

Student Awarded AHSS Internship Grant to Conduct Research in Uganda

By Naomi M. McMillen



Jessica Davidson is no stranger to challenging new experiences. The political science and public policy student has worked with a United States Senator, taught English to children in South Africa and recently was elected Student Body Vice President for DU. This summer, thanks to an AHSS internship grant, Davidson will be conducting research for the Global Livingston Institute in Uganda.

Davidson first became passionate about African studies, and about the HIV/AIDS issue in particular, after she completed a study abroad program in Port Elizabeth, South Africa, in her junior year. She taught English to children, some of whom were HIV positive, which made a profound impact on her worldview.

“The relationships I built at the Sinethemba Children’s Home were life-altering, and many of the kids I worked with there were HIV positive,” she said. “They were sick constantly, and sometimes tutoring was spent holding and comforting them when they were too sick to work, so I got a very close look at how significantly HIV can impact someone.”

Davidson’s internship grant, plus funding from the DU Undergraduate Research Center, will allow her to build upon her experience in Uganda this summer and explore the HIV/AIDS issue further.

“This experience is going to give me a great understanding of how to identify an issue that greatly impacts the public (in this case, gaps in the public’s education and knowledge of HIV prevention) and conduct research to better understand potential solutions,” she said. “My project recognizes the varying roles of church, government and community in HIV prevention education, and I think the recognition of all stakeholders will be very beneficial to my future successes in any form of policy or political work.”

Davidson is also excited about the adventure of traveling solo.

“I know absolutely no one who will be with me in Uganda. The freedom and growth that comes from traveling solo is liberating, exciting and terrifying all at once. I am going to grow in ways I can’t even comprehend from this internship, and I’m so excited for the exploration of new academia and new places that this summer will hold,” she said.

Davidson firmly believes that internships are a great way for students in any discipline to apply classroom theories and concepts in a real world setting, and has words of wisdom to share with those looking for opportunities abroad.

“I would advise students to think outside the box – talk to your professors about what other students have done, see what kinds of funding your department and the research center offer, and go from there,” she said. “Start knocking on doors and wait for one to open, because none of this came to me by being passive and waiting for a magical email with instructions on funding for overseas internships,” said Davidson.

“The worst that can happen is that someone tells you no,” she said. “Then you just have to keep knocking until you find a way.”