

Application to an SIT program in South Africa

Note: While the prompts have been updated, the essays should still help you develop ideas for how you want to approach your plan.

Connection to Studies

How will the study abroad you propose build on your education to date as well as connect to your education when you return to campus and your post-Beloit endeavors?

I am currently a Health and Society major, with a high degree of interest in furthering my post graduate education in the area of public health, nursing, social work or a combination of these disciplines. I believe the study abroad experience in Durban, South Africa will both build upon my education, to date, as well as connect to my continued education as I round out my experience at Beloit.

I specifically chose Beloit College because of the opportunities available through the study abroad program. On my visit to the Beloit campus, prior to my freshmen year, I had the opportunity to hear from two students who had recently returned from their study abroad. I left that visit full of excitement, as well as certainty about this college being the one in which I wanted to engage for the next four years.

Now, three years later, I believe that I have found the perfect study abroad opportunity that will broaden my perspective about my chosen field of study, as well as introduce me to a culture and people that are very different than myself. Specifically, the study abroad experience in South Africa would build upon my current level of knowledge and interests in the area women's health, poverty, and the conditions that create health disparities for varying populations. I have taken a broad range of courses, as well as been involved in student activities, that have provided a strong foundation of knowledge that directly relates to each of these issues. First, I am currently enrolled in a class called Health, Medical Care & Society. This class addresses the health care policy issues that are affecting the American people and provides an understanding of who gets access to health care and the reasoning behind it. The course highlights the health care disparities that exist, based upon an individual's race or socioeconomic background. While this class has allowed me to learn about the health care policies within the United States, I clearly will be able to utilize this information to compare and contrast the American health care system with that of South Africa. Second, I am also enrolled in a course called Emerging Diseases. This course looks at diseases in the form of spillovers, which are diseases that are transmitted from an animal to a human and have plagued certain countries as an epidemic. It also looks at the environmental, social and biological factors that help explain the emergence of new diseases. Several of the epidemics we have learned about, such as Ebola, malaria, and HIV/AIDS have occurred in various parts of Africa. Specifically, South Africa has the largest population of individuals in Africa infected with HIV/AIDS. Africa is home to millions of people and thousands of different animals making it a perfect area for the establishment of epidemics. The information I have attained from this class will provide a foundation for understanding the impact of disease and epidemics on the health status of individuals living in South Africa. The Emerging Diseases course will also help me understand

other illnesses affecting South Africans, through learning how an illness is transmitted, how it affects the body and what preventive measures are necessary. The third course I am taking is Social Statistics. I have learned how to study quantitative data through this class. During my study abroad experience, I will have to interpret lots of different statistical charts and be able to fully understand the information provided. This will allow me to fully understand what's going on with the health of the South Africans. Finally, I am actively involved in a Beloit club called ONE, which is a national campaign that advocates for people to take action to end extreme poverty and preventable diseases - specifically in Africa. We try to raise awareness to fight AIDS and increase investments in agriculture and nutrition, with the help of political leaders from the US and countries in Africa. In fact, we have hosted several events to educate people on the Beloit College campus about the issues affecting Africa.

I strongly believe that after returning from a study abroad experience in Durban, South Africa, I will have a much more informed understanding of the health care needs and challenges of very vulnerable populations, as well as a clearer vision of where I would like to direct my continued studies and education. The knowledge obtained through firsthand experience within a community health organization in Durban, or through participation in a practicum based research project will help to broaden my lens of understanding and add a deeper perspective to issues and ideas that I will be studying through my final semester at Beloit and beyond.

Program and Goals

A. State three to five things you hope to learn abroad. B. How will your choice of university/program and location help you achieve your goals? C. How might differences in educational philosophy and/or delivery affect your ability to achieve your goals?

The program I have chosen as my study abroad location is the SIT: South Africa Community Health and Social Policy. This program examines the health problems affecting South Africans at the community level and looks at what work is being done to address these issues. A few of the key program focus areas include looking at the relationship between traditional healing and modern medicine, exploring issues of access to health and prenatal care, understanding health education needs, and becoming familiar with the broader based health care policies of the country and how they impact the population. While each of these focus areas is of great interest to me, I have a particular interest around issues related to public health education of women and girls. I am interested in exploring what types of public health education programs are available that address issues of health care prevention, such as HIV or cervical cancer. I am also interested in health care education, as it relates to gender based violence. Some of the questions that I have an interest in exploring, include: What are the prevalence rates of HIV and cervical cancer for women within South Africa? What is the prevalence of gender based violence? What education programs exist that are attempting to combat these issues and what impact are they having? What are the factors that interfere with accessing necessary public health education?

The SIT South Africa program will provide me with experiential opportunities that hopefully will lead to increased understanding and knowledge in a few critical

areas. First, I am excited about having the opportunity to stay with host families of varying socioeconomic backgrounds. Some will be middle class, while others will be of lower socioeconomic status. I believe that this will allow me to become more knowledgeable about the culture, economic structure, and impact of class on the daily lives of South African citizens. Second, I will be able to take excursions into the rural communities where organized health care projects are being implemented to help local families. This will allow me to understand how the public health care system is working at the ground level, and explore what may or may not be working effectively. Third, I will look forward to the opportunity to speak with a diverse set of individuals that are working directly within an array of programs that are attempting to address the overall health care and social service needs of South African citizens. This will include doctors, nurses, governmental officials, local activists, and other health care providers. I will begin to understand how varying non-governmental and governmental systems are working together and have varying perspectives on how to most effectively address community needs. Learning how non-governmental and governmental policies are created will help me to establish what social factors affect the health disparities. I will also learn how the formalized health care system has drawn upon the more alternative health care practices of healers and herbalists of rural South Africa. There are still many practicing traditional healers in South Africa which a large percentage of the people rely upon.

I have spent a significant time thinking about specific outcomes that I hope to accomplish through my study abroad experience in Durban, South Africa. Some of these include:

- 1) To develop a deeper understanding of the health care disparities that exist among populations in South Africa.
- 2) To develop a deeper understanding of the barriers to health care access within the city of Durbin, South Africa.
- 3) To develop a deeper understanding of the governmental and non-governmental organizations, including their programs, which are attempting to improve health care outcomes for African citizens.
- 4) To increase my skills in the area of public health research methods and their application in an impoverished community setting.
- 5) Through my personal home-stay experience, I will become more knowledgeable about the history, customs, and people of South Africa and I will strengthen my intercultural competencies and communication skills.

While I am extremely excited about the many opportunities through this study abroad experience, I am also aware that there may be many challenges. Although I'm incredibly excited about living with a host family, I know that it may also be challenging. This is because the host families will be of varying socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds. This experience will be in contrast to my current home environment. I will have to learn how to use my resources frugally as to not be wasteful. I will also have to learn about a new culture and become comfortable living as a part of it. For example, there are 11 official languages of South Africa and each host

family may speak a different language. I will have to learn how to communicate with the locals and get around the city. There is also such a diversity of people living in South Africa that this will provide me with a different cultural outlook. It will also be interesting to understand the history and impact of apartheid on the country and its people. Although I will be facing an array of challenges through this program, I believe each will offer an opportunity for growth and an opportunity for a deeper understanding of myself, as well as the new knowledge that I will be obtaining.

Preparation for Learning Abroad

Study abroad requires background knowledge about a country. Students also need to be able to structure their time outside the classroom in productive ways. Please discuss your knowledge of the country (and what else you will do to gain more knowledge) and your plans for out-of-classroom activities while you are abroad.

Prior to submitting this application to study abroad, I have done a number of things to help me prepare for the experience. First, I have already read a great deal of available literature and on-line reading in order to gain a better understand the country and culture of South Africa, as well as Durban itself. I have become familiar with information related to the ethnic composition, the government, the economy, social and political issues, the health and social welfare needs, history of apartheid, faith and spirituality.

Second, in addition to conducting my own research, I have also thoroughly reviewed the evaluations of students who have studied through the SIT Durban, South Africa program. It appears that the majority of students have been extremely satisfied with their experience – although many have felt more positive about the experiential component, rather than their classroom experiences.

Third, I have reviewed many of the written research projects that were completed by students attending this study abroad from over the past three years. This information has given me a good sense of what types of opportunities may be available and has also stimulated some new interests for me in the area of health education.

Fourth, while I still have only a base of knowledge about this Country, I am looking forward to spending more time reading about the history and background. I am interested in reading more literature from the health care arena, such as published studies (related to health care issues in South Africa) from various health care journals. One of the key features of the SIT program is looking at the relationship between traditional healers and modern medicine, which is of interest to me as well. I look forward to rigorously exploring this concept and how it differs from the United States practice of medicine.

Fifth, although English is spoken in South Africa, during my home-stay, the family will be speaking Zulu. I will be spending time, prior to my departure, becoming familiar with this language and attempting to understand the best approach to acquiring some basic Zulu language skills.

In addition to the five items above, I also believe that I have had some relevant background and experiences that will assist me with preparing for my study abroad

experience. I was originally born in Colombia and relocated to America when I was five years old. I had to learn a new language and become familiar with a completely different culture. During this process, I lost connection to much of my native culture, including the ability to speak my native tongue (Spanish). I actually have strong memories of having to assimilate into new cultural norms that were much different than my own. For example, I learned to eat very different food and listen to very different music. I quickly became very aware of the great differences between my native home and the one which I was now experiencing. I believe this history has helped to lay a foundation that increases my ability to adapt to this study abroad experience more smoothly.

In addition to my personal experience of cultural transition, I also have had the opportunity to previously travel to Kenya, Africa. I spent time on a botanical field station that served as a research site for American academics. During my time there, I participated in field work that required me to interact with natives of Kenya. I became familiar with Kenyan culture and ate their food. I also visited a couple native tribes and learned about how their culture was different from that of natives living in Kenyan cities and towns.

I strongly believe that through both of my own personal experiences, combined with my self-initiated readings and conversations with others, I will be well as well prepared as possible for a unique and exciting study abroad experience in Durban, South Africa.

Social Identities

Social identities both shape how we see and interact with the world and how others see and interact with us. Consider how social identities, yours and others', might impact your study abroad experiences.

Social Identities are groups in which we classify ourselves. These different groups help us interact with others who may or may not have the same social identity. People with certain similarities will tend to be in the same social identity group because they all have something in common. People often feel more comfortable around others who are like themselves. Unfortunately, some social identities cause others to perceive people in a positive or negative light.

I have come to identify myself in a number of ways. Some of my personal identities include being female, Latina, and agnostic. I believe that some of these identities could potentially cause some level of challenge for me, while others could potentially help me to be received more easily in South Africa. Some of my identities, such as being female, will be easily identifiable. Others, such as my religious or political background, will remain unknown unless I choose to disclose.

As a female, I will be understanding and interpreting my study abroad experiences through the lens of gender. I have grown up female and am aware of how I am consistently needing to be cognizant of my surroundings. Within an unfamiliar setting, I likely will be experiencing a higher degree of need to assess the threat level of varying situations. I am aware that when walking in public, I may be targeted for the sheer fact that I am a female. Although South Africa is the most progressive country in all of

Africa, there are still attacks towards women every day.

Another social identity I have is that I don't affiliate myself with any religious denomination and don't believe in God. As an Agnostic, I will be a minority in South Africa whose population includes a high percentage of people who are religiously affiliated. My host family will likely be strongly faith based, perhaps Christian. I imagine that I might have some discomfort sharing my personal background if conversations took place around this issue. I have come to understand that there are many variations within the Christian faith in South Africa. I could help alleviate some of my worries through gathering more information on Christianity and engaging with other friends and faculty around issues of faith and religion prior to my trip abroad. Living in a religiously affiliated household, however, would be a new learning experience for me. I would be excited about the opportunity to learn about other people's beliefs. It will be particularly interesting if I am able to be hosted by a family who practices traditional African religions.

And finally, another social identity I embrace is that of a Latina. I am proud of my background and heritage of Colombian descent. I am a darker skinned Latina, which could create some issues for me while studying abroad. Although there is an equal number of blacks and whites in South Africa, there has been a history of racial segregation, through Apartheid. While my skin tone likely won't be perceived by others as African, it may still represent the minority of being non-white. I also come from an all-white family and if my host families or other people were to know about this, this could affect how I am perceived.

I believe that my background and experiences will have prepared me well to take full advantage of a study abroad experience in South Africa. While much will be new to me and while I know that it is impossible to completely predict every obstacle or challenge, I feel that I will have equipped myself with the necessary tools to meet those challenges head on. I am excited about having this opportunity.