

IDACA

Cape Town International Student Support Network

NEWSLETTER DECEMBER 2017

Compiled by Shannon Dowdall of IDACA

Dear Partners

Greetings to all of you from Cape Town as 2017 draws to a close.



Since the students arrived in early August, it has been a busy and somewhat eventful semester. The UCT IAPO orientation programme as well as our own one went smoothly and students very quickly settled into their accommodation, the campus and the city. One of the IAPO highlights is a day-long tour around the Cape Peninsula stopping off for lunch at one of the communities supported by UCT Student outreach programme SHAWCO. The tour was a great success not only in giving them a good idea of the layout of the peninsula and what it offers in terms of recreation but is also a good opportunity to meet SSA students from

other programmes as well as those from Europe and other parts of Africa.

One of the highlights of our own orientation was the welcome dinner on their second night to which we invited Nomfundo Walaza, a UCT graduate and psychologist who was one of the key mediators to negotiate a settlement between students and management on the eve of the examinations last year and which allowed exams to be completed without disruption. She is the former director of the Desmond Tutu Foundation and is currently involved in mediation skills development in other parts of Africa like South Sudan. As one of the few black South Africa students to participate in the American Field Scholarship programme over thirty years ago, she could offer them an insightful account of how the experience broadened her perspective and fostered self-development. She also provided a sensitive and brief, historical context of the country and its complexities.



As the semester progressed, the informal feedback about courses was once again very positive, some saying that that the lecturing style and the lively engagement during small group tutorials was enriching and stimulating. It was truly heartening to hear the manifest pleasure as students made new discoveries through readings, discussions and assignments. One or two mentioned that their social conversations had changed and seemed more meaningful as often, what they were covering in classes had relevance to current issues in the country, something they said was different from how they had previously interacted with friends.



By mid-semester, as you are aware, we had a number of crime related incidents, including a burglary, three muggings and two minor accidents. The students affected, without exception, handled these situations remarkably well and should be commended on their maturity in the circumstances. The fact that they were a very close group was evident during these times as they went out of their way to support and look out for each other. The need for extra vigilance was a hard lesson to learn but one they'll all take away with them.



In early October, we had the pleasure of a visit from Mary McMahon, Ines DeRomana and Phillip Van Saun from the UCEAP office. Their input and suggestions were invaluable in our ongoing efforts to improve where we can on the services we offer the students.

The student protest action and disruption of classes towards the very end of lectures was another unexpected challenge. They had to be fully alert to the load of online briefings from course convenors, online lectures, completion of work and finding alternative places to work when venues were closed. We organized an informal discussion group with our IDACA UCT senior students where issues around the students protests could be explored in a safe space and which most attended. Many of them also attended the large student meetings on campus around this time. We kept in contact with them throughout this period and once again the feedback we received was that they weren't experiencing unusual levels of anxiety.



After UCT stated that exams would be definitely remain on schedule and that alternative arrangements were to be made to write them, we took up the offer from Lara Dunwell to meet with our group to outline the process and to answer questions. Once again, almost everyone who could, attended and all who did, seemed to be managing these uncertainties. As far as we know, no students deferred any exams, all of them with the exception of one or two, seemed to be managing in the alternative examination venue and

with the security presence and other than a few comments about the heat, cold and noise from wind in the tent, felt it was well organized.

Thanksgiving during exams was a very special occasion this year. The whole group decided to celebrate it after the actual date so that those who were writing exams could take time off during a weekend. They organized a sit-down dinner for 40 at one of their houses with everyone providing a dish and IDACA providing the turkeys. They all agreed that it was a memorable and special occasion and really enjoyed all the preparation as well as the evening. Our IDACA student associates were invited and commented on how good it had been to be part of such an experience and the true spirit of Thanksgiving



This semester, many of the students were very involved in SHAWCO student outreach programmes, tutoring school-going students in disadvantaged community schools and some assisting in the SHAWCO medical clinics. Avery Allen (UCSD) Cheryl Batac (UCSB), Kimberley Lozano (Boston College) and Erin Mulligan (UCSC) made contact with Australian student nursing interns and attended some evening lectures at medical school with them. This group also volunteered for a day at the Scalabrini Centre, an NPO which provides a variety of services for asylum-seekers, refugees and migrants. Erin Mulligan volunteered at the Carpenter's Shop, an NPO in the city centre which offers skills development to homeless men. She ran a weekly four session budgeting course for them and then got more of the IDACA students involved in games evenings. The group also provided a Thanksgiving supper there and in return, the students were offered a "pap" making

session (a staple for many in South Africa). Through their contacts there, some of the students got to know people who were establishing small businesses like tour guiding and supported these efforts. Towards the end of the semester, Erin co-ordinated a collection to the centre of surplus clothes, toiletries and food as students departed.

A number of students who joined the Mountain and Ski Club and included Audrey Hersman (Boston) and Miguel Gamo (UCSD) went on weekend hiking trips into some of the beautiful mountains outside Cape Town as well as on climbing trips making good friends with local students. All the students did many day hikes and some of them, including Daniel Carroll (UCSB) and Nicholas Gash (UCSD) went on surfing trips up the coast. Annie Fergus (UCSB) contributed a number of articles on wide ranging topics to the student-run weekly newspaper "Varsity". Elizabeth Glensky (UCSC) went on a scuba diving trip with her Biology class to the remote St Lucia Reserve on the north east coast and Jacob Zazzeron played volley ball for the UCT team.



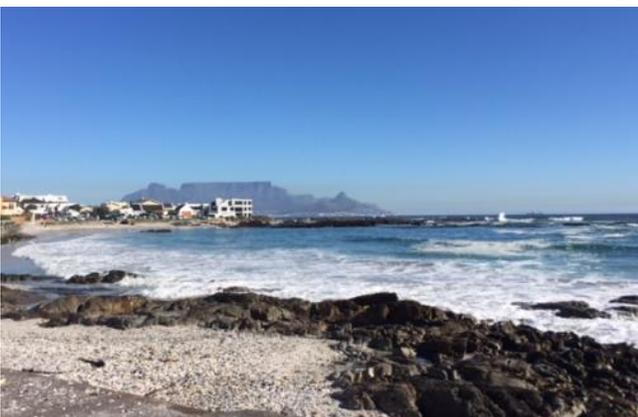
They also found time to travel frequently and widely! They went from the beautiful Cedarberg Wilderness area to the beaches of the Eastern Cape, bungee jumping on the Garden Route to the Kruger Park, Namibia, Victoria Falls and as far as Kenya and Ethiopia.



Many of them arrived with family and explored Cape Town and some are still here with family, enjoying the start of summer and exploring other parts of the country before they leave, some with surfboards and one with a mountain bike!



We believe that despite some of the difficulties along the way for some of the students, that it was a positive and enriching experience for all of them. They were a cohesive group but confident enough to move out of their comfort zones.



Annie Fergus in the following comments sums up the essence of a semester abroad, “Cape Town was the most memorable experience of my life. I learned so much about myself and even more about the world. My classes were engaging and insightful and I was able to take what I had learned in them and apply it to life in South Africa. The people I met were amongst the friendliest and most inviting I have ever met and I am fortunate to have been a part of such a history-rich community. This is the most beautiful city I have ever been to and I am lucky to have called it home for four months. I’ll definitely be back and hope to call it “home” later in life. The city is lively and inspiring. It was more than I could ever have imagined in a study abroad experience”.



In closing, we thank you for your ongoing support, for the calibre of students you send us, and we wish you a peaceful holiday season and New Year.

The IDACA Team

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