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## SAMPLE COVER LETTER

*GSAS Career Services note: This anthropologist applying for a position with a history department at a public university writes a long letter to make a strong case for his cross-disciplinary fit. See especially the second paragraph, and the second to the last.*

July 1, 2007

Dr. Smith Jones  
West African Search Committee  
Prestigious University  
P.O. Box 1234  
Anytown, Any State 12345-6789

Dear Dr. Jones:

I am writing to apply for the position as assistant professor with a specialization in West African History that you advertised on the Chronicle of Higher Education website (posted June 5, 2007). This fall, I will begin a one year dissertation fellowship with the *Crossroads of Globalization* program in the Department of History at Great State University. During this fellowship, I will complete my dissertation in the Department of Anthropology, University of Virginia (UVa), entitled: *An African Atlantic Townscape 1650-1727: Regional Analysis of the Huedan Capital Districts, Bénin West Africa*. Currently revising the fifth of seven chapters, I have scheduled a dissertation defense for February 2008. I believe that my research background on the early cities and countrysides of the Atlantic World coupled with my teaching experience, successful grant writing and publication history make me a strong candidate for the position.

My research interest in bringing historical and archaeological approaches to bear on cities of the emerging Atlantic World was fostered while completing an undergraduate BA with majors in History and Anthropology at Flagler College in St. Augustine, FL. After Flagler, I worked with a cultural resource management firm in the Atlanta area where I developed a passion for historic resource management. Since 2001, I have focused research efforts at UVa (funded by the National Science Foundation, Fulbright-Hays, Explorers Club Washington Group, Embassy of the Netherlands to Cotonou, and University of Virginia Graduate School of Arts and Sciences) on the historic emergence and functioning of kingdoms, their centers, and their peripheries in the centuries just prior to and during the period of trans-Atlantic exchange. Specifically, I am merging historical, ethno-historical, and archaeological data to investigate the emergence of urbanism and its counterpart ruralization associated with the palace center of Savi, the 17<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup>-century (A.D.) capital of the Hueda Kingdom, one of the major polities in the coastal zone of West Africa at that time. I focus on the question of how the political, economic, and social networks that connected outlying communities to Savi changed as the larger region was drawn into the Atlantic World.

As approximately one million individuals passed through the Huedan, and later Dahomean, port of Ouidah and into enslavement, the region is known as a point of dispersion of African persons and culture across the Atlantic. However, this focus on dispersal leaves the intricacies of local relationships largely unexamined. Likewise, the majority of the comparative historical and archaeological material for the

region focuses on the interaction of European traders with African elite groups and the palaces and forts where they lived, thus leaving the smaller-scale settlements virtually unaddressed. Through archaeological and ethno-historical research in the Savi area, I have discovered and documented the 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup>-century countryside sites surrounding the palace center. I have also collected ethnohistoric data that provide cultural context and dimension for these sites. The survey and subsequent archaeological

excavations revealed that a large portion of the Savi countryside shared the fate of the palace and was sacked and burned by troops from the nearby Kingdom of Dahomey, another major palace-based polity in the region, in 1727. Contemporary historic accounts suggest that the Dahomeans sold hundreds if not thousands of Huedans captured in this raid across the Atlantic. Thus, much of my future research will be trained on tracing the diaspora of these individuals throughout Africa and the New World. Although I am dedicated to a longitudinal study in southern Bénin, I am also in the early stages of developing projects to address the Diaspora Communities with ties to Ouidah found at Africatown near Mobile, Alabama and in Cape Verde.

Drawing from my particular research and teaching experiences I am prepared to offer the following courses for the History Department at Prestigious University: The Rise of the West African City, State, and Empire; Intellectual Intersections of History and Archaeology; the Material Culture of the African Diaspora; and Landscapes of Power and Resistance in the Atlantic World. Also, I am prepared to teach general survey courses on African History and Culture and World Civilization to 1500. As fieldwork is an important element of my research, my professional goals include continuing to incorporate graduate and undergraduate students in my research and offering field opportunities in Africa. In the summers of 2008 and 2009 I will be returning to do research in southern Bénin and I would be prepared to take students to the field to participate in archaeological excavations, oral histories interviews, and the final stages of a museum installation at the Ouidah Museum of History.

As my CV shows, I have been awarded numerous teaching fellowships. For consistently laudatory teaching evaluations, I was awarded the *Outstanding Anthropology Teaching Assistant Award* (2003). While serving as teaching assistant and developing independent courses, I have honed my teaching skills at the University of South Carolina, UVa, and the University of Abomey-Calavi (Benin, West Africa). During these teaching opportunities, I developed coursework that challenges students to be critical thinkers and engaged members of an intensely interconnected world.

I noted with interest from summaries posted online by PU's Office of Institutional Research and Assessment that in 2006 eighty-nine percent of your students were instate. As someone who hails from a small town in rural southern Any State, I hold a unique perspective on bringing a global perspective to your student body. I am excited about the possibility of teaching on one of the most diverse campuses in the country and developing courses for PU's program in world history and cultures. Moreover, I would be honored to help build on your department's long tradition of working across disciplines to broaden our understanding of the human condition.

This fall, I will be presenting a paper in a session on *The Archaeology of African History* at the African Studies Association meeting and would be available to meet with you at that time. If I can clarify any points from above or provide further materials, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

John A. Doe

Enclosures: CV, graduate transcripts, letters of recommendation will be forwarded under separate cover.