

## Bridging Research and Practice: Building a New Study Abroad Model in Southern Africa

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In late May – early June, PI Leedy and co-PIs Barnes and Child spent two weeks in Botswana, meeting with a wide variety of university, government, NGO, and private sector representatives to build upon existing relationships and forge new linkages that will support the creation of a new field practicum for graduate students from University of Florida, University of Botswana (UB), and potentially world-wide. UF and UB have become part of a global network of Masters in Development Practice (MDP) degree-granting institutions, a network built with seed funding from the MacArthur Foundation. The students in these programs form one natural constituency for the field practicum as it develops with full institutional partnership between UF and UB.

The UF team met with senior administrators and representatives of potential collaborating units on the main UB campus in Gaborone. These discussions made it clear to the UF team that UB has made substantial institutional commitments to ensuring that the partnership is symbiotic and sustainable. For example, UB has committed to significantly expanding the Okavango Research Center (ORC) accommodation facilities at its Maun campus. The UF team met multiple times with the UB Dean of Graduate Studies to work on detailed budgeting, instructional commitments, and in-country orientation. Upon arrival in 2011, UF participants will spend their first week in Gaborone at the Botswana College of Agriculture (BCA), joining the UB participants for an intensive week of orientation including guest lectures and visits to various relevant government agencies and NGO offices. For weeks two through seven, participants will be based at ORC in Maun and complete six one week field training and research modules. This will be followed by 2-4 week individual or small student team attachments to a variety of possible university, local government, private-sector or community entities. Discussions with senior administrators and research staff at the UB Maun campus helped to identify possible instructional



staff for the UF-UB practicum, as well as the need for expanded administrative capacity at ORC in order to undertake sustainable training programs for UF-UB and other potential institutions/clients.

The UF team also met with potential coordinating government agencies and non-governmental organizations in Gaborone to assess potential collaborative activities (e.g. attachment of UF-UB program students, staff training through participation in UF-UB program, use of monitoring data, etc.). Meetings with these organizations made it clear to the team that the imminent establishment of the field practicum would be broadly well-received for a number of reasons. First, because we plan to work in a defined set of communities annually, student training projects will generate a set of longitudinal data that can be used to monitor rural livelihoods and plan effective interventions. Second, there is a clear demand within in

various organizations for the type of training experience that the UF-UB program will offer. This provides a potential secondary constituency for the program, allowing for the possibility of students working in teams with active practitioners or the establishment of separate field practicum for local agency and organization staff. Meetings with similar bodies in Maun to assess potential collaborative activities (e.g. attachment of UF-UB program students, staff training through participation in UF-UB program, use of monitoring data, etc.) highlighted how a sustained student training program could also impact rural livelihoods by providing actionable data to community-based organizations and their private sector partners.

*Todd Leedy is associate director of the Center for African Studies. This project is supported by a two-year award of \$100,000 from the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, U.S. Department of State.*