

**Genevieve Edgell – Bachelor of Education (Primary) student relives some of the highlights of her exchange experience at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, USA semester 2, 2005.**



Looking back now, applying for an overseas exchange was one of the best decisions that I have ever made.

It is hard for me to describe the value of being an exchange student without writing a small novel! I was given the opportunity to study at a great university that was filled with wonderful people. Everyone did their best to make my fellow Australians and me feel welcome and supported, especially the teaching staff and those who made our exchange possible.

One of my concerns when arriving at the school was regarding the type of schoolwork that I would be doing. It was not long however before my mind was put at ease. The classes that I had were interesting, relevant and useful for teaching. The teachers made it clear that their aim was to get us to learn as much as we could about teaching, without loading us with too much assignment work. This included often giving us the freedom to choose the direction our assignments took so that we could learn in areas in which we thought we were lacking. One of the most valuable things that a teacher told me is that “It’s not about grades, it is about learning to become a good teacher”.

Prior to going to America I assumed I would be entering a culture that was very similar to my own, and that I would not really experience anything dramatically different – I was very wrong! Not only did I realise that in many ways American culture is quite unlike what we often see in the media, but also that there are big differences even among the American states that I had the opportunity to visit. It was a real eye opener and my views on America changed dramatically.

I met wonderful people everywhere I went and I enjoyed living, studying and socialising at UIUC. I learnt so much about myself, as well as about teaching, and life, in another country. I was able to visit amazing cities like Chicago and New York, and I was left speechless at places like the Statue of Liberty in New York and Tiffany’s in Chicago!

Overall, the exchange experience has broadened my knowledge of teaching and reinforced my desire to teach and to learn all that I can in order to become a better teacher.