

Greetings for America,

Since beginning my time as an ESU Scholar, life in Pennsylvania has been nothing short of incredible! My initial fears about moving abroad and navigating this new lifestyle disappeared from the moment I stepped foot onto campus at Mercersburg Academy. A warm and supportive community greeted me from the start and I quickly learnt that people are obsessed with the British accent. The weather has remained hot throughout October and November, often being 25 degrees Celsius making it a lovely comparison to the UK! Everyone is so friendly and excited to welcome international students.

School spirit is a large part of life at Mercersburg, where healthy competition takes place often. Within a few weeks of arriving, I was immersed into the true atmosphere of an American High School. Founders day came first, filled with lots of laughter and cheering for



your peers. A lip sync dance battle got the day off to a thrilling start, shortly following by inflatable dinosaurs races, a donut eating contest and tug of war. Grades dressed head to toe in one colour, with head bandana's and face paint to add to the full effects. The energy was electric, and my grade emerged on top by a few points, victorious!

I was also lucky enough to participate in a yearly Mercersburg tradition which is known as 'Paint The



Numbers'. This is an event for the Senior class which begins with everyone printing their hand prints, name and graduating year on the entrance driveway leading into the academy. Shortly after this turns into a fun paint fight with friends. Everyone dresses in Mercersburg apparel, and then continues to wear the painted clothes throughout their final year to differentiate who's graduating. It was nothing like I've ever experienced before, we had the best time. When else can you throw paint over your classmates!?



Dance has become a big part of my life at Mercersburg Academy. Alongside my array of studies in the Arts, which includes photography and videography, ceramics and sculpture, I dance approximately 3 hrs a day. This ranges from many styles, including contemporary, hip hop and Jazz. We are fortunate enough to have regular



workshops with industry professional choreographers and recently had the opportunity to perform in a dance concert. This was a celebration of our work as a team from this

term, with 19 numbers and around 400 attendees from the academy and public. This society has allowed me to make many new friends and is just one of the many enrichment opportunities available. For the winter term, which is just around the corner, I am on the Ski Team at Whitetail Ski Resort in Pennsylvania which is just a matter of minutes from campus. I am so excited to have this opportunity as part of the school curriculum, giving me the chance to ski four times a week! Furthermore, the rock-climbing centre situated in the mountains on site is also something which I can't wait to explore in the spring. The choices are endless!



I have also had the chance to try new things as well. One of these includes being a member of Mercersburg's Chorale Performance Group. I felt so welcomed and encouraged to explore new endeavours and have been loving my role as a soprano on this team. I have already had the chance to sing at numerous events, including Convocation, Open Events, Family Weekend, Step Songs and the Pops Music Concert, with our Christmas by candlelight coming up in a matter of days. We are fortunate enough to have a gorgeous chapel on campus to rehearse and perform in, which is filled with gorgeous stained-glass displays and has a wealth of history.

Every second is jam packed, with the days turning into weeks and months in the blink of an eye! Halloween celebrations also came around quickly. Homes were decorated with themed displays, bigger than anything I've witnessed in the UK. I was able to attend the local Halloween street parade in Mercersburg's Town and it was fantastic! From flame throwers, to acrobatics, sports teams, and marching bands... you name it, they had it! The fun did not stop there, faculty on campus invited us to their homes for a mega trick or treat evening and the whole academy dressed up. They served hot chocolate and donuts, as well as Halloween themed treats. It was a real highlight so far!



The opportunities continue off campus too. I have had the chance to travel to some incredible new places in the last 3 months, including New York, Washington DC, Maryland, Baltimore, Chambersburg and more. I was extremely lucky to be able to spend long fall weekend in New York City with some friends which gave me the chance to explore this incredibly diverse and breathtaking city. I was lucky enough to go up the Empire State Building, admire time square and the brightly coloured billboards, watch Back to the Future on Broadway and visit the New York Public Library to name a few. It felt

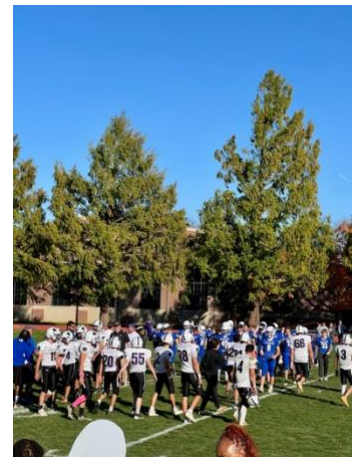
surreal to be in a position where New York is just a few hours drive away! In Spring Break I am planing to continue my US travels and stay with one of my friends at her house in Denver Colorado, to ski and explore a new area. I can't wait!



Being on campus for an occasion as monumental as the US Presidential Election, meant that got to experience the controversy and strong opinions that come with a vote this important. The intensity was exemplified, especially since Pennsylvania is one of the main swing states, with contrasting thoughts from both staff and students. For me this was fascinating to overhear and being that the watch party organised by Mercersburg Academy for both the speech's and voting announcement, gave me the full American perspective.

Sport matches here are another level of awesome! I have had

the chance to sit in the bleachers and chant at American football games, ringing a cow bell and waving the team's flag. I also had the opportunity to watch a live women's basketball match in DC, the Washington Mystics vs Seattle Storm...It was thrilling! My roommate Molly is 6ft 3" and a top basketball player for her age categories in Ohio so I have enjoyed learning more about the sport through her knowledge too.



Thanksgiving was an event I will remember in years to come, to me it felt like a second Christmas Day. People exchanged gifts and cards to show their appreciation for one another and gave thanks for everything they are grateful for that year. The food was amazing too! From traditional thanksgiving turkey, mash potatoes and corn, to more unique traditions like their sweet potato and marshmallow dessert. Personally, I wasn't the biggest fan of this exotic combo, but there are plenty of Americans who are. American Football was streamed across all TV channels along with Macy's thanksgiving parade in New York in which 30 million people watch online with 3.5 million lining the streets in person. It was such a memorable occasion!



In such a short space of time, my experience in the USA has opened my eyes and inspired me in too many ways to count. I am so grateful to everyone who has supported me on this journey, and I am very eager to see what the rest of this year will bring! Let this be your sign to do something that

scares you at first, because it might just turn out better than you could have ever imagined, just like the SSE Programme has done for me.

Happy Holidays,

Form Lucia