Why Study Swahili?

Students will learn to speak one of the most widely-used African languages. Swahili, arguably the most important and studied indigenous language of Africa, is the national and official language of Kenya and Tanzania. Swahili is spoken as a second language by millions of people in Uganda and Congo as well as in Mozambique, Rwanda, Burundi, Zambia, and Malawi. While the focus is on learning to speak Swahili, the class also touches on food, music, history, and the culture in general.

“Dr. Leonard is respected in his field for a reason. He’s talented and clever, and he’s capable of recognizing talent in his students and nurturing it. If you get a chance to study under him, DO IT!”

In addition to Africa’s great cultural richness, there are other benefits to studying Swahili. Africa is now the second fastest-growing region in the world with a large and youthful workforce. According to CNBC, major tech companies such as Twitter, Square, Facebook, Microsoft, and Google are looking to Africa as the next big tech market. Venture capitalists also see potential opportunities in African startups. American companies may well be interested in someone who understands Africa and speaks an African language.

It is a rare opportunity in America to learn about the people and cultures of the world’s second largest continent and the benefits are clear.

“Easily the best, most fun class I’ve taken at Hofstra. Prof always slows down to make sure everyone understands the lesson and tells the best stories along the way! “

—RateMyProfessors.com

About the Professors

Prof. Leonard spent seven years in East Africa with the Swahili (Waswahili) people, much of it in Lamu, an ancient Swahili city-state in the Indian Ocean off the north coast of Kenya. He did his Columbia doctoral dissertation research there: direct fieldwork, and apprenticing with a Swahili elder who was a master of the language. Leonard also heads the Hofstra Forensic Linguistics Program and Death Penalty Innocence Project.

Co-teacher Faith Okomo joined the team in 2017. Born in Mombasa, Kenya, she earned an M.S. in Criminal Justice from the University of Cincinnati. Her thesis was entitled “The Task Force on Early Intervention and the Prevention of Youth Crime”. She is currently a PhD candidate.