

SECOND PLACE, ESSAY
Study Abroad Storytelling Contest 2025

“A New Motivation”
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Synchronized skating is my whole life. Ever since I was a child, my life has revolved around training for the sport and working to improve my skating. When I reached college, I was incredibly delighted to be able to skate on UD's synchronized skating team. Our training season runs from August to March, with our culminating competition being the National Synchronized Skating Championships.

I always knew that I wanted to study abroad at UD, and when the chemical engineering department began talking about the study abroad program to Australia for winter 2025, I knew I had to take the chance. I was worried about going away and continuing my training, so I began making a plan. I found a rink near where we would be studying in Melbourne, and immediately contacted their synchro coaches to see if I could attend training with the team. The coaches responded quickly with excitement, and we planned a date early within the term where I would go skate with the team!

When the day finally came, I excitedly awoke and took our group's rented bike down to the rink. It was about two miles from where we were staying, and the short ride was very pleasant in the summer breeze of the morning (oh to experience summer in the middle of January!). I arrived at the rink, and excitedly joined the other skaters. There were 16 girls on the team, all around high school age, who were very excited to meet someone from the US. I learned the routine, and talked to the girls all about their skating and what synchro was like here. The team was preparing to go abroad to compete in Europe, which was very cool because US teams don't compete abroad until they reach the highest levels. The team told me all about how skating worked at their rink, and how their rink has public ice all throughout the day, with figure skating and hockey training only in the early mornings. This was a shocking difference for me, as in the US, public skates are typically only on the weekends or during a few short hours during the

week. Skating was a common activity even in the summer for people in Australia.

Not only did I befriend the skaters on the team, but I went skating with them almost every day before classes, meeting their other friends who didn't participate in synchro as well. Some of the skaters asked for advice on their jumps, and I began acting as a pseudo-coach to help them make great strides! They also gave me Melbourne recommendations. Nothing beats Hot Jam donuts, which one of my new friends, Caitlyn, put me on. I ate them almost every day after.

After three weeks, our UD group left Melbourne and journeyed as a group to Sydney. The best synchronized skating team in Australia was based in Sydney, and as it is my dream to skate for a senior (highest level) team, I was delighted when their coaches welcomed me into practice! Although the 5 am start time was quite daunting, I joyfully went to the address, and was shocked to see that the rink was located inside a mall. I had never seen a training rink inside a mall before, and I was delighted to have the opportunity to skate on this hidden gem.

When I sat down with the team to lace up our skates, not only was I met with a wide range of ages, but also a variety of backgrounds. The first girl I met had just moved to Australia from Berlin, where she had previously skated on the senior synchro team of Germany. The second girl I met was from Hong Kong, and was attending the University of Sydney as an international student. The third, fourth, fifth, and sixth people I met were not girls- the team had four boys! In the United States, boys in synchro were extremely rare, so to see a high level team with not only one boy, but four of them, was completely new and exciting!

We got on the ice and began doing warm up drills, and I was greatly challenged by the complicated steps that the team does. Everyone was so motivated to work hard, and we all built off each other's speed to keep pushing throughout the long practice. I learned how to do a new move called a death spiral, done in pairs where one skater holds another skater's hand as they spin them in a circle where their head nears the ice. It is typically only done by senior teams, so I

had never tried it in formation with a whole team. It was amazing!

After the practice, the skaters all stretched together, showing a continued push and desire to get stronger as a team. I had never been on a team with such a high level of drive, and I was completely taken by it. I knew that this was the kind of team I wanted to be on after college.

I'm never someone who is completely solidified on one possibility for life. It took me months and months to decide on a major, and even after choosing, it took me at least a year to be fully sure that it was the one for me. Giving up skating after college was never a part of my plan, but until studying abroad, I wasn't sure what my skating journey would look like. Now, I did. The girls from Melbourne inspired me to want to coach. The joy I got from helping them was immense. The team from Sydney inspired me to want to skate on a senior level synchronized skating team. Their challenge and the drive was unmatched. While life is unpredictable, this trip made it clear that I will make these dreams come true because they are exactly what I want. I just needed a new motivation.