

# Here's my Study Abroad Story

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**Major:** Biology— PreMed

**Typical Day:** On a typical weekday, I would wake up around 5:15 am. It sounds a little early, but that was when the roosters started making noise, so I had no choice! The minibus ride to school, including the walk to the bus stop, took around 30-45 minutes. I tried to work out on a regular basis, so by 6:45, I'd get to the gym. Most of my classes began mid-morning and finished by early afternoon. After that, I would usually hang out in the CIEE office, the student center, or a restaurant/café somewhere in Gabs with my friends. I usually went home around 5:00 or 6:00 pm because the minibuses weren't safe after dark for a foreigner travelling alone. By 8:00 or 9:00 pm I would be in bed. While I was there, Gabs had scheduled power cuts in each neighborhood. The power would go out anywhere between 3:00 or 6:00 pm and come back on as late as 11:00 pm, so it was pointless to stay up in the dark. On a typical weekend, we visited each other's homestays, hiked or travelled!



**Highlights:** Taking public transportation! Taking the *combi* (Volkswagen-type mini busses) every day helped with acclimatizing to the culture, and it gave me an opportunity to practice my Setswana and meet new people. Most ex-pats never take public transportation in Gaborone, so riding the *combis* was a great way to make conversation with local Batswana especially since many were surprised to see us. The drivers and conductors are excellent resources on where to go in Gabs and how to get there. The *combis* are also one of the few spaces where people won't bug you if you don't want to be bothered.

**Challenges:** Having to figure out how things "work" in Bots (and southern Africa in general). The more you travel, the more you realize that each country has their own subtle nuances and habits that only locals understand. At first it felt very frustrating: why we couldn't break large bills to get change, why there were never toilet seats on toilets, why the *combis* never operated on a schedule. But once we accepted that culture is something we can't change, things like meetings never starting on time didn't seem so annoying anymore. I actually miss the concept of "African Time" now that I've been back!



**Advice:** Take the risk and try something new. I mean really, really new. Don't be afraid to challenge yourself and put yourself in an uncomfortable (but safe!) position. Veer away from familiarity and I guarantee you will be amazed by how much you can learn about yourself. Study abroad is much more than just studying in a foreign university; you are immersing yourself in a new culture as a student, which is a really unique position. For science majors and premeds – don't write off study abroad! With some strategic planning, you can definitely go!