

# South Africa Exchange Report

By Laurinda Cheng

## Introduction: Why Cape Town?

Of all the places to go in the world, I—much to the dismay of my parents—chose to venture into Cape Town, South Africa, a part of the so called “dark continent,” characterized by the media as a violent, impoverished, and racially divided. These parents of mine often lamented the fact that their daughter diverged from the interests of most average young middle-class North Americans who dreamed of frolicking off to Europe for a semester abroad. I chose to do my exchange in South Africa because of its controversial political history of apartheid. I wanted to see what post-apartheid life in South Africa looked like. In addition, I chose South Africa because of my interest in African politics. I was particularly curious as to how politics would be taught and understood in a non-western context. Also, as a devoted skeptic of the mainstream discourse on Africa, I wanted to draw my own conclusions from first-hand experience.

## Pre-departure

Start planning your trip well in advance! Trying to get your documentation together to apply for your visa will probably be the most difficult part. Second to that, I found that trying to contact the International Exchange Office at UCT was difficult. If you need to contact them, I'd

students seem to experience is theft, either through in-house robberies or muggings. There are a few things you can do to prevent yourself from becoming a target. First, never carry valuables out in the open when you're walking, such as your cell phone, MP3 player, or camera. Also, be conscious of who is around you when you're walking by yourself. Don't walk alone at night, take a cab instead. And if you're out clubbing late at night in downtown, don't spend tons of time loitering outside clubs because this is when things can be easily stolen off you. To prevent home robbery, always lock your room door, front door and gate. Also, keep valuables, such as laptops and passports hidden away. The longer you spend in Cape Town, the more street savvy

(<http://www.vickysbedandbreakfast.com/>). Townships, despite their rough-looking exteriors, are communities that are bubbling with life. Everyone was very friendly and I was amazed by the rich sense of community these people shared. I guarantee that you will have a different perspective of South Africa and development after your visit. If you're interested in learning more about township life, I recommend the book *Khayelitsha: uMlungu in a Township* by Steven Otter.