

**Cole:** My name is Cole Scanlon and I'm a senior at Harvard studying Applied Math and Economics. With the generous support of a South Asia Institute grant, I was able to travel to India during Winter Session. In particular, I went to Maharashtra and Gujarat. I've always been interested in education broadly.

**What sparked your interest in schooling in India and making a comparison between school leaders in the US and India?**

**Cole:** My mom's a high school English teacher, and I grew up asking her lots of questions about policy and how she interacts with the Teachers Union, for instance. During college, I've developed an academic interest in education as well. I've taken two education policy classes, and I'm currently writing a senior thesis exploring effective school leaders, both in the United States and in India. Now, my particular interest in India came about mostly from, one, learning about the Indian education system, which I think is incredibly fascinating through research papers, articles, and The Economist, and so on. But also, more personally through my sister, who is currently on a gap here working for Teach for India, talking to her about her experience and what it's like being in an Indian school.

**Can you please describe one of the conversations you had with other researchers and Indians familiar with the education system?**

**Cole:** One of my most memorable conversations during my time in India was with the Principal of a local middle school. I remember being incredibly intrigued, learning the intricacies around her role and responsibilities, and then also by probing with some questions, learning a little bit more about India's education system as a whole. How a large proportion of students go to private schooling, and why that's the case, the inequities between private and public school and how there's a lot of variability in terms of school quality.

**What was it like visiting schools?**

**Cole:** Another really energizing and exciting part of the research trip was engaging with the students. I didn't only meet with the principals at different schools, but also the teachers and the students, and again through both groups, I was able to ask about what the school experience is like; how everything sort of fits together. And the students, because most of them are learning English, their English was actually really good. We had some long conversations, funny conversations, and just generally I got to hang out with them.

**Please share more about your changes in perspective towards education and the world.**

**Cole:** One of the greatest learnings I had from the trip was understanding how context-dependent schooling is. How the needs of the students in an area and how the school system is structured is so dependent on geography. It's so dependent on finances. It's really dependent on many factors. And even though you see that in the United States, I thought that it was incredibly interesting to see a cross-country comparison as well. To understand how India's education system as a whole, or really just looking at the region that I was exploring compares to the experiences I've had growing up and going to school in Florida, and then learning about the US school system as a whole.

**Please describe something fun you did outside of your research.**

**Cole:** Outside the research, one of the things I had the most fun doing was exploring the cities, and also the broader geography with my sister. She was really busy working, but she was able to take one day off, and we went to the Great Rann of Kutch. We were able to see some salt flats, walk around, meet some new people, try some new food, and generally just explore a new area of India.

With all that said, I just want to reiterate my thanks and gratitude for the Winter Session Grant. It was an incredibly fulfilling experience. It contributed a ton to my research, and I'm still currently putting everything together, finding new data sources, but it was such a productive trip, an eye-opening trip in many ways. So, again, thank you very much.