

# RETURNEE OF THE MONTH

MARCH 2019



## ABOUT BRADLEY SKEEN

Program: SIT: South Africa: Durban:  
Social and Political Transformation

Duration: Fall 2018

Major: Political Philosophy, Policy &  
Law and African-American & African  
Studies

## MOST INTERESTING CLASS & WHY?

Though I really enjoyed the course on Development, Transformation and Nation Building in South Africa (we learned about all sorts of current developments and dynamics, ranging from land expropriation, to education reform, to LGBTQ/gender-based violence issues, to unemployment/economic development), my favorite course focused on acquiring basic Zulu language skills and learning about Zulu culture. I'm by no means a language aficionado, but it was so fascinating learning a language that is primarily learned through speaking (rather than structured memorization/grammar instruction). In fact, my host brother told me that he did not learn to write in Zulu until he was 18, even though it's his mother tongue. Since we were living with Zulu host families, we had the opportunity to use what we learned in class on a daily basis, much to the delight and hilarity of our neighbors and host siblings. Every day when I came home, I would call, "Sengibuyile!" which means "I'm back," and my host brothers always thought it was hilarious.



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## SIT: SOUTH AFRICA: DURBAN: SOCIAL AND POLITICAL TRANSFORMATION FALL 2018

### HOW WAS EDUCATION ABROAD DIFFERENT THAN ANTICIPATED?

Adjusting to staying with host families (three, to be exact) was pretty huge.... Additionally, my classes were a bit more “experiential” than I anticipated. The School for International Training, the organization through which I studied abroad, is known for developing programs that involve a lot of community engagement, but I didn’t know how much it would be. We visited different parts of Durban on a daily basis, meeting with government officials/former anti-apartheid activists, visiting NGOs and exploring museums. I loved it. We spent a limited amount of time sitting in a classroom, which I much prefer. Additionally, I worked at a conflict resolution NGO during the latter half of the program, so that was pretty unique as well. It was dope.

### NUMBER ONE WAY THE EXPERIENCE CONTRIBUTED TO YOUR GROWTH

... Being in South Africa was truly a reprieve in this regard. Being exposed to South African media outlets for four months (while also working at an NGO that worked on conflicts throughout the continent) helped me learn so much about global politics/trends. The South African media is so outward-facing, often accounting for, and analyzing, events and trends taking place throughout the globe. Obviously, the U.S. and South Africa are too very different countries; the former’s leader can affect the economies of dozens of countries with a single tweet, while the latter is often subject to the whims and decisions of larger, more economically powerful nations. Despite this fact, I believe the American media is dangerously insular, often to the detriment of U.S. citizens. Our media fuels one of two opinions: first, that the U.S. is the greatest country in the world and that its achievements and benefits are entirely unique and second, that ours is an incredibly broken country, and that our leader is unmatched in his demagoguery/ineptitude, and so on. A healthy perspective and awareness of global trends may very well combat some of the hyper-partisanship and irrationality discernible in the U.S.



### DURBAN IN 3 WORDS

**Hectic**

**Complicated**

**Diverse**

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### MOST INTERESTING/DELICIOUS CUISINE TRIED

I'm going to have to say bunny chow, which is a Durban specialty (they've tried to replicate in Cape Town (i.e. Europe in Africa) but it's not nearly as good). Bunny chow, which is essentially the equivalent of an Indian Panera breadbowl (it's a hollowed-out loaf of bread with chicken, mutton or vegetarian curry inside), was created by the large Indian community in Durban. A large number of Indian men and women were transported in the 19th century by the British to KwaZulu-Natal to work as indentured servants (essentially slaves) in the sugar cane fields. Bunny chow was created as a cheap and portable dish for Indian laborers. If you need more explanation, Trevor Noah does a pretty good (and entirely facetious) bit on bunny chow in a standup routine.

### MOST MEANINGFUL INTERACTION WITH A LOCAL

I'd say most meaningful interaction (emotionally-speaking) with a local was the time I spent with Bonele, my seven-year-old host brother. I lived with him and his family for five weeks and was with him more-or-less constantly. We played soccer, drew pictures, and created various games to play together. I told him two bedtime stories every night (he came up with basic idea for the story, I did the rest). I really, really enjoyed my time with him. I had a lot of interesting interactions with locals, but I'll choose one. My landlord during the second half of the program was British-South African and was one of the few white people with whom I interacted regularly in Durban. I talked a lot with him about white South African identity and his time serving in the military during the country's occupation of Namibia a few decades back. He was very open and informative.

### ANYTHING ELSE TO ADD?

I can't stress how important it is to have students visit countries like South Africa or Ethiopia or Ghana because the continent needs to be demystified. Africa is anything but a monolithic, destitute landmass.



Bradley and South African politician, Mac Maharaj