December 9, 2010

Dr. __________ - Director
Penn Lauder CIBER University of Pennsylvania Lauder-Fischer Hall, 2nd Floor 256 South 37th Street Philadelphia, PA 19104-6330

RE: Postdoctoral Researcher in African Studies

Dear Dr.____________________:

I write today to request consideration for the post-doc position in the Center for International Business Education and Research. The hybrid nature of this position is especially appealing because it would afford the opportunity to pursue my research agenda while utilizing my talents and background as a teacher and an advisor.

My dissertation, *External Actors, Local Participation, and Political Reform in Africa: Ghana and Senegal Compared* drew on over fifteen months of fieldwork in five countries. I consider the involvement of new actors in new spaces in society in a novel political reform initiative and I conclude that there is differential civil society development in Ghana relative to Senegal. I argue that in Ghana, “partisans of democracy” emerged, who focused on obtaining more accountability, transparency, inclusive participation, integrity, and rule of law with more developed organizational capacity to bring about actual change than in Senegal. This was the result of a complex set of political, economic, and social enabling factors. I have consciously linked my intellectual concerns and pursuits to continued and repeated observation of politics on the ground in Africa. This has led to the development of a theoretical framework that posits “a positive politics of reform,” which I plan to test further in my future research, not only in other parts of Africa, but also in other areas of the developing world.

Although my dissertation research centered on political and economic transition in two critical West African countries, I have also worked in varying capacities in, and on, other regions of the continent. I have spent considerable time in East, West, and Central Africa. I have done intensive language study in Tanzania, contributed to digital language learning programs in Swahili, and participated in an in-depth symposium on West African issues in Senegal. My research was designed to cross diverse bridges: intellectual, disciplinary, ...
methodological, and theoretical. It is spread across the fields of both comparative politics (e.g. democratization, elections, civil society), and international political economy (e.g. development, wealth and poverty of nations, international organizations). I am explicitly concerned with politics, power, and change in one region, but my work aims to concurrently engage broader issues of comparative democratization, political economy, and development as they unfold at multiple levels of the international system. Ultimately, I aim to engage important questions at the intersection between comparative politics and international relations by focusing on similar issues of political and economic development in other parts of the developing world, e.g., Latin America, Southeast Asia, post-Communist Europe.

While at CIBER, my goal would be to prepare two articles for publication, one for more comparative journals, e.g., Comparative Politics, Comparative Political Studies, World Politics, or Studies in Comparative International Development, and another that is more country-specific, e.g., Journal of Modern African Studies, Third World Quarterly, African Affairs, or Journal of Developing Areas. My dissertation focused more on the foundations of democracy and responsive government in emerging democracies in West Africa, but I also conducted research on the political economy of poverty reduction and its impact on economic growth while abroad. This is work that I want to follow up on and continue. I plan to turn my dissertation into a book manuscript, and working at CIBER would allow me to include this research in what would be a richer volume on the role of new actors in a civil society not only in democratization, but in economic reform efforts in Africa and the developing world.

I have not yet taught a full course on the political economy of Africa, but there are sections on it in my African Politics course, and the political economy of political and economic transition is a central component of my research. This background and interest forms the basis of the course that I would develop at CIBER. It also offers the chance to more deeply connect important strands in my own work. I am passionate about teaching. To me, this means working to bring students together so that they can think critically about important issues, people, and places in the world. It means possessing a desire and interest to influence and change thinking, and maybe, lives. I feel especially rewarded when students are engaged and concerned and able to use the framework that I set up in the classroom to create their own learning experience. I view myself as a facilitator. I foster connection and ultimately the formation of relationships in the group so that I am not the only potential source of knowledge, information, and critical thought. I am a mediator among different and differing positions because I think that there is power in diversity of ideas and thought. I try to maintain a balanced and neutral position so that I am free to challenge and push students regardless of where they sit.

I hope to further my research on the political economy of political and economic reform in the developing world and working as a postdoctoral researcher in African studies at CIBER would allow me to do this in an intellectually rigorous and challenging way by attending events and participating in other relevant projects and activities organized at the Penn Lauder CIBER and the Lauder Institute. I am already familiar with key people and institutions in both Wharton and Arts and Sciences, being a recent product of the Political Science Department, which will allow me to readily teach and advise Penn students while furthering my own research. I have reachable research goals for the next year, goals, I speak both French and Swahili, and I have advised graduate students as they developed, researched, and wrote their Master’s Theses while I was at Ohio University.
Enclosed you will find letters from my committee that articulate my academic accomplishments and contributions. You will also find evidence of the quality and uniqueness of my approach in the classroom in the teaching awards I have won and in the enclosed letters from a former student and a teaching mentor.

I have a statement of research interests that outlines the future direction my research will take, quantitative and qualitative evaluation data, and a statement of pedagogical philosophy that further illustrate my capacities as a teacher and advisor. If you require these additional materials or anything else, please do not hesitate to contact me. I look forward to further discussing my credentials and interest in your position. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely yours,

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