FROM THE COORDINATOR

Geoffrey Scheurman

A lot has happened since I became director of our COST chapter here at UWRF. Besides Nora Koch working double time to keep the overseas ship afloat and teach me the complexities of the program, I attended my first consortium meeting at Kent State. There I met directors from our sending site partners, one of whom had recently vetted a potential school in France, as well as on-the-ground supervisors from American Samoa, Australia, Mexico, The Netherlands, New Zealand, and Puerto Rico. I have sent and watched the safe return of my first cohorts of students, including Melissa Johnson whose photos and reflections are featured in this newsletter. We set new precedents this past semester by having two students live and teach an hour apart in the same country (The Netherlands) and having one student complete her COST placement during the first nine weeks of the semester (students typically complete the first half of student teaching in the USA). By leaving early, this TESOL major was able to extend her student teaching experience to 12 weeks and was even invited to lodge in the home of her school's headmaster and spouse! This semester we have our first student ever placed in India and next fall our largest cohort of applicants (12) is gearing up to put their preparation to the test in all corners of the planet. I will be attending the annual COST meeting in Yucatan and Guadalajara, two of our exciting Mexican partners whose doors have recently been opened to UWRF. Many thanks to all the people who make these opportunities possible, including our very own teacher candidates at River Falls. I hope the adventures ahead are half as luminous as the memories in the rear view mirror.

NOTES FROM ABROAD

Melissa Johnson in New Zealand

I applied for the COST program requesting four countries, all in Europe. One by one, other COST participants received their placements and I heard nothing. I began to panic that I would not receive one. Then I received news that I would be placed in New Zealand, I had not thought of that.

I immediately got into contact with my site coordinator and school correspondent. I received an e-mail from my host mom describing her family and I could not wait to meet them.

Researching flights was stressful and challenging. I made an appointment with a travel agent and I was able to book a multi-stop round trip flight, from Minneapolis to Los Angeles, then to Auckland, New Zealand. I planned to travel to Sydney, Australia and Seoul, South Korea after teaching and could not wait to go. However, I still had many months to wait and this made me anxious, excited, and stressed.

From the internet I learned the school where I would be teaching was active and appeared to have great community support. I noticed that most of the buildings were not...
attached to one another so I expected that it was going to be hot most days. I was not sure how instruction within the classroom worked in New Zealand, but was hopeful it was similar to the United States.

I was to be gone for Thanksgiving and Christmas; I was nervous that during those times I would feel the furthest from home. I planned to Skype with my family and friends in order to stay in touch with them. However, I was feeling more anxious and excited about leaving to go abroad and was not thinking much about being homesick.

I had to remember that I still had a student teaching job to do before I left to go abroad. It was really important to stay professional and focused on my students in the US before I left. I shared my plans with them and showed them on a globe how I would get to and from New Zealand. I also planned to stay in touch with my supervising teacher and send pictures and updates of my travel along the way.

The final days leading up to my departure were busy. Family and friends wanted to spend time with me, which was great, but stressful because my main focus was to pack. I had four days from the time my student teaching ended in the United States before I left for New Zealand.

I looked forward to the sunshine and warm weather lacking in Wisconsin and Minnesota before I left. Packing light dressy and casual clothes was important, but packing was difficult. I was not always sure what I would and would not need on the trip. Rolling my clothes into my suitcase allowed more room, but I had to remember to weigh my luggage to make sure I was not over weight allowance. Not only did I have to think about packing for my stay, but also for my plane ride(s). Finally I was ready to go; I could not wait to experience the new culture and explore the beautiful country of New Zealand!

As I expected the weather was a beautiful, well most of the time. Living in Auckland, I had to be prepared for all four seasons of weather to occur in one day. When I first arrived the season was still spring. On some occasions it rained for two days straight. I was glad that I packed a raincoat and an umbrella. Temperature was read in Celsius so I often had to use my iPhone to help understand it. The scenery and landscapes were breath taking.

My host mother was waiting for me when I got off the plane and welcomed me with a huge hug. This was exactly what I needed after a long flight. After dropping off my bags at what would be my home for the next two months, she showed me around Mt. Albert, a suburb of Auckland, where my school was and where I could catch public transportation. It was a jam-packed day.

It took me a week to get over jet lag. Fortunately, my host family, another COST student and a student from Japan, living there kept me busy the first few days. The students showed me how to catch a train or bus, gave me directions to
shops and restaurants and were available as travel companions. We became quick friends; friends for a lifetime.

At first I felt uncomfortable about my role with my host family, but after a few weeks I did not feel homesick, I felt excited about being there and eager to learn more about the culture. I was busy teaching in my classroom and traveling when I could on the weekends so I did not have much time to think about being away from the ones I loved. Keeping busy was important.

My host family was welcoming, flexible and kind. They advised me on places to travel, even helped me plan trips and offered me rides to places. It was hard to transition back to living with children, but totally worth every minute of it. I baby sat my host brother and sister, eight and ten, from time to time and spent free time attending their cricket or soccer games. Their older sister, my age, and I became close and I traveled with her.

I had my own really nice room. Each day I had dinner prepared for me. A few nights I offered to cook. Internet is very expensive in New Zealand so I discussed what I could and could not do with my laptop. With seven people living in one house we ran out of data quickly.

Prior to going to New Zealand, I assumed that since most people spoke English I would not have a hard time communicating with my students. However, Kiwi (New Zealand) slang/phrases were used often so I had to familiarize myself with simple words such as, rubbish for garbage, rubber for eraser, or felt for marker in order to teach each day.

On my first day there, as the school resumed after a holiday, I was asked to help run Athletics Day.

The school day schedule looked something like this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GTV (school news/television)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roll</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brain Snack (fruits and vegetables)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morning Tea (coffee, tea, and treats)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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The teaching method reminded me of a Montessori school, which was great because I taught at a Montessori school prior to going to New Zealand. I enjoyed teaching language in large groups. Each week I taught sound blends. One week the sound blend was “sm”. I placed four bottles with different smells at group tables. Each child had a chance to smell the bottles and the class described what they smelled, then students wrote on their own. While students wrote, I worked with five or six individuals and focused on their needs.

The staff at the school was very supportive and open to new ideas. I enjoyed having hands-on experiences in my classroom for my students. I would like to continue this practice in my own classroom one day.

After a month it was Thanksgiving. Kiwis do not celebrate Thanksgiving however, there were several American teachers at the school, and we did. I really began to feel homesick and wished I was with my family. Skype and video calls helped, but also the comfort of my new friends and family in New Zealand.

The children were amazing.
Tips for Student Teaching Abroad

- Book flights well in advance to avoid high priced flights. Ask about international baggage allowance—some airlines will charge $200 for a second checked bag.
- Call your bank and credit card company and let them know when (dates) and where you are traveling.
- Familiarize yourself with local conditions and laws of your host country.
- Bring small amounts of American cash currency ($100-200).
- Research and familiarize yourself with the school you will be teaching in (philosophy, teaching methods, extracurricular activities, need of materials, etc.)
- Download apps before you leave, such as Viber (free calls; free text, etc. to other Viber users, on any device, in any network and country).
- Purchase an international cell phone once you arrive in your country of travel. Pre-paid plan with low minutes and text messaging.
- Bring gifts from home for your school, students, host family, etc.
- Bring a book that is known in the United States or home state and donate it to your classroom or school’s library.
- Prepare a video or picture slide show to share with your students about yourself.

I did not want to go home yet

Zealand helped me. I am glad that I was able to stay with a host family during my time there. I will miss them, but I know I will Skype and stay in contact.

After Thanksgiving, I was feeling great again about my teaching. After being there for two months I looked forward to coming home to family and friends, but was not ready to leave New Zealand. The end of my placement was also the end of school for my students. The school year in New Zealand is opposite the one in the states, just as the seasons are.

I could not have asked for a better placement. I loved my school. The children were amazing and so was my cooperating teacher.

I traveled on to Australia and South Korea next. New Zealand was not on my radar before I left, but now holds a place in my heart. I do not plan to limit my job search to the United States.

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