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***"Trip of a Lifetime"***

## Department professor brings principles of free press to journalists in fledgling democracy

By Shane Rubeck  
Journalism senior

His students showed such great motivation to learn, they would hunt down any book he referred to during class.

They often took him for a drink or food after lecture just to continue whatever discussion they hadn't had time to finish in the classroom.

He was surprised by their interest and knowledge in U.S. politics and issues involving President Bush and Iraq.

These are just a few of the fond memories Professor Glenn Sparks returned with from Ethiopia, a northeastern African country home to 70 million people.

Sparks taught a course in Communication Theory to a group of journalists at Addis Ababa University in Ethiopia in May.

According to Sparks, the \$7 million Journalism Mass Communication Program is funded by the Norwegian government and sponsored by the Gimlekollen School of Journalism in Kristiansand, Norway. The program brings teachers from the United States and Norway to Ethiopia and is designed to train journalists in a start-up democracy, like Ethiopia, that is new to basic freedoms like open elections and free press. In Ethiopia, which moved to a parliamentary form of government in 1994, radio and television news is still government controlled, and the government has yet to follow through on its promise to issue licenses for privately controlled radio and TV stations.

The program is for graduate students who were either government or private newspaper journalists. Although the students were split with different political views, they had the common drive and passion to learn. A single point during a lecture topic could develop into at least a half an hour to hour discussion, he said.

## Ethiopia Slideshow



Sparks said the students were eager to learn how a free press was to behave. He also said that being new in the practice of democratic principles, the government still has some concerns about the role of a free press in matters of politics and public policy.

Sparks found the students to be receptive to the new information he had to share and interested in obtaining as much information as possible.

"Compared to students in the U.S., the students had limited resources and were motivated to acquire anything that they could," he said.

Sparks called the conversations that spilled from the classroom to the local restaurants and watering holes a "sign that the program is working."



Sparks' education was not limited to the classroom. He described the city of Addis Ababa as a contrast of images.

He said there were luxurious buildings with many lights and fountains surrounded by shanty homes with tin roofs. When he walked outside, he often saw women working rather than men. He also said it was common to see a wild herd of sheep walking near the city. Taxis shared the road with animals.

Despite the hardships, the Ethiopian people were much different than he expected, he said.

#### For more information

[Addis Ababa University](#)

[Gimlekollen School of Journalism](#)

[Ethiopia Information](#)

"On the street, the children always smiled at me," he said. "They really seemed to enjoy life."

Sparks plans a return trip in February to teach the same course to a new group of students.

"I'm not clear whether this program will be successful," said Sparks, but it will continue "to create an environment that would help move Ethiopia toward a free press."

"Hopefully, these students will become teachers of the future (in Ethiopia)," he said.

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