

SWAH 1010/1020 Student Reflection

A. Civic and Community Engagement Reflection

Last Fall, in an effort to engage with the local Swahili community and fortify bonds between the University community and wider Charlottesville community as part of Swahili 1010 class, my peers and I met with several Swahili community members and designed a project to address the barriers they identified. My group, in particular, spoke with Deluna.

Deluna described adjusting to life in the United States. She explained how it was a shock to look around and see a majority white population and how women in the U.S. wear little clothing, something that would bring physical abuse from men back in DRC or Burundi. She also described how she had a medical checkup at the University hospital upon arrival to the U.S. and was surprised by an expensive medical bill following the visit. Lastly, Deluna described how the social bonds between Swahili community members in the U.S. are much weaker than they were in East Africa.

My group sought to address Delunas observation that there is a weakened sense of community for Swahili people in Charlottesville. In response, we planned to stream a premier league soccer game and invite Swahili community members to watch with us. However, these plans required adjustment as we arrived back to grounds to begin second semester and our Swahili class rosters had shifted. Nonetheless, I did attend a movie premier that Professor Rotich hosted where she invited a group of local Swahili high-school students to watch and eat pizza with Swahili students. I really enjoyed that event, I got to hang out with people that were similar in age to me while watching a movie that exposed me to Swahili culture.

To continue our community engagement work in the Spring semester, a group of students in my Swahili 1020 class and myself translated medical and health documents into Swahili. I, in particular, translated a 4 page document for the Safe MoTHErs program. This was very useful because it related to my current and future career

interests, maternal health, and was filling a gap in communication between Swahili Speakers and the medical community, which was also a barrier Deluna noted.

Ultimately, my CCE class teams worked well together and allocated work such as creating slides for our powerpoints and brainstorming about realistic and useful approaches to our civic and community engagement project. A barrier to a more long-termed, sustained project was the change in semesters and subsequent class roster shift, which cannot be avoided. This required us to adapt and adjust our plans to be completed during the second semester, at least in my case. Still, I enjoyed eating Pearl Island catered food, watching a movie, and meeting with Swahili community members this year. These experiences exposed me to Swahili culture and helped me gain insight into the local Swahili community experience. I encourage UVA to increase funding for civic and community engagement events so they can happen more frequently. I learned more about the refugee resettlement program, life in Swahili countries, and was able to practice my language skills.