



**Wilkes University presents**  
**the 2013 Colonels Abroad Essay Contest**  
**First Place to**  
**JACOB PARRICK**  
**For American Student Studying Abroad Essay**



Much like the breathtaking plains of Africa, my life has been filled with diversity. In the past year my life has transformed as a result of places I've seen, the people I've met, and the things I've done. I lived a rather sheltered life before starting my education at Wilkes; coming from a family of modest background, I never had the chance to see the world, though I often dreamed of traveling. As made possible by the mentoring grant committee, I had the opportunity to travel to Uganda, Africa, where I spent weeks among the locals, learning their language, eating their food, and playing their games. Immersed in their culture, Dr. James Merryman and I directly advised a local clean-water organization as to better water sanitation practices: a job I took great pride in, and one that changed my world view forever.

It was strange to me to return to my small town of Duryea, Pennsylvania, after my long journey across the globe. I had always lived in the same town, in the same house, and now it was as if I was seeing everything and everyone with new eyes. I learned in my travels that in the African language of Swahili, the word "friend" and the word "stranger" are one in the same. It is this mindset of acceptance that redefined my world at home.

A few minutes away from where I stayed was The Children's AIDS Clinic of Masindi. It was the place where my revelation began and was filled with people I will never forget. I spent hours at the Children's AIDS Clinic, talking to the patients, as well as their doctors and families. Although these children had AIDS, they radiated happiness and hope. It was a tangible kind of hope, one that I hold onto today in times of distress. These kids, even at 5 and 6 years old, became role models for me; teaching me bravery and strength. After spending the day with these kids-hearing their stories, and feeling their energy-I began asking myself, is there something more I can do with my life that could change theirs?

The next week, I visited the small village of Nyakarongo, where the people lived modest lives growing sugar cane. I set up in a small mud-hut with a thatched-roof for what I thought was just another day of surveying the villagers. After my work was finished, I began packing up when I was approached by an old man. His name was Mboiro, he was wearing a ragged old suit, and was walking with a cane in order to support his frail body. He looked me in the eyes and simply said "help me." He put out his hands, exposing a large cut on his palm, clearly infected-a risk that at his age could be fatal. He then pointed to his eyes, clouded and gray from cataracts; he was blind. I sat him down and got out my first aid kit, while the villagers quickly gathered in curiosity. I began to bandage his hand and give him eye drops, so his blind eyes could at least be comforted. He folded his hands and thanked me, again and again. When I turned around to leave, I found myself surrounded by 15 villagers, all on their knees waiting for eye drops.

I've spent a great deal of time in hospitals in America, and never have I seen someone as grateful as Mboiro, nor have I ever seen children as inspirational as those at the AIDS clinic. It was in the village of Nyakarongo that I decided I would devote myself to a life of tropical medicine, hopefully practicing alongside Doctors Without Borders, in a poverty stricken country such as Uganda. Had I not had this study abroad experience, I would have never found that life-changing village. With so much disease and so little help, my trip was cut short due to an outbreak of Ebola in a neighboring district. Despite the abrupt end to what was a life-changing experience, it was not before I saw everything I needed to see to make that decision. I know I am on the right path now-helping these people is my calling, and this trip made that inevitably clear to me. As I think back on my experience, and possibly future experiences, I want nothing more than to go back to Nyakarongo, and to make sure that Mboiro is still walking around, waving a healthy hand to all lucky enough to cross his path.