Hello Exploring Africa FIG Student,

And welcome to the University of Oregon! My name is Hayley Bridwell and I will be your FIG Assistant for this coming fall term. I am very excited to get to meet and to get to know you and the other students. As part of the Exploring Africa FIG, you will be taking two lecture-style classes as well as College Connections course. Exploring Africa is also a challenge FIG, but fear not! This only means that you will be taking a class that is considered to be an “upper-division” course. While upper-division courses are typically not taken by freshmen, this course will allow you to move away from just learning information (as you typically do in introductory courses) to critically thinking about what is presented. In addition, our very own College Connections teacher will be the instructor for Anthropology 327, so you will have a person on the inside to help you with it! I also took this course last year so I will be there to help you. The goals of our FIG are to gain key insights into the peoples and cultures of Africa and to learn about the challenges and rewards of viewing cultures from different perspectives. I was a part of this FIG last year and absolutely loved it. I hope you all will enjoy it as much as I did.

I am currently a sophomore at the UO and hail from Beaverton, OR. I love most kinds of music, I love to cook, and I go swing and/or blues dancing every week. While I am ‘officially’ undecided on my major, I am considering a major in international studies. I love to work with different cultures and learn from them in the process, which led me to this FIG. I love to learn about places that are far different from western American society. I find that when I am in those places, it really pushes my own perceptions on how the world works. It challenges my mind to open up to new opportunities and ideas that I would have never thought of. I am also a former exchange student (Thailand ’09–’10) and volunteer with AFS Intercultural Programs to help students leaving and coming to the US.

The instructor for our FIG, Professor Wooten, is a cultural anthropologist and has been a part of the University of Oregon since 2001. He got his bachelor’s degree at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, his master’s degree and PhD at the University of Illinois. He focuses on political economy and ecology, local food systems and expressive culture. Professor Wooten has been conducting field research in Mali, West Africa since 1992, and has recently started an agricultural study here in Eugene. He and his family recently lived for 8 months in Mali, where he was working a Fulbright Scholar. If you are interested, there is also an interview of Professor Wooten available online.

The College Connection class, taught by Professor Wooten and me, will connect ANTH 327 Perspectives on Africa and INTL 250 Value Systems in Cross-Culture Perspectives. The point of the FIG is to not only see how these two courses connect, but also how you can connect and critically think about your other classes. The course also provides you with a chance to meet and work with 24 other students who are taking the same courses as you. You will have us both as a resource if you need help with anything; including the things outside of academia. We will also get a chance to plan some fun activities together. When I was in the FIG last year we had an amazing African-style dinner. We also had a day to just play games and hang out. While Professor Wooten and I have a few ideas, we want to hear your input too.
Before everyone arrives in September, we have a small assignment for you. We promise it will not take long and will be worth the special effort. Before our first class, Professor Wooten and I would like you to read *Monique and the Mango Rains* by Kris Holloway. The book is about a woman who spent two years in Mali as a Peace Corps volunteer, and should hopefully get you thinking about some of the issues we will look at in the FIG. Also, please remember to bring your Student Handbook to class. For some of our advising sessions, you will need it for scheduling, planning, etc.

Please also note that **Friday, September 21, 2012 at 10 am** we will be meeting in **Columbia 150**. Just head inside and everyone will be split off into their FIG groups. Also, **Sunday, September 23, 2012** we will be going to the **University Convocation**. This is a required event for FIGs and we will all be lining up and going in together. We will talk about it a bit more on the 21st, so please be sure to come! Who knows? Those who come to class might even get a special treat.

If you happen to use Facebook, I created a group named **FIG: Exploring Africa ’12**. My FIG group and I found it very useful to communicate with each other about assignments and projects using a Facebook group. I ask that you also please send me an email with your name, a picture of yourself, and a few interesting facts. Hope you have a wonderful rest of your summer and we will see you this fall!

Sincerely,

Hayley Bridwell
Bridwell@uoregon.edu
(503)-539-9845

As the Bamana people of Mali say, I n ick! Greetings to you! I am the professor for the College Connections and the Anthropology 327 courses that are part of your FIG. I am delighted that you have decided to come to the UO and especially that that you have elected to join our Exploring Africa group for the coming school year. Sharing my love of Africa with students is one of the greatest rewards of being a professor. I have been fortunate to have many amazing and moving experiences with people on the African continent, and it's always wonderful to be able to help students see into the worlds I am so passionate about. As we study together in the fall we will have the chance to get a better sense of our own cultures and to become more knowledgeable about the importance of seeing similarities and differences with African peoples and cultures. Thank you for taking a step toward Africa and cross-cultural encounters by selecting our FIG. Together we will enjoy the rewards of our common exploration!

Yours truly,

Stephen Wooten, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of International Studies and Anthropology