The first Global Studies Global Scholars trip occurred over winter break in Rwanda and Uganda, and it was an incredible and unforgettable experience. Seven students were selected to attend this immersion trip where we traveled through the two countries and learned about many aspects of their culture and development. Our trip was facilitated by the Global Livingston Institute (GLI) and their American and East African staff. GLI is an NGO based in Denver, CO whose goal is to bring students and community leaders to East Africa to rethink our approaches to community development in the region. Their tagline is “Listen. Think. Act.,” which emphasizes the need to learn from and understand communities before taking action.

Our journey began in Kampala, Uganda, which is a busy and vibrant city. On our first day in Kampala, we had a Ugandan meal at the family-style 2k, visited the Uganda National Mosque, which is the largest in East Africa, and saw the incredible view of the city from the top of the tower. We toured Makerere University, which is Uganda's largest and oldest university. We also visited Thread of Life, an organization that provides Ugandan women with opportunities to engage in entrepreneurship through taking classes and making and selling clothing.

We then drove about 10 hours to Lake Bunyonyi in southwestern Uganda where we stayed at Entusi, a resort and retreat center which operates as GLI’s headquarters. Lake Bunyonyi is a gorgeous lake that serves as a prominent location for GLI’s extensive community development initiatives. We watched and helped out with their weekly swim lessons for the local children, which was a fun and rewarding experience. GLI also transports children to school using their boats, has a model farm to teach community members about agricultural practices, and operates a recycling center in Kabale town. We witnessed and learned about how they implement all of this on Lake Bunyonyi from the local people they employ.

Finally, we crossed a land border to enter Rwanda, where we visited three genocide memorials. To learn about the Rwandan genocide in Rwanda from people who lived through it is a very impactful once-in-a-lifetime experience. We reflected on the stark contrast between contemporary Rwanda and the war-torn landscape of just 30 years ago, highlighting the resilience and progress achieved in the aftermath of ethnic conflict.

The inaugural Global Studies Global Scholars trip left an unforgettable mark on us all, fostering a profound understanding of East Africa’s diverse cultures, resilient communities, and valuable lessons in responsible and thoughtful community development. We are so grateful to Dr. Schneider and the GLI staff for organizing everything and serving as supportive, fun, and knowledgeable assets throughout our travels.