

# The World, in South Africa

*Poverty, development, multiracial politics, a breathtaking natural environment:  
they all come together in a unique study abroad program  
that seeks to prepare students for global citizenship*



by Kermit Pattison

**O**ne of the most memorable parts of Katie Dietrich's Macalester education occurred halfway around the world.

In her junior year, Dietrich traveled to South Africa on a study abroad program called "Globalization and the Natural Environment." She and 10 other students found themselves immersed in a multi-racial country, emerging from decades of white rule, where a stunning natural environment faced rapid economic development.

For Dietrich, it was an eye opener on many levels. She witnessed a nation renegotiating its racial politics. As a Midwesterner, she was awestruck by the mountains and oceans where sea lions sat on the rocks and dolphins jumped from the waves. She was so enraptured by the diversity of flora that half her photos depicted plants. She immersed herself in demanding seminars and joined other students in an ambitious research project that examined the environmental impact of South Africa's booming wine industry, winding up as the coauthor of a paper published by her South African professor.

There was fun, too. "I went bungee jumping off the Guinness Book of World Records' tallest jump," she recalls.

Indeed, the whole trip was something of an exhilarating plunge. The program takes a unique interdisciplinary approach to an ancient and complex drama: the interplay of humans and nature. It combines rigorous classwork with field trips that illustrate globalization as a local phenomenon in issues such as ecotourism, HIV/AIDS, land reform, conservation, currency fluctuations and crime. "It's both serious and adventuresome," says Ahmed Samatar, James Wallace Professor and dean of Macalester's new Institute for Global Citizenship. "That, to me, is what really typifies the Macalester education at its best."

Dietrich returned with a deeper interest in international development. A 2005 graduate, she plans to attend graduate school in geography and



**Katie Dietrich '05** at a South African national park, Boulders Beach, in Simon's Town, in 2004. She now plans a career in water resource management, perhaps in South Africa.

hopes to eventually work in water resource management abroad, perhaps back in South Africa.

"It really refocused my view on life," she says. "In truth, I finally found that global perspective that Macalester desires to foster in students."

## Have vision, will travel

The "Globalization and the Natural Environment" program began with a vision long before it had a site. Six years ago, Samatar and Michael Monahan, director of the Macalester International Center, began discussing a semester abroad program that examined the environmental impact of globalization.

Monahan said administrators found examples of programs at other institutions that emphasized either fieldwork or classroom work but few effectively combined the two. "Environmental studies, in my view, is a quintessential liberal learning project," Monahan says. "You cannot understand the environment by only being a biologist or only being a political scientist. Even humanists have something important to say about the environment. That kind of interdisciplinary theme would fit very well with the mission of liberal learning institutions like this one."

Macalester enlisted partners with similar academic values and standards. Pomona and Swarthmore (which has a partnership with Haverford) joined the

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*Kermit Pattison is a free-lance writer in St. Paul whose work has appeared in GQ, Inc. and the New York Times.*

**January 2006:** A dozen students from four colleges gather at the southwest tip of Africa. Macalester students pictured include Meghan Rockwell-Ashton '07 (second from left), Alessandra Williams '07 (third from left), Miki Palchick '08 (second from right) and Erin Gullikson '07 (fourth from right). Not shown: Dan Murphy-Cairns '06. The three faculty pictured are Macalester Professor Bill Moseley (back left) and South Africans Mike Meadows (back right) and Jane Battersby (sixth from right).

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consortium. Such consortia allow small colleges to share the costs and faculty rotations and also offer benefits such as a richer pool of academic expertise and students. Administrators considered sites in Malaysia, Ghana, Trinidad and Tobago, Australia, Costa Rica and Europe. “We started looking all over the world,” says Monahan. “There was no geography driving this. It was the theme that drove it.”

They found an ideal site in South Africa. The University of Cape Town is arguably the premier institution in Africa and has a strong environmental studies program. Because English is widely spoken, there was no language barrier. The western cape of South Africa offered a setting that brought globalization into sharp relief. Two oceans meet at the southern tip of the continent. The cape has a varied geography of mountains, valleys and forests and both urban and rural areas. It is a biodiversity hot spot. In some respects, the country has felt the effects of globalization for three and a half centuries as a meeting ground of Africans, Europeans and Asians. South Africa remained economically isolated for many years because of sanctions, but since the end of apartheid in 1994 it has aggressively engaged with the international economy and the effects have played out very differently among social and racial groups.

“The ultimate value of this is to add value to the intellectual growth of these students and stimulate their potential to be good citizens and effective leaders of the world for their rest of their lives,” says Samatar.

“South Africa is a microcosm of the richness and complexity of globalization.”

The first students went abroad in January 2004. Over the last three years, 29 students from the four colleges—11 from Mac—have gone through the program. “It’s the opportunity of a lifetime,” says Paula Paul-Wagner, assistant director of the Macalester International Center, “but it’s also a challenge.”

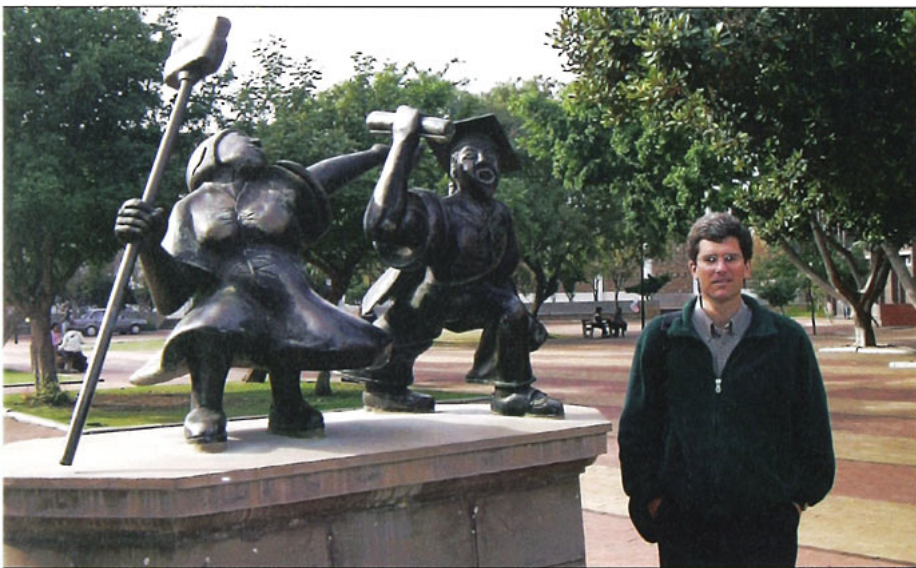
## The world outside your door

Students arrive at the University of Cape Town in January, which is summer in the Southern hemisphere, for orientation and a core seminar. Prior to departure they must read four books, including Nelson Mandela’s autobiography *Long Walk to Freedom*, and other texts selected from a reading list in African history, globalization and the environment. “As soon as the students look at the core seminar schedule, they realize that they are not on a sit-in-a-café semester abroad program,” says Jane Battersby, the academic affairs co-coordinator at the University of Cape Town. “The core seminar effectively fits a whole semester of teaching into six weeks.”

Typically, the first half of the seminar is taught by a professor from one of the U.S. consortium colleges and introduces students to the themes of the course. The second half, taught by a University of Cape Town instructor and guest presenters, moves into local case studies. The course takes an interdisciplinary approach of readings, intensive class discussion and field trips. “Cape Town is an amazing place to study globalization and the environment,” says Battersby. “We just step out of the classroom and can see these processes and their very real human impacts right on our doorsteps.”

For a unit on globalization of culture, the class visited a community radio station that specialized in hip-hop music. For a section on international investment, they met with Cape Town real estate agents. For a section on globalization of crime, they visited a coastal town rife with poaching of abalone for the international market. Such excursions are an essential element in the program—and sometimes a bit of fun, too. “They are also great for social cohesion, and provide plenty of moments of unintended hilarity,” says Battersby. “I’m sure no one this year will forget getting lost in the orchard and the state we returned the vans in.”

One typical session came during a discussion of land reform. In January, Bill Moseley, an assistant professor of geography at Macalester, lectured on land reform using examples from his own field work. Moseley, who has written two books on Africa, recently shifted his research from Mali to South Africa and has grants from the National Sciences Foundation and U.S. Department of Education Fulbright-Hays program to study land reform. During apartheid, the white government restricted land ownership by non-whites outside the so-



**Macalester Professor Bill Moseley at the University of the Western Cape. The statue depicts a working-class mother, broom in hand, and her first-generation college student son, diploma in hand, following his graduation ceremony.**



**From top left:**

A hair salon in one of Cape Town's black townships.

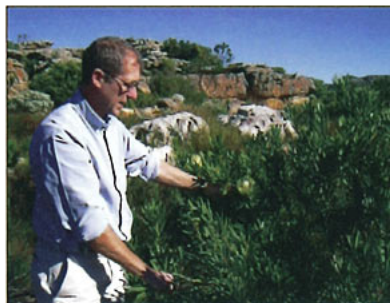
Cave paintings in the Cederberg Mountains, north of Cape Town, depict San people and elephants.

Workers at the New Beginnings vineyard, which is co-owned by black employees.



**Right:**

Professor Mike Meadows, a biogeographer, discussing the native protea species, a hallmark of vegetation found in the unique Cape Floral Kingdom.



called “bantustans,” or homelands, a policy that left only 13 percent of the country’s lands in the ownership of the majority population. In 1994, the African National Congress came to power and began land reform programs to redress this history of discrimination. The government has pledged to redistribute 30 percent of agricultural land by 2014.



After Moseley’s lecture, the students broke into a discussion. The next day, they headed into the field to see how the questions raised in class played out at the ground level. “Frankly, it’s wonderful for me as a teacher,” says Moseley. “I could lecture, we could talk and then jump in the van and go out and see it. I don’t get to do that very often.” They visited two vineyards owned by whites and two other vineyards co-owned by blacks who had obtained land from the white vineyard owner or through government programs. “The trip to the winelands was helpful because it illustrated the ways in which power structures work to complicate reparation processes such as land reform,” says Miki Palchick ’08 (Pittsburgh).

**Where are the birds?**

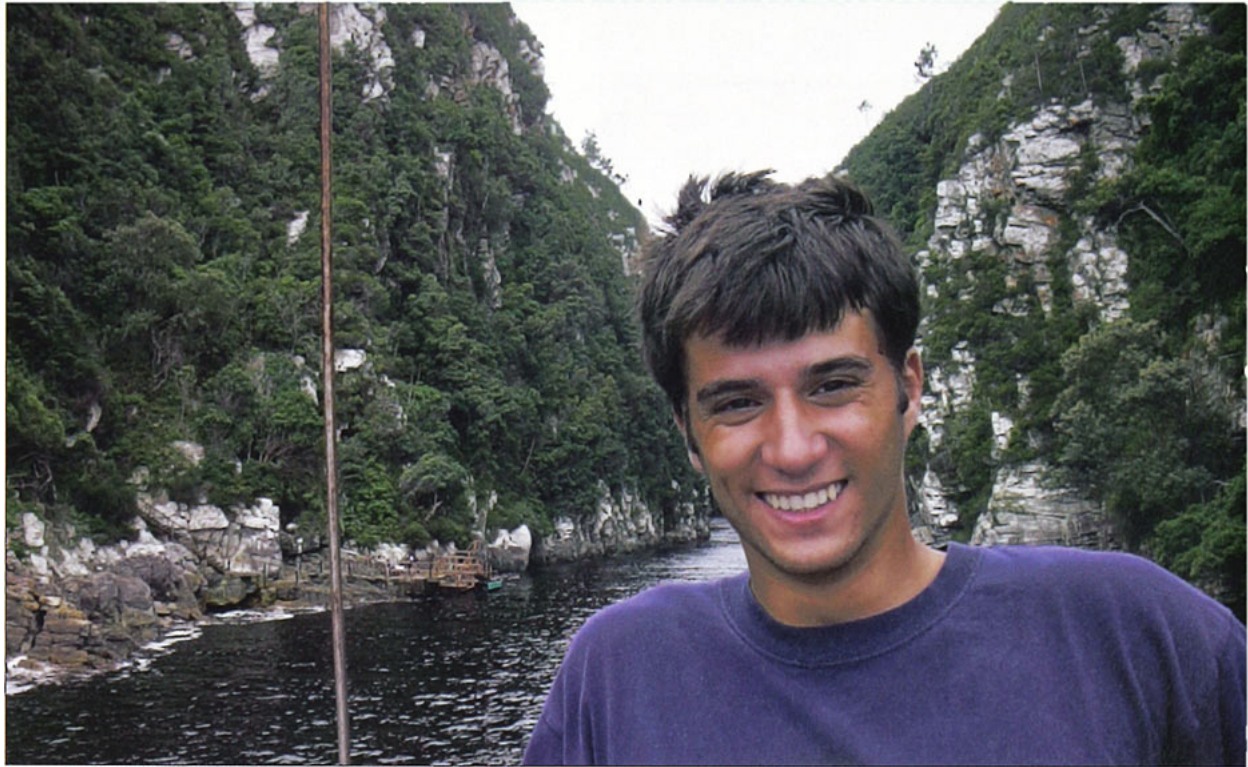
In another case, students traveled to Lambert’s Bay, a fishing village on the west coast with a history as a source of guano, or bird droppings that were exported as fertilizer in the 19th century. Students compared

this historical case with a current one—depletion of local fisheries and catch quotas—to explore the environmental consequences of international economic trends. The two cases continue to intertwine even today. When the class went there in January, Moseley says, they found that the birds, once plentiful enough to produce mountains of guano, had vanished. Why? The fisheries had become so depleted that the hungry seals began attacking birds. The birds moved elsewhere.

Mike Meadows, chair of the Geographical and Environmental Sciences Department at the University of Cape Town, says the area has a dual or even triple economy: a small, affluent, mainly white (but no longer exclusively so) population, a large labor force that is mainly “coloured” (the commonly used South African term for people of mixed racial descent) and black, and a large number of blacks who are effectively marginalized. “The population therefore has examples of people who are fully engaged in the global economy, those who are dependent on the global economy and those who are completely at its mercy!” says Meadows. “This is a simplification, of course, but the diversity and contrast in Cape Town society is very obvious to any visitor, and the students on the program are immediately struck by it and often impacted emotionally.”

For Katie Dietrich, one such revelation came when she was assigned to investigate job opportunities for a class. First she went to a recruitment agency that dealt mainly with professionals. Next she went to a temp agency and by luck happened to walk into the office on payday and found herself, a white student from Wisconsin, amid 20 black South Africans waiting for their checks. It drove home a lesson repeated many

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**Jon Rogers '06** in Tsitsikamma National Park in 2005. He hopes to study urban planning in grad school.

**'It wasn't until I lived on foreign soil that I understood what internationalism really means.'**

times while she was abroad. "Although South Africa was liberated from apartheid, an economic apartheid remained," she says.

Race relations and the disparity between rich and poor are two of the most startling aspects for many students. Students see affluent neighborhoods and malls that could belong in Minnesota, and shantytowns and squatter settlements typical of undeveloped countries. Sometimes the extremes aren't so far apart. "On the street I lived on there was a family that lived under an awning," says Jon Rogers '06 (Standish, Maine), who went on the program in 2005. "That was their only shelter." Battersby says students react in a variety of ways: some immediately want to visit the black townships, others retreat to the comfort of theory or keep company with other international students. "A lot of students have recognized things about their home cities through the things they've seen here," says Battersby. "By talking directly about racialized poverty here and segregation, they have come to recognize that they haven't necessarily always seen that these problems are evident at home too."

### **Climate, grain and grapes**

The core seminar ends when regular classes begin and students mix with the general population at the University of Cape Town. Students are urged to take one third-year and one fourth-year class such as oceanography, marine ecology, vertebrate zoology, intellectuals of African liberation, intensive Xhosa and African environmental history.

Erin Gullikson '07 (Stillwater, Minn.) began her day with a 30-minute hike up the mountain to campus from the house where she lived with other students. The university is perched on a mountainside and some students joke that the program exercises their leg muscles as much as their minds. "The walk to class is quite an uphill endeavor," says Gullikson, "though the view of Table Mountain in the morning sun is entirely worth it."

Gullikson, an international studies and geography major, took two courses: population studies and conflict resolution in Southern Africa. Like many other students on the program, she took part in extra-curricular activities, practicing with the rowing team and volunteering at a children's home in the city. "The academic program is rigorous," she says. "The students that have accompanied me on this program are as committed to their academic interests here in South Africa as I am to mine."

One of the centerpieces of the program is the directed-study project, in which students delve into a subject in greater detail. Projects have examined the role of aquariums in supporting marine environmental education in South Africa, behavioral patterns of naked mole rats, inter-African migration, and the problems of small farmers in the South African land reform program. Jon Rogers produced an ethnographic analysis of the effects of globalized tourism on one local population—in this case, Cape Town surfers, whose spiritual lifestyle is being compromised by commercialization, tourism and media. The issues he studied are "complicated and not usually associated with surfing," says Rogers, who hopes to attend grad school in urban planning. Like many others students, he later developed his research into a senior thesis.

Katie Dietrich collaborated with several other students on a project titled "To Raise a Toast: Grain

and Grape in the Swartland, South Africa.” The growth of wine production has been one of the most visible aspects of globalization in South Africa and the project examined questions such as international trade variations, workers’ rights and benefits, and changes in insect and bird populations. During apartheid, the country grew wheat for domestic consumption in order to remain self-sufficient during the economic isolation of sanctions. Now, however, many farms are converting to vineyards to take advantage of the climate and export market. Dietrich and her collaborators collected data from a grain farm, a long-standing wine farm and a third farm in the process of changing from oats to



The Swartland Region historically has been known for wheat production but is making a transition to vineyards in the southern portion.

grapes, and gathered control data from a natural area. Part of her research was included in an academic paper written by Meadows.

Dietrich describes the Globalization and the Natural Environment semester abroad as a transformative experience that brought her education to life in a way that books never could. The world, she says, became less black and white and a lot grayer. Yet one thing became clearer: the South Africa experience convinced Dietrich to pursue a career path that would combine the natural and social sciences. This fall, she will enter a master’s program in geography at Penn State, one of the best such programs in the country.

“It wasn’t until I lived on foreign soil that I understood what internationalism really means,” Dietrich says. “I could read books and newspapers for hours a day to understand this world, but nothing can beat the experience of walking down a street full of vendors, homeless, businessmen, drunkards and musicians with the faint sound of a mini-bus caller in the background. We are a strongly connected, globalized community and we need to understand each other.” ●



## Western Cape Province, South Africa