

## Kevin House Masters in Urban & Regional Planning (MPL)

### First in his program to participate in an exchange with the University of Western Australia

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Kevin standing on the sand dunes in Lancelin (WA), with the Milky Way in the background.

by Meredith Dault  
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When Kevin House was offered the opportunity to spend six months studying in Australia as part of his Master's degree in Urban and Regional Planning, he didn't miss a beat. "I saw it as an amazing opportunity," he recalls. "I think I knew that it was the last time that I would get a solid opportunity to go away for six months again. I thought, if I'm going to do this, I'd better do it now."

House became the first student in the Master's of Planning program to participate as an exchange student with the University of Western Australia in Perth. Because the exchange takes place in the second half (February to July) of the second year of a two-year degree program, House says that some of his Canadian classmates were reluctant to leave their cohort behind and blaze a trail to the other side of the planet.

But House, who had already spent time in the working world (he got time off - and financial support - from his job with the Ministry of Transportation in British Columbia in order to pursue his graduate degree), could only see an opportunity he couldn't pass up. As soon as he heard his department was offering the exchange program, he went to see the director. "I basically went to see (David Gordon) and told him I was going," he recalls.

He admits, however, that the venture did require some discipline and organization. Because the Australian academic year is slightly out of alignment with the Canadian one, House had to have the research completed for his final thesis report before he set off. "Once you are in Australia, you're hooped if you don't have it done!" he laughs. He used some of the time between the end of the Queen's term in December, and the beginning of the Australian term to get a good chunk of work done.

Though he expected to suffer from culture shock upon his arrival, House says that wasn't the case. "There are definitely all these stereotypes about Australians," he explains, "but they're exaggerated. They're actually just Canadians with accents!"

House enrolled in four courses within the Department of Planning at the University of Western Australia. "It was fantastic," he says. "It really was a great opportunity to see how other countries handle planning. There are many similarities between Commonwealth countries - but it's also interesting to see how they do things differently." House says that Perth has the same kinds of problems with urban sprawl that are common in North America. "It was interesting to go to Australia and find that they have the same problems," he says. As a result, House says he didn't feel like an outsider in class. "My issues weren't really that different from theirs."

Socially, House says it was easy to make in-roads. "Australians are really good at including others," he says. "And the university tries hard to set up activity nights for international students. There was no shortage of stuff to do." Living with students from Sweden, Germany, France as well as Australians added another dimension to the international experience. House says he was impressed at how active UWA was at recruiting international students. "At one orientation session there has to be 500 students from around the world," he says. "It blew my mind!"

At one point, House even found himself working on behalf of Queen's and the Urban and Regional Planning Department at an international university fair on his down-under campus. There, he set up a table in a bid to promote the program that had given him the chance to travel and meet all kinds of new people. "I felt like, with my department being small, I really wanted to help push the program," he says with a shrug. Instead, he met all sorts of interested students -- along with a good handful of undergraduate students from Queen's who were also doing exchanges at UWO.

Now that he's back in Canada, with his degree in-hand, House says he's looking forward to getting back to work in Victoria, B.C. "I'm going back to the 9-5," he laughs, looking slightly wistful as he recalls his time abroad. "But I'm looking forward to it. I really feel like my time here at Queen's has helped me. And I am really hoping that this degree will help move me forward."



*Kevin riding the camels with his friend Paula in Broome (WA), and feeding the roos in Cairns (QLD)*