

Miller Boyd

A select group of students at the University of North Carolina spend one semester at Duke University within their four years of college; one is Jemma Frost.

Frost, 20, is part of The Robertson Scholars Program, a full ride to Duke and UNC. Each student is enrolled at one of the universities, but is required to spend a semester at the other. Frost is from Sydney, Australia, and decided to attend college in the U.S. while her family lived in San Francisco, C.A.

“We lived there for 2 ½ years, and while I was living there I visited Stanford, and I did a sports camp there,” said Frost. “I just fell in love with the idea of a U.S. college because it’s quite different from university in Australia. We moved back to Sydney in grade seven, and toward the end of high school my parents and I talked about if I still wanted to go to college in the U.S., and I said yes.”

Going to the U.S. for college is uncommon in Sydney, so Frost’s parents hired an adviser to help with the college application process. They didn’t know of the Common App, college essays or what colleges to apply to. Frost knew that she wanted a school “where it was that traditional idea of college, sport is a big thing, everyone has strong school pride,” and there was a focus on academics.

Her advisor helped to find schools that fit her criteria, ranging from the West to East Coast. The adviser had previously worked with a student who decided to attend Duke after receiving the Robertson scholarship and encouraged Frost to apply for the competitive program.

While in California to tour colleges, Frost and her family met a Duke student from Australia in the Los Angeles airport. The student was a Robertson Scholar and gave her contact information to Frost.

Miller Boyd

“I found that she had written a blog about her first two years about being a Robertson, and so I read it and thought that it seemed really cool,” said Frost. “She talked about her summers and her switch semester, and she did this whole thing of comparing Duke and UNC, and that’s how I grew to really like UNC.”

She applied for the Robertson scholarship and selected UNC to be her main academic base if she was to receive it. While applying to colleges abroad, Frost attended university in New Castle, Australia. While in university, she was selected to be interviewed for the Robertson. The last day to drop out of her college semester without being charged occurred before the interview, leaving Frost to decide whether or not to fully commit to going to college in the U.S.

“I took the risk and decided to drop out and do the interview and whatever would happen would happen,” said Frost. “The next day I got the call to say that I had gotten the scholarship, and it was this huge relief.”

In order to be closer to her, Frost’s parents moved back to San Francisco. She began her first semester at Chapel Hill in August of 2018.

“I didn’t have a lot of hard expectations, because I didn’t know what to expect. I guess I was lucky in that way because there was nothing that could disappoint me,” Frost said.

While she did not have expectations for her time in Chapel Hill, many things were surprising, such as learning “that girls get engaged by their senior year of college.” At times during her freshman year, she wanted to return to Sydney but now considers this as “part of the process” of going to college for everyone.

“Being out of state, it’s overwhelming to be around so many North Carolinians

Miller Boyd

sometimes. I thought it was very cool and brave of someone to come to UNC from across the world,” said Sally Khuen, Frost’s former roommate.

During her first year, Frost became close with the other Robertsons and her assigned mentor in the program, Merrit Jones. Jones convinced Frost to sign up for sorority rush, and she agreed even though she found sororities strange.

“I think from the beginning she was really nervous about being in the U.S., and she was really far from home and her friends,” said Jones. “I convinced her the first day I met her because I knew she was looking to meet new people.”

While Frost viewed rush as strange, she decided to join Jones’ sorority and lived in the house for a semester before moving to Duke.

Frost still takes classes at UNC during her semester at Duke, due to the strict course schedule in the biomedical engineering department she commutes back and forth. Frost is currently only taking general education classes at Duke.

“I think it would be really hard to adjust to a new school just for one semester. Especially when you’re having to commute back and forth and you’re not able to fully invest in a new place,” Khuen said.

Frost views the transition as hard during the short period of time they are there, there is not a “desire to be super social,” as they have roots in Chapel Hill.

“Once I find my people I’m happy,” she said about her friends at UNC.