

University of Dayton

eCommons

Proceedings: 2022 Global Voices on the
University of Dayton Campus

Alumni Chair in Humanities

3-5-2022

Student Perspectives of Global Engagement

Christopher Agnew

University of Dayton, cagnew1@udayton.edu

Jayme Shackleford

University of Dayton, shacklefordj1@udayton.edu

Khensani Ngwenya

Sinclair Community College

Follow this and additional works at: https://ecommons.udayton.edu/global_voices_5



Part of the [Higher Education Commons](#), [Race and Ethnicity Commons](#), and the [Race, Ethnicity and Post-Colonial Studies Commons](#)

eCommons Citation

Agnew, Christopher; Shackleford, Jayme; and Ngwenya, Khensani, "Student Perspectives of Global Engagement" (2022). *Proceedings: 2022 Global Voices on the University of Dayton Campus*. 8.
https://ecommons.udayton.edu/global_voices_5/8

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Alumni Chair in Humanities at eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Proceedings: 2022 Global Voices on the University of Dayton Campus by an authorized administrator of eCommons. For more information, please contact mschlangen1@udayton.edu, ecommons@udayton.edu.

Student Perspectives of Global Engagement

*Introduction by Christopher Agnew;
panelists: Jayme Shackleford, Khensani Ngwenya*

Since 2017, the UD Global Voices Symposium has served our community by presenting stimulating programs on global awareness and global engagement. This year the symposium proudly presents “Africa in Our Century,” examining the growing importance of this continent for our present and our future.

I happily welcome you all to this student session, titled Perspectives on Global Education and Impact. In this session, we bring students together from the wider Dayton community to discuss their views on global education and their study abroad experiences, and to suggest ways in which we might enhance global awareness on campus and the larger community.

My name is Chris Agnew, and I serve as the chair of the history department at the University of Dayton; before that I was the director of the International Studies program. This session’s focus is of particular interest to me for both personal and professional reasons. Professionally, in my time as the director of the International Studies program, I saw firsthand how study abroad and global learning transformed the attitudes and outlooks of the students I advised. International Studies majors were



Christopher Agnew

required to have some form of global experience to graduate, and I witnessed how these experiences changed students' identities, interests, and awareness about their place in the world.

On a personal level, this session resonates because I remember my own experiences, and how study abroad sent me down the path that brings me here. Like the students you will hear from today, when I was a college student in 1996 I studied abroad. I spent a semester studying in Beijing, the capital of the Peoples Republic of China. The experience was transformative on many levels, but it was full of contradictions as well. On the one hand, I witnessed conditions of poverty that I had never experienced. China was developing quickly, but this was the era when the principal form of transportation was still the bicycle, not the car. At the same time, coming from a small town myself, I also experienced for the first time in China what I might describe as urban modernity. I took my first taxi in Beijing, rode my first public bus, took my first subway ride, went to my first disco, and saw my first police beating. And it was within this mess of contradiction that I began to reflect on myself and my own country for the first time. That is, it was only in China that I became one of the “Americans”—an identity that never really mattered to me before.

Today we are going to hear from students with global experiences of their own. As we listen to their stories, I would like for us to think not only about how these experiences changed their perspectives, but also about what this means about how we all should act to change the communities in which we live and work.

The speakers for this session are Jayme Shackleford and Khensani Ngwenya. I have asked each panelist to prepare a short presentation or talk. We will proceed with each in turn and then follow up with questions.

Jayme Shackleford

My name is Jayme Shackleford. I am a 37-year old mother of three vibrant children. I transferred from Sinclair Community College, and I am now a full-time student here at UD, a junior on the pre-med pathway.

My Traveling Experiences: I did study abroad in Africa, but first I want to give you an overview of my traveling experiences and how they shaped my life. I grew up in the very small town of Rochester, Indiana. I

barely had any experiences with anyone who was not a white Christian conservative farmer until I started traveling with my youth group on



Jayme Shackelford

various mission trips in the U.S. (California, Kentucky, Tennessee, and Chicago). Then I graduated from high school, and when I was seventeen, I went to ministry school in Charlotte, North Carolina, where I completed my Associates Degree in Christian Ministry. After graduation, I went on a trip to Denmark, Sweden, and Norway, speaking to churches and helping to support their communities, and I did the same with churches in Alabama and Georgia. At that point, my traveling for the sake

of ministry died down, and I started my family. That's when I began to travel for the fun of it! I have been able to visit about half of the states here in the U.S. and I have been on cruises to the Bahamas a few times.

My Experience in Africa: None of these experiences could compare to my study abroad trip to South Africa. I have always had a heart for serving others. It was a driving force in my life when I was young, and it has become that again at this stage of my life. It all happened when I was twelve years old, and I received a piece of mail that set me on a path that I wouldn't understand the full impact of until 2018. The pamphlet was from Samaritan's Purse, and there were pictures of sad children with extended bellies. It said "Support Africa" in big bold red letters. Everything in me wanted to help those children feel better. I don't think that sort of advertisement is necessarily appropriate, but I was consumed with the idea of living in Africa and supporting communities with healthcare, so much so that I started having very vivid dreams about living that life. Now back to 2018: I was realizing during that period of my life that I wasn't actually happy, and after some very honest grappling with myself, I decided to go back to school in the summer of 2018 to take a stab at fulfilling my lifelong dream of becoming a physician. My goal is to practice humanitarian medicine in Africa. I knew I had much to learn before I would be able to practice as a physician, but at that point I didn't understand how much I still didn't know about myself. A year later, in June 2019, is when I had the privilege of studying abroad for three weeks in Durban, South Africa,

through Sinclair Community College. It was by far the most significant and life-changing trip I have ever taken. After 25 hours of traveling by cars and planes, I stepped out of the airport into the earthy dense air of Durban, South Africa, and I felt like I was home. I actually started tearing up, because in that moment, I knew that anything I set my heart to accomplish could be accomplished. The trip became a spiritual sojourn for me. The way I thought about myself as small and incapable of causing a real positive impact for others instantly changed in my mind. My brain had evidence now that what I wanted to accomplish in my life was a literal possibility. The trip would unfold into many experiences that felt spiritual. I was able to stand in the spot where Nelson Mandela cast his first vote. I remember lying on my living room floor when I was nine years old, listening to the news report about Mandela's vote. Africa has taught us that every voice matters and deserves the space to speak. I had the privilege of walking through Gandhi's home and seeing the printing press that they funded to help educate people in their communities. The amount of love, sacrifice, and a pure stand for justice was tangible in that building. I learned their history, and it became my own. Their acts of love shaped who I wanted to be as a doctor and as a human. Another spiritual moment: We went to a Hare Krishna temple, and a monk spoke with us for a long time. He talked about ascension and how greater conscientiousness comes when we have peace. Then I was very privileged to join my host family in their home bible study, and it was pretty much like being at my home church. On the plane ride home from Durban to Dubai, I sat next to a woman who didn't speak a lick of English, and I couldn't tell if she was speaking Nepali (Neh-puh-li), Maithili (My thi lee), or something else. Not that it would have mattered, because I can't speak either one! She was the kindest woman, and I helped her connect her headphones and get the language setting correct. The gentleman on the other side of me was also very kind. He was a Muslim on a pilgrimage with his wife. He asked me how I knew the woman next to me and when I told him that I didn't know her from Eve he was shocked because she and I had such an obvious connection. We were very comfortable with each other, even with barely being able to understand one another. The man began to tell me all about his pilgrimage. He had saved and saved his whole life to be able to go with his wife. He said something to me that I will never forget. "Unless

we see people as good, then they will never be good.” As simple as that statement is, it’s also very profound. It’s a call to be responsible for each other.

The Impact on My Education

From then on, my educational goals were no longer goals. They had become solidified destinations. It was like the difference between imagining that I was going to the grocery store versus going to Never Never Land, as cliché as that may be. My trip fostered this great sense of my own shortcomings in knowledge and understanding. I realized that even if I were very wealthy at that time, I still wouldn’t have had the slightest idea how I could help make things better. I realized that I didn’t actually have factual data to back up this belief in my head that Africa has it so much worse than we do here in America. My study abroad experience put into perspective for me how large the need is in some areas of Africa and how similar those needs are here in America. The solution must be very sophisticated. As we know in our own systems, it can be rather tricky finding viable options that support individuals under the poverty level. From what little research I have done, it seems that the solutions that come from within a population and can be sustained by that same population are longer lasting and more stable. Our goal must be to work with and not for the people. I believe this will also be beneficial for our own society, because if we find people who care a whole awful lot, we can share our ideas with other nations and support each other when possible. The more we know each other, the less misrepresentation will occur, and the more honest our problem solving can be. Study abroad trips for students are relative to growth and development because they challenge all that the students think they know about cultures that are different from their own. Another phenomenon occurs during student trips, and that is the students become related to the people in the host community and vice versa. I believe this to be key in creating viable long-term solutions for areas globally that are below the poverty line or that are not thriving. Relatedness grows trust and understanding, which can help stave off paternalism. Then, when students come home to their own communities, they have new perspectives and see themselves as the ones who have the responsibility

to create solutions for local problems. I think that is what Socrates meant when he said, "Let him who would move the world, first move himself."

Why It Matters

I have always had a heart for serving others in other countries. I think that when I was young, this idea was misguided and came from a viewpoint that I was "better off" than they were and that they needed my help. The more that I traveled, the more aware I became that what I have to offer is nothing more than what they have to offer me. It is mutually beneficial, and symbiotic in nature. When you serve others, they are serving you. One other thing that I have realized from my own personal travels is that if I am thriving, but I know someone else is not, then how can I really be thriving? I believe that a world divided will not stand, and that we must keep moving toward union and brotherhood on a global level to become stronger and more stable. As far as the theme of this year's symposium, Africa in Our Century, I think this is a very healthy place to start when we are looking for solutions. We need to ask ourselves and Africans who the people of Africa actually are and what would they consider to be their personal struggles? Let's not assume that our generations in the past understood everything about Africa. The stigmas must be broken, and I believe we can do that by finding ways to become related with Africa and her people. I believe until we set the stigmas aside, and come to the proverbial round table together as a global mankind, then we won't be able to solve our complex problems.

What Can Be Done to Bring a Greater Awareness

In my own experience, it seems a bit randomized regarding what communications from the school about studying abroad I happened to actually hear. Now that I am a junior, I am more conscientious about the importance of any communication from the school; but I remember being a freshman and just trying to survive. The best way to reach me at that stage in my education would have been to have someone come into the classroom at scheduled class times and talk about foreign study programs for less than five minutes, and if they had a flier, then I would remember to take action outside of the classroom. I also think that students are concerned with how it might affect the other courses during their

semesters. They are also concerned with how they might be able to afford it. So if those things can be addressed in the flier or the presentation, then I believe that you will create more interest. Because let's be honest, there are not too many people who would turn down a study abroad trip if it were paid for and it wasn't going to interfere with their other responsibilities.

Khensani Ngwenya

My name is Khensani Ngwenya, and before I go any further, I would like to say thank you to the organizers of this symposium for the opportunity to speak on this topic.

I would like to give a brief background history on myself. I grew up in a small town in Mpumalanga, South Africa. I later moved to a big city when I was fifteen years old. I completed my high school education in 2018 and next enrolled in a drama school; what started as simply an interest became my chosen career field. Beginning in 2021, I applied to be part of the Community College Initiative (CCI) program, which is a student exchange program to the U.S. for a year, and on the first of August 2021, I set foot in the United States of America. I started the fall semester at Sinclair Community College, and starting school made me realize that this whole journey would not only be about education, but about a change in me as well.

Coming to the US

I thought that I would just be coming to school; I honestly forgot that I was coming into another country with different cultures and lifestyle. I not only had to adapt to how school operates here, I had to adapt to a new way of life. You start picking up the accent, the way of thinking and so forth—you start changing perspectives, and as the weeks go by, you do notice a change within yourself.

School in the US

Going to college in my country doesn't necessarily mean that you're going to get the best education. Now I do not know if every community college in the United States is as amazing as Sinclair, and should they be, then most people are more fortunate than they think. I remember walking

into two of my classes and being amazed for the majority of my fall semester at the computers that serenaded every desk. This to me almost brought tears to my eyes, because I realized that if someone didn't have a laptop, they could do their work or access our eLearn shelf in class. The library is so spacious and you're allowed in anytime and any day except Sundays. One could also borrow a laptop from the library for their semester! The classroom was a space where I was encouraged to speak out and also pursue interests of my own, whereas back home, we had less interactive learning and if there was a project to do, normally the teacher would tell us what to do. Here, for my classes at least, teachers give you the outline of what the project is, what needs to be accomplished, and how to go about it, but you get creative freedom to do with it as you please most of the time, which to me has been heaven.

Adjusting to the US

I talked a bit about how coming to U.S. means adjusting. I have been fortunate enough to have been around people who do not mock my accent or try and change my pronunciation of words, unless I asked for help. But it was still frustrating to repeat things on the menu because the waiter could not really understand me the first time and did not make it any easier! But after some time you get used to the flow of things here, you get used to giving introductions and having small conversations with people. Most of all, I have seen the importance of networking, of introducing yourself even to people who are very influential, with confidence, getting used to the idea of approaching people to be your mentor or to ask for their help.

Another thing I had to adjust to was the lack of people. I do agree that the pandemic played a huge part in this, but for the longest time it was disorienting making the ten-minute walk from home to school and back again hardly seeing one single person. A funny story is that when I first came here I would buy something so small—like maybe a cup of coffee for \$10, but now, I would rather go thirsty! It took me a while to realize that though the price numbers are less than back home does not necessarily mean that they are cheaper!

In all of this, participating in global education has created a mindset shift in me. Being in the U.S. particularly has taught me essential skills

such as networking, adaptation, decision making, and being comfortable in my independence. I even have a love for volunteering now from seeing people around me care and fight for their community the way they do.

The importance of global education, I believe, is that it sets you up for a shift in mindset and perspective. It teaches new ways and helps us see the world through new eyes, see issues that might not have been as important back home, and it also creates an ease with being a global citizen.

The way that colleges can do better is to be more mindful of the international students in their schools. There are concepts we do not understand and topics we haven't had the chance to learn about.

The theme Africa in Our Century allows us to change and redefine Africa as a continent and as a people. It is a conversation that is needed to be had so a new, more accurate narrative can be told.

