On December 22\textsuperscript{nd} 2011, I made the 19-hour voyage to Cape Town, South Africa to begin my International Experience Abroad. For our entire winter holiday, I was fortunate enough to receive a placement at the Steenberg Vineyards just about 20 minutes outside of Cape Town by Muizenberg. While I was in South Africa I was perpetually learning more about the South African culture, the agriculture of the country, and how the two are inherently related.

My first few days in Cape Town were spent becoming acclimated to the area and the culture. The town is absolutely stunning, with Table Mountain serving as an idyllic backdrop to the historic area. I spent my time wandering the streets of the City Bowl area, and taking in the historic waterfront area. What I found most interesting though was my tour through District 6. The area had been bull dozed and cleared during the apartheid, and parts of it still remain cleared out, symbolically. The city itself is split up into different areas, the incredibly wealthy separated by a single street from the extremely poor. This, to me, was the most interesting thing about South Africa. As I became more acclimated to the area, I would drive around the Townships just to come out on the other end, greeted by a gated community inhabited by millionaires. The interaction between the classes in South Africa was incredibly intriguing to
me and I spent a great deal of my time observing the culture in this specific aspect. When I discussed this with local South African’s from all different ethnic backgrounds, the consensus was positive on the whole. Although there is still tension among races in the country, with the younger generations beginning to grow up in a more integrated world, the class separation by race is slowly beginning to fade. It is also not uncommon in South Africa for wealthy citizens of one race to employ struggling people of another, in an effort to begin re-integrating these people back into the economy and mend apartheid altered relationships.

There are a total of thirteen main regions that produce wine in South Africa. Each region is known for a specific wine, and known for having a climate or soil composition that is conducive to producing a particular wine very well. The Vineyard is set right at the end of the M6 off of Tokai Boulevard in Cape Town, the farthest Winery on the Constantia Wine Route. The land was one of the first to be commandeered during the battle Muizenberg in the 1700s and was quickly recognized for its fertile properties and its unique soil compositions. The new Governor of Cape Town moved to make the area a perpetually successful agricultural haven and was rewarded for his fore sight. During my time at the vineyard I was able to see first hand how the wine industry was on the forefront of the reintegration process and how industry efforts continue to make a difference in the lives of struggling South Africans.
While I worked at Steenberg, I was able to pick up on the fact that South African wineries have begun to step out of the realm of commercial agricultural practices, and into the world of more sustainable and traditional agricultural practices from around the world. Among the practices used by the wineries, Integrated Pest Management, Co-Cropping, and Crop rotation are among the most utilized, sustainable and traditional in South Africa. I was intrigued by the use of these methods and was able to shadow the wine maker at Steenberg and learn about his reason for using such methods. He told me that while they often involve more manual labour than using pesticides, the IPM allows the grapes to remain in a more natural environment. He was adamantly about the fact that you have to keep your strategies as simple and natural as possible to allow the
grapes to reach their most useful and productive states each harvest season. IPM allows the wine makers to mimic a natural environment while retaining control over their harvests. I found the use of Co-Cropping to be the most interesting of the practices. Our wine maker explained that by planting different species of flowers and non-invasive plants along side certain grape varietals, the soil is able to retain certain nutrients that it would not normally be capable of keeping or need to keep if just one plant species was in the area. The final best practice was their method of rotational cropping. Each cropping area is planted with incredible specificity. The direction of the vines, the angle of the vines on the hill, the number of vines planted in a certain area, and of course, the number of times that a certain plot is utilized for planting. In a deviation from normal rotational strategies, these plots are planted with the same varietals, but they are given a season off every few years to allow the land time to regenerate and regroup. These practices were put into place almost a decade ago and have proven to be successful for many harvest seasons. With these practices, Steenberg has been able to withstand and remain
successful through harvest seasons that would have normally substantially subtracted from a vineyard’s net worth.

Due to the cool climate and cross sea breezes from the mirroring sides of the Atlantic Ocean, the Constantia region is by far the prominent region in South Africa for the production of Sauvignon Blanc. Sauvignon blanc thrives in this dry environment, and due to the placement of Steenberg up against the ridge of the Stone Mountain and Elephant’s Eye, it receives up to 20% more shade than surrounding areas which gives the grapes a different taste and develops a delicate finish in the wine. It was amazing to learn how the smallest differences in certain regions can produce drastically different results.

As I mentioned earlier on in this reflection, the wine industry in South Africa has made immense strides in bettering the lives of developing South Africans. During all stages of the apartheid, the industry was one of the only predominantly white frequented industries to retain and continue to promote their colored counterparts. In the present day, the wine industry employs thousands of developing South Africans, providing them with jobs in a sustainable and consistent industry. I was able to see first hand how successful this was by learning about a few of my co-workers at the Vineyard. They were offered jobs at Steenberg and have since been able to build on their experiences in the Wine industry. Because of the industries loyalty to its employs, no matter the race, it is a respected and highly sought after industry to work with and in.
The Wine industry in South Africa is a diverse compilation of people, practices and places, all of which interact to create a highly functioning agriculture industry. The industry uses many sustainable practices to continue its outstanding success in the wine world. I learned incredibly useful information during my time in South Africa, and was able to see how incredibly wonderful this system is; how useful progressive the vineyard owners are. I valued my experience in South Africa and am excited to use the information I gained to further my experience in IARD.