

I am incredibly grateful for the Henry Mitchell Scholarship that enabled me to spend the past five months living and learning in Cape Town, South Africa. It was fascinating to be immersed in such a different culture. Specifically, my time spent at the University of Western Cape was eye opening and gave me a new perspective on the city through my fellow students. UWC has an incredible history as a “colored institution” and one that has uniquely been on what one of my professors called “right side” of apartheid compared to other local universities. For me, it was a unique experience to be the minority both on campus and in the city. The legacy of apartheid still ripples through the communities and I was forced to face questions of race, ethnicity, and unequal wealth distribution both personally and academically.

At UWC I took classes in political science and history. I enjoyed learning from a perspective outside the western mindset, and reading about South African and world politics from South African newspapers. Although learning in a completely different educational system came with many challenges, the professors and those in the international office tended to go out of their way to help me gain the most out of this experience. I found the relationship between UMKC and UWC to be very strong. Overall, my study abroad experiences went far above and beyond what I expected, but I had anticipated there being specific events for international students to help us assimilate to the campus and get to know other students. The international office did not hold any events this semester even though they were discussed in our orientation. Also, registering and choosing classes was a difficult task and I was surprised that there was not a student or staff member assigned to help international students through the process like those who were with a program were given.

I chose to live off campus and closer to the city in the student suburb Observatory. This was a great choice for me, because it enabled me to make friends quickly and travel about the city easily. I lived in a large house with 17 other international students and interns from Europe and America. It was also very easy to make friends on campus at UWC in the dining halls, student association events, and through classes. I value those relationships more than anything else I may have gained from this experience. I met local students and their families as well as international students from Europe, America, and other African countries. Although transportation to and from university can be difficult, the long commute in mini buses became one of my favorite parts of my weeks. I met many other local students from UWC traveling to

my neighborhood as we squished ourselves into large vans everyday laughing, discussing professors, and listening to cheesy R&B on full volume.

During my time in Cape Town I also had the opportunity to experience the American elections from a different perspective. I enjoyed chatting with fellow students about what they thought about the election as well as attending democrat abroad meetings and helping other international students absentee vote. Many South Africans felt very deeply about this election because of the racial aspect and it was enlightening to hear their perspective on the state of race relations in the United States. My house of students hosted an election party for our friends and we struggled to stay up till 4 am for the results. The next day it seemed everyone who knew I was American congratulated me as if I were personally responsible for the results!

While studying I also spent time teaching and tutoring in the township Khayelitsha. I loved the challenge of teaching a classroom of 11th graders about environmental science and tutoring one on one in trigonometry. I learned so much through this experience. It challenged my views of the world, taught me to clearly communicate, and provided me with a new perspective. Along with lectures and leading discussions in the classroom, I developed strong friendships with the students and struggled through decisions about their future with them. The high levels of poverty and unemployment in the township did not lead many of these students to believe that they too could attend university. It was an honor to listen to their dreams and ideas for their future and assist many of them with daunting task of applying for colleges, technical schools, and scholarships.

Throughout my time in South Africa I also found plenty of time to explore Cape Town and soak in the natural beauty of the mountains and oceans that frame the city. I learned to surf, hiked weekly, spent time in the Cape Flats, visited many museums, and watched the penguins and whales from Cape Point. I improved my pool skills and learned to defend myself from baboons. I traveled to Mozambique, Swaziland, Botswana, and Zimbabwe where I saw a more rural southern African that differed greatly from the cosmopolitan Cape Town I was used to. It seemed as if everyday there was something new to experience whether it was white water rafting in Zimbabwe, trying traditional bunny chow, or jumping off the highest bungee jump in the world. I have never lived as well as I did while in Southern Africa, and hope I am able to hold onto the many lessons I learned well into the future.