With the generous support of the Scott Kloeck-Jenson (SKJ) fellowship, I travelled to Ghana and spent three and half months working in public elementary schools as a researcher. My research base was Sunyani, the capital of the Brong-Ahafo region, one of the ten administrative units of Ghana. Its location, straddling the south and north zones of Ghana, makes it a representative site that geographically bridges the religious settlement strata of Muslim north and Christian south. With a population of approximately 300,000, Sunyani hosts two universities and one polytechnic. It is also home to public servants and migrant workers of diverse backgrounds because of the general low cost of living and its calm and welcoming atmosphere.

My dissertation research was focused on religious pluralism in public basic schools in the municipality so I spent three months visiting six schools and engaging students, teachers and principals in interviews, observation, and focus group discussions. I was particularly interested in how different public schools (some of which have religious affiliation), represent Christianity, Islam and indigenous religion and how such representations intersected with the religious identities of individuals in the school community. My goal for the research is to explore such relationships and its implication for religious conflict prevention.

I was very impressed with the cooperation I received from the six schools I studied. The school district was excited about my research and facilitated an easy access to the study sites. While in the schools, principals, teachers and students readily answered questions, welcomed me to their classrooms and allowed me to observe other school activities. I was particularly fascinated by fruitful deliberations I had with students during ten focus group discussions. The sense of maturity exhibited, the candid expression of feeling, and overall comportment of students was very impressive to me (even as a simultaneous insider/outsider). SKJ supplied me with a digital voice recorder which was an invaluable tool in conducting and recording the interviews for future use.

I also answered a lot of questions concerning my project, UW-Madison, the US, and what it is like to be an international student. Students wanted to know more about the education system in the US and how it compares to theirs. Due to my previous experience working with high school students in Madison, I was able to answer some of their general questions and directed them to websites and other sources of information. Beyond the research I am conducting for
my academic work, I am desirous of starting a project that would connect elementary students in Madison to their peers in Ghana so as to foster friendship and exchange knowledge.

I was able to purchase and ship school supplies valued at approximately $800 which were supplied to the schools I worked with. The supplies included exercise books, pens, pencils, erasers and folders which were given to students who participated, and to their teachers for general school use. The students, teachers and principals were very grateful to me and by extension SKJ Fellowship for those gifts.

I also spent two weeks at the University of Cape Coast, 250 miles away from the study site. University of Cape Coast is the premier college of education in Ghana and my visit was to bring myself up to date with research activities currently being conducted there and to establish a relationship with Cape Coast faculty. This visit was very fruitful as I met with Dr. Y. A. Ankomah, the vice-dean of the school of education. Dr. Ankomah was very excited about my research project and extended an invitation for me to submit an article about my work for publication in one of their journals. I also had the opportunity to visit libraries and gain access to a lot more information about education in Ghana that will be very helpful for my dissertation.

Aside of the main research, I took advantage of the request by SKJ for a story from Ghana to take photographs that I am happy to share. One striking observation that visitors to Ghana would witness is the popularity of signs on cars and shops. I took a number of pictures (using the camera provided by the Fellowship) of those signs that had religious expressions or connotations. I welcome all readers to visit my page and enjoy the story told in pictures.

I am very grateful to the Scott Kloeck-Jenson fellowship, particularly the founders - the Jensons - the donors, and the managers, for the scholarship and the opportunity to become a fellow. Data collection for my dissertation is all done, and as I begin to analyze and write, I am constantly reminded that without the financial support of SKJ fellowship, this trip wouldn’t have been possible and my dissertation would be far from done. I would therefore urge all who read this report to consider donating to this fund to help support similar trips in the future.