

Maasailand Indigenous Solidarity Studies



My names are **Meitamei Olol Dapash** and I am an Indigenous person of the East African Maasai community and co-director of this program.

In rural Maasailand, I grew up seeing buses of university students crossing Maasailand. They would typically stay in lodges and venture out to see wildlife. We look at these students who have come all this way, from Europe or North America, and we wonder, 'who is teaching them about this land and our community?' And 'what exactly are they being taught?'

We see these students as highly educated people, whose knowledge and skills could be so useful to my community, and who could benefit equally from what we have to teach. So I began a partnership with my colleague Nashipae and with Prescott College in Arizona, U.S.

We have been teaching college students for 20 years now, and those early dreams of what might be possible have been long ago surpassed.



Hello! I am Mary Poole, Nashipae in Maasailand. My students at Prescott College are emerging into a challenging world, and I want to give them every opportunity to learn from people and communities who are living the reality that another world that is possible.

Are you looking for a way to learn through travel that you can trust to genuinely benefit host communities? If so, this program may be for you.

Meet The Class Of 2024!

We will let our students describe what our program is about!



“Hi, I’m Isis.

The first thing you need to know is that this program is built on Partnership!”

International educational experiences are sometimes undertaken without recognizing the power relations on which they are built, that can make these interactions extractive, shallow, and at times harmful.

This program is a partnership between MERC, the Institute of Maasai Education, Research, and Conservation (MERC) founded in the 1980s to be an outward face for dozens of Maasai grassroots organizations, to bring collective power to the Maasai community.

Prescott College follows the community lead in all conceivable ways: the curriculum and design of educational programs at Dopoi, as well as the projects undertaken by students.

Vision: Decentering 'Field' Studies

"Hi, I'm Djuna.

The term 'field studies' assumes that a 'field' exists as place for people from western cultures to go and study."

This can lead to objectifying cultural landscapes and communities into a 'thing' to be quantified for research and academic understanding. At the Dpopi Center, we explored these issues in the context of a decades-long relationship between the Maasai community and Prescott College that is built on trust

That trust, we learn, is built through our approach to collaboration. We find that when projects evolve from within the Maasai community spectacular things can result.

By putting your academic skills and creativity to work on behalf of community priorities, you are giving back something of equal value to the learning that you receive from Maasai people and culture. This is the difference between 'service' and 'solidarity.'

In our studies in the West, we learn about the colonality of power, racial capitalism and the structural reproduction of oppression. We learn about how we in the west rationalize the extraction of wealth from Indigenous lands by normalizing the current reality, and reifying the west as the only 'civilized' way forward. This normalizing of the idea that there are no alternatives feeds a sense of hopelessness. What we do not necessarily learn is how Indigenous knowledge can disrupt this hopelessness, by demonstrating the other worlds that are possible that are being lived today. Maasailand is a part of your world, and your world is a part of Maasailand! Therein lies the hope.



**Other
Worlds Are
Possible!**

Where Does Your Money Go?



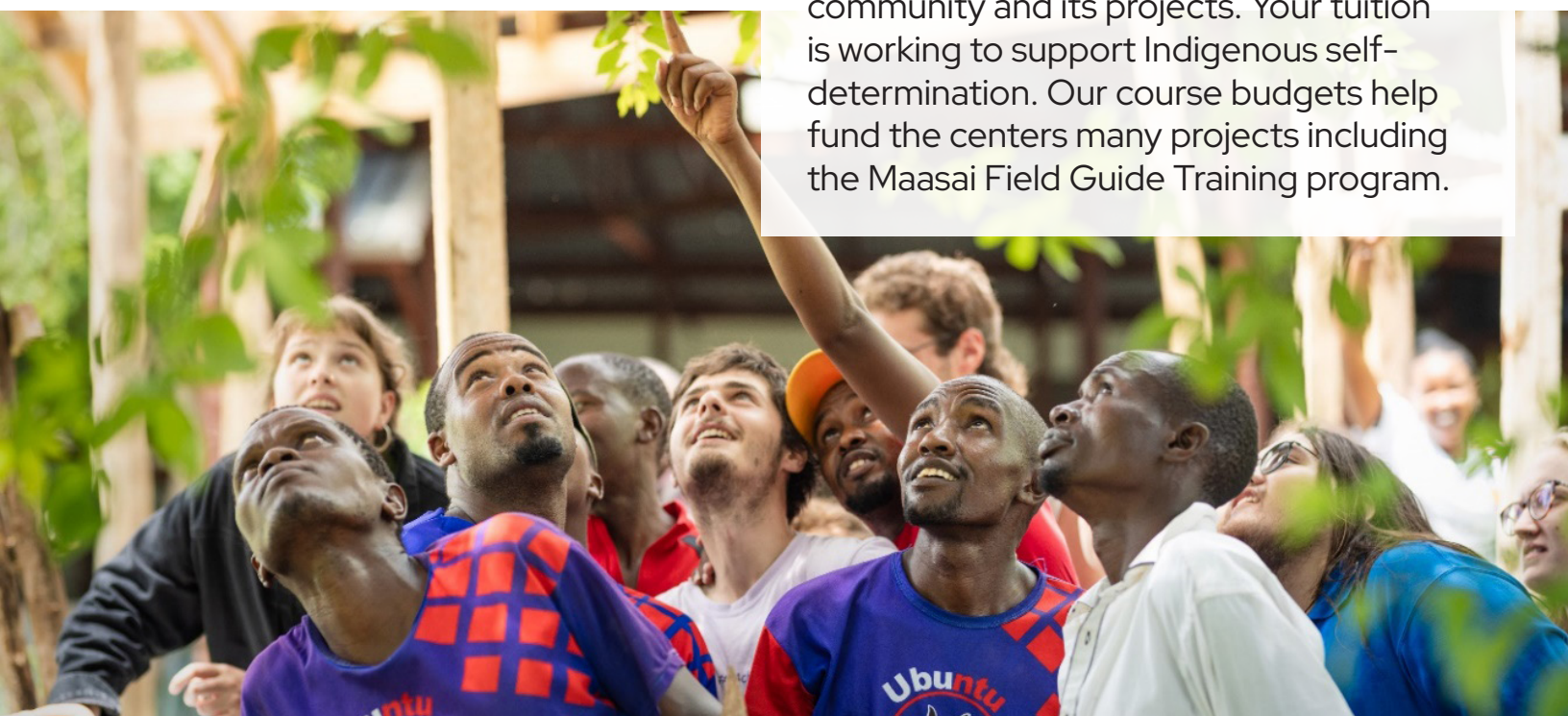
“Hi, I’m Lena.

Here in Maasailand, we exist within an extractive tourist industry in an economically disadvantaged place.”

An estimated 1% of jobs in the tourism industry surrounding the Masai Mara Reserve are held by Maasai people, though 100% of this land is ancestral Maasailand.

The Dopoi Center is Maasai community organizing hub, and an educational center for tourism and for student study. As such, it is designed to build community power and economic capital. Dopoi trains Maasai and other minoritized peoples for work in tourism, and we collaborate with local Indigenous owned tour companies.

When you come to learn here at the Dopoi center you are not just investing in your own education but investing in this community and its projects. Your tuition is working to support Indigenous self-determination. Our course budgets help fund the centers many projects including the Maasai Field Guide Training program.



What About The Center Itself?

“Hi, I’m Adam.

Dopoi was built and is directed by and for the Maasai community.”

We think that is why this learning center creates an environment that fosters mutually beneficial relationships for all involved, so that cross cultural exchange can be ground-breaking and meaningful. Student-visitors come here are given the gift of learning about Maasai culture, language, and lands, and in exchange support community visions and projects. From our perspective, what has been so integral to our time here is that hope is the motivating force behind the decolonial work that is being done. At Dopoi we experience a world outside of the permanence of colonial structures.

“My trip to Kenya came during a time of transformation in my life where I was searching for community and better ways of relating. Through Ole Keiwa’s teachings, I learned that Maasai culture was designed and refined over generations to support the growth of young people into a whole person through mentorship, family/community structures, age groups, restorative justice, and ritual. This cohesive cultural system in addition to the undeniable warmth, ease and openness felt in Maasailand, opened me up to new wisdom profound in my personal growth and in the possibility of a better world.”

- Adam



How You Learn And What You Learn



“Hi, I’m Jamie.

When you come to Dopoi with a Prescott College class you take a block course in Prescott first, then live at Dopoi for seven weeks...”

At Dopoi, classes and curriculum are guided by Maasai elder and professor, Donkol Ole Keiwa and other Prescott College and local Maasai faculty. Students learn Maasai language, ecology, economy and social structures. The following section has brief summaries of some of the classes students will engage with when studying and living in Maasailand as well as their significance.

Our course begins in Nairobi, with the British occupation of Maasailand.

The Karen Blixen Museum is the home of the Danish author of *Out of Africa*, and it tells the story of early European settlement of Maasailand while erasing Maasai existence from the land. We experience the museum tour through the lens of our Maasai teachers, descended from those evicted from this land, and thus see dominant colonial narratives being produce and reproduced right in front of your eyes.



Human Wildlife Coexistence

***"Hi, I'm Xavier.
I am studying marine
biology to contribute to
the protection of marine
wildlife, especially sharks."***

In Maasailand, I learned about the depth of Maasai cultural coexistence with wildlife, which produces a landscape that feeds and heals all life. As Ole Keiwa teaches us, even elephant dung is medicine here.





***“Supa Oleng!
I am Ole Keiwa,
the Maasai Language and
Cultural Studies Director
at the Dopoi Center and a
core faculty of the Prescott
College classes.”***

Our teachers include many other community members. This is Nataana ene Lengier teaching about ceremonial preparation of food, and some of the guides who were trained by Prescott College, members of the union, who teach about wildlife. Our curriculum centers the Nine Learning goals of Maasai education.





Nine Learning Goals of Maasai Education

Mentorship is central to Maasai culture and relationships. Instead of creating specialists, the whole person is educated through mentorships supported by the entire community. ***Learning is how we become a whole human being, and it is practiced until your very last day.*** Everyone has a right to learn and a responsibility to teach. The passing of knowledge that you receive here is an act of love.

Being immersed in the Maasai education system is awesome, and is something you will carry with you beyond your learning here in Maasailand.

1. **Unity and independence of the Maasai community.** The forming of a whole person and freeing the brain through learning.
2. **Discipline.** The integrity to not deviate from teachings.
3. **Courage.** Endurance, resistance, and perseverance. Pain is endured as it is a catalyst for growth and strength.
4. **Compassion.** You have a responsibility to help others, and people have a right to be helped. Community mindfulness and sharing is central. Do not turn away from others pain, make others feel seen.
5. **Collaboration and comradeship.** When something needs doing or there is a problem, it is everyone's responsibility.
6. **Justice.** Total equality in the justice system. Decisions are community consensus based, everyone has a voice, and it is grounded in community accountability. There is no judge but the truth, and any unfairness is not payed for by an individual but by the community.
7. **Morality.** Positive morals are born from respect and immorality is shameful.
8. **Understanding your roots and history.** You have a right and a responsibility to pass down knowledge. It does not have to be written to be known.
9. **Environment and conservation.** Everything is useful and has a purpose.



Conservation

The Dopoi Center is a leading voice a decades-long effort to reintegrate Maasai culture into the management of wildlife in Parks and Reserves located in Maasailand. The vision is to empower traditional land management centered on the historical coexistence of people, cattle and other domestic animals, and wildlife, and diverse and rich ecosystem that they have cocreated for millennia.



Pastoralism and Maasai Economy

The Maasai community holds a deep relationship to the land and livestock, and their economy, food system, and culture is centered around pastoralism. Cows (Enkiteng' - cow) are central to Maasai identity, culture, and economy. They are a main source of food and dairy, and are used within Maasai offerings, ceremonies and other community rites, as well as payment for crimes. Understanding pastoralism is integral to Maasai epistemology and history as it relates deeply to Maasai culture and identity.

Olchani – Maasai Social Justice System

In Maasailand, disputes, conflicts, and charges of crimes are heard in an open court held outside, under a tree. The word for 'tree' in Maa, Olchani, is also the word for this court, and also for medicine, as healing is the goal of a court. The tree acts as judge, and all people participate in bringing evidence and reaching consensus. The only punishment is payment of livestock. Maasai describe this to be a restorative justice system and as such are an integral part of Maasai culture that demonstrate an alternative to dominant Western systems of justice such as corporal punishment and mass incarceration. We learn about the court through a trial demonstration.



Education System & Governance

In Maasailand, the community's governance structures, leadership, and education system are deeply intertwined. Within Maasai culture, education is lifelong. It is a process of development of a whole human being through familial and communal mentorship and experience that is structured generationally. Their community is consciously developed to create whole humans through these intertwining rituals, relationships, and community structures. Learning about Maasai systems of accountability, leadership, and learning is important to understanding and witnessing the way Maasai build community power and collective understandings every day.



Oleng' oti - Nightly Sharing of News

Through this rhythmic rehearsal of the day's events, social cohesion and community is strengthened, and rehearsal of the events builds the community's oral history.

This nightly ritual opens with an invitation to "Eat the News" inosa koti illomon, to share what is important for the community to know. The news starts with a repetition that, whatever challenges are being faced all is well:

E supati inkera - The children are well.

E supati inkishu - The cows are well.

E sidai enkop - The land is well.

E sidai olosho - The community is well.

Naaketaalelo - It is how it is.

Stories with a moral are then told to teach the children, followed by riddled, jokes, and singing, as going to bed in high spirits keeps the community happy and healthy.



Olmergueit

Yellow Croton

Basal leaf arrangements display medium/large, pointed, heart shaped, and oval leaves. Yellow splotches on top of leaves and pale-green speckled underside. Bark is light grey and vertically cracked with medium sized lighter spots.

Parts used and their uses:

Roots are used in tea and soup as herbal medicine to help treat colds and coughs. Timber for building and firewood. Bark infusion kills intestinal worms.

Range:

Indigenous to the lowlands.

Medicinal Plant Walks

Students learn from Ole Keiwa and other local elders about hundreds of trees and plants with medicinal and cultural significance in Maasailand. Students may be invited to add to the ever-growing plant guide-book created by students over the years. The plant guide centers Maasai deep connection and understanding of the land (enkop), showing the immense knowledge base the Maasai hold.



Ilmurrani Song and Dance (Osinkolio)

Maasai warriors come to the center to share song and dance with us. Warrior-hood (Ilmurrani) is a pivotal part of Maasai cultural education. After initiation into warrior-hood, young boys head out to explore the landscape together, learning the ecology of herding and the social geography of Maasailand. They spend time writing songs together, naming their ages group, learning to collaborate and make decisions. Most songs are composed by the warriors and by women. Dance is used to celebrate.



Learning to Bead with Local Teachers

Neighbors of the Dopoi Center come to teach the art of Maasai beading practices. Beading happens in the shade of a tree, often accompanied by song. This is a time to get to know our neighbors, practice our Maa language skills and try your best to learn maa songs. Beading styles can be specific to regions and are used to make rhythmic noise when dancing.



Cow Herding (Airritisho)

The Dopoi center is home to a herd of 18 beautiful cows (inkishu) and there are more to come! Students are welcomed to learn Maasai herding techniques by looking after the cows. We learn the importance of the pastoral economy to the recreation of Maasai culture and community, and the love and mutuality that binds this shared life. We learn about the cow pen (onkeshu), how to use a herding stick (engudi) and whistle (aisulisho) to calm the cows.



Church (Kanisa)

Students are welcome to join Sunday services at a local church, which is a ten-minute walk from the Dopoi Center. Women's choirs and Sunday school children's choirs perform dance and song, followed by a Maa language sermon often translated into English for visitors. Visiting students are invited to share a few songs with the community to participate in cultural exchange through celebration.



Cultural Food

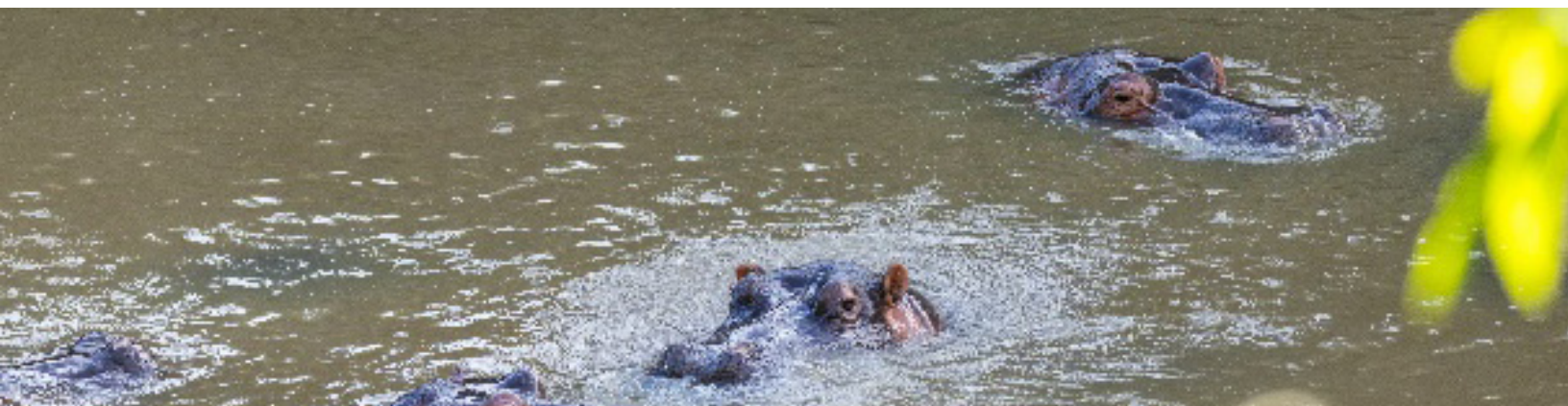
We all wanted to learn how to make chapati and ugali, important foods in Maasailand, and so we organized a cooking class taught by the Dopoi Center kitchen team.





Siringet Mara Campsite

Classes camp inside the Maasai Mara Reserve to experience the wildlife up close. At Siringet, we live near a family of rhinos on a riverbank that is home to a community of hippos. We learn about Maasai ways of coexisting at Siringet, and respect the cultural communities of wildlife and their rights to live on their own terms in this place.



Teaching at Oloigero

The Dopoi center has a long-standing relationship with Oleigero the local primary school and student-visitors are invited to step into the role of the teacher and facilitate a few classes. Schools in Maasailand are navigating the need for literacy and western education with a commitment to their own education systems, and we waded into that challenge in various ways.



Beading Cooperative

The Dopoi center is home to the Beading Cooperative, a shop that sells Maasai beaded jewelry and other crafted items to support the community's economy. The Beads are sourced directly from women from all over Maasailand that usually do not have access to tourists.



Students Who Study At Dopoi Support The Work!

Prescott college students have conducted research to support Maasai land rights and organizing.

Student-visitors entering this space have a responsibility to learn about this place, the historical, political, and global positioning of Maasailand. We might not lead movements for justice in this place, but there are no limits to how deeply we can support that work. Classes of undergraduate students have undertaken research into historical land injustice to inform Maasai community efforts at land recovery. In 2008 they researched the occupation of 30,000 acres at a place called Mau Narok by wealthy Kenyans associated with the dominant political class. The research inspired both a court case and broader Maasai land-back movement which has resulted so far in the return of part of the land.



Prescott College Students Have Supported Union Organizing In Maasailand.

The Mara Guides Association (MGA) is an indigenous labor union, formed in 2016 to represent Maasai workers in the tourism industry that takes place in Maasailand. Maasai have long suffered from discrimination in this industry. The MGA has reshaped hiring practices, publicized the issue of Maasai rights to employment, and builds collective power to influence government policy about the Maasai Mara Reserve



Students Share The Classroom With Maasai Guides In Training

To support the MGA, Prescott College has offered free training and certification to Maasai guides since 2016. Prescott College students share the classroom with guides in training, who bring their own Indigenous knowledge about wildlife to the shared study, which focuses equally on western wildlife science and Maasai Traditional Ecological knowledge. Graduates go on to start their own companies, manage lodges, and guide in the Amboseli or Maasai Mara parks.





Prescott College Students Have Worked With ASU Students On Maasai Automotive Education Center (maasaiaec.com)

The MAEC project is an ongoing initiative to start a Maasai owned automotive workshop and education facility at the Dopoi Center. The Toyota Land Cruisers used by guides on the rough roads here need constant repair, and Maasai guides face horribly overpriced service at local shops. A guide will typically spend over half of their income on repairs. MAEC will reduce reliance on discriminatory shops by empowering the Maasai community with local expertise.



Beginning in 2017, this project was designed in collaboration with members of the Mara Guide Association (MGA), the Dopoi Center, Prescott College, and Global Resolve at Arizona State University (ASU). So far, the project has put six Maasai people through a three-year mechanic training program at a technical college in Narok, who are set to graduate in August 2024. The plan is for them to work at the Dopoi Center offering Maasai guides fair and reliable repairs, and mentoring others. Funding for building the shop is still being assembled, but there's tons of excitement for this amazing project to get up and running



Prescott College Students Have Conducted Research To Support Water Projects

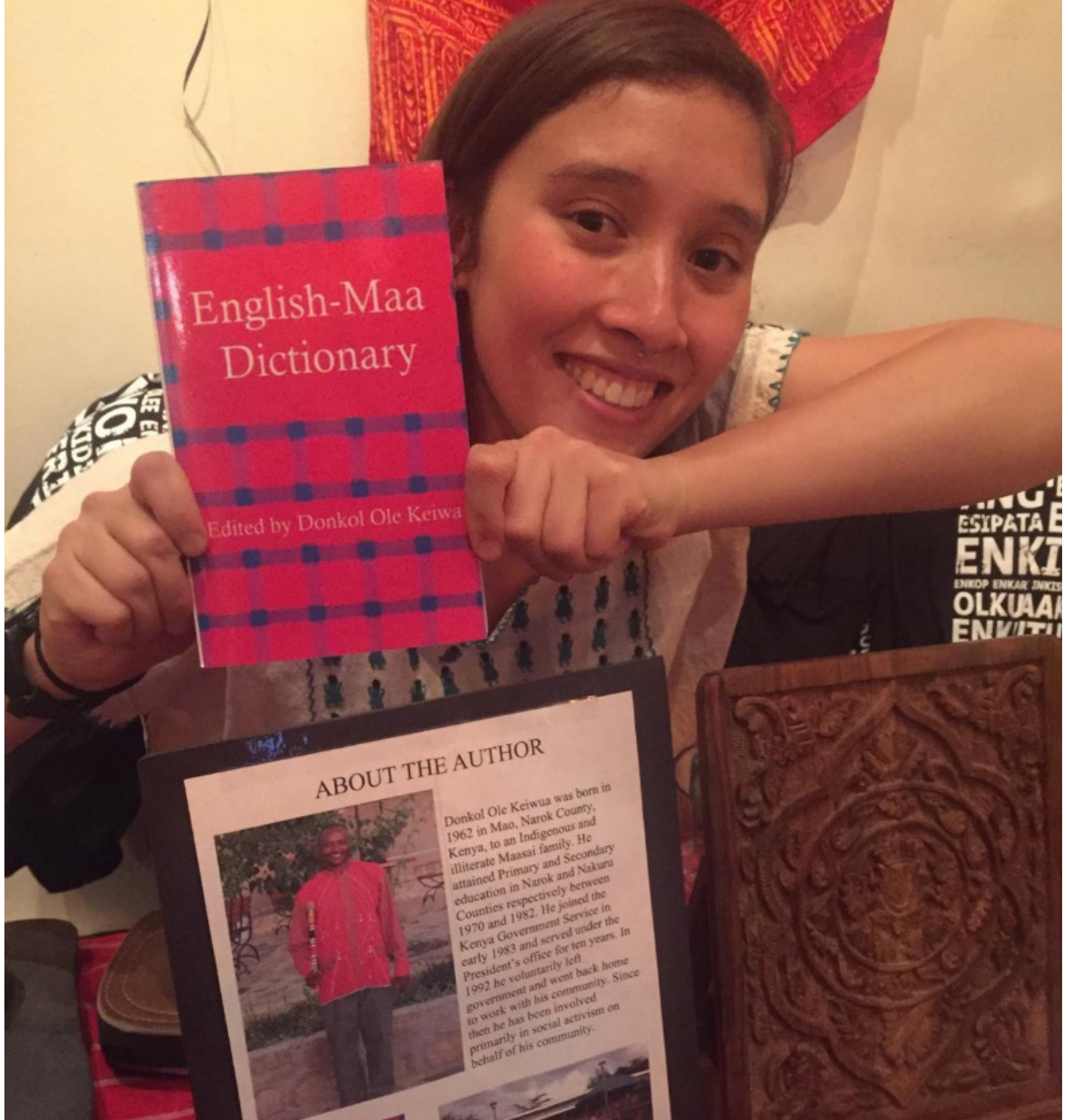
Students have supported large-scale water projects, often undertaken in collaboration with Rotary International, through research, mapping and proposal drafting.

Our 2024 class designed a Museum with Dopoi elders that expresses the local vision, informed by decolonizing approaches created by other Indigenous communities.



The Dopoi center is creating a museum with culturally accurate representations of the Maasai community and of oral history. Museums are sites of contested power, where stories are displayed to make meaning of the present. Often, they

serve hidden agendas, and have been used as a tool of settler colonialism as demonstrated at the National Museum of Karen Blixen, where Maasai have been excluded from this narrative of history. Instead, the museum at Dopoi, aims to center Maasai perspectives and acts to disrupt dominant historical narratives within both the museum and tourist industries that historically and presently misrepresents, erases, and romanticizes their culture. Guided by Maasai elders and community members, students have a change to engage with the creation of a Maasai plant guide for medicinal uses and cultural significance, as well as a decolonized timeline of Maasai oral history. As Ole Keiwa says, "It doesn't have to be written to be known."



They built the English-Maa Dictionary

The first ever English-Maa dictionary written by a Maasai author was created out of the Dopoi Center by Donkol Ole Keiwa, in collaboration with Prescott students and MERC interns. Many words in Enkutuk e Maa, the Maa language, carry complex meaning within cultural context that cannot be captured by the English language. To force total translation would be attempting to synthesize Maa into Western categories of knowledge. This is not the goal. Instead, this dictionary aims to make communication more accessible in the pursuit of collaboration. It is and will continue to be a foundational tool in cross-cultural relationship building.

Amenities - Housing, Food and more...

The center is located on 10-acres of Maasai community land within neighbor villages and within sight of the Masai Mara Game Reserve. We are far from tarmacked roads and utility grids, so Dopoi has created sustainable systems that include solar power, rainwater catchment, and gray water recycling. Dopoi and Rotary International built a deep borehole in 2017 that supplies potable water to the center and thousands of people, their domestic animals, and wildlife.



The Campus

Housing is abundant. Prescott Village has eight bandas, pictured below, with four beds each and two with inside bathrooms. Other housing is available to support research and community-based tourism.

Classroom Spaces

The Dopoi center has one indoor classroom and one outdoor classroom. Learning is not limited to these spaces! Learning at the Dopoi Center will take you all over the center, in the community and into the Maasai Mara Game Reserve.



Food

We are served three delicious simple meals per day, typically vegetarian and often vegan, with local meat served on special occasions.



Any Questions?

To learn more about the Dopoi Center and your opportunities to study with Prescott College, contact:

Mary Poole

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