

Intercultural competence summer school: Zurich Switzerland 30 June 2019 – 19 July 2019

During the June - July holidays five students from the University of Johannesburg embarked on a journey to Switzerland to attend a three week summer school at the University of Zurich.



The five ladies I got to experience this amazing opportunity with.

This journey was definitely one for the books! It was an experience of a life time! The summer school we took part in was: intercultural competence: drawing on the Swiss experience. This summer school appealed to me because as an inspiring healthcare practitioner I found it imperative to effectively interact with my diverse group of patients so that I could see to their needs at a level beyond clinical practice. South Africa's richness in diversity has taught me a lot when it comes to intercultural encounters. I felt I could share this with the world.

The summer school focused on linguistics, misunderstandings and mis communications and what to do in the case of conflict. Instead of being trapped in a classroom, we took many academic trips to places such as Swiss info (a Swiss news forecasting forum), Bern, Lucerne and historical museums. We also took part in many social programs such as cheese fondue, hiking, boat rides and a tour to the Rhine falls.



Bern: Old town





Swiss info , academic trip: Lecture on intercultural competence in the work place



Academic trip to Lucerne: Bourbaki Panorama and other historical sites



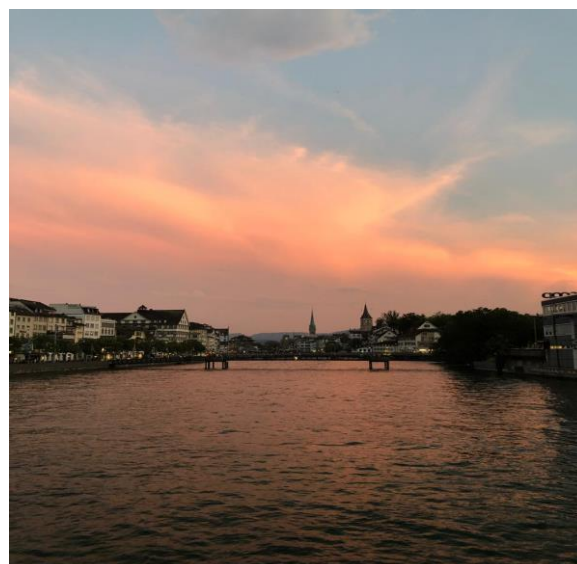
Hike up Uetliberg mountain, historical museum and the Rhine falls in Schaffhausen



Cheese fondue

We had an abundance of guest speakers ranging from linguists to prison doctors and people who worked for the Red Cross. Their stories were very insightful and changed the way in which I perceive the world. This trip was full of surprises!

One of the major things that surprised me is how late the sun went down. Upon arriving at the Zurich international Airport, I was expecting it to be dark as we were arriving at 20:30, however it looked like it was about 17:00 in the afternoon! I really had to adapt to this as I would always think it was earlier than it was, and I would end up going to sleep super late!



Lake Zurich

In preparation for my journey, I made sure to pack warm clothes, as I thought: no way it would be as hot as South Africa. To my surprise I did not need my warm clothes at all, they just came with for a little trip! I was surprised by the humidity. I would definitely say the weather in Switzerland is very much like Durban, as it is hot and humid and the next moment it is raining. This kept things interesting!



Getting caught in the rain on the way to the bus stop while visiting a friend.

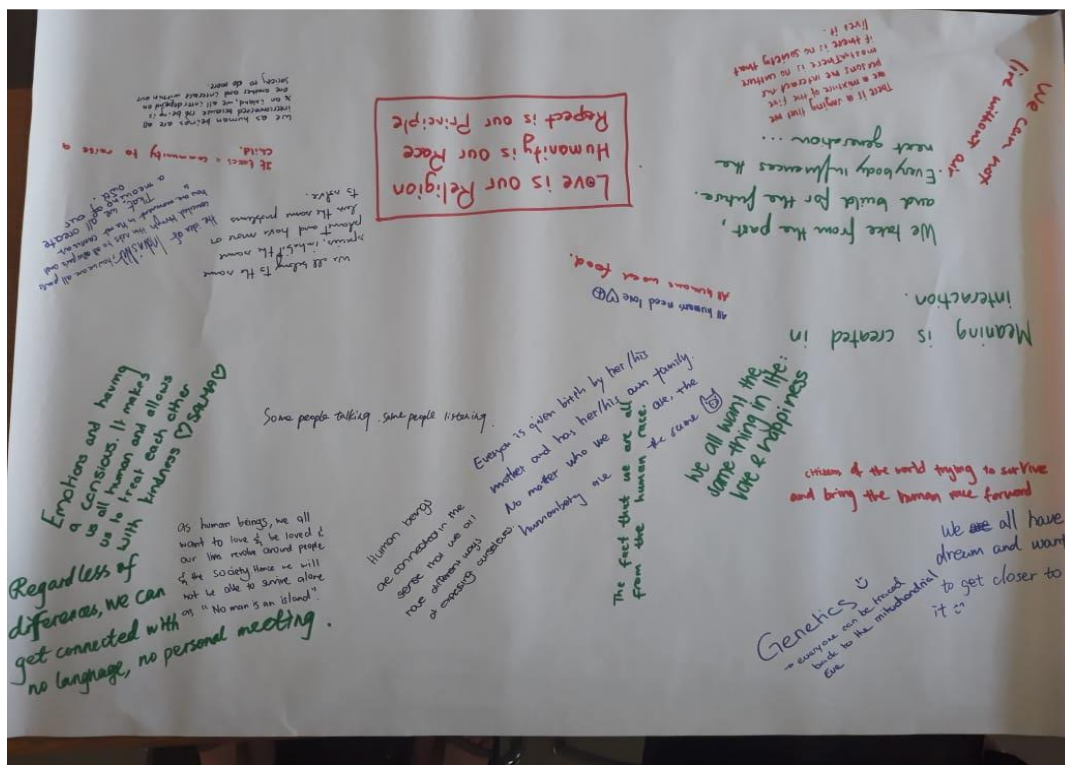
Another thing that surprised me was the transport system. It was very efficient and people seldom owned a car. The maximum time we had to wait for a bus, tram or train was about 8 minutes, so there were no excuses to being late. It became apparent why the Swiss are known for being very punctual, a habit that we too adopted!

Another thing that surprised me was how people would be out and about at 10 o'clock in the evening as if it were 5 in the afternoon. People walked around with their cell phones in view and would leave their handbags on the seat next to them whilst driving their convertibles. When using public transport, no one would check to see if you had bought a ticket. It's just something you do. No one takes liberties. People would stop at the traffic light when it was red to walk even when there were no cars passing. Everyone was very cooperative.

The course work was very insightful and enjoyable. I really learnt a lot about communicating, intercultural encounters as well as about myself. My favourite part of the entire trip was the people. I met wonderful people from all over the world and from all walks of life. This diverse group of individuals aided in learning intercultural competence in a more effective and fun manner. Not only were we learning about the theory, but actively practicing it every day.



Meeting new people and making memories!



Being my first time overseas, I found it a very enriching one as it provided me with the tools needed for future travels as I can encounter people that are different to me in a more appropriate manner. This course has not only enhanced my ability to communicate with my patients, it has also provided me with a skill to go through life with a different perspective. It definitely sparked growth within.



The most important thing I learnt on this academic trip is that every interaction with another human being is an intercultural encounter and that we must always look at the world with beginners' eyes!



I would like to thank the University of Johannesburg and the International office for making this journey possible. It was truly an amazing experience. I am forever grateful and forever changed from this spectacular opportunity.



Coming home to South Africa I realised how lucky we are to have such diverse groups of people that all have something unique to offer. We are truly a rainbow nation.

Thank you for the life changing experience!

Olivia-Rose Fouche'