

## Exploring the Global Program Trip to Ghana

Podcast episode was recorded on 3/29/24

Patrick Lageraaen:

Welcome back to another episode of the UB School of Management podcast. My name is Patrick Lageraaen and I'm your host. Today we were talking about another global program's travel opportunity at the School of Management, specifically Ghana. My guests today are Logan and Danielle, two students who traveled there this past January.

All right, so the purpose of this episode is to just get an overview of the Ghana class and experience and to hear about how it impacted the two of you. So I took the Business in East Asia class and traveled to Singapore and Vietnam, so I might be able to share some insights on that. However, I really don't know much about the Ghana and Africa experience, so this should be pretty interesting.

To start us off, can you please describe the class that you took and then what that semester portion looked like leading up to the trip?

Logan:

Yeah, I guess I could start us off. Hi, my name is Logan. I'm from the School of Architecture and Planning, and for the, I guess, in-class experience, it was a via Zoom class, but we did meet regularly on, I believe it was Tuesday, Thursdays. Danielle, correct me if I'm wrong, and I had a really great time. It was a very person... It was very much like you self-generated work and we got to work in partners, we were divided up into groups very early on and we were assigned different partners that were within Africa for us to work with. And for me, my group was paired with a hospital that operated out of Ghana and we got to meet regularly with them and it was really interesting because typically over in-Zoom classes, I feel as though you can be very unconnected or disconnected with the people and the professor, but because they were dividing us up into groups/ and we worked really closely together on these projects, I felt a little bit more connected with that class experience that you don't typically get via Zoom.

Patrick Lageraaen:

Danielle, what about you?

Danielle:

I definitely agree with everything that Logan has said so far. My name is Danielle, I'm a graduate student in the School of Engineering and Applied Sciences.

I was partnered up with the Mondiant Initiative, so they're a non-profit based out of Rwanda that helps to fund college education for refugees. So I didn't know a ton about the continent of Africa before, but it was really interesting 'cause we partnered with Hilltop Global and then we learned different videos about each of the countries our partner organizations were in, so Ghana, Rwanda and South Africa. So that was definitely a highlight and I really enjoyed the cross-functional interdisciplinary nature of the work. So I had students I was paired with from public health, from the school of management, graduate and undergraduate. So trying to apply engineering concepts to more non-profit work was really interesting because in my day-to-day, I don't do a ton of international work, so that was a nice change for me.

Patrick Lageraen:

Yeah. Looking past the project that you do in the class, did they do anything to prepare you for the trip? Were there any lectures teaching you about what to expect when going there?

Danielle:

There was. We had a doctor, we had a number of medical professionals go with us on the trip, but one of the medical professionals prepared us ahead of time. He talked about some of the vaccines that we needed to get and different things, different options for getting that. And our professor, Dr. Siaw-Asamoah, she's actually from Ghana, she actually has a home in Accra.

Patrick Lageraen:

Wow.

Danielle:

So she was able to talk to us about some of her experiences there and we did actually have a course where we learned a little bit of Twi, which was one of the more regional dialects, so.

Patrick Lageraen:

Yeah, very cool.

Danielle:

That was really helpful as well, and Naomi and our professor were very helpful with getting our questions answered.

Patrick Lageraaen:

Why did you guys end up traveling?

Logan:

Well, there was different times to travel for different people, so we were divided up into medical and non-medical group. And we were, Dani and I were a part of the non-medical group and we left... I left, I think on the 3rd, getting there on the 4th, and then I left on the 17th and got back on the 18th. I think, if I'm remembering correctly.

Patrick Lageraaen:

So to our listeners who maybe don't know where Ghana is, could you just describe where it is in Africa and then what is it like getting there? What were the steps to go from your home in New York to Ghana?

Danielle:

So Ghana is actually located in West Africa. It does border the water as well, so that was really interesting to see in Cape Coast because we were near the ocean, which was a nice change because I actually live in Connecticut right now, I attend UB remotely. So I am an ocean gal, but I was home for Christmas. I was actually visiting my parents, so my dad, shout out to my dad who drove me to Dulles and then I had a direct flight from Dulles International Airport in Virginia to Accra on United. So it was a 12-hour flight getting there.

Patrick Lageraaen:

Wow.

Danielle:

And [inaudible 00:05:13] going home, but it honestly was not bad at all. United, I think, has really improved since the last time I traveled with them internationally. So the trip went by pretty quickly and we ended up, it was an overnight flight, so we got there the next day.

Patrick Lageraaen:

I'm surprised you had to go to Virginia and not like JFK or something.

Danielle:

So that's a really good question. There's really two options for direct flights. There's two airlines, United and Delta, that will fly directly to Accra, which was nice to have that option. And it ended up just being easier to go out of Dulles because my parents were located only about two hours from there.

Patrick Lageraaen:

Wow, okay.

Logan:

Yeah, I left out of Buffalo, so that was really easy for me. Then we met up with Dani on my flight in DC or in Virginia. Yeah, I think getting the overnight flights is really key so you can really adjust to the time change difference.

Patrick Lageraaen:

Right.

Logan:

I believe we're a four-hour difference from Accra or from Ghana, five with that... They don't do the time change, they don't do the fall, spring forward, fall behind, our change. So sometimes it's five hours, but I believe when we went it was only... I think it was five when we went because we had fallen behind an hour.

Patrick Lageraaen:

Right. Just curious, do you guys remember how much the flight cost? It's probably a niche flight.

Logan:

I think it depends on when you buy it, if you buy it super early, of course, I think flights normally are cheaper that way. I believe when I bought my ticket it was maybe 1.3K think, but I know that was a little bit different because I had a connecting flight to Buffalo. If I had say, driven down to JFK, that would've significantly dropped the price of my ticket but I was also, that drive is pretty hard. I wasn't wanting just

to leave right from Buffalo, so I think that added a few hundred dollars. But yeah, I think there are ways around the higher price depending on where you leave out of and where you're located.

Patrick Lageraaen:

Yeah. So, let's talk about the trip now. So you just arrived in Africa. What is that like? Did anything surprise you? What was it like stepping out of the airport?

Danielle:

It was definitely warm, because January is actually the second hottest month in Ghana, February [inaudible 00:07:33]. So I live in the Northeast, so I'm used to the cold, but it definitely was very warm, that was my initial thought. But the actual airport experience was pretty smooth. I was really fortunate that I actually talked to one of my colleagues, his brother-in-law had just been to Ghana. So he was very kind and talked me through the airport because that was probably the part I was the most nervous about, it was really smooth.

Logan and I met up with another friend, Jayla, who was on our flight, and then we just passed through the first checkpoint, which is really the yellow fever card. And then we pass through just going through immigration like you would at any other airport. And then our luggage arrived pretty quickly, I would say, within getting to the luggage area. Our luggage was there within 10 minutes, which is nice. So honestly, it was very smooth and as soon as we walked out, the students that we were working with through All Africa Student Union, they were there to greet us right away. I was very nervous about that part, but I didn't have to be.

Patrick Lageraaen:

Yeah, that's great to hear. Where'd you guys stay when you were there?

Logan:

We stayed at a hotel that was not far from the airport, I believe it was probably around 15 minutes from the airport, I believe it was called Angie Hill Hotel and it was really nice. All of us were assigned roommates randomly. Fortunately, I was able to be assigned with someone who I was paired up with in the group activities via Zoom, so I got to meet my team members in person. I believe my team was the only team for all of us to go, so I got to meet all my team members in Africa for the first time, which was really interesting, not meeting in Buffalo but we met in Accra for the first time. And I think we all had

just one other roommate and yeah, we were all relatively close to one another as well. So if any of us needed help or had questions for each other, we were all located right next to each other in the hotel.

Patrick Lageraen:

Right. Coming back to the project in the class. So you did a project spanning the whole semester. What did you do on the trip and then was it at all integrated with that class project?

Danielle:

So on the specific trip for the full two weeks, we did a variety of things. So we did get to see Ghana's parliament, we met a judge. We got to see some manufacturing facilities, which is, I got my undergrad in industrial engineering, that was really interesting to see. And then we participated in educational and medical outreach. So we volunteered with primary school kids and we actually got to see all three levels of Ghana's educational system, so we tour. We worked with primary school kids and then we got to see a girls boarding school that actually our professor had gone to, which was really interesting.

Patrick Lageraen:

Oh wow.

Danielle:

We toured... That was very meaningful. There was a lot of connections to her family life, which are more impactful because we got to meet people that she knew in her community and her extended family, which it felt a lot warmer that way.

Patrick Lageraen:

Yeah, right.

Danielle:

We got to tour a school in Ghana, like a college in Ghana, back in Accra. So the actual trip itself, my project was based out of Rwanda, so we didn't do a ton with the project, and the actual in-person trip because it was an optional trip, but concepts and things that we had learned throughout the class, we got to really experience on the trip.

Patrick Lageraen:

Very cool. Logan, do you agree with that?

Logan:

Yeah, I think my group's project, our hospital, Narh-Bita Hospital, is based out of Accra, or based out of not Accra, I believe they're based out of Tema, Ghana, but they are within the country. Unfortunately, we weren't able to visit the hospital itself, but like Dani said, I think a lot of the knowledge that we learned throughout the semester and practical knowledge that we learned, we were able to apply while we were on our trip, rather than the information or the specifics of on what we were assigned to in the class.

Patrick Lageraen:

So, let's think a little bit about the culture because a major purpose why we do these sort of experiences. What was it like adapting to this culture? Did you have a learning period? Walk me through that.

Logan:

Yeah, last time I was in the country or in the continent of Africa, I was on the eastern side, I was in Tanzania. So I was really to see the difference in culture and the difference in customs in the western side of the continent. I think a lot of the difference that I found, it's going to be a little bit of a... My answer is a little bit informal I guess, but I think a lot of it was having a lot more patience. I think in the US we have this kind of fast mindset mentality of things that have to happen on time as we schedule them, and when we were in Ghana, I think a lot of it was a little bit more slowed for us, which isn't neither good nor bad, it's just different. I think a lot of it was having a bit more patience when it comes to interacting with businesses, organizations. I think a lot of it also for me was happening in restaurants, just the slow time for... Because they cook their meals right then and there. There's no, it's not like you're reheating something in the kitchen, all of it is made from scratch. So I think, and that takes a lot of time.

For example, when you're thinking about Fufu or something like this that takes, where it's pounded yam, I believe that takes a lot more hands-on time. So I think a lot of it was just having a bit more patience than I typically do here in the States.

Patrick Lageraen:

Yeah, that's a good point and I remember Dr. Siaw-Asamoah was saying pretty much exactly that, about how when she's back home, she has to reset herself into the ways that she grew up with, which is very different than what she has to do now when dealing with Americans. Danielle, how was that for you? How was that, dealing with the culture?

Danielle:

It was very positive. I mean, Ghana is a very warm and welcoming culture. So from the start, all of the students that we worked with were very warm people, and I come from the New England region right now, so it takes some time for us to get to know people and get comfortable with them, but it was pretty instantaneous there where we were welcomed in and they helped us along. But it is a much slower pace of life, which was nice, definitely agree with what Logan said there.

I didn't necessarily know too much about Ghana before I went, but I, in seeing their parliament and learning about their history, really got to appreciate Ghana's stability because they've had 30 years of a stable government with a lot of peaceful changeover of powers.

Patrick Lageraen:

Right.

Danielle:

So learning about that and getting to see their government in action was really interesting because based on what else is going on in the region, that's not always guaranteed. So, Ghana is very unique in that regard.

Patrick Lageraen:

Yeah, that's interesting, I didn't know that. So Logan, I know you're going to have an answer to this question. I want to talk about your key takeaways from the class and the trip as a whole. I know you'll have an answer because you did that presentation. I wonder if you could share some with us?

Logan:

Yeah, so my main motivations going into the class were because of my master's program, I'm in the International Development and Global Health program in the school of Architecture and Planning, and I



am required to have a field placement where I go and conduct research independently. Research is a loose term, independently for my master's culminating project.

While I was there, I was specifically focusing on the agricultural industry, specifically cocoa while we were there, because we got to visit places like the Cocoa Research Institute of Ghana, which is an affiliate branch of the Ghanaian, the Cocoa board, the government organization. And I think my main takeaways that I took were specifically focused to my research and I learned a lot about the economics of cocoa and the fundamentals of what it means to start a business in Ghana, because I think that's very much different than how that happens here. So it was really interesting to learn the fundamentals as we visited places like Chocolum in the Research Institute. I think it was really interesting because we got to speak with a lot of officials and people who are high up in the industry, specifically at the Research Institute. We got to speak with the CEO and their assistants. And at the Chocolum factory we got to speak with the owners of the business. So I think those were really pillar trips for me throughout the entirety of our trip in Accra.

Dani and I were also the only students to visit the American Chamber of Commerce as well, and I think that was our final trip, our final-

Patrick Lageraen:

Site visit?

Logan:

Site visit, yes, within the trip. So I think that also was really interesting to see how the Ghanaian government works with the United States and works diplomatically within other regions of the world.

Patrick Lageraen:

What is that? The Chamber of Commerce?

Logan:

It was located amongst embassies and very close to the airport. When we were driving over, we got to see lots of different flags coming out from different areas to signify the ambassadors and the embassies that we were around. And the American Chamber of Commerce specifically relates to American industry happening within Ghana and that relationship between the two countries. And they talked a lot about their board members and who's affiliated with the American Chamber of Commerce and how they work

with the local Ghanaian government and their workers to, I guess, promote US efforts within the country.

Patrick Lageraaen:

Right.

Logan:

I think some of the affiliated people, Dani, please correct me if I'm wrong, this is just me going back a few months trying to think about this conversation we had. Some of the people were affiliated with Coca-Cola or other big industries that we see here in the US.

Patrick Lageraaen:

Yeah, really cool. Dani, what about you? You have any key takeaways?

Danielle:

So Chocolu chocolate is really excellent. That was some of the best chocolate I've ever had. But getting to see, because I work more in manufacturing now, like larger corporations. So we toured Jospong, which amongst other things, they span a lot of multiple industries, but we got to see the recycling plants. So for me, getting to see the differences and similarities between businesses in the United States and how they do manufacturing and how you do it in Ghana was really interesting.

I also enjoyed seeing and interacting with primary school kids because as different, culturally and weather and everything else is the United States is from Ghana, there definitely is a lot of overlap. So you do see some similarities in your lives. So that was really, really enjoyable.

And I think Africa is, we did a conference and one of the days we were there and we learned that by, I think it's 2050, the continent of Africa is going to have one of the largest populations of young adults. So it really is emerging more as a world power and really a place of global development. So it was interesting to see that in the decades before that happens.

Patrick Lageraaen:

Right, it's almost like you're getting a sneak peek to what you'll be able to look at later in your life. So that's pretty cool, being able to look forward like that.

Danielle:

Yep, that was really interesting. And I really enjoyed the food, that particularly was something I was a little cautious about because I have a life-threatening peanut allergy. I know groundnuts or peanuts are a huge part of Ghanaian cuisine, like a lot of parts of West Africa, but I didn't have any issues. Actually funny enough, I got back from the trip and two weeks later in the United States I had a problem, but not at all in Ghana. And I got to try a wide range of cuisines from Fufu that Logan had talked about, and light goat soup, which was really delicious, to chicken and rice, to try some of their breakfast foods as well. So that was, as somebody who enjoys eating, one of the coolest parts of trip.

Patrick Lageraen:

Awesome, great to hear. So no peanuts on the plane, right?

Danielle:

No, no. United was great with that, actually. So there were no peanut issues.

Patrick Lageraen:

Awesome.

Danielle:

And I did have four EPIPENS with me-

Patrick Lageraen:

Good.

Danielle:

... And inhalers, [inaudible 00:19:54] all that stuff, so.

Patrick Lageraen:

Right, awesome. So I like this question because I wouldn't say I have regrets from my trip, but there's some things that I wish I knew going into it. So, if you could go back in time and you tell yourself a certain piece of information or give yourself advice before the trip, what do you think that would be?

I can give an example just to help you along. So I experienced quite a bit of culture shock and then obviously I like Asian food, it's delicious, but I didn't know too much about it. Walking around and looking at all the food different places, I didn't really know what I was looking at. So I was kind of learning on the fly and I really wish I had done more research going in so that I could start enjoying it day one instead of day five or six. What do you guys think about that?

Danielle:

I have, practically speaking and I will have deeper ones, but just on a practical level, if you have contacts for that 12 to 14 hour flight, take them out beforehand. You do not want to fly 14 hours with contacts in your eyes, they will be glued to your eyes.

I wish I had done a little more research on Ghana's history before I went and just because we saw in the two weeks, the two weeks were pretty jam-packed and two weeks seems like a long time, but it really flew by. And especially when we were at the monuments and memorials, Ghana's history and learning about the early presidents, it just would've been helpful to have had a little bit more background there. So in hindsight, I should have done some research. I knew Ghana was a former British colony, but beyond that they have a lot of their own history that was interesting to learn, but I wanted to have done a little bit more digging before I went.

Patrick Lageraen:

Logan, did you think of one?

Logan:

Yeah, it's going to be a little unserious, but-

Patrick Lageraen:

That's okay.

Logan:

... While I was on the trip, while we were at visiting the more rural primary school, I think that Dani had touched upon earlier, I had only brought one pair of tennis shoes, one pair of sneakers for the trip, and the sole of my sneaker during that day while we were at the school literally melt... The rubber literally melted off and the bottom of my shoe actually fell off.

Patrick Lageraaen:

Wow.

Logan:

I think I would've brought multiple pairs of sneakers because, and Dani can attest to this as well, we were up and about every single day. We went on a hike in the national forests. I was just not prepared for that to happen and I think I should have brought multiple pairs of sneakers. I know Dr. Siaw-Asamoah told us that Ghana is unkind to shoes if you're not used to that type of environment.

Patrick Lageraaen:

Right.

Logan:

She told us this, but I wasn't really mentally prepared. I didn't think that the bottom of my shoe would melt off, but it did. And so because Dani said, Dr. Siaw-Asamoah had us running around Ghana, truly we were up and down and sideways across the country for those two weeks. So I think I would definitely come prepared with more footwear because of that.

Patrick Lageraaen:

Good example. That's what I like about this question is like, in future trips we're going to be a lot more prepared and ready to hit the ground running and fully utilize the time that we have or at least more so than we did in the past, which leads me into my next question, which is travel skills. This is something that isn't really stressed a lot in global programs. They talk more about the cultural elements and that sort of personal growth. They don't really talk about travel skills and if you're on a 12-hour flight, that takes some skill to manage and get through without being miserable. I'm wondering if you guys have any examples of things that you've learned maybe on this trip or on other trips that make traveling easier for you?

Logan:

Yeah, so I think, like I mentioned before, I've traveled to the continent before, but of course traveling to different countries every single time you're going to have a new experience, especially with US airlines, things can happen.

So I think one thing that I learned between my last trip to the continent and to this past January was making sure that my carry-on is sufficient enough where if my luggage is lost, I won't be stranded for those two days or however long it takes to get me my luggage back. Last time I was in Tanzania, they lost it for a day and a half I think it took for me to get that back.

So when I went back to the continent this time when we were traveling to Ghana, I wanted to make sure that I had a mini toiletry set and a change of clothes just in case that were to happen. It fortunately didn't, both of my suitcases arrived in Accra when we landed, so I was very fortunate. But I think making sure that you're prepared in case something like that were to happen, especially on international flights, that's very highly probable. So making sure that you're prepared in that regard. Having an extra set of clothes and your toothbrush and all your medications on your person rather than in your checked luggage, I think is important.

Patrick Lageraen:

Yeah, good advice.

Danielle:

I definitely second what Logan said. I have a fear, excuse me, a fear of my luggage getting lost and I'm very grateful my dad drove me so I could get a direct flight, but the biggest rush I had before my trip was just getting duplicates of my EPIPENS and inhalers. just to ease my mind with my peanut allergy, and it was not bad at all but it was just a bit of a rush. So I would encourage you to think through that and make sure that you have more than enough medication just in case, so you aren't in a rush three days before you leave trying to get virtual telehealth providers to provide you your EPIPENS. So that would be my biggest takeaway.

And definitely changing from glasses to contacts ahead of time is key. And I will say that when we were leaving Ghana to go back to the United States, the airport experience was very, very smooth. The only unusual thing was there was some enhanced security checks at our gate, which was definitely not a problem, but it was just a little different. So when you do travel internationally, sometimes security regulations are a bit different than the United States, so it is helpful to do some research just so you're not surprised and just see what other countries do because it sounded like the secondary security screenings at the gate are pretty common internationally.

Patrick Lageraen:

Yeah, that's a good point about research ahead of time. When I arrived in Singapore, I didn't know that you needed an online, I guess it's a visa, it's like a visa on-demand thing. So that cost me about a half hour waiting at the airport to fill that thing out.

And then if I could just give a couple examples of things that I've learned from my travel experience. One would be air tags in your checked luggage, that really eases your mind when you can just look on your phone and see, oh, my bag's with me, it's on the plane. Sleeping when you can makes the flights go by faster and it makes it more comfortable in economy. And then keeping the same routine when you go to sleep, especially on planes. So brushing your teeth after you've had that meal, go to the bathroom and brush your teeth. It'll make it a lot easier to fall asleep and then you won't wake up with a gross feeling mouth.

So as a way to wrap up this episode, a lot of our listeners are either students or prospective students and they might be considering global programs for themselves. I'm wondering if you guys would have anything to say to someone who's thinking about an experience like this for themselves?

Danielle:

I highly recommend global programs, especially coming from a non-school of management, I came from the engineering school. I didn't do a lot of classes like this, which are more humanities based, working with a nonprofit. And I think it was super helpful to apply those skills in a different, in a bit of an unusual area for me, stretched my reach a bit and I'm very grateful to Dr. Cecilia Martinez Leon, who was my mentor in the School of Engineering and Applied Sciences for this course, for helping me do that. So it was meaningful to apply concepts that I learned in my undergrad and grad to a new and very friendly environment like working with the Mondiant Initiative.

And travel makes the world seem a lot bigger, every time you travel you get to experience something new. And whether you're able to go on the in-person trip or not, and I do recommend the in-person trip if you can, I think learning about new areas just expands your knowledge and horizons as a person.

Patrick Lageraen:

Do you think it makes it bigger or do you think it makes it smaller, or both?

Logan:

I think it helps you conceptualize how big it is, but I think because we had those connections with Dr. Siaw-Asamoah and her family and those people, you're really only... That you're not really that far

removed from people across the globe from you when you have when you're at a university like University at Buffalo that has such an international reach. I think it's really fun to see the connections and how you're not too far removed from these people, even though they're halfway across the globe.

Patrick Lageraen:

I feel like it makes it bigger in that, like you were saying, when you get there now all of a sudden these people become real and they exist and my world of understanding is now larger, but it also becomes smaller because I know this place and I feel comfortable traveling there again, like it's not foreign.

Interesting perspective that you learn.

Logan, any advice for students considering a global program?

Logan:

Yeah, I think because my program is international and when you're in the Department of Public Health or from the School of Architecture Urban Planning, a lot of these classes that I take, we come at it with an international lens and sometimes that isn't the case for all programs. And I think that's very important and something that shouldn't be lost on students, is looking outside of the US context. And I know that the trip is still pretty expensive for people who are of course paying for school and seeking higher education, but they do reduce it significantly, compared to if you were to do this outside of the SUNY system.

Patrick Lageraen:

Certainly.

Logan:

So if you do have the option to do something like this where the price is a little bit more, you're not breaking the bank as much, I think you should definitely take it. And I think this isn't the only global program's trip as well within the School of Management. I know I'm not from that school, but I think there are other programs. I think there's also one for Europe and one for Costa Rica, but there are other options outside of the entire study abroad program that the whole SUNY system has.

But I think it's definitely something that if you have the option to do, you should definitely do it because I think also within the global programs from this course, we gain a micro credential for cultural competency, I think it was for. I think that's really important for a lot of people to have and it's fun and



interesting that UB offers a way to show that knowledge that you gained through something that's like, you can have in hand or I guess have on your CV, rather than just saying you have cultural competency through X, Y, and Z experiences, but you really have something that's tangible to show from the university, which is really interesting.

Patrick Lageraaen:

Yeah, I think those are great points. I think we also covered a lot of great information on this podcast. We learned about both the global programs and then the UB School of Management opportunities in general, such as this Ghana trip. I really enjoyed seeing the parallels to my own trip and seeing how it compared to the experiences that you guys had. So, thanks so much for your time.

Danielle:

Thank you so much.

Logan:

Thank you very much for having us.

Patrick Lageraaen:

I hope you enjoyed this episode. Again, we were speaking with Logan and Danielle, two students who traveled to Ghana as part of a global programs experience here at the UB School of Management. My name is Patrick Lageraaen, and I've been your host. Thanks for listening.