

Hillary Alamene

Graduation Year: Sophomore

College: Arts & Letters

Major(s): Neuroscience and Behavior, Political Science

Minors(s): N/A

Scholar Group Membership: N/A

Did you received other funding for this project?: Multicultural Student Programs and Services

Could you have completed this project without CUSE funding? No

More details on CUSE funding assistance?

Project Title: 18th Annual Africa Conference at the University of Texas at Austin

Project Location: Austin, Texas

ND Faculty Mentor: Elaine DeBassige

Project Type: Conference - Attendance

Why did you undertake this project/experience? Deepen your knowledge of a topic or issue, Career discernment and/or preparation

Did your funded experience help you:

[Deepen your understanding of your coursework or field of study]: A Little

[Discern your interests and post-bac goals]: A Little

[Become confident in your ability to set and achieve your goals]: Yes

[Gain a more nuanced view of local, national, or global communities]: Yes

[Improve your written and verbal communications skills]:Not Applicable

Tell us about your experience.

Whilst at the University of Texas at Austin, I was able to attend the 18th Annual Africa Conference convened by Dr. Toyin Falola. This year's conference focused on the topic of African Leadership and Institutions. As a conference participant, I was able to sit in on various panels from those representing universities such as Vanderbilt University, the University of Miami, and more commonly, the University of Ibadan in Nigeria. Many of the participants had come from abroad, sharing their research that focused both on the historical and more contemporary understanding of Africa, pan-Africanism, colonialism, citizenship as a result of border wars, and various conditions for development. As I sat in on these panels, I was not only able to extract information from such insightful panels, but I was able to hear some of the most interesting responses from my peers around me as they shared their opinions on particular topics. The informal arrangement of the panels really facilitated discussion where all individuals could easily be integrated into the dialogue, making for such an inviting experience.

Describe the impact this project had, both on you as a student-scholar and on the people you worked with.

As a student-scholar, attending the conference was an insightful experience. For the people I was able to work with and alongside, I realized that it provided them with a platform that they were not always provided. It was interesting to see interaction take place amongst various Africans, and it was interesting to see the various sentiments harbored by individuals who lived within the same country but belonged to different ethnic or religious groups. As both a student and attendee, I was not only provided with a more nuanced perspective on African history as it relates to colonialism, but I was able to hear the sentiments of those who looked so different from me. Despite being a Nigerian-American, my attendance at the conference became a reminder that my interests were not exclusive to myself, but also that outside of my own identity as a Nigerian, there are many other individuals whose experience as Africans--whether that be as South Africans, Somalis, or Egyptians, was a very different one.

Describe how this experience is connected to your plans as a student or future professional.

I attended this conference with the hopes of identifying a starting point for my prospective senior thesis. Prior to my attendance, I knew that I was considering graduate school and so I knew it was imperative that I be intentional about my aspirations. I wanted to find myself in a place where I could interact with people who were working towards or had already received degrees in fields of Political Science, History, or Foreign Affairs, with a specialization in African Studies. The conference seemed to satisfy this requirement, as I was able to interact and communicate with graduate students and professors who had spent much of their academic careers in my fields of interest. In turn, I was able to build my network to include individuals who could provide advice for my future educational and professional pursuits.

What advice would you give other students who are planning to pursue similar projects?

I would encourage other students to attend conferences. I once thought that conferences could only be fruitful for those who had posters and presentations of their own; however, I realized that there is a lot to be had by simply being an attendee. Often, coordinators of the conference will work hard to make sure all participants are able to engage in all activities, regardless of expertise in the field. Additionally, I found that very few schools fund activities such as these where students can attend conferences, rather than just present at them. In turn, it's a great opportunity that is definitely worth pursuing.

I acknowledge that this form has been filled out truthfully and to the best of my ability. I understand that this information will be shared with many different CUSE constituencies. As such, I have provided as much useful information as I was able. I understand that CUSE will not complete my award disbursement until this form is successfully completed. If I have any questions or concerns, I will contact CUSE before submitting this form. To illustrate that you understand all of these points, please enter your Notre Dame email in the box below.
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