After months preparing, a few more vaccinations, and two days of sitting on airplanes, I finally arrived in Livingstone, Zambia. On the drive to the hostel we would be staying at, I got my first view of the city. We drove on some paved roads, as well as many dirt roads with holes that bounced everyone around in our crowded van. Out the window I saw children everywhere. It was not until then that I really grasped the fact that 50% of the population of Africa is under 18 years old. Over the next three weeks in Livingstone, I fell in love with those children, their culture, and their home.

Each weekday I woke up at 6:45 so I could grab tea, breakfast, and lesson materials before the buses left at 7:40. Volunteers from African Impact were all driven in these buses to every corner of Livingstone and dropped off at projects. The children ran after them and lovingly called them “Muzungu Bus” or “White People Bus.” In the morning, I always went to Zambezi Community School where I served as a teaching aid for the 6th grade class. My first week and a half, I took small reading groups outside to work on English literacy. Most of the students could only read at a beginner level if they were able to at all. My second week and a half, the 6th grade teacher was ill, so I taught all 50 students on my own. This was much more challenging, but also impactful because if I were not there those students would not have had a teacher at all for that time. All my students were eager to learn and valued their education. One day a break a frustrated boy named Joseph came up to me and said, “Jo, I don’t want to play, I want to learn!”

Most of my education has been given to me as a right. It was interesting, and sometimes heartbreaking, to see education as a rare privilege. Three weeks is not a long time to have a classroom, but I learned so much in my time there and was rewarded when I saw my students learning too. Around 11 am every day, after only three hours of teaching, I was picked up and went back to the hostel we stayed at for lunch and afternoon preparations.

I had the opportunity to engage with the community in so many different ways through afternoon projects. Some of the service I did includes: teaching reading clubs and math clubs to primary school students, teaching HIV education to secondary school students, volunteering at the “Old People’s Home,” leading after school programs, and building a compost bin at a farm with Eco-bricks. Eco-bricks are used plastic bottles stuffed with plastic trash and then used to build things when stacked with clay. It is amazing how much trash can fit into one bottle! Eco-bricking is a project being implemented all around Livingstone by African Impact, the organization I worked with. It serves the community by getting waste out of the streets and as cheap building material.

Around 4, I would be picked up by the Muzungu Bus once again and taken back to the hostel. I lived with many other African Impact volunteers from all over the world. Not only was I
able to learn about Zambian culture, I was able to make friends from Germany, U.K., Norway, Iceland, Australia, New Zealand, Switzerland, South Africa, and Ireland.

Finally, I experienced more of the beauty of Africa through weekend excursions. One weekend, we stayed in Botswana on a camping safari. It was incredible to see African animals and landscapes. I also visited Victoria Falls several times. Seeing the breathtaking waterfalls is a feeling I will not soon forget.

Every part of this experience made it one of the best things I have ever done. It was challenging, but rewarding. Livingstone, and Zambia as a whole, has many problems with education, health, and waste disposal among others. But, I saw so much beauty there, and so many people striving to live in the best way possible. I am studying International Studies with plans of working for international non-profits, such as African Impact, as a career. I got to work with people who are doing just that. Volunteering with African Impact made me excited for my future career and gave me connections to build off of.

I am thankful for this CSU education abroad program, for the welcoming people of Livingstone, and all the support I received that allowed me to be able to go, including the Honors Enrichment Award. I am sure that this trip is the first step to many great adventures ahead.