

Rebeca Higueros

Henry Mitchell Scholar Fall 2013

“A True South African Experience”

Traveling the world has always been a dream of mine. Making these dreams come into reality sometimes seem unreal. Fall 2013 was the best experience of my entire life because I had the privilege to study at the University of the Western Cape in Cape Town, South Africa. I never imagined it to be such a beautiful country nor did I expect to actually meet people that I now consider family. I remember walking out to the airport gate in Cape Town, not knowing what to expect. I didn't know if I was going to have to take a taxi on my first night or even sleep in a hotel in such an unknown environment. I was quickly enlightened by the presence of Debra Lamson, from the UWC International Relations Office. I was so excited to finally meet her, she had been such a great help during the application process. As discussed through previous emails with Debra, I had accommodations ready for me at the UWC dorms, named Kovacs Residence. When we arrived on campus, I had a quick tour and then I was off to my dorm, where I was going to be living for six months. The space was great! I had a private room, bath, mini fridge, and closet. I honestly thought this was still a dream.

After 12 hours of sleep, I was well rested and began to socialize with the students around me. I've always had an open mind, and I was truly eager to learn about everyone's culture and traditions. I was ready for what the university and South Africa had in store for me! With this said, I enjoyed every minute of my journey. I soaked up all the knowledge I could possibly remember and write in my journal. When school started on Monday, I woke up early enough to find my classes. If I got lost, I would simply ask someone to direct me in the right direction.

Everyone welcomed me and made me feel like I wasn't just the American foreign student. I had become a sister and a friend. I found a home in Debra Lamson's office. If I had any concerns or questions about my classes, Debra was more than happy to lend me a hand. Even when classes were booked completely, Debra found a way to make room for an extra student. I would drop in every single day to say hi to everyone and to do some homework. The UWC International Relations Office was really a home away from home.

On the second week of my stay, I was lucky enough to meet a group of ladies that made this study abroad trip unforgettable. Nerissa, Meghan, Laura, Vuyolwethu, and Melissa changed the course of my stay. Not only did they answer all my million curiosities but they also made me a part of their lives. They introduced me to traditional South African music, dances, and food. They toured me around the city to restaurants, gift shops, gardens, architectural landscapes and beaches. I even traveled to the Northern Cape to meet their families and close relatives. I was invited to plenty of UWC Rugby games and volunteered at UWC's Golden Key International charity events. I can recall countless of good memories that only bring joy into my heart and soul.

I couldn't have made this trip possible without the help of Kate Wozniak, Emma Sponge, Debra Lamson and the entire UWC/UM system for supporting me on every step of the way. This scholarship made it possible for a city girl like me to make her dreams come true. Studying abroad positively changed my life. It humbled my every move and made me appreciate those around me. It empowered me to find my inner light, passion, and drive. For all of this and more, I thank all you mentioned above.