

Hop Mathews

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Alpha Sigma Foundation Summer Enrichment Scholarship Final Report

As I return back to Chapel Hill and prepare for the upcoming school year, I have begun to reflect on a summer that was truly transformative. I feel as though I have already learned a great deal from my experiences, though, as I wrote in my mid-summer report, each new conversation yields new lessons. I am grateful for the time abroad that the Summer Enrichment Scholarship afforded me. I cannot wait to seek out more exciting adventures in the future and share with my fellow lodgers some of the amazing opportunities that are out there.

While each portion of my summer was fulfilling, the first two months of my summer have left a lasting impact on me as an individual and my aspirations for the future. These initial two months that I spent on the eastern side of Nairobi, introduced me to the vast array of human experience and helped expand my conception of the world around us. My primary occupation, while in Nairobi, was as a teacher at the Fortune Community Learners Center. The details and goals of this project as well as a greater context of the challenges they face are laid out in my mid-summer report. My work with the school was very enlightening in many ways, especially in regards to the role of volunteering. It can be difficult to know what to expect, when one sets off in an effort to help others and grow as an individual. In reality, it is almost impossible to know what one's personal impact will be. It can be difficult to avoid disillusionment, if one feels they are not making immediate and sustainable progress, as a volunteer. This was certainly a problem that I encountered. Ultimately, I discovered that the impact of a volunteers, at least at my project, was marginal. For instance, during my relatively short two-month stint, the school would not

have ceased operation, if I was not there. The kids would continue to try and learn and the faculty would continue to creatively fill gaps left by the insufficient teacher to pupil ratio. However, this is not meant to take away from my impact or that of the other volunteers working at the school, because a stream of volunteers is in fact necessary to keep the project afloat in the longer term. While the school does hope to achieve more long term stability, the reality of the current situation entails insufficient funds to continually provide teachers with competitive wages. Such a problem, also ties up all faculty in the class room and leaves additional administrative considerations unattended. Thus, while an individual volunteer may not 'needed' in some senses, their involvement in the larger scheme is crucial. Additionally, any fear that one is not doing enough can be dissuaded by working on more long term objectives and helping to improve the process of integration for future volunteers. Furthermore, one's impact goes far beyond day to day responsibilities. In part, because just looking at short term roles ignores the intercultural educational impacts on the individual and those they encounter, as well as fact that this is only the beginning of a relationship.

In many ways, only part of the educational value of my trip lies in the classes I taught or any other day to day activity, but more so in the humanization of people and problems so many miles away. Living in a new area, you learn much more than just the problems people face. Between new foods, new languages and customs, it always an adventure to find experience new cultures. You don't see people just lamenting certain harsh realities of their situation, but rather enjoying their life and, in many cases, working to change what they believed to be flawed. Much of my time outside of my project was spent bouncing ideas around about the future role of the school, improvements on the water system at Good Samaritans Children's Home (the orphanage

I helped out at), and broader ideas to help correct problems in the area. The people I met abroad showed me that no matter where you grow up there is vein that connects us all. I have continued to keep in touch with my friends in Nairobi, as best I can, and I do hope to return, when I can afford it myself. Beyond this, I hope to find new ways to help others or just make the world a smaller place for myself and those I that I meet.

Following my time in Kenya, I flew directly to London, where I began taking classes at the London School of Economics. The abrupt change in surroundings was a learning experience in itself. The indifference of a bustling, global city like London was quite a step away from an area where I would be greeted on the street just for being white. Similarly, my walk to class along the River Thames was much different from my walk to school along Kayole Spine Road. In terms of educational return, my courses in Environmental Economics and the Economics of European integration were fascinating. I also had the benefit of being taught by professors at the forefront of their respective research fields. It was also amazing to meet others taking the same classes from all over the world and, in the end, the people I met and the aspirations they shared often had a great deal in common with people I had spoken to in Kenya.

It can be difficult to condense the educational value of my summer into two reports, not least because the resulting lessons and relationships are still ongoing. This summer has taught me the power of planning and ambition, while also broadening my perspective on the possibilities that lay before me. I look forward to continue sharing what I learned with those around me.

Expenses

Flights: \$ 4,138

Room & Board/Fee (Nairobi): \$400

Money spent on travel, gifts and additional food: \$200

Accommodations (London): \$3560

Classes at LSE: \$5952

Money spent on travel, gifts and food: \$700