

NTR 353 Field Experience in International Nutrition, **South Africa** 2014



In summer 2014 Dr. Jeanne Freeland Graves led 18 undergraduate nutrition students on the adventure of a lifetime across South Africa. The program was based at the University of Cape Town, with an additional two weeks in Stellenbosch – heart of the wine lands. The nutrition faculty at the Tygerberg Medical Campus lectured on food based dietary guidelines; pediatric malnutrition; food and culture in Western South Africa; public health issues and strategies; and food security and HIV+ in South Africa. Students also took a course on the unique culture and political history of South Africa and learned about the terrible impact of apartheid on society, the incredible forgiveness of past horrors by the Truth and Conciliation process, and the intricate development of the current political system.

Learning from direct experience, students traveled to visiting community health clinics, a facility for the frail elderly, and a home for children with AIDS and cancer. They observed community gardens and job training programs, learned to make traditional Xhosa cuisine (curries, chakalaka, samp and beans), visited community kitchens and schools, conducted market basket analysis of markets and noted nutrient labeling at retail food outlets.

Most sobering were the visits to five impoverished townships created by apartheid. As a consequence of the policies of apartheid, millions of people live in townships in shanties with dirt floors, without running water, private toilets or electricity. One third of the population in the country is HIV+. Despite the readily availability of health care and antiretroviral medicines, many adults and children do not accept treatment due to fear of stigmatization.

Students witnessed the magnificent beauty of Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens, the historic wine estates, and the Cape of Good Hope, where huge waves crashed from the wild currents on the rocky beach. It was fun to watch the families of baboons scamper across the road, observe the penguins waddle on the

beach, participate in African song and dance, and sample fabulous French food at the Bastille Day Festival in Franschhoek, Capetonian food at the Hout Bay and Biscuit Mill food festivals, and Muslim food in Bo Kaap.

The culmination was the Nutrition in the Bush activity at Kruger National Park. On safari students observed the "Big Five" in their natural habitat (African lion, elephant and leopard; black rhinoceros: and Cape buffalo) and identified the most famous birds of South Africa and their diets.

In summer 2016 Freeland-Graves will lead a new group of adventurous students to return to South Africa.