

# A journalist's journey



Nothing beats old-fashioned practical experience. Except, perhaps, getting practical experience during the first presidential debate between John McCain and Barack Obama at the University of Mississippi on 26 September 2008. *Smart Start* reports.



**B**eing in the right place at the right time earned University of the Sunshine Coast journalism student Megan Mackander an experience that will stand out on her CV. At just 20, Megan worked as an intern with TV news channel MSNBC at a US presidential debate.

The second-year student from Hervey Bay studied at the University of Mississippi, thanks to a USC program that enables students to spend a semester or two overseas.

Megan mixed with 3000 journalists for the debate that was held amid amazing security.

The chance came after she enrolled in a class that incorporated a week-long internship with the university's media relations team. "I didn't even know about the debate or the class before I came to the US, and was told about it by a staff member at the Study Abroad office," she says.

## Megan's key career steps

- Picks uni with great overseas program.
- Heads over to the US as part of her studies.
- Grabs practical experience during the US Presidential campaign.
- Now boasts invaluable practical experience as well as qualification.

"On the day of the debate, I got coffee, made phone calls for staff, arranged meals, ran errands around campus, answered questions, got the live audience together by promoting the shows, and just observed.

"MSNBC was broadcasting live from UM with four shows that day, with the last one at 11pm. The show had a live audience as well, and featured US and local politicians and experts.

"With the MSNBC post-debate show only 10 minutes after the debate, the journalists had to form opinions and get the facts straight fast.

"It was extremely exciting. There were journalists from all over the world in our little tiny town of Oxford."

Megan says she was thrilled to have been involved in such a huge international event and delighted to have gained media experience that is not readily available in Australia.



Most unis have programs that assist you to study part of your course overseas. If you're interested in that sort of thing (and who wouldn't be?) make sure you investigate BEFORE choosing a university and applying – see page 58.