

# Profile: Michael Stevenson



## Hometown:

Te Anau Southland, New Zealand

## Program:

Work USA Plus Program

## Length of time spent overseas:

I intended 12 months, but returning after 6 months for job in back in New Zealand!

## Where did you live and what did you get up too?

After being accepted into an internship as a Strength and Conditioning Coach at Harvard University, I moved to Boston in mid January going from midsummer to mid winter (high 20s to often -3 to 8). Boston had regular snow storms getting up to 1 foot of snow in the city. For my first 2 weeks at Harvard I lived at a backpacker's hostel while looking for a place to live. (Initially this was quite a daunting experience as I had absolutely no contacts in America except the head Coach at Harvard who provided no support regarding accommodation, learning my way around Boston and socializing and meeting people).

Eventually I got in contact with the Boston Irish Wolfhounds Rugby Club who I played for and who helped me acclimatize to this strange new culture and country.

I had a pretty tough schedule while working at the Harvard Strength and Conditioning Facility. I would work from 6am till 7:30 pm five days a week, training for rugby 2 nights a week usually Tuesday and Thursday from 8pm till 10pm, often getting home around 11pm to cook myself dinner. Get a quick sleep and be up before 5am to catch my bus and start all over again.

Through my rugby I was able to travel to Florida, New York and other places around the country which was very useful as far as fitting in some sightseeing.

This was the general trend till the end of April when I took up a position coaching the Harvard rugby team preparing them for the National Collegiate Championship Invitational tournament in the first weekend of June. I have maintained a very busy schedule working here at Harvard and am planning to travel a little bit between work, before I return to New Zealand at the end of June.

## What are some of the experiences that you had which made an impact on you?

Some of the main experiences that have impacted me have been juggling a high workload at Harvard working up to 60 hours a week without pay while playing rugby and managing to survive on a very limited budget.

A key point in my time here would have been my first week at Harvard where it became apparent to me how different our cultures are. The American athletics and sports culture is far more professional and restrictive on coaches and athletes with a ridiculous amount of rules and regulations. There is a lot of pressure of student athletes to maintain a very high training load on top of their academic requirements that would make a lot of New Zealand Professional athletes wince at. (None of these athletes get paid or are on scholarships)

With regards to culture and society New Zealanders value our quality of life and lifestyles a lot more than 'from my experience Americans do'. We may not get paid as much but we have more time off, our employees get far superior rights with regards to working contracts and benefits.

We look after all walks of life and our people far better than Americans, (we may get taxed more but our councils and government provide a far better service to us as people and a country).

## Has working in the USA benefited your career?

YES I have learnt a lot working in the most prestigious learning institute in the world. Purely through experience alone I have come across a lot of tools that I can use to help me in my future career. I have since got a job back in New Zealand which I attribute partly to my experience over here.!



What is your advice for someone who wants an American adventure?

America is different enough from NZ to get a great new experience, but there are enough similarities to make it fairly easy to find your way around.

Don't be afraid just get out there and go for it, the biggest thing is putting yourself out there and getting into a position where you can benefit from all these experiences.

What did you find valuable in going to the USA on an IEP program?

The IEP program was great for organizing my visa and insurance, but also small bits of information that are always useful when venturing out into the unknown.

As well there was also the peace of mind that if something did go wrong they are there to help get you out.

Were there any times that were hard?

There were hard times, missing family and friends, getting over the culture differences and new people. Living in this big new place and learning that it is a harsh world out there.

What is something unexpected/different/strange about the USA compared with New Zealand?

There is a lot more double standards in the US than I have been exposed to back home with rifts between cultural groups.

How did you find employment in the USA?

I had a pre arranged position before I got here.

Future plans?

I've had to cut my time in the USA early as I have been offered a Job as a Strength and Conditioning Coach at Lincoln University back in NZ.

I am grateful for all I have learnt from this experience and how it has helped me grow as a person and in my profession.

One of the best things is that it has helped remind me of how lucky I am to have grown up in NZ, because we come from the best country in the world!



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