The program outlined in this document is subject to change according to practical realities within Senegal as well as the particular interests of participants. This flexibility allows the Bridge Year cohort to move at its own pace, to be responsive to personal and group interests, and to take advantage of the learning opportunities that result from unexpected events.
Novogratz Bridge Year Program in Senegal

in partnership with Where There Be Dragons

Participants in Senegal engage in homestays, language study, service assignments, and exploration of Senegalese social, cultural, and political context throughout Dakar, the country’s vibrant capital city. Dakar is a place of contrasts where new developments occur beside centuries-old traditions. Women adorned in brightly colored, elegant boubous walk down the street speaking Wolof on their cell phones while barefooted talibe children beg for change in busy markets. The Muslim call to prayer sounds five times a day when hundreds of people stop to worship on the city’s sidewalks. Most visitors to Senegal are impressed by the warmth and generosity they encounter within a society that prides itself on teranga, the culture of giving.

Arrival and Orientation

Upon arrival in Senegal, Bridge Year participants travel north to Mouit, a village along the Grande Côte, just outside of Saint Louis, for a week-long orientation program. This quiet village is closely linked to nearby Langue de Barbarie National Park, and many community members are intimately involved with the management and care of the park and its environs. With its stunning coastal scenery and welcoming community, Mouit offers an extraordinary first glimpse of life in Senegal. During this time students also begin intensive Wolof and French classes.

Cultural and Service Learning – Fall

Following orientation, the Bridge Year group travels to a lively Pulaar and Sereer village in western Senegal, where students experience first-hand life in rural Senegal and gain additional skills in navigating the challenges and joys of daily village life. While staying in the village of Ndioukhane, just outside of Thies, the group participates in a hands-on group service project in collaboration with local teachers. Students work together to lead a summer camp for school
children. This educational experience, primarily focused on English, French and basic math, prepares students for the coming school year.

Building on orientation, the Bridge Year cohort continues to strengthen their relationships within the group through shared experiences focused on reflections on service, learning about the Senegalese cultural context, and discussions on global and local issues. During this time, participants continue with intensive Wolof and French training, using their new language skills at the market and with the community. Looking ahead, the students reflect on their interests and plan their Independent Enrichment Activities, which they will pursue throughout the year. These activities involve one-on-one mentorship and enhance understanding and appreciation of Senegalese and West African culture. Examples of Independent Enrichment Activities can be found below.

**Arrival in Dakar**

By early October, Bridge Year participants move to Dakar where they live in Yoff, a quiet neighborhood located on the beach north of the city’s more bustling downtown. Here students partake in another five-day orientation program that prepares them to navigate what can be a complex and confusing urban landscape. Orientation provides students with a thorough introduction to the city, as well as practical skills that help participants find their way around the city, integrate into local culture, and engage in long-term service placements.
Homestay

Shortly after arriving in Dakar, program participants move in with their host families. The homestay experience is a unique opportunity to establish relationships, practice language skills, and integrate more fully into local society. Participants can expect comfortable but modest accommodations. One student is placed in each home and can expect to have his or her own bedroom, furnished with a twin bed and a place to store clothing. While some homes may have showers, participants should be prepared for bucket baths (usually cold, but sometimes heated water is available) for bathing. Most meals are prepared by and taken with homestay families. The typical diet includes rice, millet, cornmeal, assorted vegetables and fish.

Participants are welcomed into family life with a degree of genuine kindness and hospitality that is seldom seen in the West.

Language Instruction

From October to December, Bridge Year participants continue Wolof and French language training. One-on-one tutoring is also available to any student in need of extra attention. After gaining a strong foundation in the language, participants may be paired with language buddies offering Bridge Year participants another means to practice French and Wolof with a Senegalese peer from the area.

Continued classes, one-on-one tutoring and language mentoring are available to students for the full duration of the program.
During the program, other languages are introduced. Prior to and during the group trek and village stay in rural Senegal, students are trained in basic Pulaar or Sereer, languages that are largely spoken amongst rural villagers in the south and along the coast (see below for more detail).

**Community Service Placements**

Participants spend four to six hours per day, five days per week, at their service assignment. Travel to and from the service site depends on the assignment but can range from a 15-minute walk to an hour-long bus ride. Staff orient students to their respective assignments and provide continuous support throughout the program. Throughout the program, staff encourage students to think critically about the meaning of service and how the global context connects to development issues in Senegal. Below is a list of host organizations in Dakar and potential participant service assignments. This list is not comprehensive. It simply provides examples of the types of service assignments in which volunteers might be placed.

**YMCA Senegal** ([http://www.ymca.int/where-we-work/ymca-members-profiles/ymca-in-africa/ymca-senegal/](http://www.ymca.int/where-we-work/ymca-members-profiles/ymca-in-africa/ymca-senegal/)) runs various projects across the sectors of youth entrepreneurship, computer training, adult literacy and numeracy, health education, economic development programs for prisoners, and community development. Participants most often teach English at the elementary school and lead activities in the preschool. Participants have also taken on additional projects, such as teaching at a satellite location, translating reports, teaching staff English, or supporting projects in rural Senegal.

**Imagination Afrika** ([http://www.imaginationafrika.org/en/](http://www.imaginationafrika.org/en/)) is a young organization that works to engage Senegalese youth in interactive and experiential forms of learning. The volunteer can have a varied schedule from one week to the next. They may work alongside fundraising staff in the office on the latest social media campaign and then facilitate workshops and engage directly with students in schools throughout the city. Activities could also include documenting and sharing Imagination Afrika’s work through photography and video-making, creating exhibitions at local cultural centers, or researching grant opportunities to expand their programs.
SOS Children's Villages Senegal ([http://www.sos-childrensvillages.org/](http://www.sos-childrensvillages.org/)) is a not-for-profit organization that seeks to provide “the warmth of a home for each child.” The village is home to 150 children who do not have a sufficient home elsewhere, often due to the death of one or both of their parents, and provides financial support to many more children throughout greater Dakar, ensuring that the children’s housing, health, and educational needs are met. The village consists of a preschool, kindergarten and elementary school which serve both SOS children and the greater community, 15 family houses, an infirmary, a playground, and a small library. The volunteer teaches English at the preschool and elementary school. This usually involves incorporating interactive techniques such as skits for celebrations, songs for the holidays, or school-wide projects on slavery or environmentalism.

**Keur Xaley Yi** is a center for children with physical and mental disabilities within a larger hospital complex. The participant supports their programs and serves as a classroom assistant. Keur Xaley Yi is also excited to support the volunteer’s individual interests, and past participants have introduced music classes and art therapy.

**Tostan ([http://tostan.org/](http://tostan.org/))** is an international non-governmental organization founded in Senegal and currently working in eight African countries. Tostan’s primary program is a three-year, non-formal education program focused on human rights and democracy, basic literacy and numeracy, and community-led sustainable development. The international headquarters in Dakar offers a bustling office environment with a wide variety of projects. Opportunities include developing program concept papers for grant submissions, compiling the organization-wide annual report, supporting the Executive Management team, leading social media efforts, and other projects.

**Empire des Enfants ([http://empiredesenfants.sn/](http://empiredesenfants.sn/))** is a local organization that provides a center for street children. The center offers full room and board as well as classes and activities for these children as staff work to reunite them with their families. The volunteer can support their work in many different ways – from playing soccer or joining the kids for days at the beach, to designing a social media campaign, or teaching academic subjects such as French or English.
Ker Thiossane (http://www.ker-thiossane.org/) began in Dakar’s SICAP neighborhood as a common art space with the goal of providing local artists with access to multimedia and digital art tools. Ker Thiossane has since extended its mission into revitalizing the urban neighborhood and has integrated their artists space with a local youth center and community garden project, working to reclaim the disappearing “Commons” of Senegal’s rapidly urbanizing capital. Their approach “links the development of artistic digital practices to other domains of society: education and training, creative industries, citizenship, ecology and town development.” The volunteer works mainly in Ker Thiossane’s Fab Lab, “Defko Ak Ñip,” helping local artists digitally fabricate their creative vision into just about anything using computer-controlled tools. The Fab Lab also participates in festivals and outreach programs in schools and out in the community, giving people of all ages a chance to experiment with digital art and multimedia tools.

**Program House**

Program participants have access to the Novogratz Bridge Year Program House, centrally located in Yoff. The program house provides participants with a place to relax, meet with on-site staff, cook and share meals, use wireless internet, and host guest speakers, language classes and homestay get-togethers. The program house has a classroom, library, kitchen and lounge area.

**Cultural Enrichment Activities**

The following activities are part of the Novogratz Bridge Year Program, adding important context to both service work and the overall cultural experience in Senegal.

**Guest Speakers**: Over the course of the program, local experts and other guest lecturers are invited to discuss diverse topics including Senegalese and West African history, development, public health, gender issues, religion, demography, geography, the caste system, female genital cutting, philosophy, urbanization, the arts, deforestation, and politics.

**Excursions**: Bridge Year participants also partake in at least two group excursions outside of the city of Dakar. Excursion destinations depend on many factors including weather, time constraints, student interest, and relevance to the overall program, but a number of different options are available. Possible destinations include the southern coast, stopping to see the Senegalese pink salt flats and various fishing villages; Dene, a religious Sufi village, to join the community in prayer and to experience different approaches to Islam; and Saint Louis to learn
about French colonialism and for world-class bird watching. To the greatest extent possible, participants are given ownership over the research, planning, and management of logistics for these group expeditions.

**Independent Enrichment Activities:** Bridge Year participants have the opportunity to engage in one-on-one mentorships or other independent projects in cooking, visual arts, traditional medicine, traditional West African drumming and dance, traditional instruments, jewelry making, Islamic philosophy, tailoring, or other subjects of interest. The activity may correspond to or directly enrich the participant’s service assignment or simply serve to enhance understanding and appreciation of Senegalese and West African culture.

**Student-led Spring Excursion**

In the spring, students will work together to plan a week-long excursion in the Sine-Saloum Delta region and the Gambia. The Sine-Saloum Delta is a 180,000-hectare zone of mangroves and rivers, Sereer fishing villages, and coconut nut groves. Students, with the support of on-site staff, develop an itinerary that explores life in rural Senegal and delves deeper into development and environmental issues. Depending on student interest, it may be possible to also discover the Gambia which shares many ethnic, cultural, language, economic and historical ties with Senegal. Students will have the opportunity to meet with local leaders, traditional healers, regional development specialists, and other experts in the area.

**Program Wrap-up**

The final week of the Novogratz Bridge Year Program takes place in a tranquil and eclectic artists’ enclave called Toubab Dialaw that is perched on cliffs above a small fishing village outside of Dakar. Here, participants engage in a Transference Workshop to examine lessons learned for their Bridge Year experience and reflect on their return home, their goals for the future, and the ways in which they can best integrate their experience into daily life at Princeton.