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‘My Unparalleled Experience’: Narratives from the Leadership for Change Study-Abroad Program Participants

Dipane Hlalele* and Chitja Twala**

**School of Education Studies, University of the Free State, Qwaqwa Campus,
 Private Bag X13, Phuthaditjhaba, South Africa*

***Department of History, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein Campus
 South Africa*

*E-mail: * <hlaleledj@qwa.ufs.ac.za>, ** <twalacm@ufs.ac.za>*

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ABSTRACT The purpose of this paper, guided by Appreciative Inquiry (AI) prescripts, was to understand and interpret the live experiences of three (out of the five) University of the Free State (UFS), Qwaqwa campus first-year students who went on a short study-abroad program to some universities in the United States of America (USA). The three students, who come from historically disadvantaged backgrounds, made up the first cohort of 71 UFS students who were selected to undertake the groundbreaking and unexpected trip, which they described as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. The title of the paper derives from one of the participant’s narratives which was titled: ‘*My unparalleled experience*’. Owing to the appreciative overtones of AI, we mainly highlight the positive aspects of their experience. These range from the delightful time they had and how they marvelled at the opportunity, whilst contrasting their real-life stereotypes with the study-abroad experience. The experience, ephemeral as it may be, seems to have amassed unprecedented or unparalleled gains for both the students as well as the institution. The researchers conclude by reflecting on the ways in which the experience both expedites and conveys personal growth and development.