

# Vital Nyabashi

Gilman Program Alumni Ambassador  
Kenya, 2022



***“Studying abroad is something everyone needs to experience. Put your fears to the side and take a chance.”***

Vital studied abroad as a Gilman scholar during the summer of 2022 through the Iowa State University (ISU) Individual Student Biology Research Program at the Uaso Ng'iro Baboon Project in Laikipia, Kenya. His time in Kenya enabled him to design and conduct a research project, which focused on the spread of *Opuntia stricta* (an invasive cactus species) and its effects on the germination rate of their seeds after going through the digestive tract of a variety of animals. As he observed the behavior of a troop of baboons and worked with fecal seed samples from different animals, Vital learned that field research requires much time and commitment. He also learned that reevaluating one's research question and starting over does not mean a person has failed. Vital partook in some Kenyan cultural and traditional practices such as preparing ugali (a cornmeal dish) and attempting traditional dances. He also rehearsed speaking Swahili with the locals.

Vital credits his Gilman Program experience with helping him discover his interest in research. His research project also showed him the vast amount of data that needs to be collected and analyzed as part of a project. After returning to the United States, Vital realized the power of a computer to assist with data collection and analysis tasks, which led him to the field of bioinformatics. He now has experience coding in R and Python (programming languages) and in Unix.

Earlier this year, Vital returned to his elementary school in Des Moines, Iowa, to share his study abroad experience with a class of third graders. They were learning about plants and flowers, so he did a short introduction and hands-on experiment with them where they learned about seed dispersal through feces. He enjoyed sharing his experiences in Kenya and the look on the students' faces when they learned he “played with poop” for his research project.

Vital is a junior at ISU, where he studies Biology. He is also a lab assistant at the university and is co-conducting a small research project with a graduate student. Vital is excited to be a Gilman Alumni Ambassador and inspire others to pursue their dreams. He also wants to show students that they can overcome challenges and achieve their goals with hard work and determination.

- Hometown: Des Moines, Iowa
- Pursuing a Bachelor of Science in biology from ISU
- Lab assistant at ISU
- Completed a biology research project during program abroad

