All My Friends

“These are them; the kids who changed my life.”

Tyler Kohlhoff ’07, a studio arts major, spent spring semester 2006 in Botswana on a Study Abroad program. His participation in “Jwa Phala,” a youth and community-based review of the National Strategic Framework for HIV/AIDS, left him with many questions and a compelling photography exhibit — “All My Friends” — that he shared with the campus on his return and here in the pages that follow. The children he met had a powerful effect on his life. Trying to capture that feeling wasn’t easy as Tyler explained in the artist’s statement for his exhibit:

“Last spring I didn’t take out my camera very often; I couldn’t wrap my mind around the point of opening that shutter and immortalizing my memory in a blink. I felt my work would be exploitive, and I mostly shot on walks with my new family and friends.

“These pictures represent the strength in the bond between the photographer and the subject. Whether I was a mentor, teacher, or older brother, our relationships were genuine, intimate and strong. Of any home I have built, this one was the hardest to enter and to leave. The experience eats at me every day. I don’t think it will stop. I don’t think I want it to.

“These are the portraits of people I love, whom I struggled and shared with, and whom I learned so much from. These are many of the youth who helped me realize that a life of art and education is something I want to truly pursue.”
Many of Tyler Kohlhoff’s photos from Botswana feature two young cousins he calls his brothers, 14-year-old Elvis Moreki (at left) and 11-year-old Gordon Moreki (shown in inset photo at right holding Tyler’s camera). Elvis’ little sister, Malebogo Moreki, 6, (at right) “really knew how to work her cuteness and enjoyed posing for the camera,” Tyler said. Tyler’s host family lives in the village of Manyana, where he spent the first month of his Botswana study.

Elvis and his school friends (center right) had fun showing off for Tyler and his camera during lunchtime. Three of Elvis’ school friends (top right) posed for a portrait. While in the village, Tyler spent his days studying Setswana, their native language, while Elvis and Gordon and their school friends studied English. The round homes here belong to the families of Elvis’ friends and are located about an hour outside Manyana.

(Bottom right) Tyler, wearing an apron-like wrap to protect his clothing, works with a manure and mud mixture as he learns cultural building techniques. He and other Whitman students studying in Botswana used the mixture to make a porch for a house.

Some of Tyler’s photos, such as the one of a young man at center right, show children Tyler worked with at a primary school in Mahalapye. The children playing in the abandoned building along a river bank on the preceding two pages were also Tyler’s students.

Tyler Kohlhoff ’07, of Tigard, Ore., knew he was interested in education and photography when he left Whitman for his Study Abroad program in Botswana in the spring of 2006. During part of his journey, he taught school in the rural village of Mahalapye.

“It was the poorest ward in town, and the kids were hard to work with in the beginning,” Tyler said. The English language was almost as foreign to his students as the school’s method of discipline — corporal punishment — was to Tyler.

Still, over the course of their weeks together, he and his students made progress. “I can romanticize it now,” he said. “But at the time it was extremely taxing. In the end, though, I know we were able to reach a truly beautiful place.”

His journey didn’t end when he left Botswana. He spent part of the summer working in a youth art education program in Oregon. These young people, too, were part of the photography exhibit “All My Friends,” and the two groups of children from vastly different parts of the world helped him define his future. Not just education or just photography, but art education as a means of communicating with marginalized and at-risk kids.

Tyler sees himself someday beginning an art school in America, then one in Africa, and developing an exchange program between the two.
Study Abroad

The world is a classroom for students in this program

Nearly 50 percent of Whitman students spend part or all of their third year abroad. They earn class credit, but perhaps more important, they make lifelong friends and gain a global perspective, fluency in a foreign language and insight about where they fit in the world.

Whitman’s is an academic program operating under the umbrella of the Dean of the Faculty’s Office and coordinated by Director of International Programs Susan Holme Brick. The International Studies Planning Committee, made up of Whitman faculty and staff, determines the programs with which Whitman is affiliated and approves student applications for Study Abroad.

Among the requirements to participate is approval from a student’s major adviser to make sure the credits earned overseas will allow them to graduate in four years. Students also must demonstrate how their studies abroad will be an integral part of their major or minor at Whitman or of their career goals.

Since Brick took over the program in 1994, she has seen Whitman follow the national trend of rising participation in study abroad. When she began, 30 percent of Whitman juniors participated in programs mainly confined to European countries or Japan. In the 2005-06 academic year, 48 percent of juniors studied in locations that also include Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East.

Rather than offer a limited selection of programs wholly operated by the college, Whitman coordinates with established national study-abroad organizations and directly with some foreign universities to send its students all over the world.

“The beauty of the way we do it is we can offer more options for students,” said Brick. The college is also directly involved with the management of two programs administered by a consortium of liberal arts colleges — the Associated Kyoto Program and the Intercollaborate Sri Lanka Education program. In addition, the college operates one program on its own, the Whitman Summer Studies in China program, which is offered every other summer.

The reason so many Whitman students are able to study abroad is that the total cost — including the program, airfare and living expenses — is generally the same or less than attending the college for the same time period, Brick said. Financial aid can be applied to all 38 affiliated program destinations. Extra expense can come, she said, when students take the opportunity for additional travel while overseas.

As the program has grown, so have the challenges, said Brick. One of the biggest challenges for organizers and participants since Sept. 11, 2001, has been coping with tightened security requirements. Students in previous years were advised to obtain their visas by simply following the instructions provided by their program. Now students frequently need help from Whitman Study Abroad staff to fill out those documents, Brick said.

Some students are required to travel to San Francisco, Calif., within a short time frame to make their visa application in person. This adds an expense and an extra stress to the already heavy load of meeting application and approval deadlines for the particular program and the college, she said.

Nevertheless, she has never had a student say the paperwork wasn’t worth the experience.

“When our students study for a semester or year in a foreign country they often face global issues head on through the courses they take and people they meet,” Brick said.

Regardless of whether a student is debating the merits of organic farming practices with a farmer in Costa Rica, discussing the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka with both Tamil and Sinhalese professors, or talking with a French host mom about the controversy surrounding France’s ban forbidding Muslim girls from wearing veils in public schools, the students grapple with and often learn to appreciate world views different from their own.

“As educators, we hope these international encounters will inform our graduates throughout their lives as they become leaders in this challenging new millennium,” Brick said.

Students share their experiences

Global numbers

Thirty-nine percent of Whitman students who studied abroad last year studied in the developing world or a non-Western society.

Nearly one out of five Whitman students who studies abroad is a science or math major.

Over half of Whitman’s affiliated programs offer either an internship opportunity with a local organization or an independent study research project option.

In 2005-06 Whitman students studied in 32 different countries around the world.

Jonathan Rue ’07

Major: English

Hometown: Juneau, Alaska

Study Abroad: Whitman Summer Studies in China, Kunming, Yunnan Province, China, Summer 2006

Focus of study: Intensive language study, China environment and politics.

I learned: People are basically the same, different from their own. People speak different languages, perspective, perspective. People speak from forbidding Muslim girls from wearing veils in public schools, the students grapple with and often learn to appreciate world views different from their own.

Overall experience: Perspective, perspective, perspective. People speak about the Whitman bubble, but they fail to acknowledge the American bubble, which I think is infinitely more harmful because it sets a bad example of stubborn, selfish nationalism for other countries. Though the Chinese people were fairly positive about America, they taught me to see the shortcomings of the “American Dream.”

Tyler Kohlhoff ’07

Major: English

Hometown: Fullerton, Calif.

Study Abroad: Whitman Summer Studies in China, Kunming, Yunnan Province, China, Summer 2006

Focus of study: Sino-Tibetan language, cultural concern, and political science.

I learned: People are basically the same, different from their own. People speak Chinese, and prejudice have no place in the 21st century.

Overall experience: Perspective, perspective, perspective. People speak about the Whitman bubble, but they fail to acknowledge the American bubble, which I think is infinitely more harmful because it sets a bad example of stubborn, selfish nationalism for other countries. Though the Chinese people were fairly positive about America, they taught me to see the shortcomings of the “American Dream.”

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Danielle Alvarado ’07
(shown at right)
Major: Politics
Hometown: San Jose, Calif.
Study Abroad: Mexico Solidarity Network, Mexico, Spring 2006
Focus of study: Mexican social movements and community organizing strategies.
I learned: How much people appreciate outsiders trying to speak the local language even when they have to wait for us to struggle through our sentences. Overall experience: This experience gave me a much better understanding of China than I had before. It was particularly helpful and interesting studying in China because we were able to immediately apply what we were learning in the classroom. Because we studied Chinese in Kunming and traveled in the North-west Yunnan Province, we were able to experience both city and rural life as well as understand some of the differences both linguistically and environmentally.

Overall experience: My Study Abroad experience gave me the great honor to spend time with individuals creating incredible change in their communities with seemingly few resources. As a result, I am aware both of the current shortcomings and potential for our own community to be one of justice. My time away has made me even more committed to making that potential a reality in my last year here.

Desiree Conti ’07
(shown at left above)
Major: History
Hometown: San Francisco, Calif.
Study Abroad: College Year in Athens, Greece, academic year 2005-2006
Focus of study: Archaeology and history (ancient Mediterranean, Byzantium, modern Greece)
I learned: to give up control, mix intellectual pursuits with personal interests. Above everything I experienced, it was the people and relationships I made which will stay with me forever. Overall experience: My priorities have altered because I’ve been abroad, not in a finite sense such as a career or other post-undergraduate activity, but in a more abstract form. Flexibility, passion and complete immersion were cornerstones to my Study Abroad experience, and although I am physically away from the world itself, the values I held onto continue to govern the world I see myself living in today. Studying abroad taught me a new kind of independence, one in which reliance of self coincides with strength in fraternity, that to be a fully functioning adult, one has to take into account a greater awareness of self and a greater appreciation of the different communities we live in.

Chantal Stieber ’08
(shown at right above)
Major: Chemistry
Hometown: San Jose, Calif.
Study Abroad: Whitman Summer Studies in China, Summer 2006
Focus of study: Language and environment.
I learned: How much people appreciate outsiders trying to speak the local language even when they have to wait for us to struggle through our sentences. Overall experience: This experience gave me a much better understanding of China than I had before. It was particularly helpful and interesting studying in China because we were able to immediately apply what we were learning in the classroom. Because we studied Chinese in Kunming and traveled in the North-west Yunnan Province, we were able to experience both city and rural life as well as understand some of the differences both linguistically and environmentally.

Overall experience: This experience gave me a much better understanding of China than I had before. It was particularly helpful and interesting studying in China because we were able to immediately apply what we were learning in the classroom. Because we studied Chinese in Kunming and traveled in the North-west Yunnan Province, we were able to experience both city and rural life as well as understand some of the differences both linguistically and environmentally.

Gabriel Martin Gill-Austern ’07
(shown at right above)
Major: (double) Politics and Sociology
Hometown: Newton, Mass.
Study Abroad: School for International Training, Uganda, Spring 2006
Focus of study: Development studies and post-conflict reconciliation.
I learned: the ways in which war and a legacy of violence can ravage a country’s collective sensibility and leave it almost incapable of finding an internal solution, while simultaneously realizing that international meddling has done significant damage to Uganda and other African nations.
Overall experience: My time in Uganda opened up a part of me that I was never even sure existed before. I have never in my life felt so alive and invigorated by everything I encountered on a day-to-day basis. To say that I was changed by my experience in Uganda would be an understatement; I feel like I was transformed. The way I see the world, my place in it, and the role of others has been completely altered by the things that I saw and experienced.

Tyler Kohlhoff ’07 and Travis Bingaman ’07 enjoyed playing and singing for children in Botswana.

“I HAVE NEVER IN MY LIFE FELT SO ALIVE.”