

Mia Boessen: Henry Mitchell Scholarship Report

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MU Occupational Therapy to UWC Occupational Therapy

Receiving the Henry Mitchell Scholarship last year and being able to travel to the University of Western Cape (UWC) to work with their Department of Occupational Therapy was an indescribable experience. Extenuating circumstances allowed a fellow occupational therapy student to also be travelling at the same time as me to visit UWC as well. While there were some difficulties in the planning and scheduling of the program, my time in Cape Town has forever impacted the way I view occupational therapy and has further allowed me to develop my post-graduation plans.

Due to differing semester times, I was allowed to choose a clinical site used by UWC students in the occupational therapy program and would be attending a few of the remaining classes before the students began their exams. I chose to work at Chris Steytler Industries, a factory that was opened in the 1980s as a place for adults with any disability to work.

On my first day of work, I was lucky to be introduced to six other occupational therapy students. Over the next two weeks, they helped me get comfortable, meet the factory supervisors, the workers and prepare for my clients. Work at the factory is contract based, and includes a variety of tasks such as making and packaging medical visors, roofing washers and ear earplugs, sorting and cleaning hangers from local depart stores to be reused, and packaging urinal cakes, among other tasks.



Working under the therapy supervisor, it was my job to instruct workers on proper workplace etiquette, rules and expectations, as well as important work related concepts such as

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responsibility, motivation and money management. While I had learned about work rehabilitation in occupational therapy, this was an experience that I knew was unique and that I would not have had in the United States. I became a part of a team of staff and built friendships with the supervisors and workers. The workers taught me Afrikaans, Xhosa and educated me on customs and their lives in South Africa.

At the end of my time at Chris Steytler Industries, I was very sad to go. However, I had a new drive and purpose for my career in occupational therapy. Despite the working conditions being somewhat difficult, the low pay and the repetitive work, it was the happiest place I have ever worked. The workers were proud of their contribution and enjoyed the purpose that their work gave their lives. It increased their responsibility outside of work and many had drastically improved their lives since being hired. The benefits of occupation and the benefits of assisting others to have meaningful occupations have been further impressed upon me.

Despite this wonderful experience, there were some difficulties. Due to scheduling, I was only able to attend a few classes with the other UWC students. I believe that to improve this experience, better scheduling and more inclusion of the OT departments at MU and UWC would have allowed me to attend more classes. Circumstances allowed two of us to be able to travel to UWC on one scholarship, lowering the monetary assistance provided by the scholarship, which caused some difficulties and almost prevented me from being able to participate.

Thanks to the Henry Mitchell Scholarship, I made countless friends during my time in Cape Town. They were open and inviting, taking me to Table Mountain, various beaches, downtown and to many local attractions. I wholly plan on returning to visit them and am very grateful for my experience at UWC and the Henry Mitchell Scholarship fund for helping make this learning experience possible.