ISTR/Wits African PhD Seminar Student Reflection

By Kidist Ibrie Yasin
Originally from Ethiopia, Kidist is a first-year Ph.D. student at the IUPUI Lilly Family School of Philanthropy in Indianapolis, Indiana, United States.

My journey to a PhD study in Philanthropy has already opened several opportunities in less than a year, the most recent of which was four days in May to participate in the ISTR/WITS African PhD Seminar and Annual Philanthropy Conference, that was held in the beautiful *city of Gold*, Johannesburg, South Africa. **A chance to hear about my dissertation from world-class experts, networking with fellow PhD students with diverse backgrounds, participating and becoming a victor in a three-minute thesis competition, getting a chance to present my work in front of scholars and leaders of the third sector across the world, and my experience at the Wits Business School is a treasure that I will always vividly remember.**

During the two-day PhD Seminar, 20 students were teamed into three groups, each consisting of at least two senior faculty and six or seven students. This was a unique opportunity where students got a chance to present their work and obtain detailed individual feedback from the group. My group, themed general philanthropy, was awesome; it included Professor Alan Fowler and Professor Una Osili, and five more PhD students who study in Ghana, Kenya, Uganda, UK, and the US. **They generously gave me, well thought and insightful comments, that clarified nuanced issues, and evoked deeper thinking into my work, and an essential dataset for my dissertation was also suggested.** Listening to and actively participating during the presentations of my group members also widened my understanding in several areas of philanthropy and boosted my confidence in expressing my views in academic settings.

The three minute thesis competition, was a moment that made me very nervous, yet ended with massive excitement. When I was announced a co-winner of the competition, I was shocked, and became speechless! Being the winner of such a competition in an international platform embodies great motivation, strong energy, and a sense of the higher significance of the work that I do. In fact, I am very grateful for my entire teammates, and especially Professor Una Osili and my friend Tiara Dungy (a 2nd year PhD student in my school), who was also in attendance and convinced me to sign up just a day before the competition, and kept encouraging me to the last moment, even when I nearly declined my participation out of anxiety.

All the senior faculty were extremely helpful. I was able to have an extensive talk with most of them during coffee and lunch breaks. I also had a chance to interview Professor Imhotep Aligidede, Professor Ali Awni, Professor Alan Fowler, and Professor Jacob Mati about their works, for a project in my school, that aims to study the intersection of philanthropy, religion, and youth development globally.

The two-day conference on African philanthropy that followed the PhD Seminar was intensive, yet filled with interesting panel discussions that broadened my knowledge about the state of African philanthropy. The rationale and need for philanthropy for African countries, the influence of religion and community on practices of philanthropy, and the legal and policy framework for philanthropy in the continent were among the topics addressed from which I gained a lot of input, especially for a book chapter I am writing this summer on the philanthropic landscape in Ethiopia. **Moreover, the connections and networks I created, in both the Seminar and the Conference, provided me with information on funding opportunities for my summer travel to Ethiopia for my research work and writing a book chapter**.

It would not be complete if I close my essay without mentioning how I enjoyed the lunch and coffee treats on each day, and the memorable dinner at the Moyos Shop; Pap and stir-fried squashes were my most favorite and delicious cuisines that I will definitely miss whenever I think of South Africa.