Thanks to the Honors Enrichment Award, I was able to travel to Archer’s Post, Kenya for what was my best service-learning experience to date. Archer’s Post is a tiny town overflowing with gracious, welcoming people and full of Samburu culture. After 30 hours of travel time, thirteen other students and I finally arrived in Nairobi where we rested for one night before a six hour drive north to the hot, dry environment of the Samburu district.

Before I left for Kenya, I worked with Dr. Kent on a research report studying the gendered impacts of Samburu cultural practices as well as some of the current ideas and circumstances in the area. I interviewed a graduate student who was from the area and enlisted Dr. Bruyere to help me learn all the Swahili and Samburu words I could before we left. For much of the Fall semester, I used the resources I had to prepare myself as much as possible so that I would be as aware and useful as I could be during the trip.

Stepping out of our safari car when we finally arrived flipped the perception I had created in my mind and finally made the stories I had read real and complex. We were all greeted so warmly and witnessed past friendships rekindle like no time had passed. The Kenyan brotherly attitude toward us marked the trip for me. At each event or project we were welcomed as guests and as great friends as they shared their homes, their food, and their culture with us.

We spent our days working alongside some of the most incredible women I have ever met at Unity Village. It is an all-women and children village that supports itself through beaded work as well as some pastoralism. Unity welcomed us through traditional song and dance, by including us in their work, and even by the kids stealing us away to play every game under the
sun. These women value human rights and their own strength which is so apparent through their personal pasts and fun-loving but bold personalities. We learned a few Samburu words so there was at least a small amount of verbal communication possible. My favorite phrase was *ksupat olen* meaning “how great!” because it usually meant I was doing something up to their standards and the words surged with positivity—a hallmark of the entire trip. I feel honored to have met them, their children, and be able to be a part of their great work.

Our group also was able to celebrate with current students and graduates of the Samburu Youth Education Fund (SYEF) which is an organization that, in collaboration with Dr. Bruyere, selects top students to pay for their secondary education (the equivalent of high school in the US). Their value of and excitement for education re-ignited my own passion for the rest of my degree and all the opportunities I have as a student.

Finally, the experience gave me hope and drive for my future career. I was able to meet community figures creating positive change through education in their community such as board members, teachers, and employees of SYEF. I was also able watch Dr. Bruyere use his experience and expertise to impact educational opportunities abroad which is what I would like to do in the future. I was also introduced to a Deaf student named Teku who taught me some Kenyan Sign Language and I was able to use my American Sign Language knowledge to talk with him and try to interpret for him. Meeting Teku reminded me that I study languages, culture, and development because of the human connection it makes possible. After a grueling Fall semester, Kenya left me recharged and overflowing with passion, love, and inspiration for a career of serving and empowering others.

All my pre-trip research was valuable, but it barely scratched the surface in painting a picture of the vibrant and joyous community that I came to know. Traveling to Archer’s Post,
Kenya for an alternative break was perhaps the most invaluable experience of my college career thus far. I would like to share my sincere and deep gratitude to the Honors Department for this opportunity.

Teku and I