PARADIGM SHIFT: Senior Shimhanda and David Shipepe (third and fourth from the left) with other students at the Walvis Bay NASA ORACLES base.

IT WAS THE EXPERIENCE OF A LIFETIME, THE STUFF SCI-FI MOVIES ARE MADE OF.

The Oracle was awesome

KUMBI CHITENDERU

Three students from Namibia University of Science and Technology (Nust) got the opportunity of a lifetime and shadowed a team from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (Nasa).

Nasa is an independent agency linked to the executive branch of the United States government. For three weeks three Nust students learned how to collect and read data relating to climate change, and so much more that would probably go over most their heads, they say. We caught up with two of them: Senior Shimhanda, a graduate in Electronic and Telecommunications Engineering and David Shipepe, a Master's student in Spatial Sciences, who were both still in awe about their recent experience: "It was indescribable and something I never imagined would happen to me," says Senior. "I learnt so much and I got direction on my Master's research topic!" A topic he says is so brilliant he just cannot let anyone else in on it yet.

David agrees that the experience was enlightening. "I was exposed to so much and made so many new friends from around the world. I even met people whose articles I am reading to supplement my research."

According to Senior, the Nasa team was also made up of people from various other nationalities including Canadians and Mexicans This, he says enhanced his interpersonal skills and taught him what it is like to work with people from different backgrounds and disciplines.

Tied to this lesson, Senior and David both learnt the importance of finding out what you are good at and sticking to it. "Don't be a Jack of all trades," says Senior. "Specialise in your field of interest and learn to collaborate with people from other disciplines." This is a sentiment David agrees with. "There were people who were from different disciplines there but we were all working together towards a common goal. We could come up with many more breakthroughs if we learn to collaborate across the board."

Knowing that not everyone would get this opportunity, David and Senior encourage students to never wait for opportunities to come to them, but to engage in personal applied research even at an undergraduate level as this may one day afford them a great opportunity.

CAREER GOALS: Senior Shamhanda (right) at the NASA base in Walvis Bay with other students.
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