

**Student Exchange Programme First Semester 2018
at the University of Missouri + St. Louis**



**Phindulo Mavhina
BSc Medical Bioscience Final Year
University of the Western Cape**

During my high school years, I eagerly wanted to further my education abroad. However, due to financial difficulties my dream couldn't come true despite gaining admission at Queens University Belfast. I then joined the UWC family in 2015. I was so delighted to be one of four undergraduate students chosen to study abroad in the year 2017/2018 after having applied for such opportunities at the International Relations Office and found corresponding/matching courses at the institution abroad.

On the 7th of January, I boarded my very first international flight to the United States of America. It was the first time leaving the South Africa in the twenty years that I have been born. When I arrived at ST Louis International Airport on the 8th of January, Miss Melanie Tucci from the International Studies and Programs (ISP) welcomed me and accompanied me to the University Meadows, where I stayed in a furnished four-bedroom apartment with two bathrooms, a living room and a kitchen. Two of the ladies I stayed with were from China and one was a local from Florissant, St. Louis.

The International Students Orientation started the following day. I was the only black African in the whole group. The orientation was very informative. Each one of us was assigned an orientation leader, who helped us with registration and settling in to residences. Moreover, the orientation leaders were available to attend to our queries even after the orientation has ended. Additionally, I signed up for MOSAIC Buddy Program before my arrival at the United States and was assigned a MOSAIC Ambassador, a final year Computer Science student Amy Seidel, who was my go to buddy whenever I needed help for the rest of the semester.

I took four compulsory 4000th level classes and one 1000th class as an elective. Of those four, one was undergraduate research which I completed in a former Harvard University post-doctoral fellow Dr. Lon Chubiz's laboratory under the supervision of one of his PhD students, Mr Srinivas Silpi Thota from India. The teaching method was very different from what I am used to, but I managed to adjust within few weeks and obtained a 3.393 GPA at the end of the semester.

On the 04th of April, I attended the International Education Day at Jefferson City with a few international students and ISP staff. The ISP office funded the whole trip, including lunch and breakfast. I learnt how laws are made in Missouri and excitedly met other international students from around the Missouri state.



Figure 1: International students from various higher education institutions across Missouri.

There were abundant activities to do outside of classroom at UMSL, including those organized by the International House, which helped me meet other international students and get to learn their cultures and how they ended up at UMSL. One of the students was Annie Jacque Mbale from Malawi. Meeting someone from Africa made me feel at home. Additionally, the International Students Organization held numerous events throughout the semester for international students.

Even though I did not have a car, getting around the city was easy as UMSL gave me a Metro Pass to use in all St. Louis' public transports. Moreover, there were shuttles that circled around the campus and transported students to the shops/malls on Fridays and Saturdays.



Figure 2: Brooklyn Bridge, New York

After the final examinations, I got a chance to travel across the country (Chicago, Pittsburgh, New York, Washington DC, Atlanta, Charlotte, and Memphis) for two weeks before boarding a plane back home.

I am grateful for the Henry Mitchell Scholarship and the University of the Western Cape for providing me with such experience. UWC paid for my VISA fees and airplane return ticket. I used the money I received from Henry Mitchell scholarship to pay for housing. As an exchange student, UMSL waived my tuition fees. Furthermore, I'd like to thank the UWC International Relations Office for the undated support right from the application process to the transfer of my credits. Whenever I needed help they were always at my disposal, especially Ms Debra Lamson, she'd always go an extra mile to make sure that I have all I needed while at US and back here. I found a mother in her. I would definitely recommend the student exchange programme to other students.