

A NEW PERSPECTIVE

Cal Poly students gain insights into different cultures through international travel opportunities

Aurabel de Guzman Sandoc, a senior in the liberal arts and engineering studies (LAES) program, and Eliana Hollinger, a psychology major, had both aspired to study abroad while at Cal Poly, but the financial strain seemed too much to overcome. When they learned about an Alternative Breaks trip to South Africa, and the fact that there was a possibility for financial assistance, they both jumped at the chance.

Alternative Breaks offer students a chance to travel in between quarters to locations that immerse them in another culture. Students are able to examine social issues firsthand, reflect on their own positions of privilege in the world, and work with students outside their majors to make a lasting contribution to the global community.

Sandoc and Hollinger were part of a group of 15 Cal Poly students that traveled to Cape Town, South Africa. They spent one week working with Film School Africa, a live-in program in Cape Town that teaches young locals the skills they need to work behind the scenes in the booming South African film industry — skills that could help pull them out of poverty. The Cal Poly students helped the film school turn an old chicken coop into a permanent film set that resembles the interior of a local township home.

During the second half of their trip, students volunteered at a school for boys 8 to 13 years old called Bright Lights. In addition to spending time with the boys, the Cal Poly students cleaned up and renovated a run-down dorm building.

For Hollinger, the trip was the first time she had traveled internationally. She was one of five students — chosen from over 60 applicants — sponsored by the Office of University Diversity and Inclusion.

“I feel so privileged to have been selected to go on the trip to Cape Town. My biggest takeaway from this trip is that everyone has their own unique story, and you can learn so much from people and their life experiences,” she said. “I was able to see how traveling enhances our mental health and complements our education. You can only learn so much from a textbook. ... I built such special relationships and engaged in life-changing conversations.”

Sandoc also received financial assistance in the form of a stipend from the LAES program.

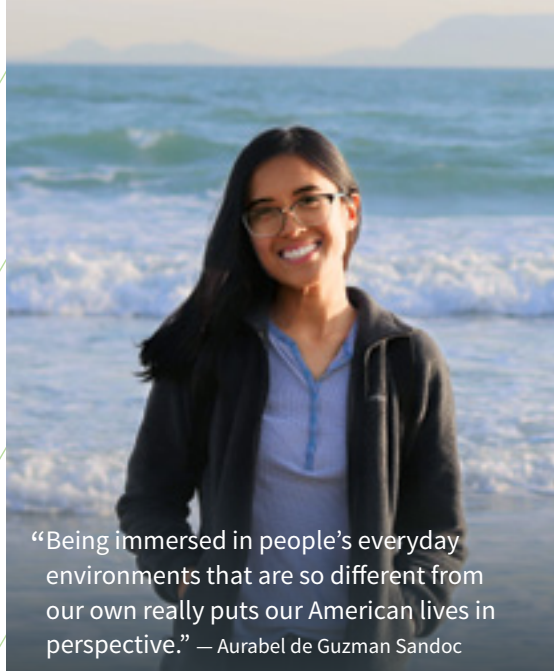
“Without the funds and support from the LAES program, I probably [would] never have gotten the opportunity to go abroad during my undergraduate career,” she said.

Both Hollinger and Sandoc believe they gained invaluable perspective from the trip and wish more students had the opportunity to travel.

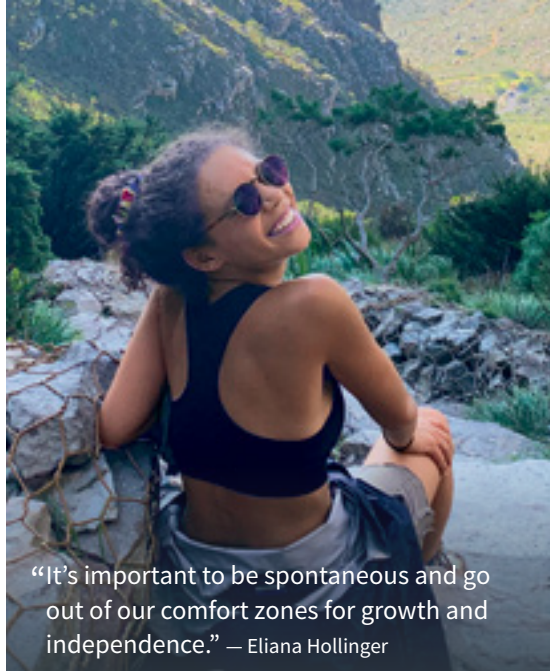
“Being immersed in people’s everyday environments that are so different from our own really puts our American lives in perspective,” said Sandoc. “I think it gets us out of our bubble, broadens our horizons, and makes us more empathetic towards others.”

Hollinger said, “It’s important to be spontaneous and go out of our comfort zones for growth and independence. International travel has so many benefits emotionally and mentally.”

Sandoc agreed: “This trip was definitely a life-changing learning experience for me that I wouldn’t have had if I hadn’t challenged myself to get out of my comfort zone.”



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“It’s important to be spontaneous and go out of our comfort zones for growth and independence.” — Eliana Hollinger

Right: Cal Poly students, including Aurabel de Guzman Sandoc and Eliana Hollinger, work with local youth on special projects in Cape Town, South Africa.



International Travel a Priority for New Dean

One of CLA Dean Philip Williams’ fund-raising priorities is to provide more opportunities for CLA students to travel internationally as part of their Cal Poly experience. “I had the opportunity to study abroad for a year while earning my undergraduate degree,” he said. “That experience instilled in me a passion for international education. I believe international education experiences can be transformative, and my goal is to find ways for more of our students to have these opportunities.” To learn more about Williams’ priorities, please visit cla.calpoly.edu/giving.