

INTERNSHIP REPORT: CIVIC EDUCATION IN GHANA

Summer 2016

Madison May

Marjorie J. and Richard L. D. Morse Family and Community Public Policy

Scholarship Recipient

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- I. INTRODUCTION (3-4)
- II. DESCRIPTION OF INTERNSHIP (4-7)
- III. ANALYSIS OF INTERNSHIP (7-9)
- IV. CONCLUSION (9-10)

INTRODUCTION

This summer, I was employed by the National Commission for Civic Education in Agona Swedru, Ghana. The creation of the NCCE was written into the Constitution of Ghana, with the primary purpose of educating and encouraging the public to defend this Constitution at all times, against all forms of abuse and violation. I chose to work for the NCCE in Ghana this summer because it is considered a model for successful and stable democratic transition. Many other African countries' transition to democracy has ended with corrupt elections and violence. Furthermore, 2016 is a presidential election year for Ghana, which is when the NCCE is responsible for public education to sensitize electorates about the voting procedure and their conduct before, during and after presidential and public elections.

My primary responsibility was educating rural communities about democracy and voting procedure. I did this by hosting community forums and giving informal presentations at churches and schools. In addition, I was shadowing an Assemblyman of the Gomoe East District and sitting in on Assembly meetings. When not involved in either of these, I was tutoring English at elementary schools and coaching soccer for young girls, with the goal of promoting confidence.

My independent project for this summer was a research project for the K-State University Honors Program. I completed a Ghana Case Study to look at the connection between religion and democracy, and how religious attitudes shape political attitudes and participation. Ghana is 71% Christian, 17.6% Muslim, and

5.2% Traditional Ghanaian religion. I implemented a plan to interview Ghanaians from each of the predominant faiths. Upon my return to K-State, I hope to use my experience to promote religious diversity and tolerance on campus. I hope to continue to build this research project to uncover patterns between civic participation in government, government stability, and religion. If progress can be made toward uncovering the source of Ghana's transitional success, then that knowledge can be applied to other countries facing similar circumstances.

DESCRIPTION OF INTERNSHIP

Since I held various positions during my internship, I had a number of responsibilities. As a worker of the NCCE, I would accompany other full-time employees to site visits around the community. These site visits varied in frequency, length, and purpose. The first site visit was to a high school about an hour away from where I was staying. I went with a Ghanaian NCCE worker and another intern. By 7:00 in the morning, we were on the road to the high school. When we got there, we were met by curious and eager stares from the high school students. The NCCE worker, named Joseph, started the presentation by giving the students a forceful, reprimanded overview of their constitutional rights as per the 1998 provisions. He impressed upon them the importance of studying to the peak of their abilities and how much getting pregnant before graduation would defer their goals and aspirations. After about an hour, Joseph turned to us and asked us to say a few words. I mentioned my passion for international travel and how my avoidance of

teen pregnancy helped me reach my goals. After a bit of awkwardness, we shook the hand of the headmaster and we were on our way. A different NCCE worker, Ernest, accompanied me on the second site visit we conducted. This time, we drove about two hours north to another rural village. We gathered at someone's house and met men and women who lived around the area. About 16 people in total were in attendance. Ernest led the discussion because the people there could not understand English. He introduced me and I sat patiently while he opened the discussion for the people to express their concerns with the local government. The community members were provided with training to create a new kind of biscuit made from the Cassava plant, but were also promised funding to get the project off the ground. The funding never came. They were distrustful of the government and claimed this was only one of many examples of unfulfilled promises. A few people admitted they had no intention of voting in the upcoming presidential election. When it was my turn to speak, I turned the discussion to civic responsibility and how essential civic participation is to the essence of a true democracy. I encouraged the women to participate in politics, even run for the local assembly election, to ensure their needs would be addressed. Ernest translated for me. These two visits are the most vivid examples of my work with the NCCE. I continued to accompany different site visits, but they usually followed suit. The main themes we always highlighted were avoidance of teen pregnancy and the importance of voting. Sometimes we met at a church, or just outside. One of the challenges the NCCE deals with is actually getting the rural community members to gather. Since the majority of them are farmers, almost always with large families, communication and

scheduling can be extremely difficult. In addition, April through June is the rainy season for Ghana, so we occasionally had to cancel due to the weather. After these complications, sit visits averaged around 2 per week.

My work with the soccer program was a larger time commitment. Gomoa Soccer for Change is a community program with the intentions of providing students with an opportunity to participate in recreational soccer and to keep them out of less desirable activities. The soccer program is a place where the community's youth, some of which come from very poor circumstances, can learn teamwork while improving their athleticism. The program currently has three teams: boys under 15, boys under 17, and boys under 22. This year was the first time they've ever had a team for girls. I was asked to be the new head coach for the girl's team. My team was made up of 14 girls, between the ages of 11 and 13. We had practice every weekday for 1.5 hours. I would run them through various drills and finish training with some stretching and some words of motivation. Although language was occasionally an obstacle, the few girls on the team who had a good understanding of English were able to translate to those who did not. My hope is that this team has empowered the girls to be more confident and continue to strive for traditionally male-dominated positions.

Finally, my third responsibility during my time in Ghana was as an assistant teacher to the elementary school. This was a very eye-opening exposure to the educational system in Western Africa. I arrived each morning at the door of the same classroom, full with about sixty kindergarten-aged children. School opened at 8 am and closed at 2 pm. There was one full-time teacher, who was not only

pregnant, but also had a four-month-old infant that she brought to school with her each day. The classroom had openings instead of windows and doors, and no fans or cooling system. The children did not have enough desks, so some sat on the floor. They did not have enough paper or pencils or crayons, so the 60-person class took turns passing around 5 broken crayons. The teacher spoke the local language almost entirely. During the day, the students would have an activity, usually drawing or writing in their activity book. It was my job to write the activity, pass out the books, and then collect and grade them when the students were finished. Even this was extremely difficult, as the students could not understand me. The teacher would occasionally ask me to teach them a song or play a new game with them, but I struggled to do even this with the language barrier. Caning is still a popular and common form of punishment in Ghana schools. Every teacher had a long wooden stick they would slam against the tables and hit misbehaving kids. Despite the violence of the cane, students typically were not deterred from bad behavior. My time spent as an assistant teacher in Ghana was interesting, to say the least.

ANALYSIS OF INTERNSHIP

Assessing the success of my internship is difficult. I definitely learned a lot, but I am not quite sure I achieved my goals. It ended up being very different from my expectations. My biggest challenge throughout all of my responsibilities during my time in Ghana was the language barrier. English is one of Ghana's official languages, and based on my previous experiences travelling in other parts of Africa,

I expected English to be used far more than it actually is. I would compare it to learning Spanish in the United States; most people take a few years in high school, but typically don't use it outside of the classroom or in the home. Even students who had been taking English classes for ten or more years could not communicate with me. Everything I tried to do became significantly harder because I had no way to express myself. I never felt like I was really contributing much to the efforts of the NCCE because everything I said had to be translated. It made me question why they were interested in hiring someone who could not speak the local language. Due to the fact that the area I was located in was so rural, my race was also a major challenge for the work I was trying to do. I expected to be empowering citizens to take ownership of their democracy, to empower women to have a voice in government proceedings. Instead, the people I met were far more interested in my hair, my clothes, and my cell phone. I was constantly being asked for money. Very rarely did I feel like anyone I met was interested in the things I had to say. This experience taught me much about international volunteer efforts, and their ultimate effectiveness. My intentions were good, but unfortunately, I don't know that my presence actually had a positive impact on the community. This experience also really opened my eyes to the kind of power the United States has in regards to culture. Ghanaian people are absolutely fascinated by the United States, be it TV shows, clothes, cars, or food. They know everything about our sports teams, our politics, and our celebrities. Meanwhile most of the students at K-State probably couldn't point to Ghana on a map. Ghanaians also seem to harbor the idea that the United States doesn't have any systematic problems and that every person who lives

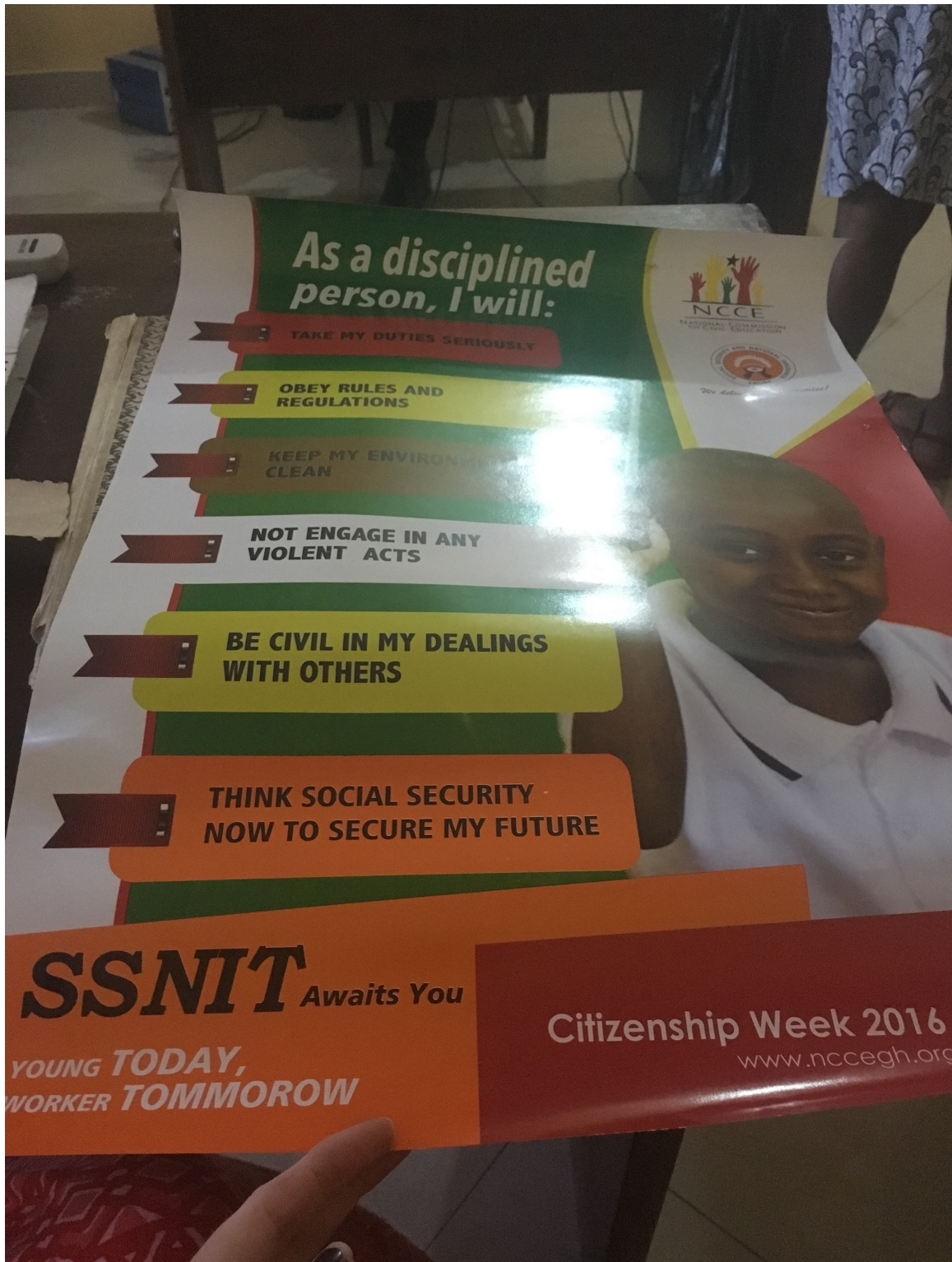
there is dripping in money and has ample political influence and power. I felt that many people believed I could give them something that would somehow improve their situation. When I was not able to deliver, I often felt that my being there was doing more harm than good.

CONCLUSION

In summation, I have mixed feelings about my internship experience. I still strongly support the work of the NCCE and its mission, and I hope to continue to pursue women's empowerment in politics in government. However, this experience has made me radically re-consider effectiveness of international volunteerism. The divide in culture and social norms took so much away from the real purpose of my trip. I had envisioned myself leading the discussion about government participation, when in reality I was just following other people around, occasionally adding my own comments that had to be translated. On the positive side, I did learn a great deal about the politics of Ghana, the problems that they have been facing, and the history of the independent state. I would go so far as to say this experience has renewed my interest in finding the most sustainable solutions to international issues. Part of finding successful initiatives is eliminating unsuccessful ones. I am grateful for the opportunity and the impression that Ghana has left on me.

ADDITIONAL MATERIALS

One of the posters I distributed for the NCCE.



Meeting Dokua Asiamah Adjei, parliamentary candidate of the NPP for the 2016 election, at a NPP political rally.



Assemblyman Ernest Quarm, my internship supervisor.



...nominated or selected because they are women; on the contrary, they want to be elected because they are capable of making decisions that affect society.

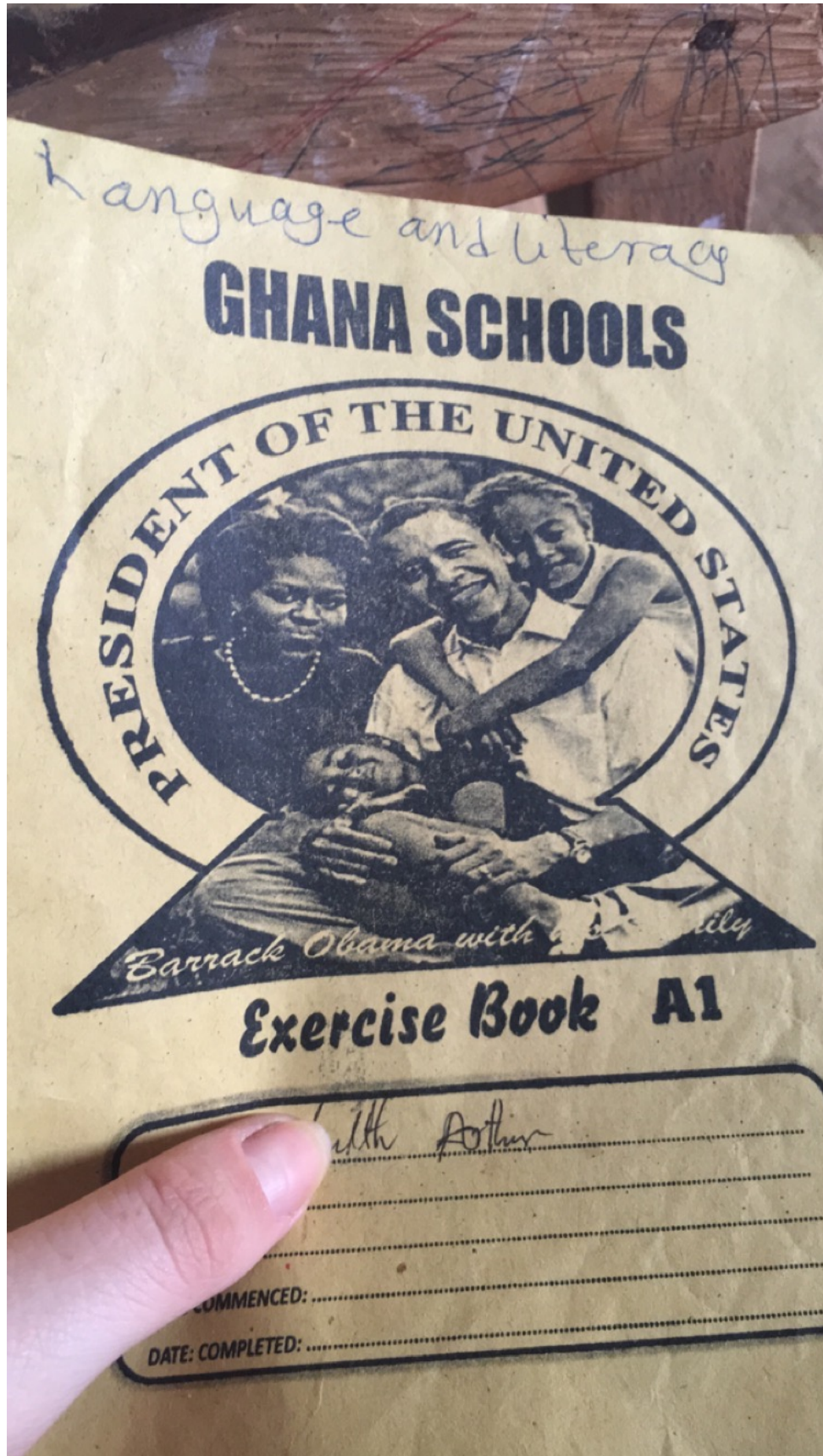
4.2 Advantages of Quotas

- Quotas do not discriminate but compensate for actual barriers that prevent women from the fair share of political seats. Because women have been excluded from political life for a very long time due to social, economic and cultural factors, the quota will increase women's participation in politics over time.
- Women have the right to equal representation and participation in politics. It is the right of women to be involved in decision making that affects their lives hence they have to be given the chance to exercise their rights.
- Women's experiences will be shared in the political life. Women are partners in development and as such they should make decisions with men to benefit the entire society. The quota system presents a level playing field at which women can battle for equality. Women and men are equal and therefore have equal rights to make decisions that affect them in the society.

The NPP candidate running for president, Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo



An exercise book the school children used, featuring the Obamas



One of the small groups we held an educational forum with

