

IDACA

Cape Town International Student Support Network

20 December 2016

NEWSLETTER

Compiled by Shannon Dowdall of IDACA

Greetings to you from Ida Cooper Associates in Cape Town

Our latest group of thirty-five SSA students arrived in the Cape Town winter in early July and by September, were part of a campus facing protest action and disruption as the #FeesMustFall movement spread to campuses nationally.

Despite the challenges and uncertainties for weeks while UCT was making every effort to negotiate and plan for a successful conclusion of the semester, many of the students believed this experience to have been transformative. They believed that they were going home with a deeper understanding of themselves and how they manage uncertainty, make decisions and create a meaningful routine without the formal structure of classes and a time-table. They thought that they had gained insight into and engaged with the challenges of education in a still deeply divided society and a campus dealing with issues of transformation.

Karolina Jaremkiwicz (UC/LA), Celeste Martore (UC/B) and Brien Griffin (UC/SB) were invited by the US Ambassador to South Africa, Ambassador Gaspard, to his residence to an open discussion on their personal experiences of being on UCT campus during the protests. As a close colleague of Barack Obama, he requested to be posted to South Africa during Obama's second term. His interest in human rights and justice, his activism and his interest in South Africa, had begun as a young teenager in discussions with his father about apartheid and

Nelson Mandela. Ambassador Gaspard was recalled to the US two weeks ago. Celeste, Brien and Karolina were inspired by his history of activism and his commitment to the pursuit of justice and human rights.



Many of the students attended discussion groups facilitated by our IDACA student associates who invited a small number of protesting students to debate. They also attended an excellent play, *"The Fall,"* workshopped by students involved in the 2016 protests and which contextualized the issues not only of tertiary education but of poverty, gender issues and violence in South Africa. They debated and read up about and experienced the biggest event on campuses in South Africa post-1994. They were in South Africa during increasing calls to recall President Zuma and they were here during their own US election in which many voted for the first time.

The students worked hard academically, meeting deadlines for papers as well as trying to

fit in their “bucket lists” of things to do in Cape Town and Southern Africa.



Many of them found the different perspectives in their course- work stimulating and some will be writing up final papers in the United States on topics relating to South Africa.

As Brien Griffin (UC/SB) said, *“Through a new educational lens, I was able to gather different perspectives on global politics. As a Political Science major, I fit right in to the new environment.”*

They studied Afrikaans, went on field trips outside Cape Town and some really appreciated the warmth and welcome of some of the more senior and smaller classes in fine art, architecture and engineering where they were able to form close relationships with local students. Those who studied African Music, enjoyed spending time with their lecturer Dizu Plaatjies, a musician and performer of note, at his home in Langa, making music and eating.

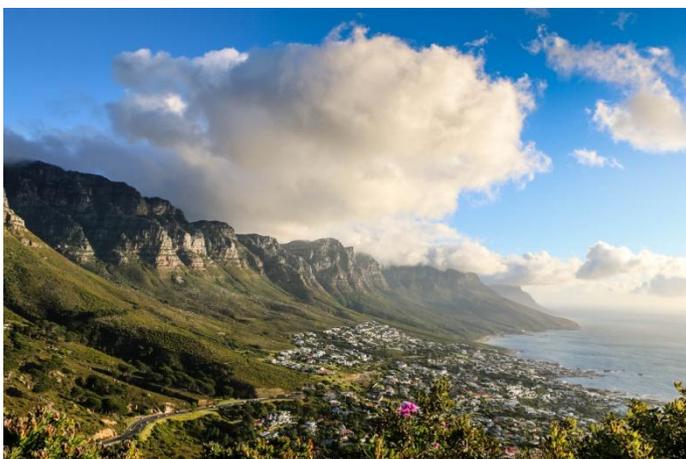


Photo: Nicole Nordstrom (UC/LA)

They were adventurous, travelling from Mozambique to white-river rafting in Zimbabwe, the spectacular sand dunes in Namibia to game

reserves in Botswana and the Kruger National Park in South Africa. Many of them spent weekends hiking in the nature reserves around Cape Town and exploring the wonderful melting-pot of culture, history , food, music and theatre in and around the city. Two of them, Lauri Label (UC/LA) and Mikaela Young (Emory University) spent Thanksgiving at a communal dinner at Mzanzi’s home diner in the township of Gugulethu.



Some of them once again volunteered through the UCT student-run SHAWCO organization in their education and health projects. Maddie Johnson (UC/LA), found the work she was able to do in health clinics in the field of HIV, an important opportunity to take on real responsibilities.

When the disruptions on campus temporarily closed SHAWCO, students found other opportunities to volunteer at places like a night shelter for the homeless (Bronte Kass, Boston College and Elizabeth Devine UC/SC) in the famous District Six area of Cape Town, an area close to the city centre and one which experienced large forced removals of people during apartheid. Other students attended regular communal suppers for the homeless and community members in a church close to where they lived. They also donated all their excess personal belongings to a house of safety on the premises. Sam Ng (Boston College), Anna Krah (Boston College), Rachel Newhall (Boston College) Kimberlyn Tilly (UC/LA) and Madison Frame UC/SB) did some voluntary work at a state-run orthopaedic hospital pre-primary school. Anna Krah also assisted regularly at a Catholic Primary School in the neighbourhood.

Most of the students attended the IDACA welcome and farewell dinners, the tour of Robben Island, the famous Mzoli's township tavern and braai and the bonding and team-building Food Jam, learning to cook really good food as well as the discussion groups.



A surprising number of parents, siblings, grandparents and friends made the long trip from the US to visit them in Cape Town.

The students made their own decisions regarding how they would complete their examinations and the majority of them completed these on campus with some deferring one or two to be written remotely via ProctorU early in the New Year. An agreement was negotiated between student protest leaders and UCT management before the start of the examinations which went ahead smoothly and without disruption.



We sincerely hope that the first semester of 2017 goes smoothly. The UCT Strategic Development Plan for 2016 – 2020 is in place

and available for perusal on the UCT official website.



Photo: Nicole Nordstrom (UC/LA)

We thank you for your continued support during this long and difficult semester. This group was a great pleasure to host. They embodied the spirit of a semester abroad and we believe it was a successful semester for all concerned. Brien Griffin summed it up as follows: *“Living in an often turbulent yet politically vibrant political society. I became immersed in the country. After all, that’s the goal of a semester abroad programme. I would recommend this programme to everyone who asks me. Life, experience, exploration and most importantly understanding, have all deemed this experience one I’ll never forget.”*



Our very best wishes for the festive season and for 2017.

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