

Joseph G. Frank
South Africa Exchange Program-Henry Mitchell Scholarship Recipient

Joseph Frank was a Mitchell scholarship recipient and studied at UWC July-December 2000. He then graduated from the University of Missouri-St. Louis in January, 2001 with a Bachelor of Science degree in Public Administration and an Undergraduate Certificate in Non-Profit Organization Leadership and Management. While at UM-St. Louis, Joe was a Pierre Laclède Honors College student, a student senator of the University Senate, and the recipient of numerous awards and honors. He is currently employed by the City of St. Louis Planning and Urban Design Agency and will pursue graduate work at the University of Missouri-St. Louis in public policy.

My Experiences in South Africa
By Joseph G. Frank
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I am extremely grateful to have received the South Africa Exchange Program-Henry Mitchell Scholarship, which enabled me to study at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) from July to November 2000.

My experiences at UWC were just phenomenal. The ongoing transformation of South Africa is a massive task, which requires the faith and support of all South Africans, as well as the international community. Hopefully, I will be able to help other University of Missouri-St. Louis students and residents of the St. Louis community understand just how important South Africa's success is to the United States. Just last week, I made a brief presentation to the UM-St. Louis Midwest Model United Nations chapter, who will represent South Africa in their regional mock United Nations conference this February.

UWC is uniquely situated to contribute to the transformation. It overcame its apartheid legacy as a segregated "coloured" institution, and became a center for empowerment of all the disenfranchised groups in South Africa. In my experience, although many UWC students come from disadvantaged backgrounds, they do succeed in their studies. I was quite grateful to study alongside the very people who may lead the African Renaissance in a few short years. Places like UWC make me confident that, whatever the current problems of South Africa, such as crime, environmental degradation, currency weakness and migration of skilled whites, the nation will be able to lift itself up and become the powerhouse of Africa.

My studies at UWC consisted of coursework in Southern African and South African politics and public administration. Because I had already completed the requirements for my degree programs, I was able to choose courses that interested me and that focused on South Africa. Studying South Africa while living in South Africa was a very different experience from just writing essays and listening to lectures about South Africa, as I had done throughout my university career. I was able to read the *Mail & Guardian* and *Cape Times*, which provided a very different, albeit somewhat Eurocentric, perspective on world events than that available in American news sources. I met real South African citizens and visited their institutions, including the libraries, galleries and museums, Parliament, and the High Court of Cape Town. I came to understand better the impact of apartheid on the urban form. We call St. Louis a hyper-segregated city, but Cape Town is even more so. Urban poverty in South Africa is much more severe and visible than anywhere I know in the United States. Despite the improvements made by the African National Congress-led Mandela and Mbeki administrations, the reality is still that of deeply entrenched racial, ethnic, and class divisions.

The UWC environment seemed very friendly to me, even as a white foreigner on a predominantly black campus. Perhaps that's just because it was a situation I had already experienced as an elementary school student in the St. Louis Public Schools. More likely, my feelings resulted from the very openness and friendliness of so many people I met. Hopefully, I will always have friends in South Africa.

Further, UWC is a distinctly cosmopolitan place. Students come from throughout South Africa, as well as from many other African states. I also met other exchange students from Germany, England, the Netherlands, Canada, China, and different parts of the United States. It was fascinating to think of the number of students who came to UWC, pulled from so many different places. I now better understand that the world is a very small place, in this era of jet air travel and e-mail.

Despite this, South Africa – like the United States -- is still a very polarized place. During my spring break in September 2000, I went on a tour into southern Namibia and the Kalahari Desert in South Africa and Botswana. It was frustrating and startling, but really not that surprising, that the tour guide, a white English-speaking man born in Zimbabwe (then Rhodesia), had never heard of UWC!

Overall, my experience as an exchange student at the University of the Western Cape was an immensely positive one. In four short months, I made dozens of new friends and saw some of the most spectacular natural places I have ever visited. Cape Town, as well, is an amazing city, and cannot be understood without a knowledge of the legacy of apartheid. I enjoyed every minute of my South African odyssey, whether watching the SABC News in Xhosa, eating a plateful of pap, or riding the Metrorail between Cape Town and UWC. My experience was worth far more than I could ever imagine; perhaps even more than my bachelor's degree itself.