For the past few summers, Dr. Dan Nielson has run his Mentored Research Program in Kampala, Uganda. This program is a great way for students to gain practical skills with real world applications. Students work in teams on projects they designed and assist in faculty research. Dr. Nielson let Dr. Jessica Preece and I work with his students to carry out a research project. I spent a month in Uganda managing a group of five students and Dr. Preece came out for over a week for the final procedures of our experiment.

We replicated an experiment we conducted in Utah County that looked at women’s political ambition and candidacy recruitment. For our experiment, we hired twelve Ugandan enumerators to survey university students on Makerere’s campus, a major university in Uganda. The enumerators distributed this 10 to 15 minute survey by using electronic tablets. The survey included basic demographic questions and questions that gauged their level of political interest and involvement.

Following these questions, the survey software randomly displayed one of three invitations, which the subject then read. The invitation was to attend a “Prospective Candidate Information Seminar” (PCIS) where the subject could learn how to become a candidate and run for office. The experiment’s manipulation was the variation in recruitment message at the top of the invitation. The control simply asked if they had considered running for office; the first treatment primed them to think about the reserved quota seats for women; and the second treatment primed subjects of the competitive nature found in politics.

Once the subject read the invitation, the enumerator asked if she or he would like to register and attend the event. If subjects said yes, they gave their phone number to the enumerator and were directed to the registration enumerator at the conclusion of the survey. The subject could then walk over to the registration enumerator and pick up a ticket for the seminar if so desired.

We worked with a group of students who were part of Jessica Weinfurter’s team. Jessica, team leader and political science student, developed a survey experiment similar to our field experiment. We combined the two experiments by adding some questions to our survey. Primarily, we added a qualitative element to the survey in which the final survey question asked subjects why they were or were not interested in running for office and their responses were digitally recorded. Our students would then analyze the responses and see if there were any differences in content according to which treatment they received.

The night before the seminar, the students sent out a text message reminder of the seminar with reinforcement to the treatment wording. The enumerators helped with the event the following morning, checking in registrants, ushering them to their seats, helping...
with refreshments, and emceeing the program. Attendance was marked in order to measure who actually made the effort to attend the seminar. Politicians and student leaders spoke about their experience and gave advice on candidacy and politics. After the event, many of the participants offered appreciation for the seminar.

It was quite the experience running a seminar of that nature in a foreign and politically controversial context. Getting everything set up for the survey and seminar was quite laborious with so much to do in so little time, but we miraculously pulled it off! Running a field experiment in a developing country really opened the students’ eyes to the intricacies of research and to the reality of foreign culture and context. It was great to see our students work and socialize with Ugandans, learning how to live and function in a different environment. Their experience in Uganda and on this program helped prepare and qualify them for jobs after graduation.

Daily living was a whole other adventure in and of itself. The living conditions were quite cramped, but we had running water and electricity and the apartments, on the outskirts of downtown Kampala, were quite nice. Having certain amenities and easy access to food and supplies made this a very different experience from when I lived in rural Uganda the previous year. We had a cook who prepared delicious meals for us four days out of the week. We became good friends with the caretakers of the apartment complex and played with the children who also lived in the complex. We walked to the nearby Ntinda branch for church or took a bus to the nearest ward in Kololo. We had great missionary opportunities and we also learned about and attended some of the Ugandan churches, such as their Watoto Church.

Even though there was much work to do, the students were still able to find some time for fun. They went on a safari, took a boat ride along the river to see the hippos and crocodiles, and then on a game drive to spot the giraffes and elephants. They also journeyed on a long bus ride to Rwanda and visited several memorial sites, learning about the tragic events of genocide that took place there. They also got to spend a day in the life of a Rwandan, working in the fields side by side with the locals. Back in Uganda, students had the opportunity to visit the Bugandan Palace, learn about Idi Amin and see his torture chambers; climb the minaret stairs of the Gaddafi National Mosque and listen to the prayer call; watch performances of traditional Ugandan dances; spot monkeys on Chimp Island; river raft on and bungee jump over the Nile; and visit the craft markets for their must-have souvenirs. Unforgettable experiences were had by all.