

African Studies Summer Leadership Institute Program

THE FINAL WEEK



July 29th- August 2nd



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Here’s what has happened during the closing week of this program!

Welcome to the final issue of the African Studies Summer Leadership Institute’s newsletter!

Firstly, we would like to express our gratitude to Dr. Wyatt. As we come to a close, we understand the deep level of commitment and strategic willpower it took to build this program from the ground up.

To the instructors, Mr. Kamau Grimes, Ms. Hellen Maleche, Ms. Chidinma Chidoka, and Mr. Daquan Lawrence: thank you all for coming up with the necessary lesson plans and utilizing your knowledge in African Studies to ensure this program ran smoothly and effectively.

I think it’s safe to say this program was very successful with its mission. The students created a bond like no other, and it was so amazing seeing them grow with their presentation skills, teamwork, and retainment of information.

This week, we had a painting session that gave students the opportunity to create the centerpieces used in the final ceremony.

Furthermore, we had Dr. Cassandra Veney, who is the Director of the Center for Women, Gender, and Global Leadership, come and speak to the students.

Zeinab and Rokheya, who are a part of the cohort, presented to their peers about the history of Griots.

Lastly, we had the final ceremony on Friday, August 2nd. And let me tell you...not one dry eye was in attendance by the end of it!

Enjoy this week’s newsletter!

Christiana Biruk

In this newsletter you can expect:

Student’s Presentation Prep

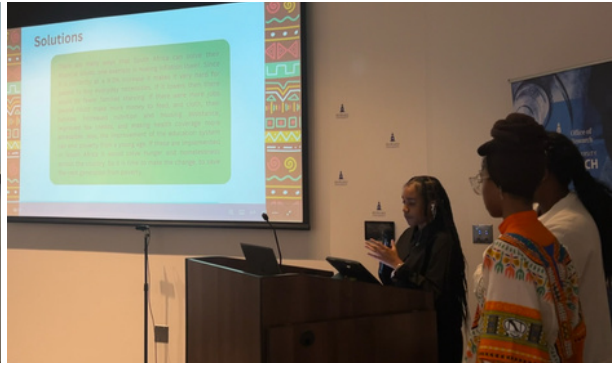
Painting Our Centerpieces

The History of Griots in Mali and Senegal

Signing the Class Card

Final Ceremony

Ms. Chidi and Mr. Daquan’s Interview



Student Presentations

What a journey these past six weeks have been! The final day is approaching, and students are steadfast in preparing their research from the past six weeks. The four topics they have chosen are as listed below:

1. How is culture preserved in the African Diaspora?
2. What are the different styles of architecture found in Northern, Southern, Eastern, and Western Africa?
3. What is currently happening in the Democratic Republic of Congo?

4. The History of Wealth in South Africa.

The research projects were initially introduced as fifteen minute presentations to take place at the final ceremony. Some students had forty-slide presentations with extensive research on each topic.

Because of the venue time-limit, they were told to shorten it by ten minutes. The projects and constant public speaking the students took part in was truly showcased that day.



Painting Session

As someone who helped plan the itinerary for the final ceremony, Dr. Wyatt and I felt it was necessary to include some form of art as the centerpieces for the tables. The final Monday, students were able to paint.

There were two things I learned from this special day. The first, is that painting heals. Whatever stresses and worries that are in place, will be released. It clears your mind and forces you to focus on what's in front of you.



We also had a proper paint & sip! There was apple cider, biscuits, & fancy cups. The students loved it! They were so engaged. Embracing each other's company but super focused on their respective canvas'. The second thing I learned was how different our minds work.

No painting was the same. No painting was left blank. I realized that artwork is a universal language, and I found out how unique each person's style of art is. The centerpieces turned out to be ever so beautiful.

We also had a drumming session with Farafinakan. The students got one-on-one experience with playing djembe drums. We learned traditional african dances at the end as well!



Griots in Mali and Senegal

Zeinab D. and Rokheya D., two bright students a part of the cohort, were given the opportunity to lecture students on the history of Griots in Mali and Senegal. To become a griot, you must be born into a griot family. It is selective in the sense that it is ancestral.

Griots are traveling storytellers, poets, and musicians who maintain a tradition of oral history. They are commonly known to be found in west Africa, however, this genealogy has been carried over into the diaspora. We see great aunts and uncles who carry the stories of those before them. These are all considered to be griots.



Dr. Wyatt's Surprise Gift

The students and faculty wanted to create a gift showcasing their gratitude for Dr. Wyatt. One problem: the card was life-sized! It was so hard to hide, especially when all the students had to sign it. Dr. Wyatt loved the gift!

Students also made recap videos commemorating their funniest moments in the program. Performing the "give me my money challenge," started on TikTok, they pranked every instructor (except me lol!).

Dr. Bahiyah Muhammad came and spoke on her integration of education in the prison system. She was the first at Howard University to ever bring college students into the prison for a week to live alongside inmates.

Dr. Cassandra Veney also came as a guest speaker. Here, she spoke on her journey as a professor. Her dissertation focused on the Kenyan refugees and their obstructions with the government.



From a gendered lens, she analyzed why women weren't allowed to become refugees without the accompaniment of a man.

Dr. Veney also spoke on the Center for Women, Gender, and Global Leadership. She is currently the executive director of the center.

The center's mission is to create "institutional leadership open to cultivating a culture of gender equity and inclusion, donors committed to gender and racial justice, and faculty devoted to applied research and social activism."

The Final Ceremony



Invocation & Speeches

The final ceremony was one for the books. I began with a prayer, welcoming the students and staff on accomplishing this momentous occasion. I detailed how I was chosen to participate in the program as Dr. Wyatt's assistant.



Im grateful for this experience, for this program, and the seed it's implanting in future generations. Many times we speak of how we can preserve our genealogy. What does revolutionary work look like? This is it! This is marroonage. Finding and making progressive spaces for African scholarship and implanting it in students. That is important and that is what this program has done. This is only the beginning!



Dr. Gladys Frances was also a keynote speaker. She congratulated the students and promised if they came to Howard and majored in African Studies, they would also become Flagship Ambassadors representing the College of Arts and Sciences on a global scale. What a great surprise!



Final Remarks

Student's Ava K., Ethan M., and Lyric R. all had such heartfelt final remarks on their experience. It showcased the program well on the varying perspectives of students. Lyric participated in the program since the beginning. Ava and her brother Langston travelled from Connecticut, bringing out a different perspective than those native to D.C. Ethan came into the program halfway. I found their speeches to be well written, summarizing the program perfectly!

Video Recap and the Origin of the Logo

Jaelah M., a film student who was a part of the cohort, made a short recap video of the program. She added vocal recordings on the student's point of view which made the video even more sincere. Naima R. helped to create the logo for the program. Here, she was able to explain why she chose the Pan-African colors red, black, and green. Jaelah was able to make the t-shirts for the program as well. Students and faculty grabbed some as they left.

Shortly thereafter, the instructors performed a spoken word displaying their journey in the program. They talked about their experiences on the first day and the transitioning of instructors, detailing every significant moment.

Dr. Camara also gave his final remarks. After, students were gifted with stoles and certificates. The program ended with a closing speech from Dr. Wyatt, where she spoke on the highlights of this program and what the students meant to her.

Closing Prayer:

As we gathered in the harbour of His safety, we thank God for this fellowship and family, and allowing us in this space. We thank you God for aligning everyone's timelines to this present moment. . We ask that our souls would catch the wind of your spirit, the spirit of our ancestors, to carry on and continue the intellectual work and the unchaining of our minds that has taken place through this program. With eternal gratitude, Amen.



Final Interviews of Ms. Chidinma Chidoka and Mr. DaQuan Lawrence

Question #1: What were your thoughts on the program thus far?

Mr. Daquan: *"I strongly believe that the 2024 African Studies Leadership Institute has been amazing, life changing and inspirational for everyone involved. The students are beyond impressive and their insights, effort and ingenuity has allowed them to learn from each other. The sessions, field trips and guest speakers have also been inspiring and significant. Lastly, the group projects have allowed the scholars to bring out the best in each other. I'm very grateful to learn from the students as well as Dr. Wyatt and my colleagues. This program has changed my life."*

Ms. Chidi: *"When we started week 4, I was glad to see how much the students had evolved since day 1. They seemed enthusiastic to build on what Hellen and Kamau had poured into them. A lot of them acknowledged their growth and looked forward to learning more. The last 3 weeks were intense as we got into the issues and challenged the students to think critically in proffering solutions. Everyday I was blown away at the way their minds worked and to see and observe the greatness they had in them. It was an intellectually stimulating 3 weeks."*

Question #2: What was your favorite moment during the program?

Mr. Daquan: *"My favorite moments were listening to the young scholars' insights, thoughts and ideas about historical and modern Africa, and seeing them work together. I admired and appreciated their ability to grasp new concepts and generate solutions, within a short time frame. Throughout the six weeks, my five year old daughter participated in a field trip and attended various sessions; seeing the students and my co-instructors embrace and teach my daughter was also very significant."*

Ms. Chidi: *"It's difficult for me to say honestly. But if I had to choose, I will say, watching them put together a presentation in less than 48hrs on Natural resources in Africa and observing their thought process. I was ecstatic at their sincere desire to see Africa turn it's wealth into a gift for Africa and its diaspora ."*

Final Interviews of Ms. Chidinma Chidoka and Mr. DaQuan Lawrence

Question #3: What's one message you would want to leave for the cohort now and the future cohorts of this program:

Mr. Daquan: *"I want all of the young leaders of the African Studies Leadership Institute to remember that they can achieve anything they conceive and believe. I would like for the scholars to recognize that within them, exists everything they need to accomplish any goal they can imagine. Lastly, I hope and pray that they remember their heritage, culture and ancestors, as they truly are their ancestors' dreams come true."*

Ms. Chidi: *"They are leaders..everything required for greatness is already deposited in them. They are the ones the continent is waiting for and they all have a need they are designed to fulfill for the continent."*

Question #4: What's one major thing you learned from the students?

Mr. Daquan: *"I learned many things from the students in our inaugural cohort, so choosing one is somewhat difficult. Each student taught me something unique, however, collectively I learned that when provided opportunities, Washington DC (African diaspora) youth will always exceed expectations. On various occasions, the students demonstrated their ability to perform and produce information on the level of professionals. I trust that they will continue to grow into the world leaders that they currently are."*

Ms. Chidi: *"The satisfaction of seeing them evolve , the light in their eyes as a result of knowledge they get daily is worth more than a million dollars and they blessed my life more than I could have imagined."*

Thank you for reading!

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