

**Name:** Claire Desbrisay

**Home institution:** University of Ottawa

**International CO-OP destination (city, country):** Moshi, Tanzania

**Travel dates:** Winter 2011 (January 8, 2011)

**Work term (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, etc.):** First

**Program:** Conflict studies and human rights



**1. Why were you interested in an international work term?**

During some time off, I travelled to South Africa. When I got back, I was very interested in going back to Africa again and had found an opportunity in the COOP Navigator to work there; however, the opportunity didn't work out in the end. So I looked at other jobs online, found one in Tanzania and took a chance.

**2. How did you fund the travel costs and other expenses for the term?**

I received \$500 from the CO-OP Office, as well as another \$500 from the International Office at the University to help with the costs. My parents also helped me a lot with the expenses.

**3. Can you tell me what steps you took to secure your CO-OP position? Was it a difficult process? What advice do you have for other students?**

I didn't end up finding the job through the University; I worked with an outside organization that was available to help me online and on the phone as well. I also had a lot of vaccination procedures to go through, as well as dealing with visas to work abroad. My advice to other students is to make sure you do your research beforehand and set aside enough time to complete everything.

**4. When conducting your job search did you find that many of the jobs available were in specific sectors (such as corporate, non-profit, government, etc.)? Where,**

**or how, would you suggest other students focus their search?**

I would say so, but I ended up mostly 'googling' and searching online for opportunities abroad...and most of them were volunteer opportunities. Still, there are usually actual internships hidden in these offers, and they're usually available for CO-OP work terms.

- 5. Tell me about the cost of living in (city or country). How did your expenses compare with the salary you were earning? Were you able to save any money? Where did you find savings or discounts to reduce your expenses?**

With the organization I used, the fees I paid covered expenses such as room, board and transportation. I had to pay for my own flights. And since I wasn't earning an income, the expenses started to pile up quickly. Fortunately, it was quite inexpensive to live in Tanzania.

- 6. How did you find accommodations and how much rent should students expect to pay in (city or country)?**

The accommodations were pretty basic. In most places (but not all), there were showers, toilets and running water, but it was also crucial not to *drink* the tap water; so you always had to buy bottled water for health and safety reasons. My friends there were renting an apartment, and it was around \$120 US, so rent wasn't too bad.

- 7. What, if any, cultural barriers did you have to overcome?**

The biggest challenge would probably be the language barrier. Most of the people don't speak English; they speak Swahili, so the communication aspect was definitely tough to overcome. However, we did receive language lessons sometimes, as well as cultural lessons, such as learning how to pay respect to elders and how to greet others.

- 8. Did you find it difficult to meet new people? What steps did you take to integrate yourself into your new surroundings and make yourself more comfortable in your new setting?**

The people were really friendly and approachable, so it wasn't very difficult to make acquaintances. The volunteers were willing to get together to hang out whenever we were free to. It's so important to be open to meeting new people when you're in a new environment.

- 9. Overall, what advice would you give CO-OP students who are seeking international opportunities?**

I'd advise them to keep an open mind and to be flexible in their expectations, because most of the time, it won't happen the way you want it to happen. It's so

important to be able to adapt to obstacles and new experiences. Even though it's definitely tough work to get there, when you do, the experience is really worth it.

**10. Is there anything else you'd like to share about your experience?**

I had an amazing time, and I'm already looking forward to my next work term abroad.