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STUDENT ENGAGEMENT FUND 2018 FINAL REPORT

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Summary of Project:

During my time abroad, I interacted with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Tanzania to gain knowledge on the roles these organizations have in the community. I was able to visit and learn from an array of NGOs operating in rural and urban communities across Tanzania. Organizations are working on different initiatives regarding the youth, women empowerment, people with disabilities, the environment, and economic development opportunities. Although each NGO I visited is targeting a different and specific goal, they are still a part of an ‘umbrella’ of developmental issues that Tanzania has and is working towards addressing. I have become better informed about the different factors and policies—domestic and international—that affect the delivery of aid services.

I spent a month interacting with local Tanzanian government and grass-roots organizations to see how they work and the obstacles they face when executing developmental services and policies. Before leaving for my trip, I was expected to read a book titled “Africa Doesn’t Matter” written by Giles Bolton which uncovers the hidden truth behind how the actions of the West impacts African countries. The publication sheds a light on the relationship between African and Western countries and its impact on aid, trade, and change as there are systems established in a globalized economy that positively and negatively influence the reduction, and elimination, of poverty in such developing nations. Both the book and my experience with the NGOs I visited has allowed me to realize how complex it is to solve poverty. It will require all three sectors (private, public, and nonprofit) to work together to address the underlying issues that developing countries face. This study abroad program had two learning sections: an independent study course and an interactive consulting component.

This second part of the course enabled me to engage theories, strategies, and classroom objectives while working on the Safe Water Mugango project, a social enterprise started with the support of microloans provided by Tanzania Development Support- an organization started by an NIU faculty member. The social enterprise helps local women make, market, and sell their water filtration systems to local communities. Being that this developing country has water infrastructure issues, I witnessed the impact that locals face regarding unsafe drinking water. Young girls and women were seen walking miles to retrieve large liters of water- often carried on their heads. Therefore, I worked with two other NIU students, with business backgrounds, to assist the group of Tanzanian women with developing an effective financial and marketing plan to jump-start the business. My team and I were able to create marketing materials, develop an effective sales pitch, and conduct a financial evaluation to determine costs, salary, and loan repayment plan.

Objectives Accomplished:

As a first-generation student- broadening my worldview, enhancing my linguistic skills, and career- were experiences and skills I hoped to strengthen in Tanzania. The most valuable lessons I acquired during this program was gaining a new perspective of

my personal culture, values, and self-resilience. It showed me that studying abroad has equipped me with global and personal-growth knowledge. I found that I did not experience a culture shock when I arrived in Tanzania. In fact, I felt intrigued to learn more Swahili phrases and speak to the locals and was able to establish positive and friendly relationships with individuals I interacted with one-on-one. I was surprised that I was able to bond more with the locals than my study abroad peers. I truly enjoyed immersing myself in a hot-climate culture that values getting to know a person to establish trust over efficiency and time. Lastly, I discovered that children in rural regions appeared to be very independent as small boys and girls were caring for their infant siblings or were walking around selling snacks without any parental supervision.

Overall, I accomplished my plan to be the first in my family to not only complete a higher education degree, but to also be the first to study abroad. One of the challenges I faced when deciding where to study abroad was the hesitation from my parents when I informed them about Tanzania. I had to clarify the reason to study in an unfamiliar part of the world and needed to explain how this investment will allow me to gain exposure and fulfill my dream of gaining international experience. Their preconceived notions and stigmas come from not having experience traveling abroad. They were concerned about issues like communicating with me, safe traveling as a female, and funding for this journey. Culturally, for my parents who came to the U.S. from two developing Latin American countries themselves, it seemed unconventional to pursue study in another developing country such as Tanzania. Hence, I was very determined to serve as a role model to my younger sister that it is possible to embark irrespective of the hurdles of this journey. The month-long experience encouraged me to not only apply my fostered classroom knowledge, but to also encounter real-world scenarios through interactive and service learning projects.

Impact on Academic Experience:

This Tanzanian experience has enriched my education as I have communicated effectively with locals by learning to speak Swahili via the intensive 2-week training program while overseas. By learning a third language, it has encouraged me to step out of my comfort zone. What is more, Swahili is the third most common language in Africa, yet it is still considered a critical language internationally. In fact, there is a surging demand for Swahili-proficient Americans to help facilitate relationships between different countries. Therefore, I was pleased to have taken Swahili-speaking classes from a native speaker as I plan to work for an international foundation where I can implement what I learned during my time at Northern Illinois University. In addition, I was able to pursue my studies in a diverse land as Tanzania, with its rich culture and language, which will transfer international knowledge that most employers and graduate schools seek in public administration and nonprofit students and professionals. This study abroad program offered me six (6) credit hours in Public Administration (PA) and NGO studies. One class (PSPA 328) was taken as an Honors course, which enables me to graduate with Full University Honors (27 credits+) in August 2018. I plan to attend graduate school to

begin my master's in PA program starting in August 2019, with the intent of working as a Program Officer for an international foundation or organization.

My perspective for my future remains the same after learning how NGOs operate in developing nations. I still want to work for an international foundation where I can use data to demonstrate how the public can help long-term. However, the ways in which I will continue to help communities in developing countries have changed as I will not participate in traditional charity aid but will become an educated consumer and vote with my dollar. In addition, I plan to inform my family and friends about microfinance, fair-trade companies, and sustainable social organizations that are working in developing communities, so we can support such efforts. After this experience, I can say that I was naive to think that international development offers a strong solution to most developmental issues. The nonprofit sector cannot manage to find a solution to the world's developmental dilemmas. It is about strong and sustainable partnerships with the private and public sector as they are all interrelated. I am now, more than ever, curious to explore other regions of the world and begin to work for an organization that is measuring their outputs and outcomes, so they can target the sustainable development goals they want to achieve.

Visual Memories:

Ultimately, my goal was to demonstrate that one can study abroad with little to no out-of-pocket costs through hard work and dedicated scholarship pursuance. The Student Engagement Fund granted met the opportunity to bridge the gap between my financial limitations, and my professional and academic goals of studying abroad. For this reason, I am forever grateful to the resources Northern Illinois University has offered me.





"The journey of a thousand miles begins with one step." - Lao Tzu