

Concept Note: DST Two-Week Academic and Cultural Exchange Program in Johannesburg, South Africa

Introduction

In an interconnected world, future leaders must not only study global issues but experience them in their cultural and historical contexts. This two-week program offers young women, in partnership with the Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. Southern Africa Alumnae Chapter, NAFSA, the African Center for the Study of the United States at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), and multiple Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), a unique opportunity to explore South Africa's social, cultural, and political landscape.

The program is centered on students majoring in the social sciences, including social work, psychology, criminal justice, political science, international relations, communication studies, world history, and cultural or Black studies. Participants will engage in academic seminars, professional lectures, collaborative projects, cultural immersion activities, and guided reflection sessions that connect their experiences to broader diaspora narratives.

Program Overview

- **Duration:** 2 weeks
- **Dates:** TBD Late May, Early June
- **Cost:** \$2,800 per student (includes local transportation, accommodations, program activities, and some meals; excludes airfare)
- **Cohort Size:** 30–35 students; 2 Co-horts
- **Host Institutions:** African Center for the Study of the United States at Wits University, Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. Southern Africa Alumnae Chapter, and partner HBCUs

Eligibility Criteria for Study Abroad Program

- **Enrollment Status:** Must be a currently enrolled full-time undergraduate or graduate student at an accredited HBCU.
- **Gender:** Open to female students.
- **Academic Standing:** Minimum cumulative GPA of **2.7** on a 4.0 scale.
- **Recommendations:** Two letters of recommendation from faculty (at least one from a professor in the student's major field of study).
- **Personal Statement/Essay:** A written essay (500–750 words)

- **Passport:** Must hold a valid passport with at least 6 months remaining before expiration at the time of travel.
- **Disciplinary Record:** Students must be in good disciplinary standing with their institution (no recent suspensions or serious conduct violations).
- **Health & Insurance:** Must provide proof of health clearance for international travel and evidence of health/travel insurance coverage.
- **Commitment:** Willingness to participate in all program activities, including academic coursework, cultural excursions, and reflection sessions.
- **Pre-Departure Orientation:** Must attend all mandatory orientation sessions (virtual or in person).
- **Financial Readiness:** Proof of ability to cover tuition/program costs, whether through personal funds, scholarships, or financial aid documentation.

Program Objectives

1. **Deepen Academic Understanding**
Gain insight into South African society through seminars and lectures by Wits professors and local professionals in the social sciences.
2. **Foster Cultural Connection**
Build bonds between African American students and their South African peers, connecting shared histories and contemporary challenges.
3. **Engage in Applied Learning**
Participate in a structured academic project that integrates field research, interviews, and cultural observation.
4. **Encourage Critical Reflection**
Provide space for personal and group reflection to connect academic content with lived experience.

Key Program Components

1. Academic Lectures and Seminars

Led by Wits faculty and guest professionals, topics may include:

- Post-Apartheid South Africa: Political and Social Transformations

- Social Work Practices in the South African Context
- Psychology and Mental Health in African Communities
- Criminal Justice Reform and Restorative Justice Practices
- International Relations and Africa's Place in Global Politics
- Communication, Media, and Cultural Identity in the African Context
- Pan-Africanism and Diaspora Relations

2. Collaborative Learning Project

Participants will work in small, interdisciplinary teams to produce a "Diaspora Connection Report." This will involve:

- Interviewing South African students, community leaders, and professionals in their field of study
- Visiting relevant organizations and institutions for field observations
- Comparing South African and U.S. approaches to their discipline
- Presenting their findings and recommendations in a final symposium at Wits University

3. Cultural Immersion Activities

- Guided visits to key historical and cultural sites such as the Apartheid Museum, Lillieleaf, Kliptown Constitution Hill, Nelson Mandela Archbishop Tutu House, Soweto, and the Hector Pieterse Museum, Union Building, Nelson Mandela Foundation (Houghton)
- Attendance at cultural performances or local community events
- Interactive workshops in South African cuisine, music, and dance

4. Reflection and Mentorship

- Daily or alternate-day reflection sessions facilitated by program leaders and sorority members to process experiences and connect them to academic and personal goals
- Mentorship from Delta Sigma Theta Southern Africa Chapter members, offering insight into professional and community leadership in the South African context

- Create a Peer-to-Peer social session with youth in business - legal, medical, mining engineering, ICT entrepreneurs and banking (Dinner at the Sanctuary Mandela - (Houghton). The objective is to focus on educational outcomes of the Mandela “Born Free” generation post 1994 onwards (Millennials/Generation Z) versus Generation Alpha and Generation Beta

Impact and Outcomes

Short-Term:

- Broadened understanding of African societies and cultures
- Enhanced research, interviewing, and cross-cultural communication skills
- Completion of a collaborative Diaspora Connection Report

Long-Term:

- Strengthened ties between Delta Sigma Theta chapters across continents
- Potential for ongoing HBCU–Wits collaborations and student exchanges
- Alumni network fostering continued dialogue and joint projects across the diaspora

Logistics and Support

- **Accommodation:** Wits University residences with security and student support staff
- **Transportation:** Local transport for all scheduled activities
- **Meals:** Provided for program events; students responsible for meals during free time
- **Safety:** Orientation, risk management protocols, and on-site staff support
- **Pre-Departure Preparation:** Virtual sessions covering South African history, culture, and project planning