ELLIE ANDERSON

Program: University of Cape Town Exchange, Calendar Year

Ellie’s Majors: Environmental Sciences; Global Health

Academic Life: The University of Cape Town (UCT) is a research university like UW. Class sizes were smaller than the ones I have taken in Madison, and my classmates were mostly South African students. My lecturers were diverse and personable. During my year at UCT, I took math, biology, environmental and geographical sciences, and psychology. I found the workload to be similar to UW’s. My biology course ran a field camp during the vac (mid-semester break), where I was able to spend a few days doing a research project with one of my lecturers in West Coast National Park.

A Unique Experience: A few major protests took place while I studied at UCT: student accommodation, #RapeAtUCT and #FeesMustFall. Living and studying in Cape Town during such a crucial period helped me to understand protest and the violence that sometimes comes with it. It taught me to see the intersectionality of every situation and system, and provided me with an understanding of race, class, gender and privilege in the South African context. The protests showed me the personal side of political, and gave me the opportunity to ask questions, listen, and consolidate viewpoints in order to develop my own. Beyond that, in analyzing South African politics and inequalities, I was able to see the U.S. parallels.

Advice for Future Students: Cape Town is rated one of the best tourist cities in the world, so it is easy to jump from Table Mountain and Boulder Beach (read: penguins) to coffee shops and surf spots. These are each real, valuable components of Cape Town, but can make it easy to miss some of the city’s important lessons. Cape Town is one of the most politically active places I have been. It is also characterized by a painful history and dramatic inequality. If you choose to study there, be ready to think critically, analyze your privilege, ask questions, and most importantly, listen.

“Cape Town is absolutely my home. It’s something you realize in small moments and routines.”