Tessa Richards, an exercise science, pre-physical therapy major, spent the summer semester 2014 in Perth, Australia interning for the West Perth Falcons Football Club. “This experience has been a once in a lifetime adventure...Studying abroad always has the tendency to put things in your own life into perspective. Putting yourself outside your comfort zone is thrilling and scary, but I’ve found it’s the best way to learn.”

What do you do for the West Perth Falcons?

“I’m currently working with the athletic trainers and physios (physical therapists) for the West Perth Falcons Football Club. I mostly help with taping the players’ ankles, shoulders, knees, and anything else that needs it before practices and games. I also give sports massages to the players before and after they play. When an athlete is injured, they see the team physios for a diagnosis; the physios also give them an approximation of how long it will be before they can play again. With the physios I’ve mostly been watching and learning how they fit into the running of the club.”

Why did you want to do this internship?

“Footy is nothing like any sport we have in America. It’s actually not rugby like most people think, but the game is just as brutal. There are a lot more injuries than any other sport I’ve seen because the players don’t wearing any pads or helmets (think hockey hits, but without any protection). I want to work with athletes in the future, and this is the perfect opportunity to be in a completely different atmosphere while gaining experience in what I want to do. I’ve also never been to Australia, so it’s a new adventure all around.”

How did you find out about this opportunity?

“Honestly, I googled it! I was on the lookout for physical therapy internships, and this one popped up. It sounded interesting, so I applied.”

What was the most rewarding part of this experience?

“Meeting all of the fantastic trainers and players. Everyone down here is very friendly and more than willing to teach you what you want to know. Learning how footy is played is pretty interesting too. The players love to teach people the rules, and also love joking around with you when you get completely confused! They are really open to letting you practice taping and massage on them, even though they usually like a certain person to do it. It has been a great experience.”
What are some differences between the US and Australia sports medicine?

“The approach to sports medicine is completely different here, which surprised me. Coaches, unlike in the US, prefer to sit a player out if he’s injured than force him to play another game, possibly making his injury worse. The concussion management is fantastic. If a player hits another hard enough to cause a concussion, they are suspended from play for a certain amount of games. When a player does get a concussion (which happens a lot with footy), they are forced to sit out for a couple games instead of pushing through it like they do in the US.”

How has this experience impacted your life?

“Studying abroad always has the tendency to put things in your own life into perspective. Putting yourself outside your comfort zone is thrilling and scary, but I’ve found it’s the best way to learn. I’ve learned so much about taking initiative and jumping right into the deep end when it comes to learning new skills. It has been interesting to me to compare the practices down here in Australia to those back home, and it has given me some great ideas on how to change the way we treat athletes in recovery.”

Have there been any challenges?

“Everything here is incredibly expensive. A small cup of coffee costs about $4. That took a lot of getting used to. I’m not used to big cities, and Perth is the largest city in Western Australia. I had
to learn how to get to work on the train and bus every day (which costs about $10 a day) and how to navigate my way around the city."

**Did this experience open any doors to other opportunities?**

“Not yet, but I’m hoping I can come back and intern longer for the Falcons in the future.”

**What advice would you give other students considering opportunities like this?**

“DO IT. Like I said, there’s no better way to learn. Going abroad is one of those experiences you will never forget, and you will make friends you will always remember. Don’t be one of those people who leaves college wishing they had gone abroad.”