Research Project and Internship Proposal

1. Review the Special Study Project Overview and Samples before completing this form.
2. Submit this preliminary proposal to the UCEAP systemwide office so that it can be forwarded to the Resident Director before the term begins. This form does not commit you to a research project or internship and it does not guarantee final approval. By submitting this form, the project will be easier to arrange once you are abroad.

Student Name: Bart Simpson  
UC Campus: UC Berkeley

Major(s): Peace and Conflict Studies, Media Studies

I will have taken a research methodology course prior to my participation. ☐ Yes ☐ No

Note: Some U of Ghana faculty prefer to work with students who have completed a course on research methodology.

Proposed Title of Project/Internship: Toxic Trade and Digital Dumps: The E-waste Labor Experience in Ghana

Description (explain the topic of the proposed study):

E-waste, discarded electronic products near the end or at the end of their useful life, has become a subject of growing environmental concern in developing countries due to illegal imports from developed nations. Each day thousands of discarded computers arrive in Agbogbloshie dump in Ghana, a graveyard for many American and European computers and televisions. Agbogbloshie slum is also directly on top of Korle Lagoon, one of the world’s most polluted bodies of water on Earth, colloquially called the “dead river”. The migrant population, women, and children of this informal settlement pull apart and burn the computers, extracting the copper and gold from inside. I propose to work with residents in this slum, government officials, and activists to better understand how government interventions are affecting the laborers at this E-Waste dumping ground. My research question is: How has the Korle Lagoon Restoration Project impacted the labor patterns of E-waste laborers in Agbogbloshie?

Anticipated types of resources needed in Ghana related to this proposal:

For this project I will need access to Agbogbloshie e-waste dumping sites and laborers. This access could come from an NGO already working in these areas that I could shadow or connect with, or some other government entity that has already established connections and trust in these areas. Additionally, I will need a faculty mentor in Ghana to guide my research. The specific methodologies I will be employing include a qualitative survey of the laborers in the slum (in which case I will need language translation assistance) in conjunction with extensive interviews about the wetland restoration project to try to better understand the interrelations between this E-waste dumping site and the restoration project. I will conduct additional interviews from leading charities and activist groups currently working on the topic such as Computer Aid, Greenpeace, BAN and DanWatch. These interviews will further outline the problem and hopefully suggest solutions. I already have a research fund from my home university that can assist me with translation and other miscellaneous costs.

Any related background work you have already done:

I have developed the requisite academic and field-specific background to undertake this proposed research through courses I’ve taken, prior research I’ve conducted, and international development internships I’ve had. I became interested in Ghana when I studied its water access issues in slums around Accra in my Water and Development course in Spring 2012. Through my coursework as a Peace and Conflict Studies major (with a Human Rights concentration) and my Global Poverty and Practice Minor, I have taken many classes on international development and human rights that has laid the foundational
empirical knowledge I need to carry out this project. Additionally, I have a strong methods training background from courses I’ve taken such as SOC 105: Sociological Research Methods, IAS H105: Advanced Research Methods in International and Area Studies, and GPP 105: Methods, Ethics, and Pragmatics of Global Practice.

I have also worked as a research fellow in Northeast India as a community development intern on a rural water management project. In this project I did field research on water access issues with women’s self-help groups; I feel that this project gave me valuable qualitative interview and survey design experience that will be successfully transferable to this Ghanaian research project. Additionally, last year I became a research apprentice for two professors to work on policy-making in the developing world. Through this research apprenticeship I learned a great deal about the politics, governance, and history patterns of environmental issues. I learned about Ghana’s water policy history and stance on labor conditions and this directly relates to my proposed project.

Briefly report on your discussion of the project with your major/departmental advisor (if applicable).

I have been in contact with a few of my professors and mentors in regards to this project. I have proposed the idea to my research apprenticeship professor and my Global Poverty professor, and they have given me feedback. My major Peace and Conflict Studies supports independent study projects as well, especially internationally. I have also been awarded a research grant to conduct this research in Ghana.