

**Faculty Seminar to South Africa:
Teaching and Research Implications**
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Introduction

I have never experienced a land of such beauty, yet such despair; such potential and hopefulness, yet such an array of challenges. South Africa is truly a land of contradictions. However, despite the many problems faced by this nation, the people encountered during my South African journey seemed determined not only to ensure the country's continued survival, but to make sure that once again, the nation would thrive. Throughout our visits to Johannesburg, Pretoria, Natal-Durban, East London, Cape Town, and Stellenbosch, I saw evidence of hope—a hope to create a *New South Africa*. This new nation would be a shining example of how by overcoming seething injustice, a new society could be created to serve as a monument to the power of the human spirit.

This report cannot do justice to the many spirits encountered during my South African journey. However, I hope to paint a picture of how this experience has stimulated my intellectual growth to include a world-wide perspective of problems and solutions, and detail how I plan to impart this knowledge, both in the academy and in the classroom.

Implications on Scholarly Work

While writing my dissertation on the issue of affirmative action in higher education, I ran across some materials on affirmative action in the South African context. Suddenly, an interest was sparked. I decided to pursue further research on this topic once I had completed my dissertation. The hope was to do a comparative study of student opinions on affirmative action in higher education. I theorized that much of the anti-affirmative action sentiment espoused by American students was at least in part due to their youth. Born in the post-Civil Rights era, these students experienced a historical disconnect from America's not so distant past of segregation. The idea was that having not witnessed or personally experienced state-perpetuated overt discrimination, American college students lacked a well-rounded perspective from which to judge the reason for affirmative action's existence, as well as its continued purpose. In contrast, I expected South African college students to not share this historical disconnect. Being much closer to the days of apartheid, I expected these students to be more aware of the deleterious effects of state-perpetuated discrimination; and thus, more accepting of corrective action. The opportunity to actually go to South Africa and learn more about this issue first hand, gave me the chance to pursue some answers, but also stimulated many more questions and perspectives worthy of further investigation.

In regards to comparing South African students to American students, visiting universities across the country provided the unique opportunity to undertake cursory tests of my theoretical assumptions. At the outset it seemed as if South African students were

much more politically astute than their American counterparts. For instance, at the University of Pretoria political parties were strong. To see several ANC members elected to a student government organization at a Historically Afrikaaner Institution was truly an amazing experience. Despite this encouraging sign, a discussion with Wilhelm Verwoerd, Professor of Philosophy of the University of Stellenbosch downplayed the importance of close proximity to state-perpetuated discrimination in shaping views on programs which seek to address the damages resulting from social injustice. Verwoerd described his discussions with white South African students in which he often had to point out that South Africa's young people need to "share responsibilities" for the injustices of the past. Even if they personally did not perpetuate these injustices, they benefited nonetheless, and as beneficiaries, they needed to take responsibility. He argued that a "historical consciousness was needed." In this way, it seemed that there were many more similarities between the perspectives of South African and American youth than I had originally anticipated. However, this revelation only increased my desire to investigate this phenomenon further.

While visiting Stellenbosch, I had the opportunity to meet with Prof. Hennie Kotze, a political scientist who has conducted several major surveys of the South African population. We discussed my idea of conducting a survey across several South African campuses surrounding the issue of affirmative action in higher education. Prof. Kotze was very receptive to the idea and indicated that he would be more than willing to serve as co-investigator on such a project. I am currently in the process of investigating different funding sources in order to bring this idea into fruition.

Actually visiting the different campuses allowed me to see that at the heart of the controversy surrounding affirmative action in higher education, as it is practiced in South Africa, is not so much the issue of student admissions, but is instead, the issue of faculty and administrative staffing. Thus, any future research to be conducted on this topic would have to include this issue as its centerpiece.

My hope is to conduct a multi-institutional study of the issue of affirmative action in South African higher education. This study would contain both quantitative and qualitative approaches including not only a multi-institutional survey, but also supplemented by campus visits, focus groups, and analyses of institutional demographic data. I hope to do more than merely chronicle the numeric desegregation of South African campuses. Instead, I would like to determine how people feel about the massive changes these institutions are undergoing. I hope to determine if there exists a link between the level of acceptance regarding change at these institutions and the quality of campus climate experienced by both students and faculty of color once they have become a part of the "*new*" South African higher education system.

Implications on Teaching

As a specialist in American politics, I frankly expected no substantial changes regarding my teaching to come as a result of this trip. However, I have found that nothing could be

further from the truth. This experience has given me new respect for the phrase “all politics is comparative.” I have come to realize that I would truly do my students a disservice to only focus on the American experience. Throughout my South African journey, I found myself making constant comparisons and contrasts between South Africa and America. It demonstrated to me poignantly the commonality of the human experience. The broader perspective that I have gained through this internal and external journey, is the essence of what I hope to impart in the classroom.

This semester I am teaching introductory level public policy courses. If I had not participated in the faculty seminar, I am sure my courses would have focused exclusively on the American experience. I have taught public policy in the past, and had been quite satisfied with the depth and breadth of the work that I covered. However, when I sat down to design my courses for this semester, I found my previous approach to be inadequate. I have now expanded my vision of an appropriate public policy course to include several comparative perspectives. For example, for our discussion of the development of the American welfare state, I have included readings that discuss the development of the European welfare state as a point of comparison. Why was America so far behind Europe, both literally and substantively, in this important aspect of public policy? How is our system different? Better? Worse? These are the types of questions I may not have asked without the experience that the South African seminar provided.

In regards to incorporating work that specifically deals with issues facing South Africa, I have included readings that discuss international inaction in regards to AIDs in South Africa as well as throughout Sub-Saharan Africa. As I see it, this is a critical health policy issue that is deserving of world-wide attention. In my course we will discuss America’s responsibility in shaping policy to address international crises. Did we drop the ball on this issue? Are we currently doing enough?

Finally, I believe this experience will allow me to create a better classroom environment for those international students who are signed up for my courses as well as for the American students who have the benefit of a living, breathing, international perspective in their midst. I hope that by the end of the semester, my international students would have not only learned as much as everyone else in the class about public policy, but also, I hope that the rest of the class would have learned as much as possible from our international students. How do our countries differ in addressing similar policy concerns? On the first day of class a student from Germany told of her experiences regarding the ease and convenience of the German health care system. This contrasted nicely with the numerous horror stories coming from Americans regarding HMOs, the high costs of prescription drugs, and the layers of bureaucracy some must face in order to get a second opinion. My experience with the faculty seminar equipped me with the tools to make the most of an internationally diverse classroom. Further, I feel as if I can at some level empathize with the unique plight of the international student in a way I would not have otherwise.

Conclusion

I truly can't say enough about the various ways in which being included in this faculty seminar positively impacted my professional growth. In addition to the teaching and research enhancement, the opportunity to meet and bond with fellow faculty members helped me to feel a part of the Richmond community even before I stepped foot on campus this Fall. Just knowing that I had already developed relationships with a group of colleagues prior to the start of the school year, eased my transition to the university and made me feel as if I was an important part of the campus community.