African & African Diaspora Studies

Boston College

Amanda V. Houston Traveling Fellowship

Sample Proposals
South Africa is one of sub-Saharan Africa’s most diverse nations. With a population of approximately 49 million, featuring four racial groups from eleven language groups, the nation is anything but homogenous. With apartheid in its very recent history, today South Africa continues to work toward a more equal nation. However today, the nation’s leaders must face an equally threatening opponent to the infrastructure of the nation: disease. Healthcare providers are faced with a tough battle in a country with rising disease burden primarily from Tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS and Malaria. With more treatments becoming increasingly available to the population, there is reason to hope for a turning tide in South Africa. However medicine does not work alone. In order to effectively treat a population, we must work towards increasing health education. In doing so, we must first understand how the different demographic groups represented in the nation learn and pass down information.

For my research study I aim to study the medical history of South Africa. This would be a two-part project focusing first on the oral history of medicine during the summer of 2010, followed by an Independent Research course in the fall focusing on the written medical history of South Africa. The ultimate goal of the project is to identify where the points of convergence and divergence are between oral and written history, and what influences the development of these points for different population groups. The study would utilize a wide variety of individuals in different race, age and class groups to ensure as comprehensive a review as possible. By studying how medical information is passed down in South Africa, this project would be the first step in a look at how accurate medical knowledge can be most effectively transmitted through different populations in the country.

Focusing primarily on the three biggest diseases in South Africa; Tuberculosis, Malaria and HIV/AIDS, the first part of the project would be done in South Africa using human subjects. The main aim of this portion will be to observe how the histories of these illnesses are passed down within different populations. Questions which will be addressed include: who is responsible for teaching members in these communities about health? How is this information distributed? What are the effects of different advances in medicine on how these illnesses are spoken about? What are differences in how this information is passed through different classes, races, and ages? And how do all of these pieces ultimately affect people’s perceptions of the aforementioned diseases? Attention will be given to the effects family structure, the use of informal (folklore, media, etc) as well as formal education systems, and how these areas intertwine.

Four major age groups will be targeted in this project; children below the age of 18, young adults between the ages of 18 and 25, adults ages 26-55 and the elderly ages 55 and up. Questions to interviewees will be tailored particularly to one’s age group. For all age groups questions will be mostly factual knowledge assays asking; what the subjects know about a particular disease, what does that mean to them, and who taught them this information. For adults older than 25, questions will also focus on how they themselves pass down medical knowledge to their own youth, particularly asking what tools they feel that they have available to effectively transmit this information.

The questions will be asked in a two-part form. The first part will be a quantitative written questionnaire assessing the subjects’ demographic representation, factual knowledge on Tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS and Malaria, and how the subjects acquire their medical knowledge. The second part of the interview will be more qualitative in nature. It will be a verbally administered questionnaire in which subjects
will be asked to elaborate on their medical knowledge and the perceptions that accompany this knowledge. With permission, a recorder will be used for this portion of the interview.

By staying at World Camps, a camp for children affected and infected by HIV/AIDS, near Johannesburg, I will have access to different groups of people both in Johannesburg and the rural areas surrounding the city. My aim is to interview most of the subjects for the project during the month of June while I am at World Camps. I have also been accepted into the summer study abroad program at the University of Cape Town, which will give me particular access to college students, who will be key representatives for my young adult demographic group. Working in these two major cities will allow me to have ample access to people in the different demographic groups that I want to reach.

In Independent Research course that I will take in the fall semester, I will turn my focus to the written medical history of South Africa. During this time, the information gathered from the research in the course will be compared and contrasted to the information gathered from interviews. The final paper and presentation for the fellowship will include both of these pieces.

I understand that in order to undertake this research project I need to have a particular set of skills which will allow me to both relate to people as well as to execute the project as close to the plan as possible in a short amount of time. I am confident that I possess this skill set. During my sophomore year, I worked as a volunteer at Tufts Medical Center in the Emergency Room as part of the PULSE program at Boston College with three other students. As part of the program, our role was not only to help the medical staff with day-to-day needs (cleaning, transporting patients etc.), but a major part of our job was to verbally administer questionnaires on patients’ care and care history and talk to patients about their health care.

As the medical center brings in a wide variety of patients from a wide range of demographic groups, our study focused on identifying disparities in care both within the emergency room, and also on the greater scale of the health care system. Through this experience, I learned how to interview people from different walks of life. I also learned the importance of sensitivity when interviewing individuals and how to identify with people and make them feel comfortable. This experience also taught me how to put together effective questionnaires and how to consolidate this information in both quantitative (graphs, spreadsheets, etc) and qualitative ways.

Aside from my experience at Tufts Medical Center, within my major I have had the opportunity to work in scientific lab environments. While research in a biology lab is quite different from the research I am proposing to do, these experiences have taught me valuable skills in how to conduct effective research. I have learned how to ask the right questions for a particular subject matter, how to create solid procedures in getting to the results, and most importantly how to be flexible when experiments go in different directions. This, in particular, will allow me to adjust and to create new plans if the project should take unexpected turns.

In my biology labs, I have learned the importance of the community in research. I understand that my short study will not be an end-all-be-all in health education and that what I learn might not necessarily be applicable to all of the people in South Africa. However, as in all scientific research, I also understand that every piece of research is a part of a whole, and that while my piece of it might not be large in any sense, it may be a small step in ensuring more effective health education in South Africa and countries like it. I am encouraged by the progress taking place in South Africa today. Many groups and individuals are working diligently towards ensuring that the state of healthcare and health education in South Africa
improves for every population group. My hope is to utilize the tools that I have available to me to further contribute to these ongoing efforts.

**Budget**

- One-way flight: Boston, Massachusetts → Johannesburg, South Africa: $1,098 (United Airlines)
- One-way flight: Capetown, South Africa → Boston, MA: $1,477 (Continental Airlines)
- Food and Local Travel: $500
- Tokens of Appreciation for Study Participants: $385
- Voice Recorder: $40
  - Total: $3,500
Proposal:

I’m proposing to travel to Parma, Italy, for spring semester of 2010, under the BC Study Abroad program. At of all the programs to study abroad, I choose to study in Italy because it was one place that I have always wanted to go since learning about Ancient Rome in various history classes to Giuseppe Verdi, an Italian opera composer, in my music class. Italy is saturated and rich in history, music, art and literature. Plus, being African American, I wanted to go somewhere outside of my comfort zone, and explore a completely different culture. In addition, share my culture with the Italians, and introduce, not only my American, but also my African heritage to them. In Italy, there are only three BC Study Abroad locations, which are Venice, Milan and Parma. I choose Parma because I wanted to experience a genuine, authentic Italian town, not a big, tourist-center city.

The Parma program has an Italian language and immersion component. Parma is small, authentic Italian town, with a population of 180,000, located in the northern region of Italy. I’m required to take Elementary Italian I, Fall semester 2009, and complete Elementary Italian II, Spring semester in Parma. As an exchange student, I will be paired with an Italian student and meet once a week to practice speaking Italian and English to each other. To further the immersion experience, I have the option to live in a shared apartment, with other exchange students, or to live with a host family.

In addition, I will take a history class on Parma, exploring the various museums and ancient churches that exhibit paintings by da Vinci and van Dyck, and studying the famous composers- Verdi and Toscanini. Before arriving in Parma, I will spend three weeks in Florence, Italy, taking an Art History course. The program also includes taking an Italian cooking course,
where I will learn how to make a full four course Italian meal; attending operas, skiing in the Alps, taking tours of museums and historic locations, and tasting Parmesan and prosciutto at the cheese factories.

A university should not only prepare its students, academically, for the world, but also socially and mentally. There is only so much a student can learn sitting in a classroom. First hand experience is the best way to learn and to grasp concepts. BC, as a Jesuit institution, believes in cura personalis, or “care of the person,” or personal growth and development. Studying abroad will complete and solidify my experience. I will have the chance to experience a new culture, learn Italian, and gain a new perspective on the world. In addition, I can use what I have learned in my sociology and communication classes and analyze the Italian and European societies, and study the means of communication in Parma. Studying abroad will be an eye-opening prospect because I have never traveled overseas, and even Boston is a new world for me from living in North Carolina.

Studying abroad of my junior year of college is my only chance to travel. After I graduate, I'm entering either graduate or law school, or entering into the workforce to pay off my loans. Every upperclassmen that I have met, have all urged me to study abroad for at least a semester and all have agreed that they have learned more about themselves and the world during their time abroad then in their three years at BC. Regardless of my financial situation, especially in this recession, I’m determine to do anything I have to in order to study abroad. I did not let the $50,000 price tag of Boston College deter me from applying or attending BC, and I’m not going to let the expenses of the program deter me from a priceless, chance of a lifetime to live and study in a foreign country for five months. The Parma program is not only an great educational
experience, but also a language and immersion experience, that will help me to transcend and bring out the true potential in myself
Proposed Budget:

*BC Tuition: $18,705+ (2008-2009 Tuition rate)

*Housing: $6,100-6,500 (Shared Apartment or Host Family)

*Health Insurance: $150

Subtotal of BC Bill: $24,955+

Books: $300

Airfare: $1,500

Meals: $600-800 (Shared Apartment or Host Family)

Passport: $100

Other Expenses: $1,500

Subtotal of Out-of-Pocket Expenses: $4,000+

Total: $28,955-29,055+

* Billed directly by BC