

Faculty *focus*

Highlighting innovation in teaching at UM-Flint

“Glocal” Agent:

Building Bridges Across Campus and Continent

by David Linden

Participation in a Peace Corps excursion to Kenya years ago “planted a seed” in Dr. Patricia Emenyonu: interest in African authors. That seed germinated, and took root. By the time Emenyonu had attained an Associate Professorship in English/English Education at the University of Calabar in Nigeria, the interest had blossomed into a specialty.

Along the way Patricia met her husband, Dr. Ernest Emenyonu, who shared her interests and had established the practice of regularly introducing African authors to his own students. The innovative teaching practice is one that Patricia would import and employ with fervor as the couple transferred their academic careers to UM-Flint. This bridge-building activity that began on foreign soil is now central to Dr. Patricia Emenyonu’s homefront academics; the global mission blended with local focus is one that Emenyonu refers to—through wry grin—as “glocal.”

Emenyonu joined the UM-Flint faculty in 2002 and describes her academic background as “History turned English and Lit.” Specializing in African Literature along with Reading and English Methodology, the Lecturer II is published in leading journals and anthologies in Africa and the United States, and is the author of *Reading and the Nigerian Cultural Background*. The dual-discipline educator divides her attentions between the Africana Studies and English Departments,

teaching courses that appeal to a broad student base.

In an academic landscape striving to increase course offerings with shrinking budgets, Emenyonu designs classes that fall into various general education attributes.

Her regular offerings—Survey of African Literature, Afro-Latino Caribbean Writers, and Women Writers of the African World (with a focus on the Diaspora)—draw students from diverse disciplines at different stages of their academic pursuits. She prefers it that way. For Emenyonu, it’s one more strategy to accomplish her glocal vision.

A partnership established in 2003 between Africana Studies and the Flint Public Library provides an opportunity for Dr. Emenyonu to further her mission of bringing awareness to African writers beyond UM-Flint classrooms. Funded by the Ruth Mott Foundation, The “Renowned African Writers Visit” Series annually brings a distinguished African to Flint for a stay ranging from 3 days to one week.



Dr. Patricia Emenyonu
Lecturer, English and Africana Studies

To expose students and the greater Flint community to these authors and their work, Emenyonu organizes and moderates a free workshop known as the Educators' Workshop. The workshop draws GISD teachers, student teachers, and others from Michigan and beyond. Her strategy for the 3-day campus visits consists of a classroom visit during which she interviews the author, followed by the all-day educators' workshop where all attendees receive complimentary copies of the author's featured book.

As part of her curriculum, Emenyonu pairs the larger works of visiting authors with shorter writings from other authors to develop common themes, "using films to fill in the gaps." Emenyonu proudly states she's taught the work of every author she's brought to campus and is pleased with the results: "The strength [of these visits] is that students are connected to and influenced by the authors in person."

Author invitations largely originate with Emenyonu's attendance at conferences for the African Literature Association where, in Emenyonu's own words, "connections turn family." Patricia passes a name on to Ernest (longstanding Editor of *African Literature Today* and current Chair of UM-Flint Africana Studies) and together they turn the conference connections into UM-Flint invitations.

The most recent guest author was Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, 2013 winner of the National Book Critics Circle Fiction Award. Emenyonu notes that Chimamanda and her work are also capturing international attention "because her book [*Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006)] was turned into mainstream cinema." The high profile 37 year-old African artist carved out time

in her busy itinerary for a late September, 2014 visit, conducting a workshop in the William S. White Tuscola Rooms and "selling out" the UM-Flint Theater for a lecture that was open to the public.

Borrowing from Chimamanda's TED Talk entitled "The Danger of a Single Story," and connecting the author's influence to her own pedagogical platform, Emenyonu offers a caveat of summation: "That's what we try to counteract - that single story we hear as Americans. Through our courses in Africana Studies, we give voice to a variety of 'stories' that need to be heard in our ever shrinking world. If we truly want a just and peaceful world, then we have to get to know each other. We can only know when we open our minds and make ourselves a little vulnerable. It may feel uncomfortable initially, but the rewards are so much greater than that first discomfort."

Emenyonu is quick to mention that next up in the visiting author series is Sindiwe Magona. Sindiwe is the author of the book *Mother to Mother* (1998), based on the true story of the 1993 murder of American Amy



As part of the 2014 African and African Diaspora Artist Series, UM-Flint was pleased to host renowned author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie this past September.

Biehl, a graduate of Stanford University and anti-apartheid activist in South Africa. A March 18th-20th date is planned for Sindiwe's visit.

Emenyonu considers her campus-driven innovations as opportunity for added academic influence in the greater community. She's active with a variety of local groups—library, sororities, film groups; she participates in teaching circles with current K-12 teachers and teachers in-training. For over 10 years she's volunteered as a member of Genesee County's Literacy Coalition which trains tutors as Certified Volunteer Tutors.

Although the seasoned academic and activist was nearing professor status at the University of Calabar, the current Lecturer II doesn't let the status "limit" her level of investment and innovation on behalf of the university. She worked with ITS to revamp the Africana Studies website and partnered with a UM-Flint alumnus to create an alumni page specifically for Africana Studies alums. She updates the Africana Studies "Study Abroad" website with



The series also includes opportunities for students and faculty to engage in discussions with the visiting authors. Pictured above are Drs. Ernest Emenyonu, Ini Uko, and Otrude Moyo.

photos from recent trips and is a staple participant in the Africana Studies Study Abroad program itself. Not paid to do so, she's "just going to do it because it's who I am—a bridge between cultures."

Outside of the Africana Studies and English Departments, Emenyonu designs flyers and recruits people to help promote class offerings. Spotting an overall decline in literature class enrollment, she proposed that the university offer more of the declining classes online (not limited to classes she teaches). The suggestion resulted in a significant increase in enrollment. Of her own volition, she attended an Academic Advising Workshop to become a UM-Flint Certified Academic Advisor. An advocate and frequent visitor to the TCLT, Emenyonu has participated in a number of TCLT initiatives—most notably the Internationalization Summit.

Recently Emenyonu participated in an intra-campus teaching circle to invite a broad spectrum of faculty to participate in global initiatives. This is exciting to Emenyonu. "It's not just an Africana Studies Department thing," she says, "even administrators attend. For her part in the circle, Emenyonu is "content to help set parameters and step aside to let others lead, facilitate, and 'take credit.'"

Emenyonu stresses that innovative ideas are often difficult to bring to fruition on campus because of competition for attention and resources, and lack of a shared vision; but she adds that the culture has evolved into a more open and welcoming atmosphere to "push" ideas along. For this she is thankful. The TCLT is proud to be at the fore of this welcoming atmosphere and join educators like Emenyonu in their push to advance even further.

The experienced and well-travelled PhD

views herself as participant in and advocate for a circle of educators—a “recruiter and inviter” of multiple disciplines, voices and learners. “Over time, I personally developed the ability to branch out from tunnel vision into promotion of self and programs.” Emenyonu invites others to emerge from their own potential tunnel vision. “It’s easy for college instructors to focus attention solely on our own work and discipline,” she admits matter-of-factly. Assuming responsibility to promote and advertise the activity she deems important to the university experience, Emenyonu seeks to connect people with opportunities on campus and beyond, including faculty and staff in the experience. Emenyonu assures, “When we do, the community shows up.”

Written by **David Linden**

Dave is the TCLT’s current Graduate Student Research Assistant and a tutor in the university’s Marian E. Wright Writing Center. He is working toward an MA in English with a concentration in Composition and Rhetoric. He aspires to teach writing and/or serve as a staff writer at the university level.

2015 African/African Diaspora Artist Series

presents

SINDIWE MAGONA

March 18-20, 2015

Acclaimed South African novelist and journalist **Sindiwe Magona** will be in Flint, Michigan, from March 18th-20th. Her books have made her a voice for African women and for the people of South Africa. Her commentary on her own life and the realities of the country before, during, and after Apartheid reflect her country’s experiences in true and meaningful ways. She writes about her life, motherhood, customs, experiences, and hopes for the future. Her published works include *Mother to Mother*, *Beauty’s Gift*, *Forced to Grow*, and *To My Children’s Children*.



2015 Schedule of Events

March 18, 4:00-6:00 pm, UM-Flint KIVA
Public Lecture, “In the Shoes of the Other”

March 19, 10:30-11:30 am, Flint Public Library
Teen/Author Forum. Registration required.
Call (810) 249-2046

March 19, 5:30-7:30 pm, Flint Public Library
A conversation with Sindiwe Magona.

March 20, 8:30 am— 3:30 pm, UM-Flint Northbank Center
Educator’s Workshop. Registration required.
Call (810) 762-3353

ALL EVENTS ARE FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Sponsored by UM-Flint, the Flint Public Library and the Ruth Mott Foundation.