I have always loved to travel and I always knew that I had to study abroad sometime in my undergraduate career. I never wanted to do the traditional study abroad locations in Europe so the UWC/UM System Exchange Program offered me the perfect opportunity to have a unique study abroad experience.

The application process for the program wasn’t necessarily the easiest thing but with the help of Kate in the UMKC study abroad office and Debra Lamson in the UWC international office I got all of my paperwork turned in to both offices and completed everything I needed to complete. One of the hardest aspects of the whole process was getting my study visa. Once I had that secured I just needed to worry about housing accommodations while in South Africa. I knew the university was a bit away from the Cape Town center and I knew that I wanted to be able to explore the city as much as possible. I settled for an in-between in an area called Parow. I stayed at a house owned by one of the staff members in the International Relations office, Hilda. The house was within walking distance of a train station and a mall. I took the train each day to and from class and on the weekend or days I didn’t have class I would take the train in the opposite direction to Cape Town. If I had the opportunity to take the trip again, I would definitely stay in town and have the longer train ride to campus because there are so many things to do in the city and much easier to do them with direct access. I was concerned about making friends since I was not living on campus but I met a lot of local students who I became very close with and spent weekends traveling in the city and the surrounding areas, especially Stellenbosch. I also met a lot
of the other international students studying at UWC and spent many weekends with them in the city.

I had already completed the core courses that I needed for my B.S. in Chemistry so I had the opportunity to take any class that interested me. I ended up taking an introductory ethics course, a humanities course focusing on the encounter between Africa and Europe, a public health course and a history class about the South African apartheid and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. There was little nightly homework required for the courses and most of the work consisted of pre-reading material for class and writing essays. The courses in South Africa are heavily writing based. The final exams are essentially just essay exams where you have several different prompts to choose from and you write 3 or 4 essays during the exam period. Instead of textbooks for the classes, each class either posted all reading materials online, had them available in the library, or had a “reader” printed. You would pay for the reader (generally just the cost to print the booklet) and it would have your course outline and readings for the class. The campus was pretty big but fairly easy to navigate. The professors were all very helpful and open to questions and discussion. One aspect of the courses that differ from courses at UMKC was the integration of a “tutorial” for each class. There would be a lecture period or two each week and then there would be one tutorial period. The tutorial was usually run by a graduate student in the department and had further assignments and discussions to supplement and reinforce the material given in lectures. It was an excellent forum to meet other students, form study groups and discuss difficult or confusing material.

The location of Cape Town was definitely a draw for me in choosing a study abroad location. The city and the whole country lived up to and exceeded all of my expectations. I spent most of my weekends out in Stellenbosch or in the city. After final exams ended in early/mid
November, I went on a backpacking trip along the coast. All of the accommodations were really nice and really affordable. There are thousands of things to do and see on a backpacking trip, several that you can only do in South Africa. I had the opportunity to go bungee jumping at Bloukrans bridge which is the site of the highest commercial bungee jump. I spent time on the beach, went on a safari, visited several townships, went tubing on the Storm River, horseback riding and hiking.

My time in South Africa is not something I would trade for anything. It wasn’t all fun and games. Studying abroad with this program requires a lot of independence and self-reliance. You have to be able to utilize your resources and the people around you but strike out on your own and make things happen. I met some of the most amazing people who I will remain in contact with for a long time and had experiences that will stay with me forever. I learned about a different culture and people who are so different but so similar to what surrounds me every day. I hope that I will never forget the lessons I learned and the people I met in South Africa. I sincerely thank the Henry Mitchell scholarship board for allowing me this life-changing opportunity.