

## My experience as an international student at the Southern Medical University in China

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*Administrative building Southern Medical University (published with permission)*



*Panom Puok Duoth Kier*

My name is Panom Puok Duoth Kier. I was born in Nasir County, Upper Nile State, Republic of South Sudan. I graduated from Mekelle University School of Public Health with a Bachelor Degree in Public Health in 2009, and have a diploma in Public Health Nursing from Haramaya University, Ethiopia. I have experience in Public Health and Clinical Medicine in government and non-governmental organizations in South Sudan and Ethiopia.

Until recently I was an International Master of Public Health student in the Southern Medical University (SMU) in Guangzhou, China. I started this programme in September 2016 and completed it in June 2018. I would like to share my experience of being an international student at SMU.

SMU, formerly known as the First Military Medical University, was started in 1951; it is a Chinese institution of higher learning with its main campus in Guangzhou city, Baiyun District, while the second campus, known as the Shunde campus, is at Shunde. SMU became one of the key national universities in 1979. In August 2002, the university came under the jurisdiction of Guangdong Province and was renamed as Southern Medical University.

SMU has a long history of training foreign students especially from developing countries. The international training programme was started in 2008 and it is supported by the Ministry of Commerce of the People's Republic of China especially under China's Foreign Aid Fund. So the Master of Public Health (MPH) that I have studied was a

two year academic programme under the sponsorship of the Ministry of Commerce and it is organized by Southern Medical University.

The curriculum is in English and was designed for professional personnel with different backgrounds and aims to improve national public health institutions, especially in the areas of public health and medical care systems, in the students' countries of origin. I feel so privileged to have had this opportunity as it will benefit me as well as my country. My batch is the second and I and my class mates are from 15 different countries from Africa, Asia and Latin America.

The curriculum for the MPH includes core and elective courses. The core courses are: Primary Chinese, Health Statistics and SPSS Soft Ware Application, Principles and Methods of Epidemiology, Advances in Tropical Medicine, Health Care Management, Acquisition and Management of Medical Information, Nutrition and Food Hygiene, Health Promotion and Health Education, Occupational Health and Safety, Field Study and Master Dissertation. Some of the elective courses are: Introduction to China, Introduction to Pre-Clinical Medicine, Toxicology, and Introduction to Clinical Medicine, Biosafety, Medical Thesis Writing, Medical Psychology and Health Economics.

I chose to study at SMU because both the university and its Public Health Department are among the most highly ranked in China. It had been my dream to study here because of its highly qualified and prestigious professors, stimulating atmosphere as well as the beautiful scenery.

I have enjoyed studying at this wonderful university and interacting with students and teachers from all walks of life. I have also enjoyed the Chinese culture because the Chinese are very peaceful, caring and hospitable people. I have been impressed by our visits outside Guangzhou which left me with unforgettable memories. Currently I am studying the Chinese language which is another opportunity to explore more of this great culture.

Some of the challenges that I have faced while living here are adapting to the environment, the difficulty of communicating with the local people, adapting to Chinese foods, and writing and remembering Chinese characters.

In conclusion, the two years that I have spent in China are full of wonderful memories and I feel so privileged to

have studied for my MPH degree here. I am proud to be part of this great family and SMU will continue to be my second home.

I thank the SMU administration, all my teachers, my friends, the Ministry of Commerce as well as the entire Chinese community.

In Southern Medical University we will keep the dream alive and move forward!!!

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