecure. There's a charge to receive packages larger than a large envelope.

Your mailing address in Burkina Faso is:

STUDENT Name

s/c SARE Elisee (Programme RWA)

Amis des Bibliothèques de Villages Africains

09 BP 938

Ouagadougou 09 BURKINA FASO

### **By E-Mail**

There are Internet cafes in walking distance of the student residences, and the FAVL office has a DSL line available to students at certain hours. The cost for such services at Internet cafes is about \$1/hour. Students are encouraged to try not to spend too much time online, but rather immerse themselves in the “real” world of Burkina Faso. Students are encouraged to setup prior to departure a blog using blogger ([www.blogspot.com](http://www.blogspot.com)). That way they can post photos and have “common” updates available to friends and family.

## EMERGENCY CONTACTS

It will be important to give your parent(s) / guardian(s) the emergency contact numbers at Santa Clara University and the *Reading West Africa* before you leave. *Reading West Africa* staff will be in regular contact with the Santa Clara University International Programs Office staff.

### **Santa Clara University**

International Programs

500 El Camino Real

Santa Clara, CA 95053-0639

Ph. 408. 554.6940

Fax 408.554.2340

[tshoup@scu.edu](mailto:tshoup@scu.edu) (Terry Shoup, *Executive Director*)

[bcolyar@scu.edu](mailto:bcolyar@scu.edu) (Barbara Colyar, *Director of Study Abroad*)

[vraatior@scu.edu](mailto:vraatior@scu.edu) (Vidalino Staley Raatior, *Assistant Director, Study Abroad*)

[lajohnson@scu.edu](mailto:lajohnson@scu.edu) (Lori Johnson, *Business Manager*)

Michael Kevane, Co-Director, RWA  
Chair, Department of Economics  
Santa Clara University  
Santa Clara, CA 95053  
408-554-6888 phone  
408-554-2331 fax  
[mkevane@scu.edu](mailto:mkevane@scu.edu)  
Michael Kevane and/or Leslie Gray (cell) 011-226-76 40 89 23

**Program Directors in Burkina Faso (Directors' Address)**

David Pace, Co-Director, RWA  
[dpac@scu.edu](mailto:dpac@scu.edu)  
s/c SARE Elisee (Programme RWA)  
Amis des Bibliothèques de Villages Africains  
09 BP 938  
Ouagadougou 09 BURKINA FASO  
(cell) 011-226-75 05 38 27 (Sept 20-Dec 10)

The Reading West Africa program logistics are organized by a non-profit organization Friends of African Village Libraries and its local staff in Burkina Faso. Local contact numbers for these staff are below. These staff members speak some English, but comprehension might be difficult if the caller does not speak French.

*Telephones*

FAVL office in Ouagadougou (ask for David Pace or SARE Elisee): 011-226-50 36 13 41  
Sare Elisee (cell) 011-226-78 01 17 52 (anytime)  
Koura Donkou (during village immersion) 011-226-76 66 52 41 (Oct 15-Nov 20)

*Email*

[dpac@scu.edu](mailto:dpac@scu.edu) (David Pace, Program Co-Director)  
[mkevane@scu.edu](mailto:mkevane@scu.edu) (Michael Kevane, Program Co-Director)

## WHAT TO BRING

**Passport & Extra Photos**

Make sure that you travel with your passport, and also keep several copies of the first page (of information, with your picture) and a copy of your Burkina Faso visa tucked in different places throughout your luggage in case of loss of passport. Leave a copy of the information with your parents or a trusted friend back home as well. Please also bring 2 additional passport-sized photos of yourself for use in completing documents when you get to Burkina Faso. You can get passport photos at Walgreens or Costco, for example.

**Weather & Clothing**

The weather will be warm to hot (80-100). The rainy season can be very humid and generally runs from late June to mid October. November, December, and January are drier and usually cooler in the evenings, so be sure to pack a sweatshirt, sweater, or light jacket. In general, it is best to bring lightweight casual clothing with two or three nicer outfits for more formal meetings. Informal dress is fine, however shorts are usually restricted to leisure activities. Remember that the field placement is part of the curriculum and, therefore, you will need to dress appropriately for these days. Slacks and skirts are fine, but shorts and mini-skirts would not be appropriate.

We ask that you leave behind military-style clothing (camouflage) and gang-style clothing. Women should avoid clothes that would attract unwanted attention such as revealing dresses, tube tops or very skimpy outfits generally. Burkinabè make a significant effort to present themselves well and appreciate it when visitors do the same. People in Burkina Faso generally do not wear shorts in public except when doing physical work or around the house. Women almost never wear shorts in public. Don't make yourself stand out if you are a woman; bring loose cotton long pants or long skirts. Bring shorts for around the house. Women do wear tank tops, especially in the village. Covering hair is not necessary, though it keeps the dust down. Many women wear kerchiefs (or wigs). Bring cool skirts (most women in the village wear a single piece of cloth wrapped around their waist, a *pagna*), and a shirt. T-shirts

are fine and comfortable.

Clothes get very dirty/dusty quickly, so avoid white- patterns work better. You will have fun if you like fabric and making clothes. You can buy cloth in the market (ask around for the prices) and have the tailors make things for you- generally they can replicate anything you bring them, though not great quality. In general you want to wear long pants and sleeves in the evening when the mosquitoes come out. People in West Africa are pretty casual though about clothing- you still see the occasional woman without a top (older women, generally!)

It is good for a volunteer to aspire to a level of professionalism that typical college clothing doesn't usually do... Some of the librarians, for example, always wear an ironed button shirt and long pants and shoes whenever they are working in the library... But volunteers will be a hit if they start to wear the *pagna* that women wear- a "wrap" like a sarong, or the open traditional shirts that men wear...Since clothes are washed by hand, we recommend bringing cotton / light-easy to dry clothing. Jeans, for example, are very hard to wash!

### **Clothing to bring**

- Sturdy comfortable sandals
- Flip flops
- Study walking shoes for trip to Dogon country: you will be walking over rocky cliffsides, not dangerous, but you will want good walking shoes- light hiking boots are best.
- Old clothes that you don't care if they get very trashed... Jeans are often too hot, so make the pants khakis or other cotton pants.
- Bring at least one set of presentable clothes. You may only be in town for a couple days, but people you meet there will be wearing nice clothes. Guys should bring two decent light cotton button shirts (you can get them for \$3 at any thrift shop or garage sale), cotton and short-sleeved, women should bring two decent dresses or pant-blouse combo. You may be invited to the ambassador's residence (it is a small country!).
- Hat- whatever you feel comfortable with. Sometimes it is very hot, and you have to wear some kind of hat.

Apart from whatever clothing and toilet articles you may need (you can buy such items in Burkina Faso, but they are more costly), we suggest bringing along:

### **Checklist**

- Insect repellent
- Water bottle
- USB jump drives (2-3 of 1 Giga capacity, since you will be storing a lot of photos) or an external hard drive, and lap top (this is optional – see section on “Computer Use”)
- Notebooks, pens, pencils (you can also buy these in Burkina Faso)
- Travel alarm clock
- Pepto-Bismol tablets, cold medicine, and allergy medicine if you have allergies
- Prescription medications
- Two thermometers (available at any drugstore; we suggest two because they often break and are often lost)
- Swimming suit and towel (the American Rec Center is available for a modest fee)
- Sun screen, sunglasses, hat
- Photos of your family
- Address book for writing friends and family
- Small backpack for daily use (books, etc.)
- Pillow and pillowcase – for the long airplane flight, waiting in airport lounges, and then for use in Burkina
- Comfortable bag / backpack for weekend travel / outings
- Safety belt or pouch (to keep money and passport safe while traveling)
- French / English dictionary
- Light jacket for cool evenings
- Rain gear (light poncho / umbrella) during rainy season (June to October)
- Bathing items (towel/s, flip-flops, shampoo, soap, etc.).
- Purifying water tablets (at least a 2-3 week supply, just in case)

- 15 Powerbars in case you hate the food or need a late night snack in order to go to sleep. Good travel food also.
- Women- tampons and pads- not available in the village!
- Very good to have a small plastic toiletries bag that is somewhat stiff on the sides and opens easily- you will be occasionally bathing outdoors in a shower stall, from a bucket.
- Swiss army knife- always useful, esp. the can opener.
- Flashlights and booklights for reading. (AA batteries are easiest to obtain... AAA are harder but increasingly available). Solar chargers of batteries in our experience perform poorly, test before bringing.

**Please do NOT bring:**

- Do you wear contact lenses? Maybe leave them behind and bring two pairs of glasses, one for emergencies if they break. The village guesthouse in Béréba, and other village places you might stay, do not have nightstands, and sometimes you end up sleeping on the ground, and you wake up late at night and you step on your. Bring a glasses case that is rigid. Cheap sunglasses are far better than expensive ones since it is highly likely you won't be returning with your sunglasses...
- Too many clothes – students often wash clothes by hand!
- Anything with too great of value as the less you have, the safer you will be
- Expensive jewelry, a lot of money, nice radios or other electronics, etc.

**A Week in Bobo-Dioulasso**

One of the highlights of my stay in Burkina Faso was the week we spent in Bobo-Dioulasso, the former capital city. Bobo-Dioulasso is a small, bustling, artistic city; if Ouagadougou is New York City, Bobo is San Francisco. It was wonderful to be reunited with the other students after a few weeks adjusting to village life! On our first day in Bobo, we took a tour of the Old City and visited the Grand Mosque. During our stay we would have breakfast and classes as a group, followed by free time in the evenings, when we could walk into Centre-Ville and explore. We visited street vendors and the Grand Marche and bought beautiful souvenirs - calabasse bowls, jewelry, masks, and pagnes - for our friends and family back home. We also took a day trip to Banfora in the southwest to see the indescribably beautiful rock formations and bathe in the waterfalls. Bobo-Dioulasso is a beautiful city full of culture and history, and it was a great treat to see it for myself.

Ashley O'Brian

**MONEY ISSUES AND LOCAL CURRENCY**

Burkina Faso, along with other French West African countries, uses the French CFA (or FCFA), which it tied to the euro, and so fluctuated considerably against the US dollar. The exchange rate for the beginning of 2010 has been about 460 CFA per dollar. However, it was as low as 350 CFA per dollar in 2008.

**ATM / Check Card**

The easiest option for accessing your money will be with an ATM/credit card (the ones with the Visa, MasterCard, or other major credit card symbol). These can be used anywhere major credit cards are accepted and can also be used to withdraw cash from your account at an ATM machine. Please confirm with your bank that you will be able to access your money internationally as students have sometimes had trouble in the past accessing their money without prior notification to their bank. Many accounts require a 4-digit PIN to access the account internationally. Check with your bank.

**Travelers Checks**

Another option is to bring travelers checks. These are easy to carry around and can be exchanged at most banks. The downside is that most banks charge a processing fee and are hard to get to at times.

**Cash**

If you decide to carry cash, bring only intact higher-denomination bills printed recently, as Burkinabè banks and institutions will not accept US bills that are old, torn, stained, or worn-out. The RWA program is not responsible for stolen cash, and we have no facility for safely housing cash. Please invest the time in setting up a bank account with international ATM access, and make sure the account will have sufficient funds for your miscellaneous expenses and travel during your stay. \$1000 should be more than sufficient.

### **Credit Cards**

We HIGHLY RECOMMEND that you bring some type of credit card with you for emergency purposes. American Express, Visa & MasterCard are widely accepted (although Visa seems to be more useful).

### **Emergency Funds**

Please have access to at least \$1000 for emergency medical needs (this may be where a credit card would be necessary). Check with your own insurance to see the procedure if you get sick abroad. We have access to good medical care, but you often have to pay out of pocket yourself, keep the receipts, and have your insurance reimburse you when you get home.

### **Planning your budget**

Your housing, most meals, and program transportation costs are included in the program cost. However, you will want to plan for some spending money while in Burkina Faso. Plan for emergencies and add a cushion when thinking about your budget.

### **Expenses to Consider:**

1. Airfare - Your airfare is not part of the program cost and you will be responsible for your round trip ticket. Check STA Travel ([www.statravel.com](http://www.statravel.com)) or Student Universe ([www.studentuniverse.com](http://www.studentuniverse.com)) for good student rates
2. Course textbooks, readings, copies and supplies (approximately \$100)
3. Crafts / gifts / souvenirs
4. Snacks (chips, cookies, soft drinks, etc.)
5. Weekend food money (about \$200 for the semester)
6. Laundry soap and computer paper (approximately \$20)
7. Phone cards
8. E-mail at internet cafés
9. Personal travel (meals, lodging, entertainment, border fees)
10. Misc. entertainment

Last year after the first month of so many students were wondering whether they would have \*any\* expenses out of pocket. The answer is, "Not if you don't want to..." The program covers all food and lodging. We decided last year that we would give students a weekly stipend of about \$10 to cover incidentals and food snacks etc. Most students found this was more than enough to cover their needs. The cooks provide two meals a day, and breakfast is usually french baguettes with butter and jam, and coffee/tea. Eggs are easily available if you want something more solid. Most students enjoyed the meals prepared by the cooks. For morning breaks we had fresh fruit every day in Ouagadougou. In the villages of course meals are different, but most students found them to be fine. We provided every student with a cellphone, and your parents can easily call you. if you want to call them, then that might cost \$5 per short conversation.

## **AIR TRAVEL TO BURKINA FASO**

STA Travel ([www.statravel.com](http://www.statravel.com)) or Student Universe ([www.studentuniverse.com](http://www.studentuniverse.com)) for good student rates. The carriers that fly into Ouagadougou are Royal Air Maroc (via New York and Casablanca) and Air France. Sometimes it is cheaper to buy two segments, roundtrip to Paris and then roundtrip on Air France or Royal Air Maroc to Ouagadougou. Fares vary up and down over the summer and it is hard to predict when a good time to purchase is. We will keep you posted over the summer. When you are ready to buy a ticket, please email Michael Kevane with the information and he will try to give you feedback.

Do not fly into Accra and then fly Air Burkina into Ouagadougou. Air Burkina is notoriously unreliable.

### **The Distinct Feel of Burkina Faso**

I arrived in Ouagadougou in layers of clothing. It was a Thursday morning and I had to leave Ethiopia and say goodbye to one incredible experience to move on to another. It was the rainy season in Ethiopia, cold and drizzly. In Ouagadougou it was a sauna and I started sweating the instant I stepped off the plane.

This was not my first time in West Africa, and I was trying my best to act as though all the action around me was familiar. Certain things did remind me of my previous trip to Senegal, taken just a year before. Being blatantly stared at, for one, was something I had grown accustomed to. I was a single white woman in western clothing alone in a public place, I may as well have been wearing a neon sign that said "Hey look at Whitey" (or "nassara" the local term for any foreigner). The oppressive heat was also familiar; it would be another two months or so before I became acclimatized. I looked around the airport at my fellow travelers trying, like some sort of egotistical anthropologist; to recognize mannerisms that were similar to the Senegalese I had spent time with before. My thoughts were interrupted by an airport policeman asking if I was a soldier because I was carrying a large backpacking backpack. The sudden re-entrance of French into my life was startling and I struggled to explain to him that I was just a student. I received a blank stare in response to my broken "French" answer to his question. It was at this moment that I realized that though I might find in Burkina some similarities to my past travels, every new experience I had was going to take on a distinct feel that only a country like Burkina Faso could provide. I realized that it was time for me to check my ego at the door. This experience was going to be one that broke me down and built me back up again, as a traveler, as a student, and simply as a person.

I returned to that airport 3 months later humbled and grateful for everything I had been blessed with in my life. There is a cliché about study abroad changing your life, but my experience went beyond being revolutionary. The connection I developed with my village, my fellow students, the kids in our library, and everyone else I met, had, and will continue to have a profound effect on how I view my own life.

Louise O'Rourke

## READING WEST AFRICA LIVING ARRANGEMENTS

### **Housing**

Unlike many study abroad programs, students who participate in the *Reading West Africa* will not have to shop for housing once they have arrived in Burkina Faso. As part of the living and learning community which will be formed, all students will live together in two group houses in the Dassasgho neighborhood near the University of Ouagadougou. You will be provided with a room, bed, pillow, desk, fan, and bed linens. WE DO ASK THAT YOU BRING YOUR OWN TOWEL(S). Housing is included in the price of the program.

### **Meals**

Meals will be simple and healthy. Breakfast, lunch, and dinners will be served in the group houses and FAVL headquarters. Please let us know if you have special dietary needs before your arrival. Breakfast, lunch and dinner during the week are included in the price of the program, however you will want to budget money for weekend meals and snacks as they are not provided on a regular basis (students will be traveling many weekends). Bottled or boiled water is available at all times. On formal program-related travel, meals will be arranged at restaurants, and non-alcoholic beverages will be included. During the village immersion, local meals (lunch and dinner) will be cooked in the village; breakfast will be the responsibility of each student (most people just have tea and bread for breakfast). Each student will have access to a propane two burner camp stove while in the village.

### **Working Out**

Although the facilities in Burkina Faso probably do not compare with those at your home institution, students will have the opportunity for physical fitness. There is a fairly well equipped gym about 2 mile from the *Reading West Africa*

(at the American Rec Center in Ouagadougou). While in the village immersion and during the Dogon trip, students will regularly engage in vigorous walking over long distances. Students during the village immersion portion will have bicycles for local transport.

### **Doing Laundry**

There are no washing machines or dryers so please bring clothes that are easy to wash and dry. Large tubs for washing will be available, as will an iron and clothesline. Students are also responsible for buying their own laundry soap and softener.

### **Computer Use**

Students are encouraged to bring personal netbooks/laptops if they are able. If you are unable to bring a laptop, please inform the program directors as soon as possible and arrangements will be made. Printers will be available for use, but we encourage students to submit materials electronically. Past Reading West Africa groups have found it helpful to have personal computers during midterm and final “crunch time”. Know that the Reading West Africa program is not responsible for any theft or damage to your computer if you choose to bring it. During the immersion weeks, however, the program will store laptops in a locked storage room in Hounde (near the villages), if desired.

### **Arriving in Ouagadougou**

SARE Elisee, FAVL Ouagadougou representative, will meet you at the airport or designate someone to meet you. They will take you to the FAVL office in Zogona (see below), a 10-15 minute drive from the airport. You must notify the program directors of your flight information and arrival time.

It's hard to explain Ouaga. People here are so so poor and it's definitely a kind of poverty I have never seen before. When you imagine a city in Africa, that's probably what Ouagadougou looks like. There are animals everywhere. Outside our house right now there is a donkey grazing, the FAVL headquarters has three goats and 6 chickens and there are goats and chickens roaming even the busiest streets all day. Despite their poverty, this is a peaceful country and the worst crime is usually robbery but even then, they are just looking for cash. The Burkinabé I have talked to know the problems they face and they can always pinpoint them on a different reason. The problem is that an education is hard to come by and opportunities are even more rare.

Meredith Kelly

### **What to do in Ouagadougou**

Elisee will help you get oriented on the first few days. The best thing to do is to plan on a walking tour of Ouagadougou. There will be maps available at the FAVL office. Make sure you figure out where the office is (there is a map in the office). Taxis in Ouagadougou are reasonably cheap, and a trip in town should cost about 200-500 CFA.

#### *Checklist of things to do in beginning of stay, while in Ouagadougou*

- Get cell phone from Elisee, learn how to use and recharge, purchase emergency recharge cards that keep in reserve
- Visit two private medical clinics in area around the FAVL office, so as to learn locations of clinics
- Register contact information with U.S. (or other relevant) embassy
- Make sure emergency contact card is with Elisee
- Make short phone calls to family to ensure cell phone works.
- Buy a thermometer from a pharmacy in case you do not have one. Make sure you know how to convert centigrade to Fahrenheit (multiply by 9, divide by 5, add 32). So  $40\text{ C} = 360/5 = 72$ , plus  $32 = 104\text{ F}$ .
- More information about Ouagadougou is at:

<http://www.ouaga-ca-bouge.net/-Ouaga-Info-.html>

<http://bethinburkina.blogspot.com/>

### **FAVL office in Ouagadougou**

FAVL operates a small guest house/office in Ouagadougou. Some classes will be held at the office location or nearby.

Small stores and restaurants are located nearby. Program directors will stay in the guesthouse. The International School of Ouagadougou is just down the street, with a restaurant where you can get hamburgers and French fries, etc., and also meet people around the pool.

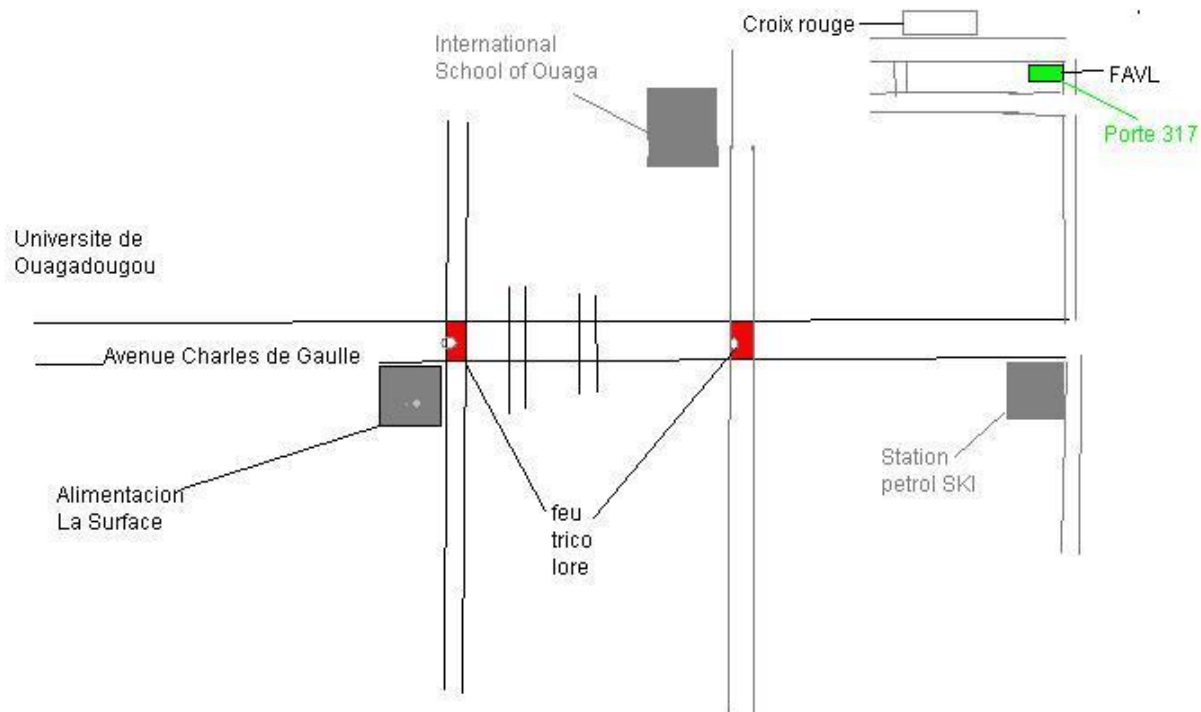


The house has five "staff". SARE Elisee is the FAVL representative in Ouagadougou, and he is in charge of the guesthouse/office. Boureima is regular night guard. He speaks French. Seydou is the regular day guard. He does not speak French. Marcel is the "one night a week" replacement night guard. He speaks French. Salimata is the day cleaner. All of them are occasionally available to do odd jobs - go to the market to get this or that, etc. That is part of the responsibility of being a *gardien*. You do not need to tip them (Generally speaking, please, do not tip them, since then they will start expecting it of every visitor). If you stay a long time, and they perform some valuable services, or you end up spending lots of time chatting with them, do feel free to leave small gifts- stuff you leave is always appreciated. T-shirts and other clothing is always fine. The best way to give a gift is somewhat casually- "Hey Marcel, I'm leaving tomorrow and can't take all my stuff, would you find this pair of shoes useful, for you or someone in your family?"

#### Directions

Several maps indicating the location of the guesthouse are below. If you are going in a taxi from the airport or downtown Ouagadougou, here are the instructions in French: "Je veux aller a Zogona/Zone du Bois, tout près de l'école internationale ou bien la siège de la Croix rouge. Prenez l'avenue Charles de Gaulle, continuez après l'alimentation La Surface. Au prochain feu (après La Surface), tournez a gauche. Continuez tout droit, vous allez dépasser la station Petrofa, après il y a le mur de l'école internationale, vous tournez a droite, allez 100 mètres, dernier porte a gauche... avant le kiosk »





Google Earth image of Zogona neighborhood and FAVL office/guesthouse

### Field Trip to Ghana

Friday morning Professor Michael Kevane came in a beat-up blue van to pick up Brian, Erica, and myself. My head was spinning from lack of sleep but we all piled in, avoiding the rainstorm that loomed ahead. We hit the road to Ghana to visit three FAVL libraries. I wish I could report on how scenic it was, but I slept the whole way. I can say one thing: the smell is unforgettable. Fresh rain, sorghum and corn plants and burnt red dirt all cooked together in the sun's gentle heat to produce a distinct scent strong enough to stick to our cotton shirts. Ghana was much cooler than Burkina and the sun was far more forgiving, hiding behind clouds and giving way to strong, refreshing winds.

We were traveling with Lucas, the head FAVL librarian for Ghana. We stayed at his family's compound both days and he served as our tour guide as well, recommending places to eat and negotiating for us at the Bolgatanga market. On Friday we visited two libraries, witnessed a community meeting, and got stuck in the mud for a few hours. That evening, we saw the most beautiful lightening storm I have ever seen. There was a cold, steady rain, but no thunder. Periodically, the slate-gray would scar with a flash of light and the whole world would light up. And the silence! What a quiet powerful sense of peace, with light and dark interchanging- as if Ghana couldn't decide if she wanted dawn to come earlier that day.

The next day we went to the furthest library, where Kevane put us to work. We classified, codified, and shelved about 400 donated books. Afterward, Erica, Brian and I learned Ghanaian dances from the sea of children who came to see us. They laughed at our honest attempts and we laughed at them laughing. It was a great and glorious exchange.

Once back in Ouaga, that glorious metropolitan city I have come to love, I showered and washed all my clothes. Away went the grime of that weekend, but also that sweet scent... A thought occurred to me on the drive home, while I was offended by my own odor sitting in the back seat of the van. This is what people smell like when we are in communion with life and nature, when we are grounded enough and human enough to forget the dainty vanity of propriety. That wonderful scent of sweat and humanity, that smelly stinky funky hippie dirty sensation, brought me back to everything and everyone that has ever been important to me.

Elena Giralt – Reading West Africa Participant '09

## **BILLING, PAYMENT, REFUND POLICY**

Please be aware that Santa Clara University no longer issues paper invoices to students. All students including participants in the Reading West Africa program are billed online via their eCampus account. You should have received an email from the eCampus administrator at Santa Clara University which will contain your security access information including your SCU ID and password to your eCampus account. Please save that email for future access to your eCampus account. For more information, please visit the eCampus website: [www.scu.edu/ecampus](http://www.scu.edu/ecampus) or email [eCampus@scu.edu](mailto:eCampus@scu.edu)

**E-BILL NOTIFICATION** – It is extremely important that students forward billing information to the responsible party paying the bill (parent, guardian, home university, etc.). SCU will send bills only to students. HOWEVER, a student can simply forward the PDF billing file to the payer's email address OR set up the payer as an authorized party to receive, and pay, future bills. Instructions on how to set up an authorized payer are located on the Bursar website [www.scu.edu/bursar](http://www.scu.edu/bursar) and on the eCampus welcome page. Only Reading West Africa students from schools with a Direct Billing Agreement with Santa Clara University will be billed via their home institution. Please check with your study abroad office if your institution has signed such contract with SCU.

**REVIEWING A STUDENT'S BILL** – Billing statements, and a student's statement history, can be viewed online only via eCampus. From the eCampus homepage, click on "Bursar's Office" then "View Account/Make Payment." These actions will take you to the QuikPay/infiNet site. From the Message Board page, click on "View Accounts." This action will show your most recent statement. To view prior statements, go to the account actions box and select 'statement history. Students who register, or change enrollment, after the initial billing date will not receive a revised billing statement until the next billing run.

**PAYING A STUDENT'S BILL** – Students can pay their bills quickly and securely online via eCampus with an electronic check, free of charge, or by credit card. Simply follow the navigation above, click on "Make Payment" and follow the instructions. Please note that a 2.75% non-refundable service fee will be charged for all credit card transactions. Students also may send payments by mail to the address located on the remittance portion of their bills or pay directly at the Bursar's Office located in Walsh Hall. Please remember to include the remittance portion with all payments by mail to ensure proper credit to your account. Questions about student accounts should be addressed to the Bursar's Office at (408) 554-4412 or [bursaroffice@scu.edu](mailto:bursaroffice@scu.edu).

WITHDRAWAL / REFUND POLICY: If a student gives written notice sixty days prior to the commencement of the Reading West Africa program, they will receive a full refund of their deposit, tuition, and other program fees. Students withdrawing forty days before the published start date will be charged the \$500 deposit. Since virtually all funds are committed once the program begins, no tuition, housing, or other fees are returned if the withdrawal occurs on or after the program start date. Please note that students who wish to withdraw from the University must complete a withdrawal form and an exit interview with the program director. Students who leave the University during a quarter without formally withdrawing are subject to failing grades in all courses in which they were registered and are ineligible for refund of fees.

Students withdrawing after the program start date will also be required to pay full quarter tuition if they wish to enroll on the Santa Clara home campus (other home institutions may have a different policy for their students). Participants in the Reading West Africa program are provided a supplemental international health insurance. This policy offers coverage for eligible illness, accident, and related travel costs. Health insurance, however, does not cover loss of tuition, housing, or other expenses related to study in Burkina Faso. It is highly recommended that students consider acquiring tuition insurance to cover any losses associated with a health-related withdrawal from the Reading West Africa program.

Information on tuition insurance is available through the SCU Bursar's Office website at <http://www.scu.edu/bursar/general/index.cfm>

*\*Reading West Africa withdrawal policy supersedes housing, tuition, and fee refund policy for home campus enrollment described in the SCU Undergraduate Bulletin.*

## HEALTH AND SAFETY

### HEALTH

#### **CDC Vaccine Recommendations**

Please see the Center for Disease Control Website ([www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)) and follow ALL recommendations for vaccinations for travel to Burkina Faso (<http://wwwn.cdc.gov/travel/destinationBurkinaFaso.aspx>). You can contact your local travel clinic, consult the CDC's website, student health center, and / or family doctor for further information. *Reading West Africa* will do everything possible to help you avoid illness. Some insurance plans cover such shots / medicines, check with your provider.

Ask for a yellow immunization card when getting initial shots (this will come in handy if you ever need vaccines in the future). You may be required to show your yellow vaccination card to enter the country at the airport.

NOTE: Be sure to bring along prescriptions and vaccination records, etc. If you are allergic to certain medication, this is also important information to have with you. (*Make sure your physician completes your medical form before you return it to Santa Clara University*)

#### **Traveler's Diarrhea**

Most physicians recommend carrying eight to ten Cipro 500 mg. or Bactrim DS tablets in case of traveler's diarrhea. The dose is one tablet twice daily in case of diarrhea. Cipro is probably better than Bactrim but is much more expensive. Cipro can also make one more sensitive to the sun. Immodium AD can be purchased over the counter and will help to stop diarrhea, though it will not cure an intestinal infection. It can be taken with the antibiotics. Pepto-Bismol tablets are also helpful in case of diarrhea and for general stomach upset. The best way to avoid diarrhea is to watch what you eat (see following page).

#### **Malaria Risk**

Risk of malaria is present in rural areas below 600 meters only (not where students will be spending most of their time). Risk is increased during the rainy season (May-October). Daily or Weekly prophylaxis are recommended. (Malarone, Methloquin, chloroquine, or Doxycycline are some of the possible prophylaxis)

## HIV / STDs

Risk of HIV/AIDS and other blood borne and sexually transmitted diseases is present in Burkina Faso. Travelers should avoid contact with blood or other fluids of persons infected with HIV or with persons whose HIV status is unknown.

### To Stay Healthy, Do:

- Wash hands often with soap and water.
- Drink only bottled water or carbonated drinks in cans/bottles. Avoid tap water, fountain drinks, ice cubes.
- Eat only thoroughly cooked food or fruits and vegetables you have peeled yourself. Remember: **boil it, cook it, peel it, or forget it.** Avoid food purchased from street vendors and salads.
- All meat should be well cooked. Do not eat shellfish, unless you are in an established restaurant.
- Milk and milk products should be avoided unless you know they have been pasteurized and are fresh.
- To prevent fungal and parasitic infections, keep feet clean and dry, and do not go barefoot.

### To Avoid Getting Sick:

- Don't share needles with anyone.
- Don't handle animals (especially dogs, and cats), to avoid bites and serious diseases.
- Don't swim in fresh water. Salt water is usually safer.

*\*\*The Reading West Africa staff provides bottled water and takes necessary precautions in cooking of all meals. Also the Reading West Africa program has a fully supplied medical kit in case of emergencies.*

## Other Health Concerns

- *Cholera:* Cholera is occasionally present in the country; however, Cholera vaccine is not required according to International Health Regulations (WHO) or the CDC. Cholera vaccine provides incomplete protection. Strict adherence to food and water precautions lowers risks.
- *Meningitis:* Meningitis is seasonally epidemic in Burkina Faso, Meningococcal disease is an acute bacterial infection characterized by sudden onset with fever, intense headache, nausea, vomiting, stiff neck, and, frequently, a rash with pink macules that develops petechiae. With early treatment, 90% of cases can be resolved.
- Immediately notify program staff if you have a fever.

## Of Bugs and Other Crawling Creatures...

I cannot say I had ever considered traveling to the center of West Africa. This should come as no surprise since neither I nor anyone in my family knew the most fantastic nation in the region even existed. Yet, I finished the paperwork and, a few months later, I was lying awake at two in the morning in Ouagadougou, listening to heavy rains beat down on our tin roof. Be warned: if you are a light sleeper and don't like geckos, sweat, or stuff that is "icky," you will definitely not sleep well in Burkina Faso. Fortunately, my wall-clinging friend, Marcus, and I were able to stay dry and get some rest.

I'm not saying it cannot still be a lifelong experience for the entomophobic. I just feel obliged to suggest getting over your "heebies" regarding roaches, mice, and small nocturnal creatures in general, before crossing the Atlantic.

Obviously it's not all bed bugs. The days are full of fascinating observations. The average Bronco would find anything in Ouagadougou an amazing discovery. The man at the corner store wraps your bread in his cousin's math homework. The family down the street is having a wedding, so they slaughter a cow... on the street. You learn that everyone around you lives on a dollar a day. But then how did that man afford his \$500 moto? What's a moto? And, once you've gotten accustomed to life in Ouagadougou, the village is another shocker.

I was in awe through most of my fall quarter. Send me an email if you're interested in this daring, educational, character building, humanitarian, and, of course, once in a lifetime escape. I love to talk about it.

Brian Lance – Reading West Africa Participant '09

## SECURITY & SAFETY

Exercise the same good judgment abroad regarding personal property and safety that you would at home. Be sure to keep a photocopy of your passport, credit card numbers, traveler's check numbers, etc. with you at all times. Make sure that your actual passport is guarded vigilantly both when traveling and at home in Ouagadougou or the village. Upon arrival you will go to the U.S. Embassy to register. Embassy staff generally contact U.S. citizens in the event of serious safety hazards.

*Reading West Africa* faculty and staff take the safety concerns of the participants very seriously. During orientation and throughout the experience, a considerable amount of time will be dedicated to talking about health and safety issues within the context of Burkina Faso. Many individuals will be invited to talk about this issue with students upon their arrival. In addition, students will sign a covenant in which they will agree to certain policies regarding safety issues which include, but are not limited to, not taking buses after dark, not walking alone at night, and not abusing alcohol.

Always keep in mind that you are a guest in someone else's home. Any breach of public order, such as intoxication or drug use, can lead to expulsion from the program, the country, or a very stiff jail sentence. Participation in any local / national demonstrations is prohibited by any *Reading West Africa* student. Given the risk to students, the *Reading West Africa* program, and our Burkinabè friends, any *Reading West Africa* student who takes part in a demonstration or visibly intervenes in local politics will be immediately expelled from the program.

Many people have concerns about their health and safety while traveling in developing countries. While the dangers are often exaggerated by the media, it is natural to be concerned about living in a new environment and it is important for anyone considering studying and living outside of their native land to gather as much information as possible.

Parents, students, and study abroad programs all have a role to play in minimizing potential dangers:

### **University Responsibilities**

1. Conduct a periodic assessment of safety conditions on site.
2. Provide safety information to prospective applicants so that they can make informed decisions concerning participation and concerning their behavior while on site.
3. Provide an orientation to participants in order to help them improve their avoidance of high-risk situations and their skills in dealing with problematic events.
4. Monitor the local environment and provide safety updates to participants.
5. Take appropriate actions in the event of a serious deterioration of the local safety environment.
6. Assist participants should a serious safety issue come to the attention of the local personnel.
7. Evaluate the safety issues surrounding program events, excursions, or other services, whether arranged through the Reading West Africa or by a third party.
8. Secure or provide referrals for appropriate medical, legal, psychological or other professional assistance for participants experiencing difficulty.
9. Make information available to students concerning health and travel insurance.
10. Conduct regular community meetings throughout the program to discuss issues of health and safety of students.
11. Insure that all participating students have adequate insurance coverage while in Burkina Faso.

### **Responsibilities of Student Participants:**

1. Make available to Santa Clara University thorough health and psychological information and other information that will be useful in planning for the participant's experience abroad. This involves completing and sending the medical exam accompanied in the pre-departure packet to Santa Clara University before departure for Burkina Faso.
2. Receive all vaccinations recommended by the Center for Disease Control for travel to Burkina Faso (see below for listing).
3. Read and carefully evaluate all materials given that relate to safety, health, legal, environmental, political, cultural, and religious conditions in Burkina Faso.

4. Make personal decisions and conduct her/his private life in an intelligent and prudent fashion, paying particular attention to local conditions as outlined and as observed by the participant.
5. Assume responsibility for the consequences of her/his own decisions and actions.
6. Abide by the Student Code of Conduct distributed by Reading West Africa staff and faculty.

**Responsibilities of Parent and Guardians:**

1. Obtain and evaluate safety information concerning Burkina Faso.
2. Be involved in the decision of the student to participate in this program.
3. Engage the participant in a thorough discussion of safety and behavior issues related to living and studying in Burkina Faso.
4. Contact the program co-directors or Santa Clara University with health and safety related questions.

**What Santa Clara University Cannot Provide:**

1. Guarantee of safety of participants.
2. Assure that risk will not be greater than at home.
3. Stand in loco parentis.
4. Prevent participants from engaging in illegal, dangerous, or unwise activities.
5. Represent the interests of participants accused of illegal activities.
6. Assume responsibility for the actions of persons not employed by or otherwise engaged by the Reading West Africa staff and faculty.
7. Assume responsibility for events that are beyond the control of the Reading West Africa staff and faculty and its subcontractors.
8. Assume responsibility for situations that arise due to failure of the participant to make full disclosure of pertinent information prior to departure.
9. Assume the adherence of US norms of what is appropriate and acceptable behavior in matters of due process, individual rights, political correctness, and sensitivity to others, relationships between the sexes and among diverse racial, cultural, and ethnic groups.

*(Adapted from William Hoffa, From The Parent's Guide to Study Abroad, NY: NAFSA/Kaplan books, April 1998.)*

HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPORTANT NUMBERS

**US Department of Health & Human Services: Traveler's Health Advisory Line:** (404) 332-4550  
**Center for Disease Control:** (800) 311-3435  
 Website: <http://www.cdc.gov>

**International Society of Travel Medicine** (770) 736-7060  
 Website: [www.istm.org](http://www.istm.org)  
 e-mail: [bcbistm@aol.com](mailto:bcbistm@aol.com)

**US Department's Bureau of Consular Affairs**  
 (Emergency assistance, travel safety, and travel warnings)  
 Website: [http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis\\_pa\\_tw/cis/cis\\_1075.html](http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1075.html)

## RESPONSIBILITIES AND CONDUCT

We are familiar with the stereotype of the "ugly American" traveler - loud, self absorbed, and culturally insensitive. *Reading West Africa* strives to be the antithesis of this caricature. We see ourselves as guests. Accordingly, in Burkina Faso we are privileged to be walking with those who have invited us. It is through their hospitality that we have mutually been given an opportunity for growth. By our choices we will shape the reputation, positively or negatively, of *Reading West Africa* in the future. In this sense, community extends beyond those we live with during the semester.

One of the most challenging aspects of the *Reading West Africa* program is to surrender the North American individualism that is bred so deeply in our imagination. We are conditioned to react almost viscerally against any perceived threat to individual choice and freedom. But this is not a universal value. So in respect of this cultural perspective, and prioritizing our "common good" above private license, we have established specific behavior expectations.

### **Alcohol Policy**

Solidarity is a value we are striving for in the Burkina program. We recognize that substance abuse and addiction cause physical, mental, and emotional impairment to the user, pain to family and close friends, and social costs to society. Burkina Faso has been negatively influenced by substance abuse, particularly alcohol. In agreeing to walk in solidarity with the people of Burkina Faso, we opt not to abuse ourselves or others by abusing alcohol. This is stated not in the spirit of crusading temperance, but rather of solidarity and sensitivity.

We need to acknowledge that our attitudes and use of alcohol have been culturally conditioned. In the United States, alcohol is portrayed as the means to relaxation and companionship. This is accentuated in the college subculture. In this climate, excessive drinking can be normative and is often justified as a rite of passage or a stage of growing up. But frequently these learned dispositions and patterns are not so easy to break. Perhaps we are now in a position to unlearn the myth that alcohol is the vehicle for sociality. These issues will be particularly salient in the village setting, where women's home-brewed millet beer (*dolo*) is drunk widely and throughout the day, and is a deeply ingrained aspect of village society. Unfortunately, *dolo* is often mixed with unclean water. Students are strongly discouraged from drinking *dolo*. It is considered polite to refuse, simply stating that you will likely get sick (which is true!).

We will discuss the attitudes and actions of alcohol use and abuse in Burkina Faso and students will be invited to make personal and communal decisions on the use (or non-use) of alcohol during the program. In the interest of setting healthy community norms and sending appropriate cultural messages, *Reading West Africa* students may consume no more than two alcoholic beverages at any one occasion. Alcohol abuse will not be tolerated in this experience as it endangers the safety of participants and on-going credibility of the *Reading West Africa* and *Reading West Africa* participants.

### **Drug Policy**

U.S. citizens are subject to the laws of the country in which they are traveling. Penalties in Burkina Faso for possession, use or trafficking in illegal drugs are strict, and convicted offenders can expect lengthy jail sentences and fines. Use of illegal drugs while participating in the *Reading West Africa* will result in immediate dismissal from the program. Costs involved will be the responsibility of the student. If this policy is unclear, please see a staff person to discuss this component. We will be discussing this policy again in Orientation.

### **Gender Issues**

As a white woman in Burkina Faso, I sometimes get the feeling that people don't really know what to think of me. Burkinabè women don't treat me like a woman because I cannot do what they can do and men do not treat me like a man even though I only ever seem to be around men here. Being foreign, I suppose that I am somewhere in between.

On our front porch in Béréba the other day, Meghan and I were surrounded by the usual swarm of fifteen ten-year-olds trying to braid our hair at the same time. We started to talk about mothers and for the third time that day I was asked if I was married. When I said no, I was then asked if I knew how to make *tô*, the staple food in Burkina Faso. The answer of course was no. The general consensus was then that I needed to learn how to make *tô* and then I would find a husband.

In Burkina Faso, there are strict places and tasks for men and women. Women cook, clean, get water, and raise children, all tasks requiring huge amounts of time, labor and energy, much more so than it would in a developed country. Men are supposed to make an income for the family but when they really end up spending half the year with nothing to make money on because they are farmers, the women end up doing much more and in a lot of ways they are tasks that are more important for survival and comfort with seemingly little appreciation. To these little girls who visit us after school every day, we must look so lazy and weak. I don't think that I have never seen anyone stronger in my life than a Burkinabè woman.

## STUDENT CONDUCT CODE

While participating in *Reading West Africa*, all participants will be expected to follow the same policies and conduct code that are applied to all Santa Clara University students. Please read the following *Student Conduct Code* which is included in Santa Clara University's Undergraduate Student Handbook.

*The goal of Santa Clara University is to provide students with a general education so that they will acquire knowledge, skill, and wisdom to deal with and contribute to contemporary society in constructive ways. As an institution of higher education rooted in the Jesuit tradition, the University is committed to creating and sustaining an environment that facilitates not only academic development, but also the personal and spiritual development of its members.*

This commitment of the University encourages the greatest possible degree of freedom for individual choice and expression with the expectation that individual members of the community will

- Be honest
- Demonstrate respect for self
- Demonstrate respect for others
- Demonstrate respect for the law and University policies, procedures, standards, their administration, and the process for changing those laws, policies, procedures, and standards

In keeping with this commitment, this Statement of Responsibilities and Standards of Conduct and related policies and procedures have been formulated to guarantee each student's freedom to learn and to protect the fundamental rights of others. There can be no rights and freedoms if all who claim them do not recognize and respect the same rights and freedoms for others. In addition to the laws of the nation, the state of California, and the local community, the University administration has established policies, procedures, and standards deemed necessary to achieve its objectives as a Catholic, Jesuit university.

All members of the Santa Clara University community are expected to conduct themselves in a manner that is consistent with the goals of the institution and demonstrate respect for self, others, and their property. Students living off campus are members of this community and as such are representatives of the University to the community at large. In this regard, students living off campus maintain an equal measure of accountability to the values and expectations of all members of this community as identified in the Student Conduct Code.

Whether living in or traversing through the neighborhood, or parking in the street, students are expected to adhere to the same high standards of conduct and behavior that are consistent with the students' developing role as responsible and accountable citizens and reflect well upon the Santa Clara University community.

All members of the University community have a strong responsibility to protect and maintain an academic climate in which the fundamental freedom to learn can be enjoyed by all and where the rights and well-being of all members of the community are protected. To this end, certain basic regulations and policies have been developed to govern the conduct of graduate and undergraduate students as members of the University community. The University reserves the right to review student conduct that occurs on and off campus when such behavior is inconsistent with these expectations and the Student Conduct Code. The following acts subject students to disciplinary action:

1. Engaging in any form of academic dishonesty, such as plagiarism (representing the work or ideas of others as one's own without giving proper acknowledgment), cheating (e.g., copying the work of another person, falsifying laboratory data, sabotaging the work of others), and other acts generally understood to be dishonest by faculty or students in an academic context. (Law students refer to School of Law code.
2. Illegal use, possession, or distribution of drugs on University-owned or -controlled property. The use or possession of equipment, products, or material that is used or intended for use in manufacturing, growing, using, or distribution of any drug or controlled substance

3. Falsification or misuse, including non-authentic, altered, or fraudulent misuse, of University records, permits, documents, communication equipment, or identification cards and government issued documents
4. Knowingly furnishing false or incomplete information to the University, a University official, or judicial hearing board in response to an authorized request
5. Disorderly, lewd, indecent, or obscene conduct; excessive or prolonged noise; behavior that interferes with the orderly functioning of the University, or interferes with an individual's pursuit of an education on University-owned or -controlled property or during an authorized University class, field trip, seminar, competition or other meeting, or University-related activity on or off University property
6. Detention, physical abuse, sexual misconduct, or conduct that threatens imminent bodily harm or endangers the physical well being of any person, including harm to self, on any University-owned or -controlled property
7. Destruction, damage, or misuse of University property or the property of any other person or group where such property is located on University-owned or -controlled property, or regardless of location, is in the care, custody, or control of the University
8. Theft or conversion of University-owned or personal property
9. Hazing, harassing, threatening, degrading language or actions, or any practice by a group or individual that degrades a student or employee, endangers health, jeopardizes personal safety, or interferes with an employee's duties or with a student's class attendance or a person's educational pursuits
10. Intentional obstruction or disruption of teaching, research, administration, disciplinary procedures, or other University activities on University-owned or -controlled property; or obstruction or disruption that interferes with the freedom of movement, both pedestrian and vehicular, on University-owned or -controlled property
11. Possession or use of firearms, explosives, dangerous chemicals, or other dangerous weapons or instruments on University-owned or -controlled property, except as expressly authorized by University regulation
12. Unauthorized entry into or use or defacement of University facilities, including residence halls and other buildings and grounds, including unauthorized entry into or presence in or on a University building; unauthorized erection or use on University property of any structures including specifically but not limited to tents, huts, gazebos, shelters, platforms, and public address systems; or unauthorized use of University property for dances, concerts, assemblies, meetings, sleeping, cooking, or eating if said activity interferes with the operation of the University or surrounding community
13. Publication, posting, or distribution on University property, through the use of University resources (e.g., computers, telephone lines, e-mail services, Internet connections), or at authorized University activities of material that violates the law of libel, copyright, or obscenity, postal regulations, or any law or statute or University policy
14. Failure while on University-owned or -controlled property to comply with a reasonable request or order of a University executive or other authorized official(s); or refusal or failure to leave such premises because of conduct prescribed by this code when such conduct constitutes violations of this code or a danger to personal safety, property, or educational or other appropriate University activities on such premises; or refusal or failure to identify oneself when requested by a University official provided the official is identified and indicates legitimate reason for the request
15. Possession, consumption, or sale of alcoholic beverages by persons under the age of 21 years on University property; furnishing alcoholic beverages to persons under the age of 21 years on University property; consumption of alcoholic beverages in a public place (all areas other than individual residences, private offices, and scheduled private functions); excessive and inappropriate use of alcoholic beverages. (Also see Alcohol Policy Within the Residence Halls.)

16. Misconduct that arises off campus in which a student is detained, arrested, cited, or otherwise charged with violations of local, state, or federal laws that materially or adversely affect the individual's suitability as a member of the Santa Clara University community
17. Tampering with, removing, damaging, or destroying fire extinguishers, fire alarm boxes, smoke or heat detectors, emergency call boxes, and other safety equipment anywhere on University property. Creating a fire, safety, or health hazard. Failure to respond to fire alarms, evacuate buildings during alarm activation, or respond to the directions of emergency personnel
18. Any behavior that disrupts or causes disruption of computer services; damages, alters, or destroys data or records; adversely affects computer software, programs, systems, or networks; and uses data, computer systems, or networks to devise or execute any scheme to defraud, deceive, or extort, or wrongfully obtain money, property, or data. Introduction of any computer contaminant into a computer system or network is a public offense and is subject to disciplinary action up to and including dismissal from Santa Clara University.

## GUEST POLICY

It is always a positive experience when family comes to visit students while they are studying at the *Casa*. However, at the same time visitors can, at times, disrupt the flow of the semester and the *Reading West Africa* experience. For these reasons, we have established a *Reading West Africa* guest policy. We STRONGLY suggest that visitors make travel plans to coincide with *Reading West Africa* students' week-long break in late November, or else join students at the conclusion of the program in early December. If this is not possible, and guests come at another time, students are still expected to attend ALL *Reading West Africa* planned events (community activities, classes, praxis sites, and various activities) and keep up with their commitments during the time visitors are present. Guests are invited to any and all events. Upon arrival, students often experience a culture shock and need space to process all of the changes in their lives. Also, students need time at the beginning of the semester to integrate themselves fully in their living / learning community and Burkinabè community and foster new relationships. For this reason, guests are strongly discouraged from visiting Burkina Faso before November.

For insurance and liability reasons, guests are not allowed to spend more than one night in the student residences. Arrangements can be made in nearby accommodations for parents and other visitors. Rates are reasonable and accommodations are more than adequate.

## CULTURE SHOCK: NOT ME

When you leave home to head to a foreign country, you are essentially starting an entirely new life for yourself. You should be aware that this process is filled with ups and downs. Adapting to a new cultural environment usually takes approximately one or two months. For a moment, consider all of the things that you have come to take for granted where you live. You know how to get from one place to another. You know where and how to do your laundry. You know where the dining hall is to get food. You can speak the language fluently and can understand the meanings that lie behind "slang" and other sayings. When you place yourself in a new environment, you throw all of these privileges out the window. You're going to have to relearn all of these seemingly mindless tasks to which you have grown so accustomed. This process can be difficult and also very exciting as you'll be learning a new way of living and being in the world.

These sudden changes in environment can and most likely will bring about the dreaded phenomena of culture shock. Culture shock (and jet lag) can affect your life in a variety of ways: headaches, upset stomach, irritability, homesickness, insecurities, and so on. If you experience any or all of these, don't worry - they are normal reactions! They can be painful and disorienting, but they will go away with time. Try to keep in mind that what you are feeling is normal and that your peers are probably going through the same thing (even if they don't admit it). Culture shock

manifests itself in a series of stages. Not everyone will go through all of these stages in the same order, or feel these stages at the same intensity. We provide them here simply as possible answers for puzzling feelings and emotions that you may experience while in Burkina Faso.

## THE FOUR STAGES OF CROSSING A CULTURAL BOUNDARY

### 1. “National Geographic” Phase

This is the tourist phase, in which the individual experiences the difference between the home culture and the new culture as exciting and exhilarating. Interest in experiencing new and different things, supported by high levels of energy. Often there is a premature identification with the new culture; premature in the sense that it is done on the terms of the individual, not the culture. The individual remains an outsider to the culture in this phase. A constant change to new possibilities is important for maintaining the excitement of this phase.

### 2. The Fragmentation Phase

After the novelty of the new culture wears off (after a month to six weeks), there is a fragmentation of the ego identity and level of self-esteem. The environmental cues, rules and routines of the new culture come to weigh heavily on the individual. The identity based upon interaction with the home culture is inadequate to the new situation. This is often exacerbated by the sabbatical syndrome, i.e., loss of usual interaction patterns in the work or school context. The individual’s usual way of interacting with the environment becomes fragmented. Symptoms are testiness, overreaction to insignificant events, and heightened susceptibility to illness. Old, unresolved conflicts from the past re-emerge now that the ego shield breaks down. What is happening is that the individual has the opportunity now to cross the cultural boundary and become an insider to the new culture. Most will do this; others will refuse and either deny the fragmentation, or leave and return to the home culture.

### 3. The Reintegration Phase

This is the rebuilding of ego identity. The individual selects elements from the fragmented identity and elements from the new culture, and begins shaping them into a new ego identity. The arrival of this phase (usually ten to twelve weeks into the new situation) is marked by events or experiences which become paradigmatic or symbolic of the new identity. There is a sense of growth and satisfaction at this stage. This is the point where one really begins to become more of an insider to the new culture.

### 4. The Consolidation Phase

This builds upon the previous stage, making new learning part of the permanent identity. It usually takes a year or more to accomplish.

## Religious Diversity in Burkina Faso

Burkina Faso is a country rich in cultural diversity, including religion. In a world where we continually engage in conflicts dominated by differing religious beliefs, I felt comfortable with Burkina Faso’s religious diversity. It is commonly said that the Burkinabé are 50% Christian, 50% Muslim, and 100% Animist. In other words, Christians and Muslims will practice Animism, their “cultural religion,” in addition to their other belief. Animists believe that the soul or spirit lives not only in humans but in other animals, plants, and rocks. Animism, which often includes sacrificial ceremonies and fetishes, is practiced openly, with respect to the other religions.

Because village communities are small, people put away their religious differences in order to work for the common benefit. The Burkinabé, for the most part, all identify with a religion, and the subject comes up in many conversations. Yet, all beliefs are tolerated. Religion in Burkina Faso is often accompanied by singing, dancing, and drum playing, especially among Christian and Animist groups. This makes each religious ceremony worth attending even if you don’t consider yourself a religious person.

Attending the Catholic church in my village, Sara, each Sunday was always a linguistic adventure, involving a melange of ethnic languages and French. The music was always lively and the congregation jubilant. I also enjoyed getting to know people from the mosque near my house in Ouagadougou. I was invited to learn and attend their prayer. I met

with the Imam, their religious leader, who consented to my request to take photographs during prayers. I became close to this community and created my civic engagement book about Islam in Burkina Faso.

Elizabeth Guerra

### MAKING LOCAL “FRIENDS”

For the first time visitor to Africa: Try to avoid the address-sharing that sometimes happens, unless you really like the person. Otherwise people will send you (at some cost) letters every 2-3 months asking for assistance. There is no special reason to prefer to help someone who was impolite enough to ask you for your address after a 15 minute chat.

Please do not give out your cell phone number to new acquaintances. Just say, “C’est interdit.”

It will happen quite frequently that you will meet someone very briefly, and they will then declare that you are now their best friend and how can you help them to come to America, or help them in their business. You are under no obligation to help them after a ten minute chat on a street-corner! Be polite, and simply say that you are a student visiting Burkina Faso and you are learning a lot while you are in the country, and when you return you will continue to be a student. In our experience, repeating that statement several times will lead your new friend to decide that (a) you don’t speak French very well, or (b) you are a little dense. They will then happily shake your hand and go on their way. In other words, do not respond to requests by denying them (too rude) or explaining why you can’t help (too complicated). Respond by offering an affirmation, “Je suis une étudiante et je suis au Burkina pour étudier et aussi travailler dans une bibliothèque.” The friend can draw his or her own conclusions. Trust us, you’ll feel better doing this than practically any other strategy. Occasionally in Ouagadougou and Bobo around the marketplace you will be accosted by young men who want to “direct you” to buy at particular places. They are “touts” and that is how they earn their living. They can be very rude, and a common tactic is to accuse you of being a racist if you ignore them. You will quickly realize that 99% of Burkinabè are quite respectful and polite, but empathize with the young men, agreeing that it is a tough job to be a tout. So be unfailingly polite, saying over and over again with a polite smile, “Ca va, ca va, merci, merci.” Your experience will always be more pleasant the more you maintain your composure. The touts are often board, and many expats think they actually have little competitions to see whether they can provoke angry responses (more fun for them).

## FINAL THOUGHTS & SUMMARY

**PACKING:** Your study abroad experience will be more beneficial if you take time to prepare sufficiently before you leave. It’s much easier to bring everything you need than to have someone else find it and send it to you; in the same breath, don’t bring too much. As mentioned in the mission statement above - you are coming to Burkina Faso to embrace a simple lifestyle in the context of a developing country.

**RESEARCH:** Do some research on Burkina Faso. We will be sending you some articles to read and videos to watch via email. In addition, you may want to begin following the news from Burkina Faso; the place to start is the comprehensive website [www.lefaso.net](http://www.lefaso.net).

**COMMUNICATION:** Collect important addresses, emergency phone numbers, and know how you plan to call internationally (calling card, etc.).

**MONEY:** Bring travelers checks, cash, or credit cards, although the easiest way is to get an ATM card that operates also as a check card (it bears a major credit card’s symbol on the front). These cards can be used as credit cards and also to withdraw cash in your country’s currency from an ATM without the fees imposed by money changing stands. Again, remember you are coming to Burkina Faso to experience the reality of the simple life-style. Keep that in mind when you budget for this experience. Virtually all expenses (all food, lodging, and program travel) are covered in your tuition. You will need to budget for additional personal expenses (see page seven).

**COPIES:** Make photocopies of important documents such as your passport, plane ticket, ATM cards, and phone/address list. It will cost you less than a dollar and can save you countless hours of hassle.

**PASSPORT:** If you don't have a passport yet, GO GET ONE! It can take up to 6 weeks to complete the process and you CAN'T participate in the *Reading West Africa* program without one (because you cannot enter Burkina Faso without one)!

**MEDICAL FORM & VACCINATIONS:** If you haven't begun this process yet, do so immediately.

**FLEXIBILITY:** Be ready to adjust to new aspects of foreign culture. You may feel extremely tired, lonely, HOT, or scared at first, or you may be perfectly fine. *Reading West Africa* staff will make every effort to address such issues during orientation and throughout the experience.

**CELEBRATE:** This is an incredible learning and living opportunity. A select group of students have been chosen from across the country for this experience, and you are ONE OF THEM. Congratulations!

### **FOR MORE INFORMATION**

University International Programs  
Santa Clara University  
500 El Camino Real; Santa Clara, CA 95053-0639  
Phone: 408-554-6940; Fax: 408-554-2340  
[www.scu.edu/casa](http://www.scu.edu/casa)  
[www.scu.edu/studyabroad](http://www.scu.edu/studyabroad)



## Useful Information from – An insider’s guide to volunteering in Ghana (relevant also for Burkina Faso!)

By Godwin Yidana and Gayle Pescud

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### What Makes a Good Volunteer?

Age, gender, work experience and nationality have nothing to do with volunteer success, or how much people contribute and how well they cope when they travel abroad to a foreign culture to volunteer. As a volunteer myself and, later, manager of volunteers, I never could tell who would adapt and who would run into problems coping. Many times the impressions I formed after the first few days together were proven wrong as time passed. I learnt that some people take a few weeks to warm up and find their stride and I shouldn’t be too quick to judge.

Indeed, I was one of them. Some begin all optimistic, but become frustrated after a week or two with the pace of things. I worked with several volunteers between the ages of forty and seventy-three who were fine with bucket baths, power cuts, and coping with the weather while a few young folks almost passed out at the thought of bathing from a bucket or hand-washing their own clothes. I worked with some high school graduates from Europe, whose English was minimal, but who put their hand up for anything and achieved much more than some highly skilled professionals who didn’t show such willingness. Other professionals, however, were excellent. It was a valuable lesson in human nature.

I learnt that the ones who excelled shared certain key personality or character attributes irrespective of age, gender, background and nationality. The most important and helpful attribute was a willingness to do what was needed, not necessarily what you thought was most important or what you wanted to do.

This is one element of volunteering that was completely unexpected—the great friendships. I know that plenty of volunteers I worked with have remained friends, caught up in their home country and even traveled together to other countries since they returned home.

The key to volunteering is need, flexibility, and willingness

[What isn’t helpful]: People who had a rigid idea of how things should work—even if they had only been in country a week (or a day!). People who complained about things like power cuts and water shortages as if we had the power to change that.

We have determined that the key qualities in a good volunteer are: flexibility, determination, mindfulness of others (especially your hosts), commitment, compassion, being non-judgmental, a positive attitude and patience. Now that you’re aware of these, if you don’t naturally possess these qualities you can learn and practice them. You don’t have to be the most mindful or determined person on earth, but a bit of each will go a long way. You may lose patience at times, but try to see the big picture. Most people around you may never get to leave their village or town, let alone travel abroad. A sense of humor helps too because everything that can go wrong often does and you need to laugh about it.

Some pointers on attitude. You are in someone else’s country or work place. Respect their culture, customs and traditions. Respect their circumstances. Be mindful of the fact that they may not be as educated, wealthy or well-traveled as you. Withhold your judgment until you have spent (at least) several weeks getting to know people and places. And keep in mind that you have an unparalleled opportunity to learn—you’re as much a student as you may be a teacher. Be professional. Your hosts will appreciate your professionalism. And if something upsets you, talk with your volunteer coordinator about it directly.

The right attitude is always more important than having the “right” skills.

#### But What Difference Will I Make?

The one comment that virtually everyone we worked with made was that they were disappointed with “how little” they achieved and they didn’t feel like they made a difference. I said the same thing myself early on. This is what happens. Your expectations of what you will achieve before leaving home as a volunteer, and what you actually achieve in country, are usually different. That is, it takes twice as long (or three or four times) to do anything in most developing countries as it does in a developed country where things work. Most volunteers expect to operate at their home country speed on the ground at their project. Unless you’re the World Bank—with air-conditioned offices, back up generators, high speed internet, dedicated vehicles, and highly skilled staff—you can’t.

You can’t change the world in two weeks or two months—on your own. Even two years is pushing it.

What you can and will do is contribute your skills and experience to a group who collectively, over time, make a huge difference.

If you view your contribution in isolation, you may think it was negligible. But you’re not volunteering in isolation, you’re part of a group and it’s the combined efforts of many hands that make a difference.

#### A Few Etiquette Tips

##### Meeting and Greeting

Ghanaians will spend the first few minutes upon meeting, shaking, asking after the other, then family, health and work, before getting down to the issue. Shaking involves right hands and, after the shake, you click your middle fingers together to make a snapping sound. It takes some practice but it is fun and worth getting the hang of. In fact, I felt incomplete when I traveled in other countries after Ghana and no one snapped.

No one ever responds in the negative and says they are not fine (or I am yet to hear it anyway), even if they’re clearly suffering. Ghanaians make the best of it, which appears to keeps things moving and people smiling no matter what.

If you need to approach people to ask for help, first ask, “Hello, how are you?” and wait for a genuine response before asking, rather than walking up and saying, “How do you get to...?” without first acknowledging the person.

Overall, Ghanaians place great stock in greetings so it’s a safe bet to always greet everyone when entering a room or vehicle and always return a greeting, wherever you are—especially when you enter an immigration office to extend your visa. A simple “Hello, how are you?” and a smile should suffice. You’ll know very soon that “I’m fine, thank you,” is what follows.

##### Left hand no-no:

An important custom is not to use your left hand for eating, handing over money, shaking another’s hand or anything at all when interacting with others. It’s considered dirty—the hand you wipe your bottom with. It’s the same in many other cultures across the world. However, as a lefty, I have erred. I learnt that Ghanaians will assume I’m unaware of this issue and overlook it, but it’s better to try to avoid doing it in the first place.

##### R-E-S-P-E-C-T:

Don’t blurt out a question or request for help without stopping to greet people first. Also, unless you want to make a bad impression, don’t speak in English about Ghanaians or negative aspects of Ghana within earshot of Ghanaians. It’s ungracious. We’ve been at dinners where the majority of people were foreign, with a few Ghanaians, and the foreigners complained, joked about, and criticized Ghana and Ghanaians as if the Ghanaians present were deaf. Likewise, we’ve experienced this in volunteer work places where volunteers condemned various aspects of Ghana quite loudly, to the extent that we had to quell the emotions of the Ghanaians who overheard these comments. Likewise, I’ve spoken with taxi drivers who have overheard entire conversations about the organizations they’re driving for, or the people that were under discussion or doing the talking, as if it was assumed that taxi drivers can’t

understand or remember anything said. Remember you're a guest in Ghana. Our advice is that if you feel frustrated, write it in a journal, email it to a friend, or discuss it in private.

#### Smoking:

Ghanaians hardly smoke tobacco cigarettes, partly because the cost of a packet is equivalent to the average family's daily income so it's prohibitively expensive. There is a general cultural tendency to look down on those who do smoke as being somehow weak or flawed. While smoke from the widespread burning of plastic refuse seems to be tolerated, most Ghanaians detest inhaling another's cigarette smoke. If you do need to smoke, excuse yourself and stand away from gatherings or crowds.

"You are fat" or "You have grown fat."

This is directed at women and men alike. As I said elsewhere, there is no culture of political correctness and some people simply say exactly what they're thinking.

But let's put it in context. This is not western culture. This is Ghana and the traditional culture esteems plump, curvy, buxom, big-hipped, round-bottomed, shapely women and heavy-set men. This is traditionally because it suggests good health and wealth, which have never been easy to obtain.

So, if someone comes up to you and says "You are fat" or (they know you already and you may have put on some weight thus) "You have grown fat" they are, conversely, complimenting you. It's not intended as an insult at all. Ghanaians value shapeliness.

What westerners call "pear-shaped" is called "Coca-Cola shape" in Ghana, after the classic glass bottle, and this is the feminine ideal. Men and women will utter the words, "Your Coca Cola shape is wonderful". Complete strangers have approached me on the street or in the market, patted my hips and exclaimed "plenty, plenty!" So if you're shapely or larger than average, be prepared for lots of "compliments" and statements about your size and shape and remember where you are. It's a good thing. In fact, I remember one summer of volunteers where the larger (quite beautiful) girls were receiving a lot of attention and the thin girls who would have been popular in their home country were completely ignored. You could see the confusion as if, "This isn't right." Get used to it.