Going on the Bucknell Brigade was one of the best decisions of my life. I feel so fortunate to have had the opportunity to spend those ten days immersed in a culture so different from my own and to get even the slightest idea of what people in Nicaragua experience day in and day out.

Living in the dorms provided by Jubilee House Community, our host organization, we provided any aid we could to the community of Nueva Vida—a community that has been struggling to recover from Hurricane Mitch since 1998. Our tasks ranged from pick-axing and mixing cement to build a side-walk, to painting benches and playing with children, to helping out at a pharmacy and translating at the medical clinic. Former brigade members helped to build the dorms, the clinic and the pharmacy.

While one of our greatest goals in traveling to Nicaragua was to give back to the community of Nueva Vida, I think it is safe to say that we all received so much more from the experience than we gave. We had the opportunity to witness how Nicaraguans live, understand how US foreign policy has affected their history, taste their delicious food, and enjoy the gorgeous scenery. It was also great to see the difference that Bucknell has made in the community, and to be filled with the spirit of hope that characterizes the Nicaraguan people.

The Nicaraguans, while living in small living quarters with aluminum roofs and little or no running water and electricity, with minimal medical care and mostly no more than a third grade education, consistently displayed the most joyous, loving, and friendly spirit you could imagine. Children, adults, and grandparents eagerly waved to us as we drove through their neighborhoods. Even though in many cases our manual labor skills hardly lived up to those of the locals we worked with, they told us they were thankful just to have us there willing to help at all.

In addition to helping out in the community during the week, we got to be tourists for a few days as well. We hiked up some of Nicaragua’s most beautiful volcanoes, swam in an absolutely incredible lagoon, and listened to a variety of speakers to learn about Nicaragua’s rich history. I can say confidently that I left Nicaragua with a deeper understanding on what really matters in life. I feel extremely blessed to have experienced an opportunity like this and to be able to grow close to a group of twenty-five fantastic individuals in the Bucknell community at the same time. I would highly recommend the Bucknell Brigade to every student at Bucknell.
1. Is there a particular personal experience that motivates you to do this project?

Yes. As an international student and a woman of color, I had several experiences during my freshman year which made me feel alienated from the rest of the Bucknell community. After taking part in the Vagina Monologues, common ground and other similar campus programs, I realized that there were other Bucknellians who shared my feelings. Unfortunately, there was no space where the entire campus community could come as a whole to hear about other people’s unique experiences so I created the ‘This is Me’ project to provide such a space.

2. What things worked well and what things didn't work so well for the previous edition?

The cooperation of the campus community in writing and performing the pieces, coupled with the support from faculty and staff for the workshops, was instrumental in making the project successful. For the previous version, there was no point of reference to learn from so we had to implement a trial and error method with some decisions made in advance. This was a major challenge.

3. What changes did you make from the previous play to make this one better?

We planned better. We started planning for this edition mid-spring semester and we counted on the mentoring of faculty and staff members who, inspired by the project, decided to partake in its continuation. This helped in the delegation of tasks and provided more time to gather ideas on who should be involved in the workshops. It also made it possible to promote the project in other creative ways. For the previous edition we started planning during finals week of that spring semester which was my freshman year and that was rough.

4. Can you tell us about the T-shirt idea and what purpose it serves?

The purpose is to create a bridge between the performers and the audience which can then be showed to the rest of the campus when people wear the t-shirts. For the first year we gave people sharpies so that when they saw anyone else wearing the t-shirt, they would introduce themselves and write something nice on the other person’s shirt. For the second year, we made everyone complete the phrase ‘I am ______’ so that they would raise awareness of their own identities to the rest of campus.

5. What are you most proud of about the ‘This is Me’ Project?

I am proud of the participants, of all who have taken the leap of faith to share their stories, of the actors who took the responsibility of embodying someone else’s story, of my directors, writers and coordinators who took the risk of being part of this journey with me, and of the staff and faculty who from day one blindly trusted my leadership of this project.
My name is Taylor Zahn and I am a junior biomedical engineer. Over this past winter break, I spent two weeks visiting my fellow engineering classmate and friend, Patience Osei ('14), in Botswana. Traveling halfway around the world by myself seemed like a very daunting experience in the weeks leading up to my departure, but traveling alone wasn’t nearly as difficult or scary as I had expected it to be and I tremendously enjoyed the trip!

The fifteen-hour flight to Johannesburg, South Africa was followed by a short, one-hour flight to Gaborone, the capital of Botswana and Patience’s hometown. The first thing that hit me when I arrived was the heat: I left the States with temperatures in the 30s and 40s Fahrenheit, and landed in temperatures that were in the low 30s Celsius, which is equivalent to 80-90 °F! Even in my summer apparel, it took some getting used to.

We spent a lot of time visiting Patience’s family and friends in Gaborone so I got to see a good portion of the city, including the central business district, her church, a number of shopping malls, her primary and secondary schools growing up, and a game reserve just outside the capital. I used the pula – Botswana’s currency – to buy souvenirs and travel by combi (a type of public transport resembling a van) to many places. Patience taught me some words in Setswana, one of the official languages used in Botswana, and I could tell that it was appreciated when I tried to use the few vocabulary words that I knew, even when I didn’t pronounce them correctly!

On New Year’s Eve we went to church where we prayed, sang, and danced to bring in the New Year. I didn’t sing so much but the dancing was pretty fun. I wasn’t expecting to enjoy church as much as I did! I had never considered the possibility that New Year’s could be a spiritual holiday because we had always celebrated by watching the “ball” drop on TV while eating lots of food and counting down with family and friends. This was just one of the many ways in which my eyes were opened to different traditions, cultural norms, and customs that were different from my own.

As an animal-lover, I was very excited to see some of the wildlife that is often associated with Africa – lions, elephants, giraffes, etc. – because they aren’t native to the States. We saw giraffes, warthogs (like Pumba!), impalas, and kudus at the Gaborone Game Reserve, and even more cool animals when we drove ten hours to the northern end of Botswana to spend a couple days at a lodge situated on a distributary (like a tributary but instead of flowing into the parent river, this flows away from it) of the Okavango Delta. While there, we took a boat tour of the Delta and saw a lot of different kinds of birds – this is the best time of the year for birdwatchers. We also learned how to weave traditional baskets out of reeds. After three hours of work and little to show for it, I had a lot more respect for the craft of basket weaving! On the way back to Gaborone, we drove past a cheetah, zebras, and elephants, one of which almost charged our car!

With lots of great pictures, gifts, and cornrows, I flew back to the U.S. after two weeks in Botswana. I will forever be grateful for the opportunity to experience Botswana with Patience and her family, and I expect the memories to last a lifetime.
2013 Black History Month

**JAN. 28**
MLK Beloved Community Dinner > 5:30 p.m. Weis Center Lobby
Celebrate Dr. King's birthday with a regional blues themed food menu and a program featuring Keynote Speaker: Prof. Arthur Flowers (Creative Writing & English, Syracuse University), Student Speaker: Caesar Valley (15), vocal performances by Beyond Unison, poetry by Laklyra "Gompa" Williams and more.

**FEB. 4**
Keynote Lecture: Professor Koritha Mitchell (Ohio State University) > 7 p.m. LC Forum
A campus lecture that draws on her award winning book Living with Lynching: African-American Lynching Plays, Performance and Citizenship 1890-1930 to explore this dark chapter in American history.
(contacts-supported by CIREG)

**FEB. 5**
Poetry reading by Terrance Hayes
> 7 p.m. Stadler Poetry Center

**FEB. 8-9**
“Come to the Table”
(Bucknell written student performance)
> 7:30-8 p.m. Student Hearth Space

**FEB. 12**
Blues concert by Doug McMinn
> 7:30 p.m. Weis Center Lobby; FREE

**FEB. 19**
Film Screening: Jonesown: The Life & Death of Peoples Temple
> 7:30 p.m. Campus Theatre; Grot Institute

**FEB. 20**
Filmmaker Stanley Nelson
(Director of Jonesown)
> 7 p.m. LC Forum; Grot Institute

**FEB. 21-24**
Black Arts Festival (Black Student Union + various co-sponsors)

**FEB. 26**
Read-In lunch discussion of Blues People and Stamping the Blues
> 12 p.m. Weis Lounge
(Contacts-supported by the Writing Center)

---

**Pictures from the 2013 Martin Luther King Dinner**

International Student Services | Multicultural Student Services
64 Elaine Langone Center, Bucknell University, Lewisburg, PA
phone: 1.570.577.3794
IEA Hours: Monday-Friday, 8:30-4:30