2013 Plastino Scholars Project Summaries

Alexandra Davis
Project Pop-Up: Fueling Local Businesses and Fostering Budding Entrepreneurs

Allie Davis’ proposal abstract described her project this way: “Cities across the globe are increasingly plagued by the ill effects of stagnant economic growth. To combat this insidious pattern, a growing trend has captivated progressive policymakers in cities like Cape Town, London, and Wilmington, DE: the pop-up shop. Pop-up shops are temporary projects that provide capital and skill development for aspiring entrepreneurs and the pop-up movement is generating investment and providing opportunities for entrepreneurial advancement. At the opening the first pop-up in the state of Delaware, I was impacted by the avidity of the shop owner and the enthusiasm of the entire community. This validated my commitment to working with individuals and organizations to maximize economic potential on a personal and community basis.

In South Africa, a nation experiencing depressed entrepreneurial activity, pop-up shops have a growing presence and are a key strategy in the success of local businesses. In order to explore concepts and strategies being implemented in South Africa regarding pop-up shops and small business development, I will spend eight weeks in Cape Town in the summer of 2013. I will work with Iziko Lo Lwazi, an organization that specializes in the production of paper products crafted by local women to provide business mentoring, loans, English literacy training, and opportunities for entrepreneurship as a way to empower women, consistent with the pop-up movement’s mission. The organization’s director, Alison Prest, has conveyed to me the strong presence of pop-up shops in Cape Town and her desire to push the boundaries of Iziko Lo Lwazi. The goal of my Plastino experience will be to work with Iziko Lo Lwazi in facilitating a transcontinental exchange of ideas and strategies between this grassroots organization in South Africa and the Delaware Economic Development Office. I will accomplish this by presenting to both parties the innovative ways each is approaching the challenge of stimulating entrepreneurship and building economically strong communities.”

Allie ultimately spent eight weeks in Cape Town, Pretoria, and Johannesburg, South Africa working under the auspices of Iziko Lo Lwazi, the Mapungubwe Institute for Strategic Reflection (MISTRA) and the University of Pretoria, in addition to conducting research for my senior thesis. She writes:

“Overall, my Plastino experience in South Africa was an absolutely phenomenal eight-week journey that has not only provided me great resume building experience, a strong foundation for a very interesting senior thesis, and invaluable professional connections, but has opened my eyes to so many opportunities in international economic development policy to pursue in the future. My network grew exponentially while in South Africa as I had the chance to connect with community leaders, local entrepreneurs, scholars, political activists, and policy professionals. I am confident that the diverse nature of my experience could not have been accomplished via a traditional study abroad trip or a vacation, and therefore I am thankful for the dynamic nature of the Plastino Scholars program that has afforded me this life-altering adventure.”

Ian Guthoff
A Modern Muir: Conserving America’s Parks

In his proposal, Ian Guthoff wrote: “Ken Burns called the National Parks ‘America’s best idea’ in his PBS documentary showcasing the American parks system. Protecting more than 84 million acres of land in every State, with the exception of Delaware, the National Parks system has been an American
tradition for near 140 years. Preserving untouched landscapes, the parks are windows into American antiquity; they are the last relics of a time before man on the American continent. A proud University of Delaware student, I feel it is my responsibility to give back to the parks, especially because Delaware is the sole State without any National Park lands within its boarder. My project, ‘A Modern Muir: Conserving America’s Parks,’ embodies David Plastino’s dedication to service, but also incorporates the University of Delaware’s own philosophy of creating a ‘citizen university.’

A service-based project that is composed of two pieces, my proposed project focuses on giving back to the parks, while encouraging others to do the same. Working with each of the six parks on an individual basis, I’m designing six separate projects that will benefit each of the parks in unique ways. To execute this project I have been working with Parks Department employees at each of the National Parks I plan on attending. The second part of my project will be documenting both my service and the beauty of the parks through digital photography, prose, and poetry.”

Upon returning from his trip, Ian wrote: “My Plastino Project provided me a wealth of experience. Working with six National Parks to organize service opportunities, and finally being able to work at five of them, my Plastino project granted me the opportunity to plan and orchestrate a project of serious magnitude. The work I did at each park provided serious service to the NPS, especially during a time of budget issues as the sequester weighed heavy on the minds of the workers. The project exposed me to the different landscapes and people that America has to offer, truly displaying the diversity that exists in America. I met and spoke with people from all walks of life, each providing their own advice about my journey, my future, and how to live a full life.”

Matthew Roarty
Improvational Comedy

Matthew Roarty wrote a proposal that described his love for and interest in Improvational Comedy— and his desire to learn more: “Many of the great comedic talents of the last half decade – including Tina Fey, Will Ferrell, Stephen Colbert, Steve Carell, Mike Myers, Alan Arkin, and half of the original eight SNL cast members – began by studying improvisational comedy (improv). In improv, performers create a scene without any kind of pre-planned material. There are two types of improv, short-form and long-form. Short-form is the more popular style, and is used in the show ‘Whose Line Is It Anyway’ and its derivatives. Long-form improv generally consists of little more than an empty stage and a word from the audience, after which a 30+ minute scene is created. The cradle of modern improv is in Chicago, which is where my Plastino experience would take me. I will take a 5-week Summer Intensive course at the iO Theater from July 6th to August 9th, consisting of classes ranging from the fundamentals of improv to the Harold, one of the more popular styles of long-form improvised comedy. Each week is taught by a different teacher, and the course culminates in a performance on August 9th. Classes were from 11 am to 6 pm, Monday through Thursday. My routine each Monday through Thursday was to wake up, go to class, see a show or two, go home to sleep, and then repeat

Upon returning from his Plastino experience, Matt wrote: The Summer Intensive at the iO Chicago Theater brought together people from all over the world, including England, Australia, Denmark, and even five from Estonia. My group, Section 5, was similarly a melting pot of all Americans. There were five weeks to the program, and each week we would have a new teacher, culminating in a performance on August 8th. Classes were from 11 am to 6 pm, Monday through Thursday. My routine each Monday through Thursday was to wake up, go to class, see a show or two, go home to sleep, and then repeat
that three more times. Friday to Sunday was pretty much the same except with sleep eating significantly into where the class time had been. By the end of it all, I saw at least fifty improv shows while I was in Chicago; the good ones entertained me and the great ones inspired me.”