

Syracuse University | News

A Classroom of Promise

Thursday, August 15, 2013, By Kathleen Haley

SU Abroad students explore South Africa's pre- and post-apartheid educational system and develop projects to enrich academic life of young students

Aracely Hernandez G'13 had just returned to Syracuse in June after working with students in South Africa when she sent them an email to test their math skills.

She couldn't resist.

"I wrote 'I left Grahamstown at this [box type="default" size="medium"] Aracely Hernandez G'13 time and I arrived in Syracuse at this works with students in the Inkululeko program as part of an SU time. Given the time difference, Abroad course experience in South Africa. [/box] how many hours did it take me to get home?' And they wrote back to me," says Hernandez, who earned a graduate degree in childhood education. "I want to make sure I keep the dialogue going with these kids. I told them, 'You have a friend in Syracuse; I'm always thinking about you.'"

Hernandez and four fellow SU students—Ivy Green '14, Nicole Keler '15, Anqi Liu '16 and Ayania Wellington '15—traveled to South Africa for an SU Abroad course experience that had them explore the nation's socio-economic development and education in the pre- and post-apartheid eras. They were also required to develop a project that would have a lasting impact on the students in a youth empowerment program, *Inkululeko*, in Grahamstown that partners with local community-based organizations and schools for academic and leadership development.

The course, "Socio-Economic Enterprise in Post-Apartheid South Africa," was led by Timothy Eatman, a *School of Education* faculty member in the higher education department who also serves as co-director of the national consortium *Imagining America: Artists and Scholars in Public Life*, headquartered at Syracuse University.

Eatman worked closely with Jason Torreano, founder and executive director of Inkululeko and SU abroad adjunct instructor, who is based in Syracuse, and Matt Kellen, deputy director and curriculum advisor for

Inkululeko, who works at the Grahamstown site.

A life under apartheid

During the four-week course, the SU students examined the country's history and educational system, through such readings as "Kaffir Boy" by Mark Mathabane, an autobiography about growing up under apartheid.

Hernandez saw the impact of apartheid in the educational system when she and her fellow students went to observe classrooms. "There were teachers who were educated in the '90s, just as apartheid was ending," she says. "The philosophy under apartheid was that black people were created to be servants so their education was very minimal. It's no longer legal, but it still lingers."

While they were there, they came to understand even more the impact of anti-apartheid leader and first black South African President Nelson Mandela, whose precarious health has dominated the news. "Everyone sees Nelson Mandela as their hero. He's like Martin Luther King," Hernandez says.

Through his vision, apartheid was defeated, but the country still has a long way to go in transforming itself. The students observed the lingering effects of apartheid, including the stark transitions between the wealthy and poor communities.

"I noticed the separation between the blacks, the whites and the coloreds and how the past is still unspoken," says Green, a public health major. "There wasn't much pride in their history because there is much pain behind it."

A program for change

[box type="default" size="medium"] Anqi Liu, Nicole Keler, Ayania Wellington, Aracely Hernandez and Ivy Green, from left, take a break in the Inkululeko classroom. To help enrich the academic life of township youth and generate hope for a new generation, the nonprofit organization Inkululeko selects middle-school students into its enrichment program and works with them to get them through high school and the matriculation exam to enter university. [/box]

"While white South Afrikaners have a myriad of opportunities, black South Africans are less fortunate. This nonprofit is designed to target those students, not necessarily those who are smartest, but those with ambition and motivation," Eatman says.

The SU students worked with Kellen in understanding what assistance he might need for the Inkululeko academic enrichment component, which included English instruction and math and critical thinking skill

development.

“I implemented classroom management strategies to harness every single minute we had with these kids to make it effective,” Hernandez says. Those included working on transitions between different topics, a system for students to mark their own attendance and initiating community building and mental math exercises.

Critical lessons

[box type="default" size="medium"] Professor Timothy Eatman, left, and Jason Torreano, SU Abroad adjunct instructor [/box] During another part of the classroom work, Green implemented a curriculum, developed with the assistance of public health associate professor Mary Ann Middlemiss, on a critical health concern in South Africa. “A team of students from Rhodes University helped me deliver a lesson on HIV/AIDs, several preventative methods on how to remain free of the disease and how to remain safe and healthy if infected,” Green says.

Keler, Liu and Wellington built their final project around the organization’s data from applications and surveys to help refine the instruments, archive the data and be better able to identify new students for the program.

Hernandez also initiated a small classroom makeover with some new supplies. “The kids are just like sponges. They are dedicated; they just don’t have all the resources,” says Hernandez, who is working on projects back in Syracuse to bring more student teachers to South Africa, along with a school supply fundraiser.

The SU students’ efforts have helped to propel Inkululeko forward, Torreano says. “Each had a profound, positive impact on the organization,” he says. “Our Inkululeko learners will benefit a great deal from this mutually beneficial collaboration with SU Abroad.”

The experience for the SU students provides them with more choices about finding meaningful careers. “It’s an opportunity to think more broadly about the world they live in, and how the career decisions they make can have global consequences,” Eatman says.

Pictures and videos documenting the SU Abroad students’ trip will be shown during an Inkululeko fundraising event at The Redhouse Café in Syracuse, on Wednesday, Aug. 21, from 7-9 p.m. “An Evening Across Africa” will feature a wine tasting of South African wines, appetizers influenced by cultures across Africa, a silent auction of hand-crafted South African art and an African drumming performance by members of the Wacheva Cultural Arts Center.

All proceeds will benefit the youth of Grahamstown, South Africa, by providing funds for the tools and resources that Inkululeko students need to earn a quality education. For information, email andy.perrin@inkululeko.org or visit <http://www.brownpapertickets.com/event/432278>.

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