



Ferris State University professors get the job done inside traditional FSU classrooms and beyond. Ferris Professor Phillip Middleton is taking his academic expertise overseas to teach students abroad. He also is working to strengthen his own knowledge through additional travels into northern Africa. Further information about Dr. Middleton's travels is available by contacting Sandy Gholston, interim assistant director of News Services. This story was written by student writer Natasha Berryman.

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### **Ferris Professor Middleton is an Academic Globetrotter**

BIG RAPIDS – Learning from the global communities he sets out to educate, Ferris State University's Phillip Middleton submerges himself in cultures abroad in the pursuit of education and intellectual intrigue.

Middleton, a professor of English and two-time Fulbright Scholar, has taught African-American poetry in Croatia the last two summers. Passionate about teaching abroad and immersing himself in other cultures, Middleton plans to travel abroad again in March of 2011. This time he is heading to Ireland to teach students from the National University of Ireland, Maynooth, about the mechanics and culture of African-American dialectal poetry.

“What I like about the students I teach is that they are game for anything,” Middleton explained. “They are really keen to learn. They want to know more than just how to read the poetry I give them. They want to know everything about America and travel. I try to explain to them that they have the world to see.”

In Croatia during the summer of 2010, Middleton taught students how to read African-American poetry, a genre of literature he teaches at Ferris. Setting out to help his students understand the cultural background and historical context of the genre, Middleton simultaneously works to equip his students to understand the dialectal significance this genre of poetry contains.

In early 2011, when he arrives in Ireland, Middleton will impart that same message to students he will meet. After spending some time in that country, he plans to travel south into northern Africa to the countries of Senegal and Mauritania where he will transition from “instructor” to “student.”

“I've never been to these two countries in Africa; 17 others, but not these,” Middleton noted.

“Up until 1983, Mauritania still had slavery. On the books, it was banished at that time, but from other sources, I know that it still exists there. I want to go to this country to observe – to be a tourist – a fly on the wall – and just live; to check it out and see what I see. I’m looking forward to it.”

Since finishing his graduate school studies, Middleton has set out to tour and delve into the cultures the continent of Africa presents. Drawn to it because it is a continent he perceives as “politically alive,” Middleton ultimately hopes to not only pass on information to those he interacts with, but to also accept the information they pass on to him.

“I want to give the students I teach abroad the notion that they are part of a larger community. There is a lot to learn from other people and other places,” Middleton said. “I learn a lot from them – everything from what they eat to how they view American politics to their take on the current state of Israel. The process of exchange their café society creates says that discourse, debates and discussion should continue well beyond the classroom. I try to bring that back here.”

Middleton began teaching at Ferris in 1989 and has taught African-American literature, African literature, Shakespeare and freshman composition courses. A 2003 recipient of Ferris’ Distinguished Teacher award, he also has served as a Fulbright scholar in the Sudan, Romania and Syria.

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