

# The Black Oaks Newsletter

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## **William Kamkwamba: Elon's Common Reading Co-Author**

On September 16th and 17th William Kamkwamba, co-author of Elon's 2014-15 Common Reading, *The Boy who Harnessed the Wind*, spoke to audiences in McCrary Hall consisting largely of students and faculty from Elon's Global Experience course. Mr. Kamkwamba began by describing growing up in Malawi. He focused on a particularly challenging period of his youth, an extended drought that left his parents unable to earn enough from their farm to continue to pay his school fees.

Rather than be deterred by his ill fortune, Mr. Kamkwamba used his additional free time to go to the local library and pick up books on energy production and physics. He began to experiment with alternative energy generation by building a windmill on his family's compound out of discarded bicycle parts and other refuse from a nearby garbage dump.

Although Mr. Kamkwamba initially was teased and even called crazy by his classmates and community for his seemingly odd creation, when his windmill began to generate electricity, suddenly Mr. Kamkwamba became quite popular. Neighbors were sur-

prised and impressed that Mr. Kamkwamba, who was then a high school dropout, was able to create an invention that powered light bulbs in his parents' home and began to line up to get their cell phones charged using his windmill's power rather than trek to the nearest village that had electricity.

The common reading charts Mr. Kamkwamba's challenges and eventual success and describes how his creation came to the attention of local reporters and eventually a much wider audience that led to him writing his life story.

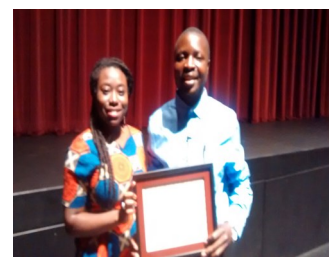
Mr. Kamkwamba is a young entrepreneur on the rise. He has given talks around the world, recently graduated from Dartmouth College, and was voted one of *Time* magazine's top 30 people under 30 that are changing the world.

His stories of perseverance and hope in the face of multiple challenges were inspiring to those fortunate enough to hear him speak at Elon.

Mr. Kamkwamba intends to return to Malawi after working with an entrepreneurial think tank in California.



Mr. Kamkwamba fielded Elon student, faculty and staff questions for nearly an hour for each of his four presentations in McCrary Theater.



Mr. Kamkwamba is recognized by the Elon African Society (EAS) for his contributions to Africa and Africans through his entrepreneurship. The award was presented by EAS founder Omolayo Ojo.

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## *Senegal Saint Joseph Choir*

By Omolayo Ojo ('15)

Thursday September 18<sup>th</sup>, the walls of McCrary Theatre reverberated with the sounds of 3 jambes – a type of West African drum – and the melodic voices of 9 Senegalese choir members singing in Wolof, Diola, Sérère and Portuguese Creole. Led by their Music Director, Mr. Ambroise N'Diong they gave audience members a taste of Senegalese culture infused with styles from Gregorian chants. A true tour de force of the mixing of cultures, the group started their performance in the uniformed robes of choir members and came back for the 2<sup>nd</sup> half in the bright and colorful fashions that are found in much of West Africa. Similarly, their first three songs, “Fala La,” “You Better Mind,” and “The Storm is Passing Over,” were distinctively Western in style. From there, the songs became more mixed, a particular testament to that being “Requiem Latino-Wolof,” and adaptation of Mozart’s Requiem in the Wolof language. The first half of the

performance ended with the drummers performing a sabar – a style of Senegambian drumming and dancing that includes elaborate rhythmic composition that is almost always mesmerizingly fast.

This sabar did not disappoint. Upon return from intermission, the percussion started off the tone again and the 2<sup>nd</sup> half, with its traditional clothing and continually more traditional music was infused with sabar dancing from the women in the group as well. This dance involves an incredible amount of energy as it keeps up to pace with the drumming and has the dancers jumping, spinning and shaking their arms to the beat of the drums. Two of the

songs, involved some theatrical performances. “Elé Way Way,” is a song that is performed to give young women strength during the traditional tattoo ceremony in which their gums are tattooed upon getting married. Two women acted it out and were greeted with the cheers and continued singing of family and friends – the rest of the choir. Another song highlighted Senegalese wrestling known as lamb.

All in all, it was an amazing show that gave audience members a great peek into Senegalese culture, but the incorporation of the Western style of choir songs made it truly unique and performance that shouldn’t be missed.



## *Elon African Society Welcome Back Mixer*

By Omolayo Ojo ('15)

The Elon African Society (EAS) kicked off the semester with a mixer on September 11th in the new Global Education Center (GEC). Faculty, staff and students came for snacks, but stayed

to mingle, catch up with one another and check out the new home of the GEC. With snacks such as chin-chin, fried plantains, peanuts, Scotch Egg, and Nigerian puff-puff – a crowd favorite, no one left still hungry. With some recent West African

hits playing the background, new students were able to learn more about various African cultures and how to get involved with EAS, while faculty and staff chatted with one another and also found students to share their expertise with.

## Author of the Month Luncheons

African and African-American Studies (AAAS) hosts author of the month luncheons each fall and each spring term.

### Our spring speakers included:

*Dr. Mussa Idris* in February, who spoke about the business experiences of Ethiopian and Eritrean transnational migrants in Washington, D.C.

March's featured author was *Dr. Crystal S. Anderson*, Associate Professor of English and author of *Beyond the Chinese Connection* (2013). She explored the cultural and political exchanges between African Americans, Asian Americans, and Asians over the last four decades.

### Our fall speakers were:

In September, *Dr. Julie Lelis*,

Associate Professor in the School of Communications, spoke on the selective buying campaign of 1968 in NC.

*Dr. Hella Bloom Cohen*, Visiting Assistant Professor in the Elon Core and the Department of English engaged in a comparison of the challenges faced by Palestinians and African-Americans in October, and;

*Dr. Jak Peake*, Visiting Fulbright Scholar in the Department of English, who gave a talk on black Caribbean authors in November.

AAAS organizers of the luncheons were pleased that due to demand, more than one of the lunch time talks needed to be moved to a larger venue on campus.



November 2014 speaker, Dr. Jak Peake



March 2014 speaker, Dr. Crystal Anderson

## From the DRC to NC: A Panel Discussion

On Monday October 20th, members of the campus community and beyond gathered in the Global Commons for a panel discussion on "Resources for Refugee and Asylum Seeking Families in Greensboro." Speakers included:

*Mussa Idris*, Assistant Professor, Sociology and Anthropology  
*Million Mekonnen*, Executive Director, North Carolina African Coalition Services  
*Sharon Morrison*, Associate Professor, Public Health Ed-

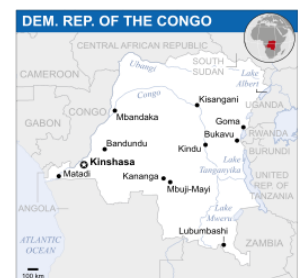
ucation & Research Fellow, UNCG Center for New North Carolinians  
*Heather Scavone*, Director, Humanitarian Immigration Law Clinic  
*Latosha Walker*, Operations Manager, North Carolina African Services Coalition

The Moderator was *Aunchalee Palmquist*, Assistant Professor, Sociology and Anthropology and Director, Program for Ethnographic Research and Community Studies (PERCS).

The event was an opportunity for members of the campus community to learn more about diverse populations in the triad and opportunities to partner with NGOs that assist them. Although African Services Coalition has visited Elon before and students have volunteered there for more than five years, many with closer ties to the organization have graduated. The panel was one of several events in the fall term co-sponsored by the African and African-American Studies Program.



To learn more about the African Services Coalition, please visit their webpage: <http://ascafrica.org>





## *Two of Three SFRF Awards go to AAAS Faculty*

In November the winners of the Senior Faculty Research Fellowships (SFRF) for 2015-17 were announced. Two of the three, Dr. Heidi Frontani and Dr. Tom Henricks are faculty in African and African-American Studies.

Professor of Geography, *Heidi Frontani* will use the award to complete her manuscript "Partners not Patrons: Rockefeller Foundation and Wellcome Trust Medical Philanthropy in British Colonial Africa" which is based on archival research at the Rock-

efeller Archive Center in New York and the Wellcome Library in London. Frontani's work contributes to an under-researched area of development assistance to Africa, namely that undertaken by charitable foundations prior to 1945 and the era of Official Development Assistance.

Professor of Sociology and Distinguished University Professor, *Tom Henricks* will use the award to complete his seventh book, "Ill at Ease: Modernity and its Discon-

tents." His manuscript examines the sources and implications of discontent in modern societies, offering an "analysis of the conditions that confront and support human involvement, the possibilities for connection and disconnection from these conditions, and the ways in which these relationships have been altered by the social and cultural patterns of advanced modernity." The project will extend and complement Henrick's earlier work.

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## *On MLK and Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel*

On October 21st, Dr. Susannah Heschel, Professor of Jewish Studies at Dartmouth College gave a talk in the Numen Lumen Pavilion entitled: "Praying with their Legs: Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel and the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr."

Dr. Heschel, spoke about the close friendship and shared vision of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and her father, Rabbi Dr. Abraham Joshua Heschel. The two men worked together as political activists in the civil rights movement and were both opposed to the war in

Vietnam.

Abraham Heschel was an émigré from wartime Europe who taught at Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati and at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York. He is one of the world's best known Jewish theologians.

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## *New Study Abroad Course in East Africa*

January 2015 will mark the launch of a new study abroad course in Africa: HST 273: Ethiopia and Tanzania: An Exploration of the History, Culture, & the Natural World in East Africa. The course will allow students to experience contemporary life in Ethiopia to view some of Africa's most outstanding national parks in northern Tanzania. Students will

learn about the long and fascinating history of Christianity in Ethiopia and its relationships with Judaism and Islam, Ethiopia's successful resistance to European imperialism in the 19th century, and the country's struggles with Fascism and Communism in the 20th century. The course will integrate classes with faculty from the University of Addis Ababa and

visits to historic sites in the capital. Student experiences in the city will include opportunities to learn about the plight of Eritrean refugees. Within Ethiopia students will visit the fabled medieval rock-hewn churches of Lalibela, trek through nearby farming villages, meet with the community-based Tesfa organization and observe Timkat, a major festival of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.



Dr. Mussa Idris will co-lead the new course

## ***News Briefs from a Few of Our Alums***

*Jordan Only* ('14) is teaching elementary school in Charlotte, NC through the Teach for America program. It is challenging work, but Jordan loves her job.

*Frank Stiefel* ('12) who majored in AAAS is working in Camden, in his home state of NJ, to provide welcoming spaces for those recently released from prison.

Alison Brooks ('10) received a Boren Fellowship for 2014-15 to study Swahili in Florida and Zanzibar. She also spoke on campus in the spring with COR 110 faculty and students in an Africa seminar about her research on the eye disease trachoma.

*Courtney Latta* ('09) was recently married.

*Justine Davis* ('08) began her PhD program at UC-Berkeley in Comparative Politics with a regional focus on Africa this fall. She recently received a travel award through the African Studies Association in support of her dissertation research.

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## ***AAAS Student Worker Receives National Honor***

*Erin Turner* ('15) who has served as the student worker for the AAAS program was honored by the American Advertising Federation as one of the Most Promising Multicultural Students. She will travel to New York City in February 2015 with another Elon honoree for a three-day workshop to interview with industry professionals and have the opportunity to be recruited by the nation's top strategic communications firms.

AAAS welcomes *Donita Sharkey* ('18) who will take over for Ms. Turner in 2015.

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## ***Student Hosts Panel on Ebola***

*Omolayo Ojo*, an AAAS minor and Global Neighborhood student leader, moderated a panel on Ebola on November 13th. Panelists included *Dr. Brian Digre*, Professor of History and International Studies and *Dr. Aunchalee Palmquist*, Assistant Professor of Medical Anthropology.

Digre talked about the history of Ebola, from the virus' first identification in 1976 in Yambuku in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where Digre served as a Peace Corps Volunteer. He also discussed the current situation in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea in West Africa. He stated that health is a human right and that the West African countries most impacted by the disease are ones with relatively weak economies, minimal infrastructure, and are emerging from violent political conflicts. These factors have contributed to a poor local response to Ebola. Palmquist talked about the characteristics of Ebola, an often fatal hemorrhagic viral illness that is spread mainly through human-to-human contact. She stressed the importance of understanding how poverty and poor health infrastructure can aid disease spread.

Two student organizations, the Elon African Society and Elon Partners in International Development, along faculty and students of the January 2015 Tanzania & Ethiopia Winter Term class have partnered not only to increase awareness at Elon about the Ebola outbreak in West Africa, but are also participating in fundraising efforts to support the work of Doctors Without Borders in West Africa.

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## ***Student Presents Research on Plus Sized Black Women at SURF***

*Raven Bennett* ('14) used the Student Undergraduate Research Forum (SURF) in April to showcase her study on how Hollywood stereotypes influence perceptions of fat, black women. Dr. Prudence Layne mentored Bennett's research which Bennett also presented at the 38th annual National Council of Black Studies Conference in Jamaica.

## Mission Statement



The mission of the program is to promote the production and dissemination of knowledge about African and African-descended peoples through advocacy, learning, research, scholarship, service and teaching.

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*In Memoriam:* it is with sadness that we note the passing of acclaimed poet and civil rights icon *Maya Angelou* on May 28, 2014. She died a year and a half after speaking to over 2,400 students, faculty, staff and community members that gathered on campus for our Fall Convocation.

## The Coordinator's Corner

I am pleased to take on the role of Interim Coordinator of African and African-American Studies at Elon (AAASE) for the 2014-15 academic year.

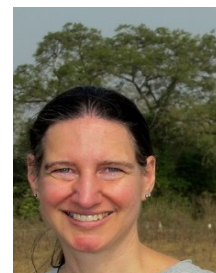
As is evident from our newsletter, our program and our affiliates were quite active in hosting and co-hosting events. Some of the many events of 2014 which were not featured in this newsletter included:

- The many events during Black History Month including tables at College Coffee, African dance, exhibits of Elon's African art collection and speakers
- Community voter registration drives
- A panel on Troy Davis and the Death Penalty
- Panels on identifying and reducing discrimination
- An open house to celebrate the transformation

of Elon's Multi-Cultural Center into the Center for Race, Ethnicity and Diversity Education (CREDE).

- The Second Annual DIVAS Conference
- A reading and discussion of 12 Years a Slave
- A Faces of Homelessness panel
- Talks and panels related to the events in Ferguson, including reflections from Mia Watkins, a student who is a resident of Ferguson, MO.
- A talk by Dr. Ywone Edwards-Ingram on Slavery and the Significance of African American Spiritual and Religious Leaders
- And more...

I am looking forward to many exciting events in the new year and encourage you to keep an eye on the AAAS



Dr. Heidi Frontani,  
Interim AAASE Coordinator

webpage for information on Black History Month and other events for 2015.

Please note that although there is much happening at Elon, there are also many opportunities beyond our walls, such as the Conference on African American and Diasporic Cultures and Experience (CACE), at the Elliot Center at UNCG February 10-11, 2015, which will feature undergraduate and graduate presentations from a variety of disciplines.

-Heidi Frontani