

## **Kimberly Rooney**

Mellon Foundation Area and International Studies Fellowship for Incoming Graduate Students  
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Thanks to the Mellon Foundation Area and International Studies Fellowship, I was able to spend 5 weeks in Dakar, Senegal and the surrounding area conducting pre-dissertation research. Though still in its preliminary stages, my thesis question became clearer over the course of my fieldwork. The exchanges and observations I carried out focused majorly on the primary and secondary educative systems of the country. While my dissertation will focus on representations of education in sub-Saharan Francophone literature and cinema, this fieldwork provided an invaluable opportunity to gain a general understanding of Senegalese schooling, teaching, and learning in a more ethnographic sense.

Because of previous experience in Senegal, I was able to reestablish contacts with educator circles, professionals involved in countrywide educative initiatives, and employees of the Ministry of Education. I also established new contacts with professors at the Faculté des Sciences et Technologies de l'Éducation et de la Formation (FASTEF) and researchers publishing works on issues in education in Senegal. These contacts will continue to contribute to my research as new questions arise about the logistics as well as cultural aspects of the Senegalese education system.

Thanks to these contacts, I conducted informal interviews with numerous professors, teachers, administrators, and students. These discussions helped me form an understanding of the school system as well as develop a deeper sense of societal attitudes towards schooling and education. In addition, I took a trip outside of Dakar to the smaller city of Thies in order to talk to teachers from more rural areas who may have different experiences than those in the capital. I was even lucky enough to live right next to a large primary-through-secondary school and was able to make important observations in regards to the quotidian activities of the actual school environment.

The Mellon Fellowship and my time in Dakar were equally beneficial to my research because of the opportunity they presented to collect documents and works pertinent to my dissertation topic. I purchased novels that are thus far little-known in which schooling and education feature as major themes. I acquired the files that outline in detail the State curriculum for each major school subject. Finally, I purchased current and past editions of State-mandated textbooks from Nouvelles Editions Africaines Senegal (NEAS), a publisher founded by Senegal's first president, Léopold Sédar Senghor. These texts will provide insight into changes that have taken place in the curriculum and therefore in the ideologies promoted by the State.

Lastly, I spent ample time exploring libraries like the West African Research Center (WARC), campuses such as FASTEF and the Université Cheikh Anta Diop (UCAD), the Senghor museum, and the local movie theater in order to make observations pertaining to "school culture" as well as interaction with history, literature, and cinema in Dakar. These observations, while not necessarily providing tangible data, were probably the most beneficial in terms of raising important questions about the cultures of learning, studying, schooling and the general rapport with the humanities in the capital city.

This field research provided a special occasion for me to build my base understanding of this sub-Saharan Francophone country's educative systems, school environments, learning attitudes, as well as literary and cinematic culture (not to mention the valuable opportunity to hone my language skills in a Francophone context). I'm very grateful for the Mellon Area and International Studies Fellowship for granting me these experiences while developing my dissertation research.