



My Akron Experience

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I was full of frustration and hope when I landed at the Akron-Canton airport on August 8, 2011. I was leaving behind twenty-eight years of struggle, twenty-one of which I survived as an orphan. I knew that being awarded the Fulbright scholarship was a turning point. I also was convinced that the steps that I was going to take in Akron would change my life. But, I was not sure what to expect. I had never heard of The University of Akron before. Fulbright chose Akron for me, as I did not express preference for a specific university in my scholarship application.

I was welcomed to Akron by my host family, the

Turners. I was put in contact with the Turners by the Akron International Friendship (now Global Ties). The Turners were my guides, and I lived with them until I moved to Envision Apartments on Sherman Street. They taught me how to survive off campus, as well as the importance of making my own food instead of depending on junk food. Later, they became to me a family where I could go during holidays and whose support was key to any project that I undertook during my stay in Akron, including the CPA licensure. When I first got on campus, I was impressed by the school buildings, the library, indoor and outdoor sport infrastructures—a feeling probably shared by most African students when they first visit an American university.

Then came the orientation week. In addition to clarifying my rights and obligations as a foreign student, the orientation allowed me to meet friends that were not accounting students. Among those friends, I have stayed in touch with my South Korean friends, who came to Akron as exchange students. The orientation week also allowed foreign students to hear about the Chapel International's Friday dinners and outdoor activities. I saw the Niagara Falls and rode the Cedar Point Roller Coasters thanks to the Chapel International.

My first visit with the student advisor, Mr. Davis, did not go well. My 570 GMAT score was not satisfactory because the score on the quantitative section was not good enough. Mr. Davis informed me that I could only get a provisional admission

to the Master of Science in Accountancy (MSA) program. However, as I started preparing to retake the GMAT, I learned that, since my score was above the five-hundred minimum score, I was eventually granted full admission into the MSA program. The only condition was that I stayed enrolled full time and that I maintained a 3.0 GPA. It made sense to me that the school should have doubts about my ability to succeed in the graduate accounting program. I graduated from a university in Africa that nobody had heard of, Université Marien Ngouabi. And, the official language in my country, the Republic of Congo, was French, not English. I figured that I needed to prove that I deserved the chance I was being given. I believe that most Fulbright students faced that kind of challenge.

Luckily, the sight of our flags hanging in the College of Business Administration (CBA) and the diversity of Akron students' backgrounds were enough to make us understand that we belonged there. I met with people from basically all over the world. From Asia to Latin America, including Europe and Africa. The power of the English semantic also contributed to that feeling of belonging because we were not called foreign students. We were international students. The adjective international brings a certain prestige and makes you feel that you too have something valuable to share. I managed to maintain a GPA higher than the minimum requirement, varying between 3.75 and 3.94. This performance was made possible by the fact that I was put in the best studying conditions I ever had in my life. We used books in each class.

Information system was extensively relied upon. Professors in the College of Business Administration and in the School of Accountancy were excellent and so supportive.

Another key factor was, of course, my passion for accounting and auditing. I cherished the privilege that Akron was giving me to study world-class and advanced subjects in the field of accountancy. It is true that I regularly suffered headaches due to the high frequency of exams and papers. It is also true that the beginning of each semester was followed by fear about my capacity to survive the intense MSA program. But my motivation kept me going. No wonder I ended up sitting for the CPA examinations and passing its four sections the same year I completed the master's program.

Despite the busy class schedule, I was involved in student organizations. I started with the accounting association and I was later inducted into Beta Alpha Psi (BAP). Being part of those student organizations reinforced in me the feeling of belonging because of the common interests we shared. It also allowed me to participate in community service. Besides, it allowed me to meet Ryan, my closest American friend. Ryan was the vice president of BAP. He made my winters bearable because he always gave me a ride after the evening classes that often ended at ten p.m. Besides BAP, I also volunteered with Akron's branch of Children Hunger Alliance, which allowed me to visit Cleveland during a charity marathon. Another special connection I had with the Akron was through the time spent at Concordia Lutheran Church. The church helped me

keep my faith strong when the road was getting bumpy. I also met exceptional people there, including Ms. Linda Bell and my godmother, Barbara Fink. It was at the church, too, that I first came across people who were surprised to hear that we also had universities in Africa. I was happy to help them learn more about my continent.

Of course, my Akron story would not be complete unless I talked about Metro buses. Indeed, while my host family would always help with a ride whenever I requested so, I also enjoyed riding Metro buses. This complemented the Roo buses and allowed me to go as far as I wanted. While I could shop at Dave's and Chapel Hill's stores riding the Roo buses, Metro buses made it possible for me to visit other locations. For instance, I went to Stow for the first time riding Metro buses. It was in Stow that the Prometric center where I took the CPA examinations was located.

Although I am proud of my academic achievements at UA, I have two reasons for regret. First, I did not take enough time to talk about my country, the Republic of the Congo. I was invited only once, along with other international students, to talk about my country to elementary school students. Second, I regret that I did not seriously work on networking while I was still in Akron. I spent a lot of time studying because I believed that keeping a 3.0 GPA or better and passing the exams were my greatest challenges. But it was a mistake. The biggest challenge was actually not mentioned in any statement. Not in the classroom. Not in books. Not even enough during the

meetings of BPA. That challenge was building a network out of everybody that was around me.

Ryan briefly discussed this with me. That was when he was still a candidate to the vice presidency of BAP. He was frustrated that his good grades were insufficient to help him get where he wanted to go. He then got so involved with BAP that, sometimes, he had to miss classes for a couple of days. I wrongly thought at that time that a Fulbright student's priority was only to complete their master's degree in the allotted time and with excellent grades. That being said, I left Akron with the confidence that I could learn and master anything related to my field. I think I remember a professor saying that that was the true meaning of a master's program. To shape human beings that would no longer need a professor to understand things related to their field of study.

The career developments that followed my graduation have thus been the best I could wish. After almost two years spent at Ernst and Young Congo, I passed the recruitment test for the Banque des Etats de l'Afrique Centrale (BEAC), which is the central bank for the six countries that form the Economic and Monetary Community of Central African States (Republic of the Congo, Gabon, Cameroon, CAR, Chad, and Equatorial Guinea). These countries share the CFA franc (XAF), a currency pegged to the Euro via monetary conventions signed with France. As of today, I am the only US CPA working at the banking supervision branch of BEAC. The department I work in is in charge of making sure that banks and other

financial institutions use safe business practices, inspired from the Basel framework, in the pursuit of their business objectives. Our teams travel throughout the CAR, Cameroon, Chad, Congo, Equatorial Guinea, and Gabon for examinations. Internal control, corporate governance, accounting information system, and risk management are some of the key areas of focus.