Playing catch-up.

June 30, 2014 By mezaram15

To start off, I would like to thank the Moreau Center for Service & Leadership and the Pamplin School of Business Administration at University of Portland, and the Foundation for Sustainable Development for providing me with this incredible opportunity—the East Africa Initiative Internship.

Writing my first blog entry is exciting for many reasons: 1) I have never written a blog before; 2) I am in Africa for the very first time; 3) This is my first official internship; and 4) There is so much African culture I wish to share with my friends and family back in Oregon as well as around the world!!! I hope anyone and everyone who reads it finds it entertaining. :) I encourage comments, questions, and general advice.

Okay, so here I go. I have already been in Kenya for two full weeks. My access to Internet has been very limited, however, which is why it has taken me this long to even begin posting anything. Fortunately for me, the other three UP interns (Shashana Packus, Jaclyn Sisto, and Dillon Zang) have already posted good stuff for me to go off of. :D Although they already wrote about our first week, orientation, I still want to start off chronologically for my blog’s sake. Today will be about that first week and hopefully tomorrow I can give an overview of last week, our second week in Kenya.

Note: I did not have time to buy a camera before I came so I purchased one the day after I arrived in Kakamega. It’s a Nikon something; pretty nice, apparently. I don’t know cameras, but I like the quality of the pictures so far. I hope you enjoy them, too!

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For all those who know me and my traveling tendencies, you know I absolutely love to pack last minute. This trip was no different. On Wednesday, June 11, 2014, I finished packing at 1pm. Then my good friend Ty Woods drove me up from Portland to Seattle to catch my flight by 5:45pm. We were cutting it short, but that didn’t stop us from jammin’ out to 90’s rap. As I waited at the gate, I ran into Jaclyn. I knew we were both flying Emirates, but I did not know we had bought the exact same route. It was really nice to see a familiar face even though we did not sit anywhere near each other in the airplane. The flight to Dubai was approx. 15 hours. I watched 6 new releases. Who needs to go to movie theaters when you can just fly, right? From Dubai to Nairobi it was approx. 5 hours and I watched another movie, an episode of Supernatural, and listened to music.

So, Dubai: unbelievably awesome, but ridiculously hot and sticky. And we were there at night! *How do you do it, Fahad? :D Jaclyn and I stayed overnight at a hotel because our layover was 15 hours. The airport is huge and we were inefficiently directed so it literally took us 2 hours to get out. We checked in to the hotel and got ready to go out for dinner at 10:30pm. The receptionist recommended a bar that apparently has good food. Turned out, that bar was hosting the opening game of the World Cup! Hundreds of people were there celebrating. We didn’t find
any food, unfortunately. At midnight, Jaclyn and I walked on the Marina and placed our feet in the Persian Gulf. :) An hour later, we headed back to the hotel because we had to be up by 6am.

Note: At this point I didn’t have a good camera, so my pictures of the buildings at night didn’t turn out so well. I hope to get better ones on my return flight. Stay tuned.

In the Nairobi airport, we ran into 10 of the 12 Duke interns also working with us and FSD. We didn’t officially meet them until after we flew from Nairobi to Kisumu where we were welcomed by Peter, the Kakamega Site Team director. In Kisumu, all 16 interns met and boarded a minibus that was not made to carry 19 persons (interns, director, driver, and a helper) plus luggage. Yet, that is exactly what it did. Very snuggled, the drive from Kisumu to Kakamega was two hours and very bumpy. We arrived at Sheywe Guest House around 9pm, got assigned rooms, and ate dinner. By then, it was Friday, June 13. After traveling for more than 40 hours, feeling exhausted was an understatement.

Note: My roommate was the beautiful Zarah Udwadia. She is a sophomore at Duke University, originally from India. I was so thankful to get along well with her. *Hakuna matata, my dear roommie(s), aka, Clare and Paige. There is still a special place in my heart for you two. ;)

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I think this first blog post ended up being a “pre-arrival” kind of reflection instead, but since I don’t want to exhaust my readers, I will stop here today and actually begin writing about orientation tomorrow. This means the following day I will write about the move into my host family’s house and my first week working for Support Activities In Poverty Eradication & Health, better known as SAIPEH.

Happy Monday to all!
-Eloiza

Filed Under: East Africa Internship

Orientation Overview

July 1, 2014 By mezarami15

If you are reading this it means my first post appealed to you in some way. Way to go me! haha

Orientation basically consisted of five components: Kiswahili [Ki=language, Swahili=people of Kenya] lessons, sessions on how to implement sustainable development & other FSD expectations, introduction to Kenyan culture (food and customs), introduction to Kakamega Town, and getting to know one another.

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Day 1 in Kenya went a little something like this, as written on our Orientation Itinerary:

- 8am breakfast
- 09:30 Introductions to FSD Site Team and roles
- 10:00 Professional Standards
- 11:00 Safety and Security
- 12:30 Lunch
- 14:00 Break/Nakumatt for supplies
- 15:30 Everyone to share why they chose to come to Kakamega
- 17:00 Rest/free time
- 19:00 Dinner and Discussion: What we hope to accomplish this summer

Actuality:
Both lunch and dinner were served on “Kenyan time,” as were most of our meals the entire week. Kenyan time means anywhere between the specified time and the following two hours. I was so thankful I packed 10 power bars, 20 fruit snacks, a bag of mini Kit Kats, some Pringles, and bags of Hot Cheetos, Turbos, Tapatio Doritos, and *spicy tubes. lol The chips were the first to go because most Kenyan food has little to no flavor, in my opinion. I don’t mean to sound high maintenance, but my Mexican taste buds are used to plenty of flavor and I was in vital need of spice in my life that first week. I’m slowing getting used to the food at home, but I may need to be re-supplied. ;)

Nakumatt is a supermarket. Other major supermarkets in Kakamega are Mama Watoto, Tuskies, and Yakomatt. We went there for bottled water because it’s cheaper than at the hotel/restaurant. Other things we went to purchase were local phones + SIM card and Internet Modems + SIM card. We were also able to withdraw cash from the ATMs. There were multiple ones and I think only certain ATMs take certain cards because I had to try more than once for my Visa to work. In addition to buying necessities, supermarkets are used to get change. ATMs and banks generally give large bills so in order to get smaller ones you buy something and ask the cashier for “small change.” This comes in handy later on.

Note: Nakumatt is where I decided to purchase my Nikon camera, in the spur of the moment. I didn’t even bother taking the box; I simply walked right out using it and since the man selling it to me was very nice I decided to take my first picture with him. :D

Here is “why I chose to come to Kakamega”:
First and foremost, the main reason why I am here is because I switched majors this year. I am still concentrating in accounting but I am not majoring in it anymore. If I were, I would have fought for an internship in Portland with a good accounting firm. As it remains, I am a global business major now considering different paths after university. During my service and learning immersion to Nicaragua in May I began to seriously consider applying to the Peace Corps. Another idea was looking into Foreign Service, i.e. working for an embassy. This brings me to the other major reason I chose to come to Kakamega. I wanted to see if I could handle working abroad. I have studied and traveled abroad many times, but working is something totally different. Down the road, I still want to be a certified public accountant. However, my personality pushes me to consider a different path than most CPAs. I love to dance and travel and
eat. I want to LIVE a little more, before I settle down and devote my life to the job. Potential employers, is this something I should not admit to? Be honest. Everyone else, what are your thoughts? Do you think I’m delusional? I may day dream a little too much, but I believe life is what you make of it and I want to make the most of it while I’m alive and well.

Moving on…

We didn’t get to the evening discussion. It was late and people were tired.

Day 2:
Kiswahili lessons began officially. Our professor actually had experience teaching Peace Corps volunteers, which I thought was pretty neat. Afterwards, we had a mini tour of Kakamega Town. We really only walked to the Golf Hotel for lunch. Not much was seen since the walk there was one and a half streets long, though it was a good 30-minute walk. Between lunch and dinner we had sessions on Kenyan Culture, Local Community Orientation, Transportation, and Host Family Integration. Most nights were entertained by the World Cup. A TV would be set up in the open area below the restaurant and all guests were welcome to sit and watch. I can’t remember which teams played each day, but it was fun watching some of the games with the locals.

Note: I don’t know if it was only at the Golf Hotel or if all burgers in Kenya are weird, but I was excited to order a cheeseburger with fries. To my disappointment, my beef burger tasted more like a mushy vegetarian burger though I’ve never had a vegetarian burger. All I know is it tasted more like vegetables than meat. Instead of the fries being the side dish, they became my main course. The burger was a challenge to eat. Oh, well. Maybe it was a sign to stick to local food instead?

Day 3:
Believe it or not, I woke up at 6:30am to run. It was a short half hour run (more like jog) to the Golf Hotel and back. It felt great to be up and stretched early in the day. I had plenty of energy for most of the day, up until around 4pm when we went to Safaricom, the largest telecommunication company in East Africa. The first day the group was less than half successful in purchasing SIM cards so today was the day we went to the Safaricom “shop” to purchase the rest of them. (Would we say the Verizon “store” back in the States? I’m not sure.) I stood in line for more than two hours and still had to walk home. I love walking, but I was not in the mood after the long wait. Plus, with the conditions of the roads and my not-so-comfortable sandals, the way back was unpleasant. Even worse, I was very hungry as I waited in line and although dinner was scheduled for 7pm, we weren’t served until past 8pm. Let’s just say I was not a happy camper that night.

Two highlights of the day, however, were getting to know Yolanda better as we stood in line together. She is a junior at Duke, studying public policy, and Chinese. (I love the diversity in our group.) Earlier in the day, everyone got to ride bodabodas for the first time. They are essentially bike taxis, quite fun and not very dangerous. I loved actually being able to see the people in town. Since the roads are bad I always have to watch my steps so I’m always looking at the ground instead of at the people and other surroundings.
Note: Right before the Safaricom experience, we met with Dr. Bakunda for some general health tips. He said:
1. Use a mosquito net at night.
2. Wear long clothing.
3. Use bug repellent.
4. Wear sunscreen.
5. Drink lots of water.
6. And if you plan to be sexually active, please have your partner tested for HIV & STIs free of charge at his clinic.

It was funny the way he said that last one so casually though he was very serious.

Day 4:
Kiswahili lessons were split in half today, half in the morning and half in the evening. Sessions this day and the day before included Needs Assessment, Asset Mapping, Culture Shock, Immersion Strategies, Designing a Work plan, and Grant Writing. Two hours were set aside in the afternoon for each of the interns to have Meet-and-Greets with the respective supervisors. Mine didn’t show up. He was busy or at a meeting.

Day 5:
Three hours of Kiswahili in the morning were a bit tedious. Thankfully for lunch we went to Mama Joyce’s home. The home is big and beautiful, equipped to host dozens of people. She has had the most experience hosting interns and it showed with the way she greeted and attended to us. The food was delicious and abundant. Most days I had been left hungry. Again, I was very thankful to have brought so many snacks. Right before dinner we had a session on Advocacy and Online Fundraising. After we assess the needs of our respective communities and organizations we come up with a goal and objectives to help address those needs and with the help of a work plan and budget we can apply for a grant from the central FSD office in San Francisco and/or fundraise online. I have yet to decide which to do. The grant proposal is due next Wednesday and I am still assessing the needs of my community and organization. :/

Day 6:
Today was our final Kiswahili lesson. In one week we completed an approx. 15-hour crash course. The rest of the morning was a scavenger hunt challenge. There were four 4-person teams. The challenge: to purchase all food items on our sheet and return them to the FSD office for lunch. The prize (initially a secret): chocolate. The result: don’t remember. :D I think my team got second or third. The final sessions that evening were: Integrating into your Host Organization and Organizing your Internship.

~

Day 7 was a trip back to Kisumu. So, this is where I take a break. Come back tomorrow for pictures of hippos and exotic birds!

Peace,
Eloiza
P.s. *Johnald, how’s this for a long, overdue novel? :D

Filed Under: East Africa Internship, Immersions, International

For ye nature lovers.

July 2, 2014 By mezarami15

Today’s post was going to be storytelling though photographs. However, I could not upload the pictures directly onto the blog to save my life. Sorry. Instead, I’m providing you with a link to my album on Facebook. Hope you enjoy!

https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.10202835593391399.1073741829.1248316643&type=1&l=8383b09198

Note: Yesterday, Mr. Mathews aka Rusty informed me that his team was the one who won the scavenger hunt challenge. Kudos to them!

*Mr. Mathews is, and I quote, “a ginger trying to survive out in the blistering African sun.” :D He’s also a junior, econ major at Duke.

Bis bald,

Eloiza

Filed Under: East Africa Internship, Immersions, International

First Weekend with my Host Family

July 22, 2014 By mezarami15

Needless to say that my access to Internet has been nearly impossible (yes, worse than Milton-Freewater and Salzburg, *Andrew) since my last blog post was July 4th AND I’m still trying to cover the first weekend with my host family, which was way back when, June 21st and 22nd. Yep, I’ve been living with my host family for over a month now and although I spent close to three months with one of my host families in Brazil (I miss you, *Margot e Petit), a month here has felt eternal. Life is lived much slower in Kenya so there’s time for more each day. YET, even with so much time, very little seems to get done on a daily basis.

Plenty of house work gets done: cooking meals, cleaning the house, doing laundry, taking care of livestock or crops, and of course, caring after the many kids and spouse. Office work, however,
is another story that I shall leave for another time. For now, let me finally tell you about my host family and what my first weekend with them looked like. :)

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The FSD Kakamega Site Team Director, Peter, dropped me off early Saturday morning, June 21st. Neither one of my parents were home. Instead, they had the neighbor and house girl receive me.

Note: A house girl here in Kenya is house help. My family’s house girl is named Naomi and she lives with us. Currently, though, she is out because her father is sick. She’s been gone for two weeks now, so my parents hired another temporary girl named Nancy. Anyway, Naomi wakes up before 6am and goes to bed close to midnight. (I don’t know how much she gets paid or how regularly. Usually house girls didn’t finish high school and in Kenya you cannot get an official job without a high school diploma. Official can mean working at a grocery store or even a gas station.) She is responsible for making breakfast, tea, lunch, tea again, and dinner. She does the laundry and dishes and all other household cleaning. She helps get my brothers ready for school and watches them whenever my parents are out. She was even in charge of making my bed, but I took over eventually. Whenever I tried to help clear the table I felt uncomfortable because I didn’t want my parents to think Naomi wasn’t doing her job and I didn’t want Naomi to think I wasn’t happy with her help. Her English is limited and my Swahili is basically non-existent still, so we mostly smile at each other, which is quite nice. While I’m here, she shares a room with the two boys.

After Peter explained once again the contract rules with the neighbor, he left me to settle in my room. I was welcomed and greeted so warmly by the two young ladies. Though both my host parents were out working, my host brothers were home and so precious!

My host dad got home in the afternoon, but he just said hi and let me go about my business. I think he was busy, too. My host mom got home later, close to dinner. She knocked at my door and as soon as I opened the door she gave me a huge hug. It was heartwarming, but much unexpected. They’re not usually very affectionate, which is okay.

The next day, Sunday June 22nd, we woke up early to attend Mass with the high school boys at 9am, then we attended Mass again with my host grandparents in their local Church around 10:30am. The school is Anglican and I think my host family is too. Because there are so many boys, they just gather out in one of the fields and have a preacher come in every week. The boys’ choir is quite good. On our way out to the village, we stopped by the market twice and then chatted for a bit at the house before proceeding to Mass. We were late, but that was no surprise considering how casual we went about our morning. My host parents, like all Kenyans, do not take time seriously. Let’s just say that. I was asked to introduce myself at both services right after the homily and I was told both times that I speak too fast. Haha The village church service was almost three hours and past lunch time. Around communion time, my mom walked me out to eat a snack. I felt bad, but was rather hungry so I followed.
At dinner, I was informed that my dad would be gone for the week on a business trip to Mombasa which I hear is a fabulous city on the coast. I hope to one day come back and visit it.

Note: The sweetest thing happened when he returned. He had my youngest host brother give me a gift. He had bought me fabric from Mombasa! In Kenya, fabric is sold everywhere and women have it tailored into all kinds of outfits. I made a traditional dress out of it already and plan to have many more made! Watch out for pictures of my new outfits. ;)

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My host father, Peter Yves Omutiti, is the principal of the Lubino Boys High School. It is a boys’ boarding school, so we live in the school compound. There are over 900 boys at the school…imagine driving past them as they take their meals or see them outside the house, just past the yard, doing their own laundry! It’s rather intimidating, but I’m slowly getting used to it. So, my first impression of my “dad” was that he was a very serious man. This was because before I met him there were dozens of family pictures on the walls and in only about one was anybody smiling. Later, I realized Kenyans don’t smile in pictures, no matter how happy and smiling they are right before. Thankfully, he is not serious in the least bit. Haha He is a very social man, who loves to dance and go out with his buddies whenever possible. My host brothers definitely got the dancing jeans from him! He also enjoys traveling, whether it is half an hour away to his parent’s village or to the Philippines for work. I think he was just as excited as I was that first Sunday when we went around getting to know the area. :D He’s actually been the one encouraging me to explore this country! It’s refreshing because I’m usually told not to since security here is a bit sketchy. Thus far, I have not felt unsafe, js.

My host mother, Jacklyn Wembani, is a police woman who commutes to Kakamega every day. Police officers can live in the police compounds but she didn’t want to live away from her husband and children, naturally. She is fabulous! And she and Shashana are the ones I’ve been consulting for fashion advice. Shashana and I have come to love the tailoring and second-hand business in Kenya! Haha We either buy clothes for KSH50/- (a.k.a. 50 Kenyan shillings which is equivalent to 70 cents) or purchase beautiful fabrics and take them to a tailor. I have inherited my mother’s personal tailor. Haha One weird thing is that my mother is pregnant and I was never told. Obviously, it was not something I would ever ask, so I assumed not. Multiple people asked me if she was and I did not know how to answer. Apparently, women in Kenya do not broadcast their pregnancies; they simply wait for the baby to be born and then everyone finds out. I find that weird. She finally made a comment about it this weekend, though, which was good to hear confirmation from her.

Note: Unlike other interns, I have not experienced too much of gender roles while in Kenya because my father treats my mother fairly. I am very thankful for this. Although, male dominance is predominant across Kenya, it would be very hard for me to live with it every day. If you’re interested in knowing more about gender roles and how to handle it, talk to Shashana. Unfortunately, she has experienced it in many different situations and it’s been hard. Anyhow, it is partly because my host mom is a working woman who does not have to depend on a man for money and partly because my father is a great man that I live in a well-balanced home.
I have two very adorable host brothers. Enos is 5 years old and Joshua is 6 years old. They actually have the exact same birthday, July 12, which is super cool. I got to celebrate their birthdays and it was an honor. They are very intelligent, so playful, and as respectful as any 5- & 6-year-old could be. *Tela, Luli, Madga, Ale, and Yoyo, try making your little munchkins play with a tire or just sticks and string for hours! lol Sometimes I play soccer with them after work and sometimes I dance with them during/after dinner. :D After play time, they are good about respecting my space if I feel the need to retreat to my room. I love it. One thing I still haven’t understood is why they are both in the same nursery class. Nursery is pre-school, I think.

Note: My parents hired a piki piki driver they trust to drive me to and from work. Richard, my personal motorbike driver, picks me up every day at 7:45am to take me to work, at 1pm to take me home for lunch, at 1:45pm to take me back to work, and at 5pm to take me home. I also have his number in case I ever need a ride other times on the weekend. It’s so much fun to have my own driver, especially when it gets close to rain-time (again, another story for another day) or when it’s a beautiful day and I get to have my hair flowing in the wind. It’s also very convenient for whenever I’m exhausted, which unfortunately has been more frequent than it should be.

Filed Under: East Africa Internship, Immersions, International

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**Shower by Bucket**

July 22, 2014 By mezarami15

I was very proud of myself for mastering the art of a “bucket shower” on my very first attempt. lol It is literally taking a shower with a bucket. There are three large buckets. One filled with boiling water, one with cold water, and an empty one to mix the two. To get the perfect temperature, you must mix four pints of hot water, and six of the cold water. There’s a small pint-size jug to use to pour the water on you. I pour one to two half-pints on my head before applying the shampoo. After lathering and rinsing with two more half-pints, my body is wet enough to wash with soap. Then I rinse again with the remaining water. It takes about 20 minutes because I have to make sure the curtain is closed, my towel hangs on a clean area, mix the water, and slowly wash my hair. Even with these extra obstacles, I shower in less time than I do at home! My real parents would be surprised but very proud, I think. *Chuya, be sure to tell my mom and dad. :D Also, the shower room is not a bathroom, so there’s no room to change. It’s just a room with buckets of water.

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