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SOUTH AFRICA | FALL 2007 STUDY ABROAD PROGRAM EVALUATION

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MAJOR1: Economics
ABROAD_DURING: Fall 2007

PROGRAM: The University of Cape Town through Interstudy

COURSE_#1: Applied International Trade Bargaining
COURSE_#2: Colonial and Post-Colonial Encounters
COURSE_#3: Human Evolution
COURSE_#4: Political Economy of International Relations

TYPES_OF_COURSES: Regular university courses

EXPLANATION_OF_COURSES:

COMMENTS_ON_COURSE_WORK: My academic experience at UCT was about what I would have expected from a large state university here in the US. My smallest class had about 40 people and my largest had nearly 200. There was very little homework for most of my classes. The one exception was Applied International Trade Bargaining, my one economics course. It required roughly three hours a week of personal interaction with other members of the course in a style similar to Model UN. I recommend you take this course if you've taken at least macroeconomics.

STUDENT_BODY_COMPOSITION: I was usually one of just a few international students in my classes. The one exception was Colonial and Post-Colonial encounters which seemed to be geared to international students who hadn't been exposed to much African history.

COMMENTS_ON_TEACHING: As you might expect, the quality of teaching in all aspects was not nearly as high as at Amherst. Professors did have office hours available for at least one hour a week, although I rarely used them.

The professors or "lecturers" in the British system used by South African schools really were lecturers. They stood at the front of the class, spoke for forty minutes, and then scampered out of the room before too many questions could be asked.

ACADEMIC/LANGUAGE_PREPARATION_NEEDED: None. Any Amherst student is fully prepared for at least the 3000 level courses and even a 4000 level course in their major field.

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DESCRIPTION_OF_HOUSING_&_MEALS: I lived in a house with three other American students off campus although most Interstudy houses have at least eight residents. We cooked all our meals ourselves although many restaurants were cheap enough (\$4-5) to eat out often. We also had a cleaning lady come once a week.

WHO_MADE_HOUSE/MEAL_ARRANGEMENTS: All of this was taken care of by Interstudy.

LIVING_COSTS: \$400 a month

MEDICAL_FACILITIES_AVAILABLE?: I never used them

WHAT_PROGRAM_SERVICES_WERE_AVAILABLE?: Interstudy did a minimal amount of orientation, but they were always one phone call away if you needed help. CIEE seemed to do a better job of orientation etc.

HOW_DID_YOU_MEET_LOCALS?: There is a vibrant student life in and around Cape Town. Just get out and explore. And try not to worry about getting mugged.

DID_YOU_EXPERIENCE_DISCRIMINATION?: Yes. A black lesbian housemate of mine felt very uncomfortable coming out to people. When she did, many males said they had never met a gay person before and were somewhat upset. In categories other than sexual orientation, however, South Africa seemed fairly welcoming. I never felt awkward being white.

DID_YOU_TRAVEL?: Yes. During spring break I went to Namibia for ten days and I traveled after classes ended within South Africa.

WOULD_YOU_RECOMMEND_THIS_PROGRAM/UNIVERSITY?: I would recommend going with CIEE instead of interstudy if the two programs seem otherwise equal to you. CIEE seemed to have a more professional setup than my program.

SUMMARY: This is really too broad a question for me. I really enjoyed my trip, and I feel like I will be better able to visualize the situation of a developing country during my career.

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MAJOR1: Black Studies
ABROAD_DURING: Fall 2007

PROGRAM: School for International Training, Reconciliation and Development Program in South Africa

COURSE_#1: Introductory Language Study: Zulu
COURSE_#2: Reconciliation and Development Seminar
COURSE_#3: Field Study Seminar
COURSE_#4: Independent Study Project

TYPES_OF_COURSES: Program sponsored courses

EXPLANATION_OF_COURSES:

COMMENTS_ON_COURSE_WORK: We had about six papers (varying from two to eight pages long), a final written and oral exam for Zulu, and a month long independent study project that resulted in a 40+ page paper and 20 minute oral presentation. The class size was the entire program (22 students) and papers were graded on the South African scale and then converted to American grades. Classes were in the form of lectures that were interesting and included frequent excursions around the area and to other institutions. We also had a week-long focus study at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in one of five subjects.

STUDENT_BODY_COMPOSITION: All American

COMMENTS_ON_TEACHING: We had guest lecturers every week so the quality would vary but for the most part I was pleasantly surprised by the rigor and great teaching methods of most lecturers. Our Academic Director, who taught a few weeks, was wonderful and taught us a great deal in the course of a few lectures. All of the faculty at SIT were extremely accessible and willing to help.

ACADEMIC/LANGUAGE_PREPARATION_NEEDED: I did not prepare at all for my trip in terms of courses and felt fine. I read a few of the books on the reading list but that wasn't necessary. A history course on South Africa would be a nice background resource but you're fine without it.

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DESCRIPTION_OF_HOUSING_&_MEALS: We had three homestays which was a perfect amount I think. Our meals were provided either by our families, the program or on our own, a good mix among the three options. The longest homestay was my favorite and lasted about seven weeks with a Zulu family in Cato Manor, Durban. We also had a homestay with a rural Zulu family for a week and then one with an Indian family in a township outside of Durban also for a week.

WHO_MADE_HOUSE/MEAL_ARRANGEMENTS: We were assigned our homestay families by the program. For the final month of the semester we were given a list of housing options (apartments, hostels, etc.) by the program director.

LIVING_COSTS: Around \$400 including grocery, rent and living costs but we were given a stipend to cover the rent of our apartment for the final month.

MEDICAL_FACILITIES_AVAILABLE?: Yes

WHAT_PROGRAM_SERVICES_WERE_AVAILABLE?: We had a week-long orientation in Johannesburg that provided social, cultural and historical background as well as safety and adjustment tips that were necessary before moving to Durban for the semester. The directors at the program were always willing to meet with you if you had issues or any questions.

HOW_DID_YOU_MEET_LOCALS?: Living in homestays and interacting with the communities rather than living in an all-American dorm was the most rewarding and effective way to learn about the cultures of South Africa. My host families taught me about what their lives had been like under apartheid, how they struggle to make a living, what they hope for their country and ordinary things like what music, tv shows and movies they liked. It was incredible to be a part of so many different families and see South Africa through their eyes.

DID_YOU_EXPERIENCE_DISCRIMINATION?: South Africa is a curious mix of a constitutionally progressive country with the society itself rife with racism (not only between black and white), sexism, classism, and homophobia. Daily interactions with South Africans revealed all of these problems but the progressive nature of the constitution is attempting to ameliorate these issues.

DID_YOU_TRAVEL?: We had planned excursions during the program and were not allowed to leave the country to travel.

WOULD_YOU_RECOMMEND_THIS_PROGRAM/UNIVERSITY?: I would recommend this program to other Amherst students, but with a lot of qualifiers. The overall experience was one of the most incredible things I have ever done and the amount of knowledge I gained from being so immersed in a country and in so many cultures was invaluable. However, the size of the program was a major problem because you are stuck with the same group of people everyday for nearly 4 months. And because SIT attempts to show you so much in that short amount of time the lack of freedom and agency was debilitating. The dependency on the program that was instilled on us students was frustrating and suffocating at times because everything was so structured and on a schedule. Because Durban, South Africa is a pretty dangerous city it is not feasible for a young woman to walk around by herself or be free to explore as extensively as in other places. I think living in South Africa was absolutely incredible and made me grow as an individual but you would have to recognize the danger of the place itself and that the program will run your life for the first 2 and a half months. Also if you don't do well with deprivations (note: weeklong rural

homestay with no electricity or running water) then this probably wouldn't be the program you should go on.

SUMMARY: Studying abroad has raised my awareness of myself in a global context. I know that's a go-to response to this type of question but it is so true. Reading about profound poverty, the AIDS epidemic, crime, apartheid and racism is one thing but to physically encounter all these things (or their legacies) and learn about them first-hand is something completely different and invaluable. My time abroad has made me grow as an individual and definitely made me look into certain career plans that I had only had an inkling of before. I think it will also help me look beyond Amherst and see the greater issues of developing a third world country that we may not be as exposed to on a college campus.



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SOUTH AFRICA | FALL 2007 STUDY ABROAD PROGRAM EVALUATION

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MAJOR1: History
ABROAD_DURING: Fall 2007

PROGRAM: CIEE and The University of Cape Town

COURSE_#1: Gender and History
COURSE_#2: Africa: Colonial and Postcolonial Encounters
COURSE_#3: CAS: Thinking Africa Differently
COURSE_#4: Africa Literature and Languages II: Allegories of African Writing

TYPES_OF_COURSES: Regular university courses

EXPLANATION_OF_COURSES:

COMMENTS_ON_COURSE_WORK: UCT being a large university the classes were very different than Amherst. First they were much larger, mine ranged from about 40 to 150 but I knew people who had 300 or 400 person lectures. The classes were set up in that each had two to three lectures a week and one smaller tutorial. While you could get away with not going to lecture tutorials were mandatory and if you missed to many of them you couldn't take the final and automatically failed. Because of the size lectures were very impersonal but for the most part I liked my tutorials and connected with my tutors (most often grad students - and they are the ones who grade your papers. The grading system is totally different, a 75 is a really good grade and is comorable to an A. It was sometimes hard to adjust to this system but I did by the end. Exam schedules are really rigid, you can't make up. Exam's count for up to 50% of your grade which can be stressful but I didn't find any of mine too difficult. Still you can't really get away with not studying. One note, while it is really tempting sometimes to miss a ton of lecture because there is no attendance taken it can end up coming back to haunt you around exam time. I would recommend Amherst students take 2000 and 3000 level classes although difficulty and workload really can vary. I would say in the end although it wasn't as hard as Amherst I definitely had to do a decent amount of work if I wanted to pass, UCT is a legit university. Also side note they think 2,000 words is a short paper. (and try and avoid the media department)

STUDENT_BODY_COMPOSITION: Depended on the class. If you take classes really Africa focused chances are you will end up with quite a few international students. However some of my

classes (like Gender and History and my Lit class) were almost entirely South Africans. The more general the class, the more South Africans there will be.

COMMENTS_ON_TEACHING: Faculty is way less accessible and it is much more of a bureaucracy, you have to go through a lot of secretaries and assistants. My teaching quality really varied by professor, I had a few great professors and a one who no-fail put me to sleep. One thing that is different is that courses are often split between professors, i.e. one professor takes the first few weeks, another the next few etc.

ACADEMIC/LANGUAGE_PREPARATION_NEEDED: I would make sure to take some kind of South African or African history class, it helps you pick up on a lot of the casual references.

DESCRIPTION_OF_HOUSING_&_MEALS: My housing worked out really well. I choose to live in one of the houses because I had heard the accommodations in the res's were pretty awful. My house was absolutely beautiful and I was a 5 minute walk from the shuttle to campus. We made our own food but luckily there were 2 grocery stores in a mile radius. I lived with 7 Americans and 1 South African. A downside to the houses is that you don't live with as many South Africans and if you don't try you can end up in an American bubble. However I had no problem making South African friends through classes and traveling.

WHO_MADE_HOUSE/MEAL_ARRANGEMENTS: CIEE sets it up.

LIVING_COSTS: MORE than they recommend (because you will want to travel). I probably spent 3,000

MEDICAL_FACILITIES_AVAILABLE?: In Cape Town yes, when traveling often not. I went on a trip to Mozambique where there was a scary medical incident which the hospitals were not adequate to deal with. However in Cape Town and Jo-berg the care is really good.

WHAT_PROGRAM_SERVICES_WERE_AVAILABLE?: CIEE does a week long orientation. The greatest thing about CIEE Cape Town are the program directors: Felicity and Quinton. They have an office on campus and they are available whenever you need them. They also give you their cell numbers and you can call them if you need help at any time of night. My friend had a bad allergic reaction one night and Quinton made sure to come to the hospital even though it was after midnight. They are also great to talk to about anything, homesickness, travel recommendations, money problems etc. CIEE also has a really intense volunteering program and they help you get involved in the community in any capacity you want to. Take advantage of it. There are also UCT student leaders called Solmates. They were really helpful in the beginning because they were immediate access to locals and they not only told us where to go but hung out with us, introduced us to their friends etc. CIEE also takes you on a few trips, like to a small game reserve and wine tasting in Stellenbosch. Most of the trips were totally worth it.

HOW_DID_YOU_MEET_LOCALS?: Talk to people in your classes, go hang out in the student areas and talk to people there (at bars etc), I meet a ton of people while traveling on Spring Break because I went on a trip with a local dive shop so there were Americans and South Africans. Also you can meet people by joining clubs and sports. I have a few friends who joined an Ultimate Frisbee League. Just basically don't be afraid to talk to people and just do the stuff you are interested in.

DID_YOU_EXPERIENCE_DISCRIMINATION?: Race is a really upfront topic. People talk about it all the time, especially in light of South Africa's tumultuous recent racial history. Even

though Apartheid is over there is still a ton of prejudice and raw feelings, I saw a few small scale fights erupt into racial incidents which was scary. I was never more aware of my race than I was in South Africa but I also never felt threatened because of it. Still don't be afraid to talk about race, you will learn alot. In terms of gender for the most part I did not feel more or less discriminated against as a young women than I did in the US. I did have one incident with a South African guy that ended up being about gender relations, and even though he attributed it to "cultural differences" I put it more on him than wider society,

DID_YOU_TRAVEL?: Traveling is a must! There is a ten day Spring Break where I went to Mozambique. There are plenty of planned trip options, I would recommend doing one that is not just targeted at American students because they are more expensive and you are traveling with only Americans. Also there is a bunch of long weekends. Renting a car is pretty easy and it is worth it to do the Garden Route and to go to some of the further away bays. Also Jo-berg is really interesting and a pretty cheap plane ticket away. Traveling is amazing but factor it into your budget, it gets expensive.

WOULD_YOU_RECOMMEND_THIS_PROGRAM/UNIVERSITY?: Yes, I had an amazing time. I will say that the experience is what you make it. IF people don't try they can get stuck in an American bubble but with a little effort its not hard to meet people. Can involved with as much as you can, it will end up being worth it. It felt like I was doing something new and exciting every day.

SUMMARY:

