What experience had the most impact on you?

The experience that impacted me the most was the time we spent working in St. Mary’s Mission Hospital. The staff was so gracious and welcoming. I can look back on the week we spent volunteering there and think of multiple instances that really changed my views about global healthcare, and helped develop my cultural awareness. One day, early on in the week, a physiotherapy patient was scared to have me touch him because I was a White woman. I have never experienced anything like that in my life.

Instead of letting it offend me I simply worked to develop dialogue with the patient, and was able to gain their trust so I could help with their physiotherapy exercises. By the end of their appointment I was stretching them, and we were exchanging smiles.
What were your expectations for the trip? How did your experience differ from your expectations?

I had no idea what to expect for the trip. I was the only Physical Therapy student involved with the trip, and the rest of the trip members were nursing students and/or already had nursing careers. I honestly thought I was going to be "forgotten about". Regarding the culture, I thought I might see some shocking disparities and different techniques. However, during the trip the faculty ensured that I had an active role in everywhere we went. They allowed me to experience different aspects of the Kenyan healthcare, and I learned so much because of that. I never felt like an afterthought, instead, I felt a part of something great and meaningful. Every person on the trip watched out for me, and I even learned a great deal from every nurse on the trip. The culture was much more welcoming than I thought it would be. Most Kenyan people welcomed you with a smile and interest in your story. They were so eager to share their culture, and learn about our culture. The disparities were greater than I imagined. The hospital we volunteered at even had patients lying on the floors because they didn't have enough beds. Then, when I got home and started my job shadowing for graduate school I experienced greater culture shock then I did while in Kenya. We have so much, yet, we still take it for granted and don't work nearly as hard as we should to maintain what we have. I didn’t expect the trip to open my heart and develop my senses of empathy and respect for the Kenyan healthcare system like it did.

What were some of the biggest cultural differences you witnessed or experienced while abroad?

The biggest difference I experienced was being a minority. Everywhere we went adults and children were saying "white people!" The system of healthcare was also different. They had no
confidentiality, minimal resources, and performed all paperwork and filing by hand. I was also so amazed at the mentality of the patients. Here, in the states, they are often rude and disobedient. In Kenya when a patient was told to do something, they did it. I saw patients grimace through the pain, saying nothing, until their healthcare provider was satisfied. There were also no appointments made. Patients arrived as early in the day as they could, and waited until it was their turn with no complaints. I saw multiple families wait all day to see a doctor, and still greeted them with a smile and gratitude.

**What surprised you the most about your time abroad?**

I was most surprised at how the Kenyan healthcare system did so much with so little. At one point I saw a physiotherapist tie a thera-band to the window in order for a patient to do exercises because there was nowhere else for her to place it. Also, in Kisumu, the physiotherapy department had workout equipment, but couldn't use it because they didn't have the tools or instructions to put it together. Yet, for their lack of resources, Kenyan healthcare providers worked extremely hard to provide the most patient oriented and best quality of care they possibly could. They were inspiring.

**Has this experience changed or had an impact on you? If yes please explain how.**

My experience in Kenya changed me for the better. It made me hope to one day become a health care provider who can focus only on my patient, and never take my resources for granted. It also developed my cultural awareness, and helped me become a better communicator with people from a different culture than my own. It helped me become grateful for everything I have, and encouraged the drive I have to help those that are less fortunate.

**Willing to be contacted by prospective study abroad students about your experience?**

Yes