For seven weeks this summer I spent frustrated hours fixing computer programs, solving logistical concerns, and dealing with experimental issues in Kampala, Uganda. I had many late nights and early mornings trying to figure out how to best program a survey, assign enumerators to locations, or calculate budget expenditures. It was not a typical study abroad where students spend much of their time sightseeing, eating, and finding adventures. Instead, it was grueling, exhausting work with many sleepless nights and I loved it (oh, and there were plenty of adventures as well, just of a different variety).

The Uganda Mentored Research Program is an undergraduate experience unique to Brigham Young University. This program pairs undergraduate students of all backgrounds and experiences with BYU faculty to conduct student designed political science experiments throughout Uganda. It allows undergraduates to have an in-depth experience with top notch research and not only experience a new culture, but also gain close relationships with professors and better understand if they would like to do research for the rest of their life or pursue other avenues. I have had many extracurricular experiences through BYU but I believe this experience has affected the rest of my life more than any other.

While in Uganda I worked with a team of two other students on a political science experiment we had designed during the winter semester. We had the hypothesis that ethnic conflict can be reduced if a competing third party is suddenly introduced into the equation. We call this hypothesis the “Napoleon Effect” because of the effect that Napoleon's conquests during the 18th and 19th centuries had on the political unity of states like Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands. We hoped to test this hypothesis by setting up group based prisoner dilemma models between ethnic groups in Western Uganda that had a recent history of
For our experiment we worked in Kasese, Uganda on the border of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We worked with twelve amazing Ugandan enumerators to identify over 160 villages in the region where we could set up focus groups to discuss development projects. Each focus group consisted of three adult males from the Basongora ethnic group, and three adult males from the Bakonzo ethnic group. These six men were instructed that they were to jointly decide on a development project for their community and that they had three choices of projects. Project 1 involved dairy farming, which was the primary occupation of only one of the ethnic groups. Project 2 involved crop farming, which was the primary occupation of the other ethnic group. Project 3 involved water management, which was a major concern in the area for all ethnic groups. The voting structure was based on the Prisoner’s Dilemma model and had different budget outcomes based upon what project was chosen, basically awarding more money for supporting the project only they wanted and less money if no consensus was created. Our treatment was to tell one set of the groups that they were competing for limited resources with similar groups in Rwanda. We also told a final group that since there were limited resources, our NGO partners would only fund those projects that had consensus.

Although we have not completed the analysis, we are excited about the possible outcomes of this project. Not only can we better understand how ethnic cooperation can be increased, but our information can help NGOs in conflict areas increase cooperation using development projects. Regardless of any outcomes, however, the chance to run an experiment in a foreign country with the complete trust and support of our professor was an amazing experience. Not only do I better understand the theories behind experimental and survey design, I also have personal experience with some of the logistical challenges of field experiments. This was an amazing opportunity and something that I highly recommend to any student who is pondering a career in research or a PhD.