

South Africa Trip Reflection

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Pre-Departure Sessions/ Trip Expectations

Once I heard about the South Africa Study tour, I was sure this was going to be a once in a lifetime experience. I have always been interested in South Africa and this is my chance to really explore this amazing country. My interest in South Africa came around when I was very young, I watched the movie *Sarafina (1992)*, a movie about students involvement in the Soweto riots. After that movie I was hooked, I wanted to learn more about this amazing country.

I have always been interested in learning more about apartheid; this situation always has reminded me of the American Civil Rights Movement. Being from the South my family has always talked to me about the Civil Rights Movement and it truly made an impact on how I was raised. Knowing that just a little over twenty years ago South Africa was just beginning new post-apartheid age. I was fascinated to learn about “Mandela’s Children” and more about the country as it changes and grows. Entering a country where the wounds of segregation, hate, and injustices are so recent is going to be an eye opening experience.

I have been privileged to have the ability to travel the world, traveling is something I have always loved. Most of my trips have been solo or with a small group of friends, this is my first experience traveling with a large group. This aspect of the trip makes me somewhat nervous especially because I do not know everyone. I believe no matter what happens this will be a learning experience that will help me grow personally and within the field of student affairs.

The pre-departure trips have really helped me to prepare for the trip and ease some of my initial fears. It was enjoyable to meet with my coursemates and learn about South Africa’s demographics, race relations, history, higher education systems, and much more. The in class projects also really helped me get further detailed on the setup and makeup of the South African

higher education system. The course projects served as a tool to help me see the enormous role apartheid played in every aspect of South Africa. From the start of my research on South African universities I began to see the vast differences between the universities and their approach to student affairs. Through the research I was able to better understand how important and crucial South African history was to the development of the institution and the development of the student affairs division. It was great to hear all the presentations within the course to learn more about the different universities and their original racial makeup. Through the course discussion I was really able to form a notion of the student affairs make up within the South African higher education institution. Many times we discussed the pushed for the formalization of student affairs within the country.

The pre departure sessions also were a good place where we were all able to ask questions and gain more knowledge. Being this was my first time to South Africa and on a study tour I was unaware of what exactly all I needed to be prepared for. The pre departure sessions really helped me to better understand the trip schedule, weather, what to pack, immunizations, and much more. The facebook group was also fantastic to ask on the fly questions that arose. I enjoyed having the ability to connect with my fellow peers.

This is a huge adventure for me, but I am ready. I know that all of these experiences will help me grow. I have really questions my experience while here at Bowling Green; I am hoping this trip helps to put into perspective if higher education is for me.

Apartheid Museum

“I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers that fear.”-Nelson Mandela (no date)

Today we went to the apartheid museum, and it was a life changing experience. From the moment we walked in I felt moved. As I looked through the artifacts and read about these amazing men and women, emotions just flooded my body. All I could think was “one day I want to be a part of a social change” and “how scarcely similar apartheid was to the Jim Crowe laws of the American Civil Rights Movement.” The notion of these men and women who were a part of something bigger than themselves was amazing to me, how many of them without second guess stood up for what they believe in. As I think of social change, I think of huge movements such as the Women’s Right Movement, Gay Rights Movements, Civil Rights Movement and question where I will make my difference. As a millennial I have heard stories about Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King Jr, Medgar Evers, Steve Biko who stood up for their rights and freedom for all. It is difficult for me to grasp a movement that large and power. I question myself, would I have been strong enough or brave enough to fight for my rights?

I think about all the social movements happening now and how even though I support them am I really being an activist. I think about the quote “if you stand for nothing, you’ll fall for anything.” This quote speaks to the fact that if I am not actively standing up for these social justice issues I am not really being an activist. The visit to the apartheid museum moved me to tears, but was a fantastic start to the trip. I knew this would be an eye opening and life changing experience.

Introduction to South African Higher Education

Today Eric and Cecile came and talked to us about higher education in South Africa. This was a great conversation and a fantastic way to learn more about the history of student affairs in South Africa. During this time I was able to really get a better view of the South African universities. The conversation topic that constantly came up was that of the “merging” of the higher education institutions. Cecile and Eric both spoke about the many problems and disadvantages of the merger. During the pre-departure sessions we talked a little about the merger, but this was the first it was explained in detail. It was interesting to hear about this merger and I am excited to see how the various universities are coping with this change. Eric and Cecile also explained the financial status of many of the students and the government loans. It was very thrilling to hear how the South African and American systems are similar and how they differ.

It was interesting learning that South African higher education had a similar start to higher education in the United States. I was shocked to hear that the main focus for student affairs took place in residence life and that many of the services stem from there, also that the original student affairs professionals were the faculty. It was also nice learning about the student involvement aspect of higher education. Working in student involvement it was nice to hear about the push for students to become more involved and engaged in campus life and student organizations.

This was a great precursor to the university site visits. Talking amongst the group and with Eric and Cecile was fantastic. We had a chance to reflect on South Africa’s higher education during apartheid and now post-apartheid. Eric and Cecile gave fantastic information

that I think will come in handy as we explore the various institutions. Today's session has made me extremely excited to start visiting the universities these next couple of weeks.

University of Pretoria

We had our first site visit today; we explored the main campus of the University of Pretoria. The campus was beautiful; it reminded me a modern "hilltop" college. You could tell the resources on this campus were abundant and easily accessible to students. Most of the students I saw were using some form of technology (i.g. cell phone, laptop, etc). One thing that I noticed was that there was not a large mixture of racial groups. The groups were very segregated.

During our time at University of Pretoria we met a lovely individual, Cindy, who worked in the university bookstore. It was great to chat with her for a few minutes and learn about her experience as student in South Africa. She was very welcoming and friendly. It was a great start the trip connecting with a new friend.

Tshwane University of Technology

Today we visited the Tshwane University of Technology; I must say I loved the visit. We received the history of Tshwane and how they have changed since the merger of the institutions. Tshwane is made up six campuses, with three being distance campuses. Tshwane is one of the institutions that did a full overhaul after the merger to make sure there is no overlap within the campuses. When I walked into campus I could instantly tell the financial difference between Tshwane and the University of Pretoria.

We started out the day with the various functional areas. It was great to hear about the breakdown of the various functional areas and their role within the campus. When then broke into various groups to get more information on a certain functional area. I choose the leadership centre since that is one of my main focuses in student affairs. It was amazing to see all the services that are provided to the students with such little resources. The office was staffed by four individuals who divide all the merged campuses. They explained the biggest challenges were the resources and lack of staffing. Having so many responsibilities the staff found themselves working twelve hour days, seven days a week. It really made me appreciate the opportunities I have been given. It was fantastic and moving hearing the student worker talk about the leadership program and the impact the program had made on him. Everyone could see the passion the staff possessed and how hard they were working to make this a life changing experience for the students.

The next part of our day was a tour of the residence halls. The residence hall I tour was in the all women engineering hall Polonaise, referred to as the “5 Star Hotel”. This is where we learned a little bit more about the residence committee. There were a lot of key topics that came up during our time there, such as pregnancy, FERPA, and curfew. When our guide explained the rules with pregnancy and curfew it really reminded me of *en loco parentis*. We discussed whether there is any type of “FERPA” like laws that prohibit the university from talking to parents or guardians. This allowed for some very interested conversations on residence life, autonomy, and much more.

Our next step was visiting West City, this was my favorite part of the day because we had the chance to interact with the students. This was my first time ever hearing about private/public residence life partnerships. It was an interesting set up, but you could truly tell that the

company and university worked well together. It was astonishing to see the different between West City and the main campus residence halls. Learning about the residence committee power and common practices of West City was very interesting for conversation. There was a curfew, they were required to attend certain events and do certain activities, many things that we would consider “hazing”. These were all university enforced rules so it was interested to learn why they were participating in these practices.

Overall it was an amazing day; everyone was so welcoming and friendly. It was fantastic talking to the students and learning about their experiences at Tshwane. Everyone could clearly see that the staff and students were happy and excited to be there. This place truly felt like “home”.

University of KwaZulu-Natal

The University of KwaZulu-Natal was one of the institutions I researched during the pre-departure session. Knowing a little about the institution I was excited to learn more and actually physically see things. From the beginning KwaZulu-Natal seemed to vary from Tshwane University of Technology in the amount of research and theory they applied to their student affairs functional areas. There was also a very large educational different between the staff employed at the institutions. Many of the staff members at Tshwane had their bachelors, where much of the staff at KwaZulu-Natal had a masters or higher.

KwaZulu-Natal being one the only university where Indians students were able to attend, it was interesting to learn more about the history of the institution. The history of the institution also played into the makeup of the student population. There was a presentation about the students and their financial situations. It was very common to some American universities where students are accepted into university and they cannot afford it, also the usage of government

funded loans. One presenter used the term “revolving door” to explain their first year population. The presenter explained that the first year students seem to have a higher dropout and failure rate. It was interesting to learn that we are applying much of the same practices and theories to work on these situations.

One of my favorite things to learn about is KwaZulu-Natal’s doctorate of student affairs program. This is the first institution that we have visited thus far that has talked about a program to professionalize student affairs. It was interesting to learn about the programs set up and implementation. It was very enjoyable talking to all the staff members and learning much more of how they are trying to advance the field. It was clear that everyone was very aware of the need to professional the field and working to make this happen.

Durban University of Technology

Durban University of Technology was an interesting visit, especially when the student member of the Student Representative Committee (SRC) spoke. The student talked with passion about his experiences at Durban University of Technology and the many opportunities he has been afforded since being there. He talked about student leadership within the campus and the push for students to become involved. The SRC is a topic that has come up at every campus we have visited, learning about the power has been interested and eye opening. This was the first opportunity that we have had to speak to a student who was actually a member of the SRC. The student explained running with the political parties and they impact the parties have over the SRC’s agendas and policies. This was interesting as I began to reflect on my undergraduate institution's student government election process.

Learning about the SRC's power over many campus policies and initiatives was also very interesting. Residence life explained how the SRC would threaten to pull funding if the rates for rooms went up. I was shocked that a student organization has such power. The young man also explained about the protest and riots that students participate in during various situations (i.g. when tuition rates increase or housing). I was so surprised by this, but it was nice to see that students were coming together to fight for a cause they believed in.

One other topic we discussed while at Durban University of Technology was the lack of female student leaders. The young man explained the difficulty to get women to apply for leadership roles and if they do apply they only apply for small roles. He explained the SRC's push to expand women's leadership roles throughout campus by creating various initiatives with women leaders. This was fantastic to see that they were approaching the problem head on.

University of Cape Town

When we arrived at the University of Cape Town it felt as if we were in the middle of a United Kingdom university. You could clearly see this was a privileged institution with a lot of opportunities and resources for their students. It was interesting to learn about the initiatives the university was taking to improve the field and resources for their students.

Other than the University of Kwazulu-Natal the University of Cape Town was the only institution that touched mental health. They spoke about the transitioning to college, mental health diagnosing, and university counseling.

Another very interesting thing was all the aspect of residence life and the impact that they had within student affairs. University of Cape Town was one of the institutions that touched on the first year experience and any programming affiliated with that. The programming for first

year experience all fell under residence life. This was still very interesting to see what the institution is providing to help the student succeed. The first year experience was more of an early warning system to help students see where stood academically midway through the semester.

Through the academic portion of residence life was also where the orientation process was held. This was a two week process focused on promoting a sense of belonging, security, and inclusion. Orientation included about three-hundred events. They were very detailed in how they ran their programs and their learning outcomes. University of Cape Town was fantastic to visit; they had a great institution and clearly have really started to professionalize the field a little more.

University of Western Cape

The University of Western Cape was fantastic to visit. I love hearing Professor Tshiwula explain her experiences while at UWC and how the university has grown tremendously post-apartheid. The first very interesting fact was that they do not define it as student affairs, but as student development and support. By saying development and support one is saying that they are enabling students the space to grow and develop, but also “supporting”/helping them.

This was an interesting visit for me because I was sick and was able to firsthand experience some of the services. Through conversations we had learn that many student do not have health insurance and that institutions must accompany all the student’s needs. I checked in to the facilities as a guest and paid R250 to be seen by a doctor and receive three prescriptions. Seeing that this is a normal co-pay in most doctors in the US and also that this covered medication, which is usually a cost on your own. I was very impressed by the services and really saw how much the students here depend on the services. As I was in the office I spoke

with the physician who said that they are the only resource many students have and how critical that they are providing the students with the most for their money.

It was fantastic going to the University of Western Cape; everyone was really welcoming and friendly. Being this was the sixth institution we had visited I was really able to see the differences, but especially some of the similarities between all of the institutions student affairs divisions. There was something about Tshwane University of Technology and University of Western Cape that I had that overwhelming feeling of being at “home”. I truly reflected that these were places where I could work and live.

Stellenbosch University

When I first came to Stellenbosch I really wanted to dislike the university knowing that this was the birthplace of apartheid. Once I got over myself I was able to really enjoy the university and learn a lot. Stellenbosch was one of the most welcoming and developed university we visited throughout the entire trip. Learning about the changes and initiatives the university is making to make sure students are successful was amazing.

Wellness in the United States has really taken off and Stellenbosch brought some similar aspects to their community. I enjoyed hearing about optimizing the students experience in the out of classroom experiences. Also their work with “day” or commuter students. Most of the campuses touched on day students, but did not provide many or any services to them. Stellenbosch was one of the only universities that had an active and develop program for day students. This was very interesting especially with the bed shortage within institutions. I like that fact that residence life also worked to accommodate day students, that was something none of the other institutions discussed.

I think one of my favorite programs was learning about the development of the Listen, Live, and Learn (LLL) community. This was such an inventive and amazing approach. I know that various campuses throughout the US have Living Learning Communities, but this was a very unique approach on this type of community. I really enjoyed that a focus of the community was making students multiculturally competent and competent of the world around them. Being a program mainly developed by one person with little research it was outstanding to see the benefits it has had on students. This was something I really wanted to look more into and follow up with.

Trip Reflections

This was an amazing trip and truly a once in a lifetime experience. I was nervous as I began the trip, but I have learned and grew a lot since the start. This trip has really taught me someone is never too old to try something new and continue learning. It was encouraging to see the faculty and doctoral students engaging with the speakers and asking questions. I have learned there is always something new out there to experience and learn, no matter your job title or how long you have been in the field. This experience will stay with me for a lifetime.

I came into this trip pompous about my study abroad experiences and feeling if I knew everything about traveling, this was not true at all. Being around others for such a long period of time has really helped me to learn patience and maturity. I know I still have a long way to go, but you have to start from somewhere. I hope that I have truly changed and do not slip back into old habits. I have spent a lot of time reflecting on my growth and I am hoping that growth stays. I know that the change is there and I continue to push myself to be the best me.

Having this opportunity to explore the world and really learn about a different culture has been eye opening. I always have seen myself as an open minded person, but saying you're open

mind and actually being open minded are two completely different things. This experience really has helped me become more open minded and actively take in other cultures. At the beginning of the trip I found myself comparing the cultures and somewhat rating what each did better. Throughout this trip I have really learn to accept that difference does not mean there is one right way and a wrong way.

Our visit to the institutions were a great way to learn more about the programs and find programs we could potential bring back to our home campus. One program that really stood out to me was a program from the University of Cape Town. This program involved faculty interaction within the residence halls. This was done in various ways: faculty tutoring hours, faculty talks, and faculty lead programs. I think this is fantastic because at my current campus faculty do not have much interactive outside the classroom. I believe this would be an opportunity for faculty to learn a little more about an aspect of student affairs and for students to get to know their faculty. The University of Cape Town held these programs various times of the semester so there were multiple opportunities to become involved.

Another program I would love to emulate would be the Listen, Live, Learn community. I feel like this a chance to really implement personal development within the students. This community focuses on various aspects of diversity, but also incorporates a social justice issue as a theme. The setup of this program really forces community and bonding within the students. As we strive to develop well rounded and holistic students, this is an opportunity to help with that development. This holistic approach to development touches on many aspects outside of academics.

Overall this has been one of the best trips of my life. There were some rocky parts, but even with those I was thankful for. South Africa is an amazing and beautiful country. All of the

people were extremely kind and welcoming. Learning about the history of the county and how far they have come and how hard they are still working was fantastic. Hearing stories, going to historical sites and museums really touched my heart.

One of my most life changing experiences was the township visit. When I arrived at the township I saw as a sad and improvised place. Though all of the living conditions were not amazing, the community was in no way sad. No matter where we were people had a smile on their face and welcomed us like family. This made me reflect on how selfish and ungrateful I can be sometimes. Instead of being happy that I am alive and healthy, I complain about small things that have no large effect on my life. This was eye opening and really made me take my priorities into consideration.

This experience has taught me a lot, I have spent days reflecting on the trip. I find myself referring back to experiences and lessons I have learned since I have returned home, these experiences will stay with me forever. Once and a lifetime events like this do not come around often. I am so thankful and happy I embarked on this journey; my life will never be the same!

Final Entry

Through technology, trade, immigration, education, and much more we are all becoming citizen of the world. Life is no longer silo to someone's country of origin. This sharing of knowledge, cultures, experiences, and practices influence educators to build and mold productive global citizens. This can be done by enhancing individual's intercultural and multicultural competencies. As an educational leader I am charged with the task of a holistic approach to developing and supporting global citizens. I reflect on one of the characteristics from "Characteristics of a Multiculturally Competent Student Affairs Practitioner". The characteristic that stood out to me was the "ability to incorporate new learning and prior learning in new situations" (Pope & Reynolds, 1997). This made me reflect on past work experiences and if I was successfully applying this skill with my students. I reflect on the importance of teaching students how to apply their prior skills and experiences to the world today. This was very eye opening to me on the lack of preparation the students I work with had. I think if we are going to truly give students a meaningful experience we must be adequately preparing them, not putting them at a worldly disadvantage.

As I reflect on building global citizens, I began to question whether I am myself well prepared. The study tour helped me to change my world worldview tremendously. It gave me the opportunity to really see the world as an open book and to take in as much of it as I can. Pope, Reynolds, & Mueller (2004) have a very powerful statement "the key to building affirming relationships with others who are culturally different from us is being able to look for similarities and differences simultaneously" (p.91). This was something I engaged in frequently during the study tour. I was able to pull from the similarities and differences to help to build a working knowledge and understand of the culture. I felt more prepared to have candid conversations and

to discuss my views. I was also more advance in my listening and learning skills. I felt more like the observer, then always sharing. This was a fantastic role to take, because I believe I was able to really let the trip sink in more and gain much more knowledge on what was happening. I learned to view the world as a whole and appreciate the difference, this helped me to open my eyes and become more competent and confident in my personal and professional growth.

This trip really has shown me what a globalized world we live in, I see the benefits of this globalization and how we are preparing students to become more globalized. Globalization affords a plethora of opportunities, one of the biggest being that it remove individuals from their comfort zone and forces them to think about the bigger picture. This allows for individuals to be introduced to new ways of life and new ways of doing things. People are able to get a further understanding of cultures that are unlike their own. They are able to participate and learn new practices. Globalization helps to connect everyone, but still values individual identity and differences.

There are also some drawback and challenges to globalization, one of the biggest challenges is forcing someone out of their comfort zone who is not ready. This could be they are not prepared due to lack of understanding or willingness to understand. These individuals might not be prepared to facilitate or participate in difficult conversations that will help them develop further. Globalization while a very important aspect in today's society might still be overwhelming for some individuals.

When I started this experience I began to do some reflecting on my world view. Since I embarked on this journey I have gained a completely new view and appreciation for the world around me. As I began to implement this into practice I think of how specific my focus has been. The study tour has provided me with the opportunity to have internal and external

reflection. I believe I have gain some skills and knowledge during the trip that will help me excel in working with students.

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