Program: UW Agriculture, Health, and Nutrition in Uganda, Winter

Lauren's Major: Gender and Women's Studies

Academic Life: Our group participated in a one-credit class in the fall before our program. I thought that this classroom experience prior to going abroad was extremely helpful because we were able to get an introduction to the country, and learn from professors, doctors, and researchers about some of the complex issues in Uganda, whether they be historical, political, environmental, or health based. In Uganda, all of our learning was done “in the field.” We met with doctors, midwives, traditional healers, bureaucrats, students, farmers, community health care workers, and a number of other Ugandans who invited us into their work spaces and homes to help us understand their work and how they are attempting to address health in Uganda. I couldn’t have asked for a better learning experience or more exciting lineup of mentors.

Lauren's Most Memorable Experience: One of the things that I will always remember from my program is sitting in the home of a traditional birth attendant in Uganda. She didn't speak English, so some team members helped to translate the birth attendant's stories and answers to our questions. Towards the end of our visit she asked about birth culture in the United States, and my group all looked to me as the spokesperson for the topic and our country. It was such a humbling moment, and it made me so proud to be able to share my knowledge and training experience surrounding birth with the group. I was thankful to the people translating who helped me hold a conversation and share the similarities and differences between our countries. At the end I was able to thank her in her own language and non-verbally express gratitude for the work that each of us does with birthing women.

What Lauren Learned About Herself: I learned that I can be patient and relax. I am usually the person that is half an hour early to everything, lives by my clock, and is always multitasking and thinking about what I have to do next before my current tasks are even done. I feel that being on this program helped me to understand what it meant to be in the present. I realize that there are a number of things to do all the time, but being able to step back to evaluate what is important at a given moment and fully experience each moment has been something that I hope to carry with me as I readjust back to school and American culture.

“I fell in love with Uganda as a country, but it was the people and their spirit and openness to us as students that made me feel that Uganda was a second home.”

Lauren standing at the source of the Nile river in Jinja, Uganda.