

Chapter 8

Teaching the Economics of Poverty and Discrimination as a Study Abroad in South Africa



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Abstract Study abroad programs can be immensely rewarding for both student and professor alike. However, the high start-up costs for teaching a study abroad course can be intimidating. This chapter describes our experience teaching the economics of poverty and discrimination in South Africa. We not only discuss the reasons for choosing South Africa as a destination, we also lay out the details for assignments, planning, budgeting, and field trips. Our aim is that this chapter will help those wishing to lead a similar program by lowering their start-up costs so that more such programs can be offered.

8.1 Introduction

The population of the United States represents a diversity of races, ethnicities, socioeconomic statuses, sexual identities, and religions. Likewise, college students come from a great variety of backgrounds, though some college campuses are more diverse than others. Most US college students do not experience extreme hunger or a lack of shelter, while for others that is their norm. Likewise, many students experience discrimination based on their race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, religion, weight, sexual identity, or other factors, while some have never been the target of discrimination. How does one even begin to approach teaching about poverty and discrimination in a classroom full of such diverse experiences? Or harder yet, how does a professor adequately address poverty and discrimination topics in a classroom of people who come from similar backgrounds or who have privileges that those in other countries could never imagine?

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Teaching about poverty and discrimination in a typical college classroom is limited, even with the inclusion of hands on activities, service learning projects, and modern day and historical examples. While these tools help, this learning pales in comparison to the insight and understanding that one gains from a study abroad experience in a developing nation. Admittedly, there are places in developed countries that can yield similar experiences, so we do not wish to diminish the poverty or discrimination felt here in the United States or other developed countries. Rather, we seek to aid others in their ability to teach study abroad classes in order to expand the learning opportunities available to their students.

This chapter lays out our process for teaching the economics of poverty and discrimination in South Africa as part of a 3-week study abroad program. We realize that the largest cost to teaching abroad is often developing the program, the curriculum, the connections, the budget, and the itinerary. Our aim for this chapter is to facilitate that process and equip professors for leading study abroad experiences.

8.2 Why South Africa?

South Africa's beauty, diversity, apartheid history, experience with the AIDS epidemic, and extreme inequality make it a prime location in which to study poverty and discrimination. The country is beautiful and diverse in terms of both its landscape and its populace. The varied landscape offers mountains, beaches, cities, diamond and gold mines, national parks, and big game safaris. Furthermore, South Africa is a unique study in both discrimination and reverse discrimination, poverty and wealth, government instability, slavery, and economics.

With regard to its populace, Desmond Tutu aptly referred to South Africa as the 'rainbow nation'. South Africa has thirty-five languages indigenous to the Republic, with ten designated official languages. Within the four main racial groups, there are numerous ethnicities. The two largest black African ethnicities are Zulu and Xhosa, while the two largest white ethnicities are Afrikaner and English. Coloured (an official South African characterization of mixed-race individuals) and Asian (mainly consisting of people of Indian ancestry) make up the other two largest racial groups in South Africa. Table 8.1 illustrates that, over the last century, the percentage of Coloured and Indian Africans calling South Africa home has remained fairly constant, while the relative share of black Africans is increasing, and the relative share of white Africans is decreasing.

Table 8.1 Race in South Africa. Stats SA (2015)

Group	1904	2015
Black Africans	67.5%	80.5%
Coloured Africans	8.6%	8.8%
White Africans	21.6%	8.3%
Indian Africans	2.4%	2.5%

Source: Feinstein et al. (2005, p.259)

Statistics South Africa's 2019 poverty line update defines the food poverty line at \$1.24 per person per day (R18.70). This is the estimated amount a South African would need to obtain 2100 calories per day. Two other poverty lines they report are the lower bound poverty line and the upper bound poverty line. These are the food poverty line plus estimates of some basic essentials a household would need. The lower bound poverty line is at \$1.80 a day (R810 per month), while the higher bound poverty line is just under \$3 per day (R1277 per month). Approximately one in four South Africans live below this bleak food poverty line, while roughly half of all adult South Africans live below the upper bound line, and the majority of these households have no indoor access to sanitation or water (Stats SA 2019).¹

We discuss these dire circumstances with our students before traveling to South Africa. And yet, these discussions cannot begin to compare to the insight gained walking through shantytown encampments that lack electricity and running water in Soweto before being immersed in the lavish wealth on display in Sandton. With one of the highest levels of income inequality in the world, the contrasts in wealth and poverty and the dire circumstances faced by many South Africans are quickly apparent to anyone visiting South Africa.

In addition to extreme inequality and poverty, South Africa has the highest HIV infection rate in the world. Approximately one in five adults in the country has HIV, and over 62% are on antiretroviral treatments (Avert 2020). South African children also contract HIV at high rates, and AIDS is responsible for over half of the country's 3.8 million orphans (UNICEF 2015). Stigma and discrimination furthers the spread of the effects of AIDS, as "in the third decade of the HIV epidemic, stigma and especially moral judgement, is still a factor that can undermine the efforts to prevent and treat HIV/AIDS" (Visser et al. 2009, p.9). South Africans on the margins of society are often discriminated against when receiving treatment for HIV, and this stigma is preventing individuals from seeking and receiving medicines and treatments to prolong their life and prevent the spread of AIDS. This dynamic of discrimination, infection, and poverty is key to understanding the full story of poverty and discrimination in South Africa.

Race and inequality discussions and considerations are present most everywhere, but are especially poignant in South Africa, where apartheid ended in 1994. The history of apartheid in South Africa, the pains in establishing a new government post-apartheid, the historical and present instances of discrimination and reverse discrimination, and the stories of both struggle and reconciliation are very much alive and felt by all who visit South Africa. Numerous opportunities exist to learn more about South Africa's troubling and discriminatory history. These include planned visits to Robben Island, the Apartheid Museum, and the District Six Museum, meetings with government leaders, and a visit to the Hector Pieterse Museum and Memorial. And yet, many of our most poignant learning opportunities in South Africa typically occur by happenstance.

¹Note, at the time of publication SA Stats had not measured the poverty rate since 2015 due to a shortage of funds (Stoddard 2019).

For example, a conversation with a taxi driver of Indian decent whose relatives were brought to South Africa as slaves quickly morphs into a discussion about an ethnicity that has felt discriminated against both during and after apartheid. At the District Six Museum, we meet a black South African who had to leave her home by force under the Group Areas Act of the late 1960's. As we study recent government proposals involving the repatriation of land from current white owners without compensation, and as students meet with whites who have seen and experienced the reverse discrimination caused by racial employment and ownership quotas, discussions organically progress into an examination of how to attempt to remedy prior mistakes and injustices without creating additional discrimination.

The same statistics that make South Africa an excellent country for studying poverty and discrimination may make it seem formidable as a study abroad destination. Crime rates in South Africa are substantially higher than in other locations where we lead study abroad courses such as Australia, New Zealand, Costa Rica, and Northern Europe. As a result, group security issues play a more prominent role in course planning and design with a trip to South Africa. While we have taken students and our own four young children to South Africa on multiple occasions, members of our group have experienced credit card theft, hotel room theft, personal theft from people on the street and even extortion from local police looking for a bribe.

On the other hand, our experience has been that students have learned more on this trip than they have on other similarly planned trips to less crime-ridden destinations. The people of South Africa are incredibly friendly and hospitable, and thankfully, no one in our group has ever been a direct victim of physical violence. One doesn't have to know a foreign language beyond English to get around, and the level of public infrastructure makes it relatively easy to move a large group of students around the country with few issues.

South Africa is an attractive destination to students, as it houses numerous outdoor activities such as shark cage diving, safaris, bungee jumping, zip lining and rafting. Though these attractions may be what initially draws a student to the program, the student will almost certainly finish the program with significantly impactful academic and personal development. Further, South Africa allows the budgets of American students (and professors) to travel further than the aforementioned locations due to the typically weak value of the South African Rand.

South Africa's economic history and history of race based institutional discrimination paired with its vast diamond and gold deposits makes it a country that can both inspire and challenge one's preconceived notions of poverty and discrimination. In our opinion, these attributes far outweigh any concerns we have about security in the country. In the sections that follow, we break down our course set up and logistics, the budget, and the types of experiences and field trips we undertake in country.

8.3 Course Set Up and Logistics

We pair the course in the economics of poverty and discrimination with a second course offering on the economics of South Africa. This second course covers the economic history of South Africa and current issues in the South African economy. The two courses combine to yield a better understanding of South Africa's present and past and to allow students to earn 6 hours of credit within a 3-week travel period. The second course also helps to justify the elevated cost of a study abroad vs. taking an online or on campus course during the same time period. In order to ensure that we have enough contact hours to justify 6 hours of academic credit, each class meets for several class periods pre-departure in order to cover much of the initial course material. By meeting as a class ahead of time, we are better able to make the most of our time in country. Our course layout is broken up below into pre-departure requirements and in-country experiences.

8.3.1 *Predeparture*

Prior to departure, we meet once a week for 8 weeks (four per class) for 2 hours at a time. These meetings consist of lecture, discussion, readings, presentations, a paper and a midterm. Then we meet one final time in our home for dinner to help the group become even better acquainted, to tie up any loose ends, and to answer any final questions prior to departure. The tradeoff for students is that while they get twice as many credit hours earned during their 3-week January term, they do have to meet ahead of time on top of their regularly scheduled fall classes. We collect information from each student regarding when they are available and schedule classes (admittedly at some odd hours) where everyone can (and must) attend.

For the course in poverty and discrimination, we administer a survey before meeting in order to get students thinking about their existing opinions, viewpoints, and biases concerning poverty. While we administer the survey on paper in order to allow for more extended responses, survey software and online technologies such as Kahoot provide another alternative to a paper survey.

The survey questions provide an interesting reference point for our lectures. Questions asked in this initial survey are listed in the Appendix. They include questions such as 'Why are some people poor/rich?', 'In what ways do you think the government should help the poor?', 'How much money does a household need to get by?' The survey also includes questions on minimum wage, school vouchers, marriage incentives and disincentives, definitions of terms we use throughout the course, and questions about racial and geographical differences in poverty.

Following the administration of the survey, the remaining on campus class periods explore official definitions of terms and measurements related to poverty and inequality, readings on poverty, inequality, and discrimination as it relates to South Africa (or the United States and the rest of the world for comparison), trends

and statistics as they related to both countries and to other countries around the globe, and an examination of policies and actions around the world that are intended to combat poverty and discrimination.² The course uses Schiller's (2008) *The Economics of Poverty and Discrimination* as the textbook, but relies heavily on readings to complete the picture from South Africa's perspective.

The economics of South Africa course uses the book *An Economic History of South Africa: Conquest, Discrimination and Development* by Feinstein et al. (2005) along with articles from popular press outlets regarding current economic issues in South Africa.

The pre-departure meetings also provide background to students as they work on their papers. The paper topics (and related presentations in country) are varied but cover subjects including discrimination in education, discrimination in the criminal justice system, the apartheid, healthcare, inequality, affirmative action, social safety nets, aid programs, and food insecurity. A complete list of paper topics is included in the Appendix.

The student's grade in each class is a function of the midterm (given before departure) (25%), the paper and presentation (30%), the final exam given the last day in country (25%), and the student's journal kept in country relating site visits to class discussions and readings (20%). The journal is the only item that counts towards the students' grades in both classes. All other exams and presentations are course specific, so each student takes a total four exams and is part of two papers/presentations for the two classes.

8.3.2 *In Country*

In country details will likely vary depending on the course's home institution and that institution's policies. The authors' home institution leaves reservations, site visits, budgeting, and other details up to the faculty. For our travel to South Africa, we have typically chosen to take a longer combination of flights, saving approximately \$600 per person. We then use this cost savings to enrich the students' experiences in other areas such as on Safari or with an extra excursion to Victoria Falls in Zambia. For instance, we find that flights to South Africa out of Washington, D.C. are often substantially cheaper than those out of Atlanta. This is true even after including any other expenses of flying to D.C. We also sometimes fly into London, layover there, and then continue to Johannesburg. This route helps substantially with the budget and also allows us a chance to sightsee in London for the day. As we typically offer our South Africa classes during a January term (while it is summer

²The website <https://www.saldru.uct.ac.za/income-comparison-tool/> also has an interesting income comparison tool to help students see where their household income places them among South Africans.

in South Africa), we find that flying over New Year's holiday saves further expense. Budgeting details are included in greater depth in a later section.

A sample itinerary is included in the Appendix, but our time in South Africa is spent in Johannesburg, on safari at Kapama Game Reserve, and in Cape Town. For our first study abroad to South Africa, we also visited Durban and the Drakensburg mountains.³ However, for subsequent trips, we have chosen to omit these two destinations and instead travel to the Kingdom of Eswatini (a separate country completely surrounded by South Africa—formerly known as Swaziland) and/or Zambia. We have met with an American citizen who is part of a missionary and economic development organization in rural Eswatini. Then we have used some of the financial savings of the cheaper flights to explore Victoria Falls in Zambia, one of the seven natural wonders of the world. Being on the border with Zimbabwe, it also opens the door for class discussions regarding the government and poverty in Zimbabwe.

Field excursions in Johannesburg include stops at the Apartheid Museum, the Hector Pieterse Museum, Nelson Mandela's earlier home, a tour of Soweto and Sandton (poor and wealthy townships located in close proximity), a talk at the Free Market Foundation, and a trip up to the observation deck of the Carleton Center (the tallest office building in Africa). We then travel to Kruger National Park for a safari before heading to Eswatini, where we tour economic development initiatives and do a rural home visit. Next, we travel to Cape Town, the longest stop of the trip. There we visit Robben Island, District Six Museum, and the Springbok Experience Museum, which discusses discrimination in sports. Cape Town also offers numerous opportunities for meetings with business and government officials. For our trips, these typically include meetings at the Department of Economic Development and Tourism, meetings at Wesgro, and a visit to a venture capital firm. In addition to these academic excursions, the time in South Africa includes several touristy excursions such as: a tour of the wine district in the Western Cape, a South African World of Beer tour, a visit to a gold mine in Gold Reef City, a hike up Table Mountain, time shark cage diving and relaxing on the beach, and visits to Cape Point, various botanical gardens, and a penguin colony.

8.4 Budget

The budgeting process differs from university to university, but we describe below our typical expenses so that those wishing to lead a similar course will have a better idea of the various types of costs to consider. At our university,⁴ students do not pay

³In Durban we visit the KwaMuhle Museum, tour Moses Mabhida Stadium (to show the contrast between funding soccer stadiums over other social needs and discuss the economics of hosting the World Cup tournament), and spend a day at the beach to round out the trip.

⁴The courses referenced here were taught at Western Kentucky University.

Table 8.2 Per person budget for South Africa

Item	Cost
Roundtrip air	\$1300.00
Faculty overhead	\$1660.00
In-country travel	\$500.00
Housing	\$1900.00
Excursions	\$400.00
Health insurance	\$30.00
Visa to Zambia	\$50.00
Study abroad fee	\$150.00
Meals	\$5.00
Total	\$5995.00

Table 8.3 Approximate hotel breakdown per night, per person

City	Hotel costs
Johannesburg	\$35.00
Safari	\$435.00
Eswatini	\$35.00
Cape Town	\$50.00
Victoria Falls	\$150.00

tuition for study abroad courses, but instead must fund all costs (including salary and benefits) for the program leaders. Thus, these costs are factored into our total budget and are passed on to the students as part of their program fees.

Table 8.2 provides a summary of our typical per-person budget, while Table 8.3 gives a per-person nightly breakdown of hotel costs. Of course, prices and exchange rates change, so this is only meant to be used as an overview of what costs to include. In Johannesburg and Cape Town, we usually have four students share a two-bedroom apartment, while we have two people per hotel room in Eswatini and Victoria Falls. Safari costs are on a per person basis, as food is included for the duration of the stay.

Also, we should note that exchange rate variations play a huge role in the ability of a budget to stretch to fund extras such as shark cage diving, nicer safaris, or extra excursions and meals. Combined, we have traveled to South Africa a total of four times: 2010, 2016, 2018, and 2020. The exchange rate in March of 2010 was 7.3 ZAR to the USD. By the time we returned in 2016, it had reached a high of 16.9 ZAR per \$1 (despite being below 12 ZAR per \$1 when the trip budget was submitted to our study abroad office). In early 2020, the Rand was trading at 15 ZAR per USD.

As budgets for study abroad courses are typically approved almost a year in advance, extra flexibility has to be built in for fluctuations in exchange rates and changes in flight prices. Increases in the value of the US dollar can easily be spent on extras, but unexpected dips must be planned for too. One way we have built flexibility into our budgets is by advertising some excursions as optional and not promising to cover these expenses or all meals. We still build into the budget money for these excursions and a few group dinners, but make no promises up front. That way, if we find that we are able to book flights, hotels, and other expenses below

budget, we can use the savings to cover these extras. In the event flight costs rise or the value of the dollar falls before tickets are able to be purchased, we can use those funds budgeted for extra excursions to instead cover the essentials. Alternatively, we can make changes in our accommodations to fit the budget.

In the case of our January 2016 study abroad to South Africa, former President Zuma unexpectedly fired his finance Minister Nhlanhla Nene in the month prior to our trip. His replacement David van Rooyen only lasted a few days before Zuma also replaced him. As a result, the value of the Rand fell drastically. Not only did this provide an interesting course discussion on the importance of government stability, but this also meant our budget went a great deal further on this study abroad. In the months prior to our return in January of 2018, former President Zuma once again fired his finance minister, which sent the Rand plummeting. In both cases, this greatly lowered our expenses in country. As our university does not allow repayment to the student of excess funds (instead they are “absorbed” by the university), we build in a budget for meals and extras that can be expanded to cover situations such as this. That way, the students’ money is still spent on the students.

8.5 Final Thoughts

We believe in the benefits of studying abroad so much that we have offered programs to South Africa, Costa Rica, Australia, New Zealand and Northern Europe. We have also participated in semester long study abroad programs at Harlaxton Manor in Grantham, England and on Semester at Sea (run by Colorado State University) traveling throughout Asia and Africa. We know personally how rewarding it is for faculty to leave the traditional classroom and interact with students within the broader classroom that is our world. However, we also know all too well the trials experienced by faculty as they walk a program from its inception to its culmination abroad. Thus, we have written this chapter to help in the development process. Although our details here relate to our South Africa study abroad, many of the details can be used to plan a similar experience elsewhere. It is our hope that these pages will serve as an inspiration for those trying to decide whether to take the plunge and lead a study abroad so that more faculty and students can benefit from the incredible experiences offered outside of the United States.

Appendix

Preliminary Survey: Initial Impressions About Poverty

This survey is designed to gather your initial impressions about poverty and discrimination. You do not need to put your name on this. We will refer back

to results from this quiz throughout the semester to compare your thoughts with opinions of the general public and findings from current research.

1. What are the most common reasons why some people are poor?
2. What are the most common reasons why some people are rich?
3. In what ways do you think the government should help the poor? (Circle all that you agree with)
 - (a) Better education or greater government subsidy of education
 - (b) Government assistance in skills training
 - (c) More or better jobs and job opportunities
 - (d) Financial aid/welfare
 - (e) Subsidized housing
 - (f) Better/more health care coverage
 - (g) Better/more child care assistance
 - (h) More social programs and services
 - (i) Tax breaks or lower taxes
 - (j) More opportunities such as . . .
 - (k) Raise the minimum wage
 - (l) other
4. I believe that the federal minimum wage in the US should be
 - (a) raised
 - (b) lowered
 - (c) abolished
 - (d) kept the same
5. True/False and explain: The government should enact marriage incentives as a method to limit poverty.
6. School Vouchers would better the educational opportunities of
 - (a) only the poor
 - (b) only the rich
 - (c) only those in religious schools
 - (d) only other select students
 - (e) all students receiving vouchers
 - (f) students in numerous groups listed above
 - (g) no one
7. True/False: Persons in South Africa are poor for similar reasons as persons in the US.
8. Privatization of social security would enhance social security benefits for
 - (a) the rich workers more so than the poor workers
 - (b) poor workers more than rich workers
 - (c) all workers evenly
 - (d) no-one

- (e) all workers, but at a different rate
 - (f) none of the above
9. I feel the best poverty policy is one that (check any/all you feel should be covered)
- (a) offers benefits such as free or reduced price housing, food, clothing
 - (b) offers work training and childcare for impoverished individuals
 - (c) creates government funded jobs for poor individuals
 - (d) gives poor individuals a monthly check
 - (e) other
10. Define the following terms: poor, equity, efficiency, equality, income, wealth
11. Do you consider yourself rich? Do you believe you will one day be rich? Why or why not?
12. What ‘necessities’ must one be able to afford to not be considered poor in the US? Ex. electricity, running water, . . .
13. How much money is needed a year for a family of 4 (2 adults 2 children) to:
- (a) just get by in the US?
 - (b) live reasonably comfortably?
 - (c) be considered rich?
14. Nearly one-fourth of African Americans and Hispanic Americans is considered poor as compared to 1 out of 13 Caucasian Americans. Why do you think this discrepancy exists?
15. Circle the letter of any you feel is poor. Who of the following is poor?
- (a) A homeless schizophrenic with \$500,000 in the bank
 - (b) A young woman living with wealthy aunt in a beautiful home who enjoys accompanying aunt and doing some shopping and helping her around house. This aunt gives her money when needed, typically \$3,000 per year and room and board.
 - (c) Similar woman to the person in (b) getting room and board and paid \$3000 for similar chores for aunt but doesn’t enjoy aunt’s company.
 - (d) PhD student making \$25,000/year stipend from her university as a teaching assistant.
 - (e) McDonald’s employee making \$25,000/year.
 - (f) Elderly woman in a \$500,000 house making very little who is unable to heat house fully and skips meals due to money but doesn’t want to move since all of her friends and family there.
16. In what ways do you believe poverty is different in South Africa and the US?
17. What similarities do you believe exist between the poor in the US and South Africa?

Sample Paper and Presentation Topics

1. Inequality in the US and South Africa
2. Unemployment in South Africa
3. Poverty in South Africa vs. Appalachia
4. Discrimination in the US Prison Justice System
5. Racial Discrimination in South Africa Since Apartheid
6. Economics of the South African Beer Industry
7. Economics of Labor Unions in South Africa
8. Discrimination against Women in South Africa
9. South African Poverty Relief Programs
10. Economics of the Gold Mining Industry
11. Economic of the Diamond Industry
12. South African Infrastructure
13. Zimbabwean Immigration to South Africa
14. The Impact of HIV on Eswatini's and South Africa's Economies
15. Aid Solutions to help the Poor
16. Economics of Game Preserves
17. Tourism and South Africa's Economy
18. The Role of Sports in South Africa's Economy
19. Education in the US vs. South Africa
20. Economics of the South African Wine Industry
21. Health Care and the South African Economy

Sample Itinerary for January Economics of South Africa

1. Day 1. Flight
2. Day 2. Layover/Flight
3. Day 3. Time change and arrival in South Africa
4. Day 4. Full day tour of Carleton Center, Soweto, and the Apartheid Museum
5. Day 5. Meetings at the Free Market Foundation and tour South African Brewers World of Beer
6. Day 6. Gold Reef City 'Jozi's Story of Gold' tour followed by free time in the theme park
7. Day 7. Travel to Kapama River Lodge, Kapama Private Game Reserve, game drive (3–4 h)
8. Day 8. Morning and afternoon/night game drives (3–4 h each)
9. Day 9. Morning Game drive followed by travel to Eswatini Swaiziland
10. Day 10. Tour of Cabrini Ministries (school and medical clinic), lunch with local officials, and a home visit in rural Eswatini
11. Day 11. Travel to Cape Town and free time in Cape Town

12. Day 12. Robben Island Tour (The Prison Home of Nelson Mandela and others) and Springbok Experience Museum
13. Day 13. Shark Cage Diving with Marine Dynamics
14. Day 14. Morning meetings at Wesgrow and the Department of Economic Development and Tourism—Afternoon Table Mountain hike/cable car
15. Day 15. Morning meeting at venture capital firm Glenheim Ltd. Friedrich Naumann Foundation. Afternoon at the District 6 Museum (a visit to the Castle of Good Hope is also possible)
16. Day 16. Wine Country Tour with shuttle (4 wineries). Tsiba Tsiba Tours
17. Day 17. Cape Point, Kirstenbosch Botanical Garden, and the Penguin Colony at Simon's Bay
18. Day 18. Flight to Zambia and settle in at Victoria Falls (Note: Purchase Double entry visa to allow walking into Zimbabwe)
19. Day 19. Victoria Falls and final exam
20. Days 20 & 21. Flights back to the US with an overnight on the plane

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