

International Experiences in Public Administration and Policy

In January 2009, a group of 12 students and two faculty members from the University of Delaware's School of Urban Affairs & Public Policy (SUAPP) traveled to Cape Town, South Africa for a two-week international study experience. The students on the trip represented diverse research interests, including public health, community development, nonprofit leadership, and environmental management. Through several meetings with prominent community leaders and research scholars, the students and faculty members were exposed to a global perspective on issues related to public administration and policy in a recently democratized nation.

Many of the scheduled meetings during the two weeks in Cape Town focused on the challenges facing communities in post-apartheid South Africa and initiatives to overcome these challenges. The SUAPP group had the opportunity to meet with Ashoka Fellow Lane Benjamin, who created a program called Community Action towards a Safer Environment (CASE) in the historically segregated township of Hanover Park, located on the outskirts of Cape Town. CASE works with adults and children of the township to try to break the cycle of violence that has plagued the community and also empowers youth through personal development initiatives. The SUAPP group met with another Ashoka Fellow, Thope Lekau, an entrepreneur who established the Kopanong Bed and Breakfast in Khayelitsha Township. Thope's alternative business model demonstrates that socially responsible entrepreneurial activities can be successful in alleviating poverty in the historically segregated communities in South Africa through involvement of the entire community.



In another meeting, the SUAPP group visited several professors at Stellenbosch University's School of Public Management and Planning. In describing their research projects, the professors provided the group with an international perspective on public administration. The SUAPP group also stayed at the Sustainability Institute, associated with Stellenbosch University, where they learned about research initiatives involving sustainable communities, agriculture, and the environment. Other experiences in South Africa included a tour of the Green Point Stadium, which will be used for the World Cup in 2010; a visit to the District Six Museum, which memorializes a once vibrant and racially mixed community that was destroyed during apartheid; a tour of Robben Island, the site of the former prison where Nelson Mandela and other political dissidents were imprisoned; and a visit with the Institute for Democracy in South Africa (Idasa), a group that strives to educate citizens and encourage active participation in democratic processes throughout South Africa.

The SUAPP group, of course, had plenty of opportunities for sightseeing and was able to make time to tour the beautiful surrounding landscape, where they visited several of the region's vineyards and the famous African Penguins at Boulder's Beach.

The SUAPP study trip to Cape Town proved to be a profound learning experience for students and faculty members alike. The trip provided the group with a greater awareness of community-development initiatives and public policy challenges within a recently democratized nation. Many of the experiences will undoubtedly

impact the future academic work of many members of the group and will likely result in future collaborations among the SUAPP community with several South African organizations and leaders.

—by Erika Farris