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NEWS RELEASE

UD STUDENTS TO EXPLORE AMERICAN TRADITIONS IN AFRICAN ROOTS DURING MUSICAL ODYSSEY IN GHANA

DAYTON, Ohio — They'll take a symbolic walk through the "door of no return," explore the roots of American music, observe master craftsmen at work and work with children in community service.

For 10 days in March, students and faculty from the University of Dayton and other schools will "break out" of the traditional classroom routine to experience first-hand the culture of Ghana.

Sponsored by UD's Center for International Programs through its Interdepartmental Summer Study Abroad Program, the West African Musical Odyssey spring "Break-out" adventure will focus on Africa's rich musical heritage. Participants will also have the opportunity to explore the social, economic and religious culture and history of the oldest independent black African nation.

Trip coordinator Donna Cox, an associate professor of music at UD, said the adventure will begin in the pre-dawn hours of March 9 when travelers gather at 4:30 a.m. at the music building to depart for Cincinnati International Airport.

The tour group includes Cox and Vernellia Randall, professor of law at UD; senior music students Colleen Egan of Southampton, Pa., Erin Higginbotham of Columbus and Matthew Scheeser of Sandusky; sophomore music student David Scimonelli of Columbia, Md.; and junior political science student Malia Bajpai of West Carrollton. Professors Cedric Adderley and Ronnie Hopkins from the music and dance departments at Benedict College in Columbia, S. C., will join the group as will Cox's son, Jonathon, a sophomore at Stivers School for the Arts.

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The odyssey will allow students to immerse themselves in African culture and explore how indigenous American music, including jazz, blues and spirituals, grew from African roots and developed through the iniquitous slave trade, Cox said. To understand American music traditions, participants will examine African culture and society - from the marketplace and village life to children's games and songs.

"We will also be treated to lectures and demonstrations in African music, dancing and drumming by professional dance troupes as well as by professors from the University of Ghana," Cox added.

Other highlights of the pilgrimage include visits to Kumasi, where Kente cloth is woven, and to the slave castles of Elmina and Cape Coast, a shipping port for millions of Africans displaced to a life of bondage.

"At Cape Coast, we'll experience going through the "door of no return" and stepping back through in symbolic celebration of the African American's return home in victory," Cox said.

As a service learning component to the odyssey, participants will spend a day in community service at Ekumfi Asokawa, a village sponsored by Dayton's Omega Baptist Church, where Cox is a member. Students are now collecting small school supplies to bring to the children there.

"Much of African American culture - and therefore American - has its roots in West African culture," Cox said. "By exploring some of these American retentions at their source, we'll be better able to understand our own culture.

"The added benefit is the opportunity to serve a community which, although rich in culture, is poor in monetary wealth. This, too, will help us put our own blessings into perspective."

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For media interviews, call Donna Cox at (937) 229-3946.