

VIP Africa: Serve Learn Sustain Syllabus Fall 26

<https://vip.gatech.edu/teams/vyt>, multiple sections, Variable Credits

TUE 6:30-7:20 PM, Klaus 1440

Instructor Information

Co-Instructors	Email	Drop-in Hours & Location
Katundu Imasiku (ISyE)	kimasiku3@gatech.edu	ISyE Main Bldg 317, TUE 2-5
Chris Ippolito (African Studies/Modern Languages)	cippolito6@gatech.edu	non-teaching faculty this fall
Michael Oxman (Scheller)	michael.oxman@scheller.gatech.edu	TBA
Valerie Thomas (ISyE)	valerie.thomas@isye.gatech.edu	Groseclose 415 by appointment

General Course Information

Description

This interdisciplinary, project-based course challenges students to present useful projects for Africans. Students will work in teams, instructors will assist. Active Participation and Attendance to weekly class on Tuesday 6:30-7:20 PM in Klaus 1440 essential, mandatory and part of the grade.

This VIP course has many sections. On CANVAS, we'll use the "VIP-2601-VYT" section for all sections. Other Canvas sections have been combined with the "VIP-2601-VYT" section.

Pre- &/or Co-Requisites

There are no pre-requisites or co-requisites for this course.

Course Goals and Learning Outcomes

This VIP team will focus on accelerating sustainable development in Africa. Through this VIP students will:

- Learn and practice professional skills;
- Make substantial contributions to their team project;
- Experience different roles on a large, multidisciplinary team;
- Learn about Africa

Course Requirements & Grading

VIP teams function like real-world project teams. Members work on different aspects of a shared project, ranging from sophomores to graduate students, and from first-time participants to those with multiple semesters of experience. Students may enroll for variable credit hours, which are considered in grading.

Note: Zero-credit enrollment is reserved for paid participants and follows the same grading criteria.

Grading Overview

Each student is evaluated across three core areas, with three mandatory requirements. Regardless of role or experience, students must demonstrate achievement in all three areas:

1. Documentation and Records

- Maintain individual documentation (required).
- Contribute to team documentation: [VIP Wiki](#), [blog](#)

2. Personal Contributions

- Complete assigned quizzes, modules, essays, or reports.
- Engage actively in the project.
- Pursue knowledge relevant to the project.
- Contribute to technical progress.
- Experienced members may also contribute to project management.

3. Teamwork and Interaction

- Participate in peer evaluations. Failure to submit results in a full letter grade deduction.
- Attend meetings on time.
- Collaborate toward team goals.
- Coordinate and assist teammates.
- Contribute to team presentations.

Rubric(s)

As/if needed. May be added in Canvas.

All Assignments/Grading Components

10%	On-Time Attendance and Active Participation (attendance taken each Tuesday)
5%	Assignment: Peer evaluation of classmates midsemester (due date TBA)
5%	Canvas Assignment: Draft Research Report (due date TBA)
5%	Canvas Assignment: Individual notebooks midsemester (due date TBA)
10%	Canvas Assignment: Near final research report (due date TBA)
10%	Canvas Assignment: Individual notebooks final (due date TBA)
25%	Canvas Assignment: Final research report (due date TBA)
25%	Canvas Assignment: Project Team Presentation (due date TBA)
5%	Assignment: Peer evaluations end of semester (due date TBA)

Grading Scale

Your final grade will be assigned as a letter grade according to the following scale:

A	90-100% / superior performance
B	80-89% / above-average, high-quality performance
C	70-79% / average performance
D	60-69% / below-average performance, needs substantive work
F	0-59% / unacceptable performance

Course Materials

Materials/Resources

Selected documents [on Canvas](#).

Course Website and Other Classroom Management Tools

This course uses [Canvas](#).

Peer evaluations are administered by the VIP Program [Click Here](#) to access peer-evaluations from off campus. [Click here](#) to access from on campus. You will be prompted to sign in. Users can only log in from on campus or via [VPN](#). Students can only access the peer evaluation portion of the system during active evaluation periods.

Course Policies, Expectations, & Guidelines

VIP is a collaborative, multidisciplinary, project-based learning and research experience. Your success in this course depends not only on your technical contributions but also on your active engagement with your team and the broader learning process.

Your Role in the Learning Process

As a VIP student, you are expected to:

- Take initiative in exploring and applying knowledge relevant to your project.
- Collaborate effectively with team members across disciplines and experience levels.
- Document your work thoroughly.
- Reflect on your learning and contributions throughout the semester.

This course is a real-world team environment, where learning is dynamic, self-directed, and collaborative. Your growth depends on your willingness to engage, contribute, and learn from others.

Team Meetings and Participation

Attendance and active participation in **team meetings** and **sub-team meetings** are required. These meetings are essential for:

- Coordinating project tasks and timelines.
- Sharing progress and receiving feedback.
- Learning from peers and mentors.
- Contributing to team decisions and direction.

Failure to attend meetings without valid reason may negatively impact your grade and your team's progress. If you anticipate missing a meeting, communicate with your team and advisor in advance.

Use of External Resources

You are encouraged to consult external sources to support your learning and project work. However:

- Do not present someone else's work as your own.
- Always cite and reference external materials used in your notebook, code, presentations, or other deliverables.
- Proper attribution is essential to maintain transparency and integrity in a collaborative research environment.

Academic Integrity

Georgia Tech aims to cultivate a community based on trust, academic integrity, and honor. Students are expected to act according to the highest ethical standards. [Review Georgia Tech's Honor Code](#) and the [student Code of Conduct](#).

Any student suspected of cheating or plagiarizing on a quiz, exam, or assignment will be reported to the Office of Student Integrity, who will investigate the incident and identify the appropriate penalty for violations.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

If you are a student with learning needs that require special accommodation, [contact the Office of Disability Services](#) (404-894-2563) as soon as possible to make an appointment to discuss your special needs and to obtain an accommodations letter. Please also [e-mail us](#) as soon as possible in order to set up a time to discuss your learning needs.

Attendance and/or Participation

On-Time Attendance and Active Participation in the classroom each TUESDAY 6:30-7:20 PM in Klaus 1440 are expected and part of the grade. Only a GT letter can excuse an absence. Please make a constant effort to present your point of view/ideas/arguments. Students are responsible for participating in their team and sub-team meetings. If you miss any meeting, you are responsible for knowing what occurred in that meeting, typically by discussing it with other team members. An excused absence does not relieve you of that responsibility.

Extensions, Late Assignments, & Re-Scheduled/Missed Exams

Not allowed.

Inclement Weather and Digital Learning Days

If needed (if the campus is close...)

Student-Faculty Expectations Agreement

At Georgia Tech, we believe that it is important to strive for an atmosphere of mutual respect, acknowledgement, and responsibility between faculty members and the student body. [The Student-Faculty Expectations](#) articulate some basic expectations that you can have of us and that we have of you. In the end, simple respect for knowledge, hard work, and cordial interactions will help build the environment we seek. Therefore, we encourage you to remain committed to the ideals of Georgia Tech while in this class.

Student Use of Mobile Devices in the Classroom

Only if needed for the course.

Additional Course Policies

VIP Room and Equipment Use Policy

VIP rooms and equipment are shared resources used by multiple teams. To ensure a productive and respectful working environment, the following rules apply:

1. Room Usage Priorities

Room use is prioritized as follows:

1. Scheduled team meetings, lectures, and learning modules
2. Weekly sub-team meetings (multiple groups may share the space)
3. Video conferences or special meetings with VIP stakeholders
4. Other project-related work (multiple groups may share the space)

Room schedules are available on the VIP website.

Note: A “good neighbor” policy applies—students may use rooms during other activities as long as they do not cause disruption. Quiet individual work or studying is allowed when it does not interfere with scheduled uses. Similarly, multiple groups may use a VIP room at the same time.

2. Cleanliness and Conduct

- Everyone is responsible for keeping rooms clean.
- Food is allowed, but spills must be cleaned immediately.
- **Gum must be disposed of properly—do not stick it under desks or on carpets.**
- Rooms are monitored by cameras; violations may be reviewed via video.

3. Equipment Use

- Equipment may be designated for general use or assigned to specific teams.
 - General use examples: Projector in Klaus 1440, monitors in VL 465 and VL 463B.
 - Equipment assignments may change each semester.
- If unsure about equipment access, contact: vip-request@ece.gatech.edu
- Use equipment only for its intended purpose. Misuse may pose safety risks.

Important Equipment Rules:

- Equipment may not be removed from VIP rooms without a signed loan agreement approved by a VIP Director.
- You are financially responsible for any equipment not returned in good condition.
- You must know how to operate equipment safely. Approval to use equipment does not imply safety training has been provided.

4. Computer Accounts

- Accounts are for individual use only—do not share with others.

- All usage must comply with Georgia Tech, USG Board of Regents, and State of Georgia policies.
- Respect privacy and data integrity. Having access to a file does not mean you are authorized to read or modify it.

5. BuzzCard Access

- Access is a privilege and is logged.
- Rooms are under video surveillance. In cases of theft, vandalism, or messes, logs and footage will be reviewed.
- Do not allow unauthorized individuals into VIP spaces.
- Always secure the room (close the door) when leaving.

Campus Resources for Students

Undergraduate Student Academic Success Resources:

A list of resources for undergraduate students' academic success and information about advising can be found at [Success at Tech](#).

- 1:1 Tutoring: Students looking for additional assistance outside of the classroom are advised to consider working with a peer tutor through Knack. Georgia Institute of Technology has partnered with Knack to provide students with access to verified peer tutors who have previously aced this course. To view available tutors, visit gatech.joinknack.com and sign in with your student account.

Graduate Student Academic and Professional Success Resources:

A list of resources for graduate students is given on the [Office of Graduate and Postdoctoral Education](#) website. Specific information for [current graduate students](#) includes

- [Academic Resources](#) such as the Communications Center, Language Institute, Library, Catalog, Registrar, resources for conducting research, Advocacy and Conflict Resolution resources, and how to manage unexpected situations that may impact your academic performance;
- [Student Resources](#) such as Campus Services, Child Care/Family programs, Health & Wellness, Career Services, and the Student Resource Guide; and
- [Professional Development](#) such as the programming from the Career Center and other professional development resources and events”]

Student Well-Being:

At Georgia Tech, we are concerned about your overall physical, social, and mental well-being. A [comprehensive list](#) of wellness related resources has been compiled and maintained by the Office of the Vice President for Student Engagement and Well-being ([student-resource-guide \(gatech.edu\)](http://student-resource-guide.gatech.edu))

Course Schedule

Week	Date	Homework/Assignments with due dates , Activities/Events
Week 1	TBA	Introductions: students/instructors present themselves + issues, places they're interested in. Syllabus/Assignments discussed. Overview of team's work Discussion of semester goals introduction to the Rwanda Spring Break 2026 Program, embedded in this VIP course Time-permitting: Intro to Africa (African subregions/maps, issues) and tools (maps, links...) (1)

	Begin an electronic VIP notebook (due twice later as a PDF)
Week 2	Sub-team selections pre-finalized Sub-team meeting times finalized Sub-teams discuss objectives/define agenda/divide work Intro to Africa (African subregions, issues), tools (maps/links...) (2) Verification of Student Participation in Class Due Friday 30, 4pm
Week 3	Sub-team selections finalized Sub-teams work on their projects (stage 1), instructors assist Africa/Sustainability: introduction (methodology, documents) (1). Chris Ippolito absent (invited to another state).
Week 4	Sub-teams work on their projects (stage 2), instructors assist Africa/Sustainability: introduction (methodology, documents) (2)
Week 5	Sub-teams work on their projects (stage 3), instructors assist Sub-team update due in class: Sub-teams briefly present their projects in class (title, team members, short outline, organization...)
Week 6	Sub-teams work on their projects (stage 4), instructors assist
	Assignment: <u>Peer evaluation of classmates midsemester (due by Feb. 20, 2 PM)</u> (Web-based peer-evaluations released for students to complete. Online form due by end of the day Friday 20th. Late submissions will not be accepted.)
Week 7	Canvas Assignment: <u>Draft Research Report (due Feb. 23, 2 PM)</u> Canvas Assignment: <u>Individual notebooks midsemester (due by Feb. 23, 2 PM)</u> [Submit individual VIP documentation for mid-term grading]. Instructors must have the notebooks in hand when reviewing peer evaluations (close at the end of week 7) and do midterm grading/feedback.
	Midterm presentations (Optional) Sub-teams work on their projects (stage 5), instructors assist
Week 8	Midterm grades for 2000-level courses due in OSCAR (S for satisfactory, U for unsatisfactory). Sub-teams work on their projects (stage 6), instructors assist
Week 9	Sub-teams work on their projects (stage 7), instructors assist
Week 10	Canvas Assignment: <u>Near final research report (due by Mar. 16, 2 PM)</u> Sub-teams work on their projects (stage 8), instructors assist Withdrawal Deadline
Week 11	OPTIONAL TRIP TO RWANDA or SPRING BREAK

Week 12	Sub-teams work on their projects (stage 9), instructors assist
Week 13	Sub-teams work on their projects (stage 10), instructors assist
Week 14	Canvas Assignment: Final research reports (due Apr. 13, 2 PM) Canvas Assignment: Individual notebooks final (due Apr. 13, 2 PM) [Turn in individual VIP documentation for final grading] Canvas Assignment: Project Team Presentations (due Apr. 14, 6:30 PM) (Final group presentations)
Week 15 (Week preceding finals, Last week of class)	Assignment: Peer evaluations end of semester (due Apr. 21, noon) (Web-based peer-evaluations released for students to complete. Online form closes at 11:59PM on Tuesday 21.) Presentations: Discussion, Corrections...
Week 16	Project evaluations. Towards project publication or implementation. Debate on Africa's future
Finals Week	No final. No assignments.

The above schedule is subject to changes. Any changes will be announced in class, ahead of time. Should you be absent on a day a change is announced, it is your responsibility to remain apprised of that change.

SOME LINKS

https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/static/bd0fd4375b21514438e9b9435d8b7c4a/africa_pol-1.pdf
(map)
<https://www.axl.cefan.ulaval.ca/afrique/AFRIQUE-MAP-clic.htm> (Fr. interactive map)

In English: use LINKS on AFRICA below

NEWS

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/africa>, <https://africanarguments.org/>
<https://africa.cgtn.com/> (China Global Television Network)
West and Central Africa: <https://www.independent.co.uk/topic/west-africa>, or
<https://www.aljazeera.com/africa/>

HISTORY:

http://aero-comlab.stanford.edu/jameson/world_history/A_Short_History_of_Africa.pdf (short history of Africa)

For more, see <https://en.unesco.org/general-history-africa> (in English or French)

ECONOMY:

<https://www.afdb.org/en/knowledge/publications/african-economic-outlook>
(Supporting Climate Resilience and a Just Energy Transition in Africa; from the African Development Bank Group; esp. see these 22 slides: https://www.afdb.org/sites/default/files/2022_aeo_ppt-final-kcu-13-30_hrs.pdf)

BUSINESS/SUSTAINABILITY:

<https://african.business/>
<https://businessafricaonline.com/>
<https://www.bbc.com/news/topics/cyq54q01grmt>

<https://africasustainabilitymatters.com/>
<https://www.businessgreen.com/tag/africa>

“SUSTAINABILITY” in Africa. Some specific topics (case study/example: Rwanda; how Rwanda has taken advantage of engineering advancements to improve socio-economic well-being):

- Health & Life Sciences, eg Medical drones in national blood logistics
- Energy & Power Systems, eg Turning Lake Kivu’s methane into electricity or Hydropower development
- Water & Urban Services, eg Kigali Bulk Water PPP - a potable supply PPP
- Digital Government & Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI), eg Irembo e-government platform
- Manufacturing & Special Economic Zone (SEZ), eg Made in Rwanda” practical lessons
- Circular Economy, eg E-waste at industrial scale: The Enviroserve Rwanda Green Park
- Space & Remote Sensing, eg RWASAT-1 and national data

While these topics are core engineering, they can have a business aspect since they lead to socio-economic development in Rwanda

BLOGS:

<https://blogs.worldbank.org/africacan> , <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/africa-in-focus/>
<https://blogging.africa/> , <https://blogs.afdb.org/> , <https://africasacountry.com/blog>
<https://africa.googleblog.com/>

OTHER:

<http://www.africatoday.com/cgi-bin/public.v0.1.cgi> (Periodical: political, economic, and social issues)

<https://library.columbia.edu/libraries/global/africa.html> (Bibliographies & Resource Guides in African Studies, Columbia U; electronic bibliographic resources and research materials on Africa available on the Internet)

<https://library.stanford.edu/areas/african-collections> (Stanford site for African Studies)

<https://www.africabib.org/> (African woman, African periodical literature, missionaries...)

<http://www.mshale.com/> (African Community News, US)

in English and in French:

<https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/REO/SSA/Issues/2024/10/25/regional-economic-outlook-for-sub-saharan-africa-october-2024> (or

<https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/ar/2024/french/>) Regional Economic Outlook (Africa)

<https://www.afdb.org/en/knowledge/publications/african-economic-outlook>

<https://www.afdb.org/fr/documents-publications/perspectives-economiques-en-afrique-2024> Afr Econ Outlook

African languages and area studies at GT

-ARABIC: <https://modlangs.gatech.edu/languages/arabic>, contact Natalie Khazaal, nkhazaal3@gatech.edu

-ENGLISH: <https://www.lmc.gatech.edu/>; also check the Black Media Studies program,

<https://www.lmc.gatech.edu/black-media-studies>

-FRENCH: contact Chris Ippolito

-**Information for a minor in French** (15 credits beyond 2002; ALIS Major in French: 4 more courses only).

<https://modlangs.gatech.edu/degrees/minors-language-studies>

Minor declaration form: <http://www.registrar.gatech.edu/docs/pdf/MINORCHANGE.pdf>

(Modern Language Advisor for Minors and Majors: Dr. Mirla Gonzalez, mgonzalez96@gatech.edu)

Student Associations

-GT African Student Association: <https://gatech.campuslabs.com/engage/organization/african-student-association>, contact asa.gt.secretary@gmail.com

-GT African American Student Association: <https://m.facebook.com/pages/category/Campus-Building/Georgia-Tech-African-American-Student-Union-137918842969172/>

-GT Black Graduate Student Association: <http://www.bgsa.gtorg.gatech.edu/>

-GT Black Student Recruitment Team: <https://admission.gatech.edu/bsrt>

RELEVANT GT DEGREES AND STUDY ABROAD PROGRAMS

MINOR IN AFRICAN STUDIES

(<https://modlangs.gatech.edu/degrees/minors-and-certificates/minor-african-studies>)

The Schools of Modern Languages; Economics; International Affairs; Literature, Media and Communications; and Public Policy offer a minor in African Studies. This interdisciplinary minor connects studies of all African regions and countries (North, West, Central, East, South), their languages, their cultures, and their peoples—both concurrently in their national and international relationships as well as longitudinally—over the course of history. This minor is designed for undergraduates who will enter a wide range of careers that can lead directly or indirectly to interactions with the people, social organizations and businesses, and governments of Africa, both abroad and in the U.S.

The College's interdisciplinary [African Studies Minor](#) (15 credits) started in fall 2021 with courses in Economics, International Affairs, Literature, Media and Communication, Public Policy, and Modern Languages (languages and area studies). The minor's focus is on Africa today, with one (1) mandatory course (Introduction to Africa, in English), and four (4) electives, with at least two given in an African language at the introductory, intermediate or advanced level: Arabic, French, Portuguese, Swahili, or Wolof (the language of Senegal, where we have a [study abroad program](#) also open to non-Georgia Tech students). Many related courses on Africa for the African studies minor, French minor/major, MENA minor, and other IAC majors in ECON, INTA, LMC, Public Policy, and LMC's Black Media Studies minor

Requirements: View minor requirements for the African Studies minor in the [Georgia Tech Course Catalog](#). Students wishing to declare a minor should submit the [minor declaration form](#) to [Mirla Gonzalez](#) to allow us to track their progress and gain priority registration. Your main advisor and I will sign this form. For further information please email the minor's advisor, Chris Ippolito, cippolito6@gatech.edu

List of Featured Fall 2026 Courses for the African Studies Minor:

<https://modlangs.gatech.edu/degrees/minors-and-certificates/minor-african-studies>

Featured Fall 2026 Courses approved for the African Studies Minor to be announced in Spring 2026.

STUDY ABROAD PROGRAMS (contact your instructor if interested)

Sustainable Development in Rwanda—Spring Break 2027 (in English)

Must take a course linked to the program, as the program is embedded in courses on a list available at <https://sites.gatech.edu/rwanda-study-abroad/> with other relevant information. Courses on Africa include ARBC/FREN/SWAH/WOLO 3420), FREN 4699 and the VIP “Africa: Serve, Learn, Sustain.” [2025 Trip Pwpt + pics available](#). Application Deadline: **TBA**. Contacts: valerie.thomas@isye.gatech.edu, tony.giarrusso@design.gatech.edu, or cippolito6@gatech.edu