



12-6-2010

Senior Plans to Bring Lessons from South Africa to the South Side of Chicago

Rachel Hatch
Illinois Wesleyan University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/news>

Recommended Citation

Hatch, Rachel, "Senior Plans to Bring Lessons from South Africa to the South Side of Chicago" (2010). *News and Events*. 1508.
<https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/news/1508>

This Article is protected by copyright and/or related rights. It has been brought to you by Digital Commons @ IWU with permission from the rights-holder(s). You are free to use this material in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use. For other uses you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s) directly, unless additional rights are indicated by a Creative Commons license in the record and/ or on the work itself. This material has been accepted for inclusion by faculty at Illinois Wesleyan University. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@iwu.edu.

©Copyright is owned by the author of this document.

Senior Plans to Bring Lessons from South Africa to the South Side of Chicago

December 6, 2010

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – Illinois Wesleyan University senior Bianca Spratt knows that having the support of a university can make all the difference.

A sociology major, Spratt is a first-generation college student from Chicago's South Side. "Where I come from a lot of people don't make it out and go to college or graduate from college," said Spratt, who knew she wanted a degree that would enable her to return to her community and open a youth center. "At home, I had a lot of mentors who took me under their wing and showed me what community organizing was about, how to organize youth, how to allow youth to lead." Spratt said she knew she would find the same mentoring relationships at Illinois Wesleyan.

That mentoring began with the Summer Enrichment Program (SEP) the summer before her first year at IWU. SEP offers minority students the opportunity to engage in an internship and connect with mentors. "It was a great way to begin my college career," said Spratt.

Although her dream is to return to work in her Chicago neighborhood, Spratt said she also chose Illinois Wesleyan because of where it could take her. "I've always wanted to study abroad in Africa, and IWU is one of the few school that gives you the opportunity to study abroad and to graduate on time," she said. To prepare, Spratt absorbed information from across the campus. "I took classes like Politics in Africa and African Expressive Art," she said. "I spoke with Wesleyan students from Africa, who shared with me thoughts about their home."

Spratt also spoke with Director of the International Office Stacey Shimizu to find a program that fit her desire for social justice in South Africa. "Bianca was looking for a program in Africa that would allow her to combine her studies with some sort of hands-on research, and the School for International Training program in multiculturalism and human rights seemed like a good fit," said Shimizu. "She has such a drive and energy, I knew she'd do well in the program."

At Shimizu's suggestion, Spratt applied for the Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship, a highly competitive national scholarship, which offers awards for undergraduate study abroad. Spratt won the scholarship and went in the spring of 2010 to rural South Africa. There, she worked with an eco-friendly business school that is geared toward teaching underprivileged youth business skills. "The school is about sustainability and being green as well as building business skills, leadership skills and social skills," she said. "The school's coordinators are about the holistic approach." While abroad, Spratt studied and wrote a 40-page research paper on the school and its interaction with a local non-government association.

One of the key lessons Spratt said she took away from her South African experience is an appreciation of the ability to communicate through language. "South Africa has 11 official languages, and my study abroad program taught us one language," she said. "I stayed with four families in South Africa, and only two of them spoke Xhosa, the language we learned." Spratt said overcoming those language barriers helped give her perspective and learn that communication is about more than speaking. "It allowed those of us there to immerse ourselves in the culture, rather than just being a tourist. That is a lesson that can be applied anywhere," she said.

Spratt said she will take all the opportunities Illinois Wesleyan has given her and use them back home in Chicago. "I want to be a trailblazer for youth in my community, youth in my family and people older than myself who want to go back to school but feel their dreams won't be accomplished," she said.

Contact: Rachel Hatch, (309) 556-3960