

Kate Eslick – AIM Overseas, North Carolina in 2009

Last year my flat mate gave me a web link that not so much changed my life, but enhanced it. It was a link to the AIM Overseas website, where they were advertising a Teacher Education and Practice Program, which would be held in Charlotte, North Carolina on the east coast of America for three weeks.

Since I was young, I have wanted to travel to America and attend school there, based on what I had read about, seen in movies and heard from friends. American schooling seemed so different and exciting compared to Australia and I desperately wanted to experience it. And so on after clicking on that link, applying and being accepted into the program, on January 23, 2010 I stepped off the plane at Charlotte and was met by a staff member of the University of North Carolina, Charlotte (UNCC).

This program was about providing pre-service teachers an insight into the American education system, touching on theoretical and practical aspects. The first week of the program was all about academic classes at the UNCC campus. We discussed current educational issues, innovative teaching methods and new instructional technologies. When we first walked onto campus on Monday morning, I was amazed at the sheer size of the buildings; I mean the Student Union was a massive three-story building, which housed fast food restaurants, an all-you-can-eat buffet on the second floor and a slightly more expensive restaurant on the top floor. It also had a Star Bucks, a Barnes & Nobles bookshop and much more.

Throughout our second week we were driven all over the city of Charlotte, visiting elementary, middle and high schools, which opened our eyes to the variety of school structures available, and the reality of cafeteria food. One of the main things that constantly amazed me would have to be the size of the student population - we have approximately 22 million people living in Australia, well in America there is roughly 55 million students within their education system alone!

In our final week, we spent our time in one school as an intern in a mentor teacher's classroom, where we were able to observe and teach some lessons, rounding off this fantastic learning experience. I honestly think that the students were more interested in me talking about Australia and what we ate, rather than discussing their novels that they were reading.

The academic side of things was all great and I really learnt a lot, but just sitting down and having conversations with the vast variety of people we came in contact with was phenomenal. Hearing people's stories about their own lives, careers and suggestions on what we must do before we leave (like eat some Carolina Barbeque and southern fried chicken), really helped us feel welcome and a part of something.

In between the academic classes and school trips, we have several cultural activities that we could choose to do. Shopping at a massive mall, which had its own cinema, bowling alley (with a bar!) and an arcade, visiting the local NASCAR race track and one of the team's workshops and we were taught line dancing at a place called 'Coyote Joe's' (they had saddles as bar stools and a LOT of animals on the walls). I must admit though, one of my favourite moments of the whole trip was the Ice Hockey game, as I have always wanted to see one live.

Unfortunately, the weather interrupted some of our plans, such as spending the day with an American family, visiting some museums/historical sites, and heading to uptown Charlotte and to the 'Epi Centre'. BUT I experience snow for the first time, so I didn't mind so much.

Everything about this program helped me improve upon my own understanding about education. Many of the 'hot issues in US education today' are topics in the spotlight here, in Australia and other countries around the world.

My goal in life is to travel and teach wherever I have the opportunity. The USA is one of the many countries I am keen to live and teach in, and so having participated in this program has made my goal that much more accessible and believable.

I am in my fourth (and final) year of an English/History Secondary Teaching degree and so to have opportunity to travel to the US and study without it impinging upon my current university studies was remarkable. It has also provided me with resources, strategies and skills that I will use throughout my career.

If you have ever thought about heading overseas to study, even for a short period of time, why not make it a reality? I did, and would do it again in an instant. You make life-long friends, take wicked photos, see things you would not have thought existed and most importantly, you have a blast while doing it all.