



Zim students discuss experiences in the U.S.



Mutsa Mutembwa



Tawanda Tasikani



Nicollette Maunganidze

Harare, January 6, 2010: Tuesday afternoon thirty Zimbabweans pursuing higher education in the United States took time during their academic breaks to share their experiences in the U.S..

In a Food for Thought session – ‘Tell it Like it is’-- organized by the Education USA Advising Center based at the U.S. Embassy Public Affairs Section in Eastgate, the students hailed the U.S. education system, noting that U.S. universities offer opportunities for creativity, flexibility, and cultural exchange.

“The education system builds a person of excellence in and outside the classroom,” said Mutsa Mutembwa (20), a Mathematics and Economics major at Indiana University. “You are built to be someone who is curious about the world and wants to know more.”

Tawanda Tasikani (20), a sophomore at Amherst College, added, “The pace of the curricula is very fast (but) gives me control over what I want to learn. They encourage you to explore more into fields that you may not have thought of earlier.”

Nicollette Maunganidze (22), the only Zimbabwean student at Spelman College in Atlanta, said her college, a historically black college for women, is more than just education to her: “The first emotion you get when you get there (Spelman) is empowerment. You begin to know who you are and appreciate that you are just as valuable as the next person you think is better than you.”

Tawanda noted that there were six other Zimbabweans at his college, which meant initial social support from his fellow country-folk. However, he admitted, “While we did not discriminate against other cultures, we tended to gravitate towards other Africans, which I think in some ways is natural.”



Most American colleges have social clubs that assist students with information about events and activities within and outside college. Said Mutsa: “At Indiana, we have an African Students Association. I don’t go for a week without getting e-mails about individuals, events and activities. You also get faculty professors who offer a lot of advice.” Nicolletta said that although Spelman is exclusively female and predominantly African-American, she does not feel limited because her college “offers so many opportunities to meet people- you have outings, you have sport etc.”



Tell it Like it is- U.S. based Zimbabwean students share their experiences with prospective students about life in American Colleges

Excellence in both academics and sport is valued in the American higher education system, and a number of students have earned scholarships for talents demonstrated during their high school years in Zimbabwe. As former Arundel High student Mutsa has experienced, American colleges invest to ensure students excel in both fields.

“The athletic system (at Indiana University) is built in such a way that you push in both directions. There are so many facilities, opportunities for you to get help, to improve your studies, to ensure that your studies are kept upwards,” says Mutsa, who plays hockey at IU and is a member of the Zimbabwe national hockey team.

Mutsa’s achievements have earned her a Rhodes scholarship to pursue further studies at Oxford University. She attributes her success to a ‘Zimbabwe work ethic’ produced by the educational system in Zimbabwe: “You gain a work ethic from being Zimbabwean that is really unique. I continued with that and reaped the benefits latter. I think I earned a lot of respect because I worked hard, I promoted Zimbabwe.”

But there are other adjustments to student life in the U.S.: “At first, I missed sun jam, bread with sun jam and margarine,” says Nicollette who had to cope with Nigerian produced jam. She admits it was not the same.



However, Tawanda says students should not expect radical changes. "I found in some other ways, it is the same. Yes, there is no sadza, but there is rice, the beef is the same, although the cooking might be different. Some days you eat Chinese food, some day Vietnamese food. The food is exotic, even for them (American students)," says Tawanda.

The discussion with returned students is held annually during holidays and offers students considering study in the United States an opportunity to get a picture of what life is like at American colleges from their Zimbabwean counterparts. The session, attended by nearly 100 Zimbabwean A level students interested in pursuing higher education in the U.S., provided the opportunity for the returned students to discuss a wide of issues from social issues such as dating, cultural integration, food, and sport to academic issues such as scholarships and doing well in class.

"We continuously try to expose students to the diverse issues they will experience transitioning from life in Zimbabwe to that as a student in the U.S. Zimbabwean students already studying in the U.S. and those that have completed their studies assist students to plan for their higher education in the U.S.," says Rebecca Zeigler Mano, coordinator of the Education USA advising center. The center provides comprehensive, current, accurate, and unbiased guidance on all opportunities available in the United States.

According to *Open Doors 2009*, the annual report on international academic mobility published by the Institute of International Education (IIE) with support from the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the United States Department of State, there were 1269 Zimbabwean students enrolled in U.S. institutions of higher education.

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This report was produced and circulated by the U.S. Embassy Public Affairs Section. Queries and comments should be directed to the Acting Public Affairs Officer, Andrew Posner on hararepas@state.gov, Tel. +263 4 758800-1, Fax: +263 4 758802. Previous reports and media statements from the Embassy can be accessed on <http://harare.usembassy.gov>