

PRINCETON IN AFRICA

Fellow Report: 6-month

This report focuses on the details of your fellowship that have changed and evolved since your 3-month report; it also aims to help you begin formulating greater reflections about your fellowship experience. To complete this report, you may find it helpful to have a copy of your 3-month report form nearby.

We will use your comments to assess partner organizations, site placements, stipends, and overall logistics. The information you include may be shared with the Board of Directors and future Fellows. We may use your comments to give feedback to partner organizations as well. Please indicate when information is not to be shared outside of PiAf and rest assured that we will honor your request.

Your Personal Information

Organization: Equal Education
City, Country: Cape Town, South Africa

Anticipated fellowship end date:

1. How have you been dealing with money during the course of your Fellowship? Have you opened a bank account? Are you using traveler's checks? Relying on ATMs? Any advice on money/banking issues to share with future Fellows? *I have kept my bank account in the US and simply used ATMs as needed. Most stores and restaurants accept Visa/Mastercard, so there is little trouble accessing money. The fees for swiping obviously depend on banks, so just make sure to check beforehand and determine at what point it's cheaper to withdraw money or just charge it. Also, a convenient way of skipping the withdrawal fees is to offer to buy dinner for a group of people with your card, and they can pay you cash.*
2. Are you taking or have you taken anti-malarials during your fellowship? If so, what kind and how/where did you acquire them? *N/A.*

Your Work

3. Have your responsibilities evolved or changed since the start of your fellowship? If so, how? *I have gained a lot more responsibility as we are now fewer staff in the department and my relationship with my supervisor improved. Now she delegates very specific responsibilities, such as research projects and creation of internal materials, directly to me. I was also given the opportunity to write for publications, including SABC (a major news outlet) and an academic journal, both on behalf of Equal Education. More broadly, staff are much more familiar with me and regularly include me on task teams for organization-wide efforts like trainings at youth camp and logistics for demonstrations. These are major improvements from my first directionless months.*
4. Please describe in greater detail 1-2 projects that you have undertaken or accomplishments you have made in the last 3 months. (Feel free to update us on a project you have been working on since the beginning of your fellowship or to share information about a new project.) *See above for other examples but here I will concentrate on the journal article. In September and October, I worked with two members of the Equal Education Law Centre (EELC) on an internal analysis of South Africa's recently published National Development Plan and its chapter on education. Since EE was requested to submit feedback on the draft plan, our analysis focused on whether or not our recommendations were incorporated in the final version. The internal memo didn't get much reaction, but then EE was then invited by "Social Dynamics", an academic journal about southern African affairs based at the University of Cape Town, to submit an article about the NDP's education chapter. I, along with the EELC staff, co-authored the article and submitted in December 2012. We are*

now waiting for editorial feedback and it should be published in the coming months. This is a very exciting personal and professional development. It also marks a huge step in solidifying my relationship with EE staff and my supervisor.

Your Fellowship in the Future

5. Would you recommend that this fellowship position be repeated again in the future? If so, what about your post might be improved upon by/for future Fellows? *I would recommend it with one large caveat, that a description of responsibilities be drafted prior to the fellow's arrival. EE is a very flexible organization, and so I understand that a fellow's eventual responsibilities might fall elsewhere but it is essential at the beginning to have a sense of what the fellow can and should be doing, since supervision is minimal. Otherwise, there are many opportunities, once the fellow is more comfortable in the organization, to express interest in certain tasks and projects.*

6. What would you tell someone who is interested in being the next PiAf Fellow at your post? *Start reading up on the South African education system as soon as possible. There are many (important) differences to the United States, so it's a bad frame of reference many times. Also, be a self-starter and develop some goals for things you'd like to achieve (whether it be writing, or organizing youth group sessions, etc.) based on your past experiences. It will help you create a niche for the fellowship.*

Your Reflections

7. Since the beginning of your fellowship, have you returned home (i.e., for the December/January holidays)? If so, how did leaving your posting in Africa affect you and your work? *No, I have not.*

8. What will you do differently in the next 6 months until the conclusion of your fellowship-- at work? Outside of work? *I am going to focus on more opportunities for writing, so I can leave with a decent portfolio that I can carry with me into my next job or fellowship. I may also spend more time outside of work learning either Afrikaans or isiXhosa.*

9. After 6 months in the field, what have you learned about Africa, development, and living abroad? What issues do you want to learn more about during the remainder of your fellowship experience? *First, that there is a serious dearth of politics in the world of international development. By that I mean, the bureaucratic tendencies of the aid world do little to think radically about many things, perhaps the role of international actors and the real issues of threatened sovereignty first and foremost. Working at a domestic advocacy organization has reinforced my suspicion that the important battles need to be fought primarily by citizens in a country for meaningful change to occur. As much as I may care about the state of schools in Khayelitsha, politicians will only respond to political threats, and as an American citizen, I am not much of a threat. But a group of 450 angry parents in a township where the governing party hopes to win in coming elections IS a threat. If anything, my time at EE has demonstrated the need for the international aid world to get more political, not less.*

Second, as for living abroad, I have discovered that the ex-pat life is not my thing. Many enjoy it, and having a year is much preferable to a few months since I can invest in relationships. One of the ways I've combated the effects of transiency has been finding mainly South African friends, which is obviously something one should do anyway.

Third, concerning things I want to learn more about, I hope to discover more about the coloured communities in Western Cape. Our work at EE hardly touches these townships, even though they make up the majority of the province's population. This is one shortcoming that means my experience remains more black/white than the multi-cultural reality of Cape Town. One of the reasons I want to focus more on Afrikaans is so I can get more access to coloured music, writing and culture.

10. How have the first 6 months of your fellowship shaped your plans for the future? *The exposure to policy advocacy has been invaluable in determining what kind of career will make me happy. This was one of the most exciting things I anticipated when starting at EE. Perhaps the surprise has been that I am less inclined to stay in international development, despite having two years of previous work experience in African affairs and now another year with PiAf. What I've learned through the fellowship is that "citizenship" is a powerful concept, and as a non-citizen of South Africa, I'm detached from these heated policy battles in a dispiriting way. Conversely, it has re-energized me to continue with the same kind of activism work in the United States, where many of the same issues of poverty and inequality exist.*

11. It is often helpful for us to draw from PiAf Fellows' words when we disseminate information about PiAf. However, we hate to hassle you whenever we need a blurb! So, please tell us a bit here about what PiAf means to you. Your insights and anecdotes give interested supporters a glimpse into the scope of your projects and potential to make a difference in one year. Please write a few paragraphs as if you were being asked to comment on PiAf for a promotional brochure. What would you say to a potential supporter? An interested applicant? An employer? A friend? What does PiAf mean to you? What have you gained or learned from this experience?

Princeton in Africa came at a crucial time in my early career, where I had some work experience but needed international experience before I could make a decision as to where I wanted my career to go. I couldn't get this same kind of experience with my student debt unless I had financial support, which is exactly what makes this fellowship unique. It acknowledges that working abroad for non-profits should not just be limited to those with means, which is the norm. Considering how many recent graduates must choose now between jobs that pay and jobs they want, I have found a real sweet spot in the Princeton program. More importantly, the fellowship affords fellows a great amount of independence in determining how to make the most of their year in Africa. It doesn't hold your hand, but it's theirs to catch and coach you along the way.

My year in Cape Town has been instrumental in helping me sort out my priorities in life by giving me the chance to work in an energetic and earnest social movement in the townships, and discover that the only thing you need to wake up in the morning is passion about what you're doing. That's right, I don't need coffee (most days) if I know I'll be working on education policy! While I don't know if this will translate into an immediate jump into the field when I return, I can sense that education advocacy will now be a lifelong passion of mine.