

Prof. Jenifer Hartman, a Fulbright Scholar Activities in 2021-2022

I have had a wonderful year of learning about Kenyan culture and education during my time as a Fulbright Scholar and Visiting Professor at Kenya Methodist University in Meru! For a description of the Fulbright Scholar program and the University of South Florida where I am an Assistant Professor in the Educational Leadership Master's Program, go to the following link: <https://www.usf.edu/education/blog/2021/assistant-professor-fulbright-kenya-education-leadership.aspx> Here are just a few highlights of this past year at KeMU...

In early 2021, Vice-Chancellor Prof. David Gichoya invited me to come to KeMU as a visiting Professor in the School of Education and Social Sciences. DVC, ASA Rev. Dr. Mary Kinoti greeted me in Nairobi in August and right away I felt a part of the Faculty as I participated in the 2021 graduation ceremony.



KeMU graciously offered for me to stay in one of the guesthouse apartments on campus. My large kitchen window faces the forest and I watch the baboons and monkeys as I prepare my meals and bake bread, cakes, and other sweets to share with the faculty, staff, and students.



One of the most illuminating and rich cultural experiences has been visiting local schools with Dr. Esther Thuba as part of her teaching practice observations. I was able to see students learning in all types of schools – National, county, extra-county, and public day schools. What goes on in Kenyan schools related to teaching and learning is so different from in the U.S. and these visits allowed me to experience the challenges in person. It was also a great opportunity to get to know Dr. Thuba as an Education Professional and colleague.



One of my graduate students is the Education Director at Lewa Wildlife Conservancy and I was thrilled to see the work they are doing in communities around the conservancy. I enjoyed the wildlife there as well!



One of my areas of expertise is distance learning and developing online courses with significant student engagement. The Directorate of Virtual and Blended Learning faculty and staff have become my Kenyan family! As we all lived through the COVID pandemic, improving online instruction has taken on new meaning and we have journeyed together in this adventure.

Engaging with students has been a terrific way to understand Kenyan communities because they come from all parts of Kenya. I've learned so much about the different ethnic groups and cultures from the students. My research study focuses on students' perceptions of ethnic differences and educational equity – the data collection is in progress and I'm fascinated by students' responses. I participated in the Crochet Club (I enjoy knitting) and this spring helped organize a student trip to the Nanyuki Spinners and Weavers. We all learned so much from the amazing local women who spin wool into yarn and weave beautiful scarves and tapestries.





Singing with the chapel student choir gave me the opportunity to learn more Kiswahili. I love the music and movement in Kenyan music!

Visiting the national parks in Kenya and going on game drives, especially Meru National Park very near the KeMU campus, has been an amazing adventure. I've visited MNP three times so far and plan to visit again before I go home. I made good friends with the kitchen staff at Ikweta Camp where I stayed, spent a day in their kitchen learning about their cooking, and teaching them to bake sourdough bread. Chef James is a champ! I took a group of students and staff to the park for a game drive and spent some time in the swimming pool teaching them to swim. I enjoy the water so much and sharing that with them was a treat.



My time in Kenya is almost over and I will go back to the United States at the beginning of June. But I am a better person for all that my Kenyan friends and colleagues have taught me, and my life is richer for the wonderful experiences I have had. I am so grateful for the opportunities the Fulbright Scholar Award has given me and thankful for my Kenyan friends. Asante sana Kenya Methodist University!

Blessings,

Prof. Jenifer Nkatha Hartman