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Summer Cook Associate Professor of Kinesiology (COLA) travels to Australia

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Summer Cook

Associate Professor of Kinesiology

I was partially supported by a CIE International development grant to travel to Perth, Australia for one month in 2016. Dr. Timothy Fairchild, a colleague and friend, invited me to visit the Department of Psychology and Exercise Science at Murdoch University in the hopes of establishing a research relationship with the University of New Hampshire Department of Kinesiology. Over the last several years, I have had students earn Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowships (SURF) from the Hamel Center and have always wanted to give students an opportunity to apply for SURF abroad grants or to study abroad while conducting research within our field. The idea of international collaboration and the opportunity to leave the New England winter to work on the coast of Western Australia made the decision to travel very simple.

My daughters (ages 6 and 9) and I traveled to Perth, Australia in late January and we immediately became immersed in the "Aussie lifestyle" by residing with the Fairchild family (Tim, his wife and two children ages 4 and 6). Typical days included early morning runs along the coast, work at Murdoch University (referred to as "Uni" by all the professors), and late afternoon trips to the beach with the kids. Weekends were filled with family activities of hikes in the bush, kangaroo watching and of course, surfing and boogie boarding at the beach. What stood out to me most about this Aussie lifestyle were the laid back attitudes often accompanied by the saying "No worries, mate". This was very important for me to observe at Uni as I was surrounded by prestigious and productive scholars that had a high quality of life and appeared to have no worries. As I reflect back on my time at Uni, I want to continue that important balance between family and work.



An evening at Trigg Beach in Perth, Australia



Prof. Cook (center) with exercise science faculty at Murdoch

I found my work at Uni to be diverse and valuable. The first thing I did was meet with the administrators from the Academic Registrar's Office to figure out how to get UNH students to Murdoch and Murdoch students to UNH. I learned of multiple ways for this to occur for not only our Exercise Science students but for all UNH students as well. I met with several Murdoch University Exercise Science Ph.D. students to learn about their research and I shared information on the similarities and differences between American and Australian universities. I also presented my research to the Department of Psychology and Exercise Science at Uni. I spent a considerable amount of time working with two new faculty members that have similar research interests to mine. One researcher, Dr. Ann-Maree Vallenge, taught me how to do transcranial magnetic stimulation (TMS). This noninvasive method to stimulate parts of the brain can be used to assess motor unit excitability and force production. Dr. Brendan Scott is an up-and-coming researcher in blood flow restricted exercise. I helped him set up his laboratory, we practiced several exercise protocols, and he taught me how to measure muscle thickness using ultrasound. Together, the three of us were able to develop a large scale research study that includes a Ph.D. candidate and

several undergraduate students. My plan is to begin working with a UNH undergraduate student to apply for a SURF abroad grant to conduct an individual piece of the study at Murdoch University under the guidance of Dr. Vallenge, Dr. Scott and myself. While there, he or she will have access to technologies that are currently not available at UNH and will be mentored by a group of respected researchers. They can do this all while experiencing the Aussie lifestyle.

Overall, this trip was an amazing experience for myself and my children. We were always eager to immerse ourselves in the Aussie culture and we cherished our times of having morning tea, eating vegemite, driving on the left side of the road and giving shakas to the fellow surfers. I look forward to incorporating the knowledge I learned and the Aussie lifestyle into my work at UNH. I can't wait to go back to Murdoch University with some UNH students.



Prof. Cook and her daughter with a kangaroo





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