A resource for studying abroad

Australian Learning & Teaching Council

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Program goals

In the overarching context of the internationalisation of higher education, the aims of this module are:

- To encourage students to think about education as an example of a cultural institution and to reflect on the differences between the education system in Australia and in their host country;
- To increase students’ empathy for overseas students in Australia; and
- To generate effective strategies to better integrate students’ exchange experience into home campus academic settings and continuing studies.

Rationale

Campus internationalisation

In Australia today, universities’ aspirations for their graduates almost invariably include attributes based around ideas of ‘becoming global citizens’ who can ‘engage in an internationalised world’.

According to its website, Murdoch University strives to have its students acquire a global perspective through ‘awareness of and respect for the social, biological, cultural and economic interdependence of global life’. University of Melbourne expects its graduates to become active global citizens who accept ‘social and civic responsibilities’, are advocates ‘for improving the sustainability of the environment’, and who have ‘a broad global understanding, with a high regard for human rights, equity and ethics’. Similarly, Monash University prepares its graduates to be ‘responsible and effective global citizens’ who ‘engage in an internationalized world’, ‘exhibit cross-cultural competence’ and ‘demonstrate ethical values’.

As these descriptions attest, however, and as international higher education pundits such as Madeleine Green (2012) and Hans de Wit (2012) have argued, the meanings of terms such as ‘global citizen’, ‘internationalisation’, and ‘global engagement’ are hard to pin down and contextually dependent. Some of the measures which universities use to demonstrate their internationalisation credentials include:
• the extent of student mobility in terms of students going on exchange or on study abroad trips;
• the number of units with ‘international’ or ‘global’ or similar in their titles, for example international relations, international business, Chinese business economics, Islamic law, or global engagement;
• the number of students enrolled in foreign languages;
• majors or degree programs specifically targeting international topics, for example, international development;
• and above all, the number of international students enrolled.

Equally difficult to define, though equally popular, is the associated notion of ‘campus internationalisation’, which has seen a two-fold emphasis on curriculum internationalisation, largely driven in Australia through the work of Betty Leask; and better integration of international students into the classroom and into campus life. The ALTC project Finding Common Ground (Arkoudis et al. 2010) has recently focused on this particular element of campus internationalisation. As part of these sorts of initiatives, academics are being encouraged to become more aware of international students in the Australian classroom and of the value of incorporating their perspectives into classroom discussion. At the same time the diversity of perspective which already exists within the domestic student cohort, in terms as broad-ranging as gender, age and maturity, regional background, internal or external modes of study, part time or full time, ethnic or migrant background, and indigeneity, is increasingly being acknowledged.

The experience of having studied abroad should add another rich element to that diverse mix. Yet the overwhelming experience of returned exchange students is that their experience is not acknowledged or valued; indeed that it is largely irrelevant on their return to their home classroom. Students often say when they come back from exchange that they seem to pack away all their experiences – their travel and personal experiences but also their academic learning – into a suitcase, never to draw on them again; that even the academics who supported them going abroad are not interested in their academic experiences on return.

Teachers may not be indifferent to a student’s international experience but the idea of capitalising on it, for the benefit of the rest of the class as well as for the individual student, has little or no currency in Australian classrooms, despite universities’ evidently genuine concern with campus internationalisation and creating globally-engaged citizens.

One of the beliefs which motivated the Bringing the Learning Home project team was that the academic insights and the knowledge of other national approaches to particular disciplines gained while students were on exchange, was potentially an important learning resource for Australian universities. We continue to believe that the returned exchange or study abroad student can help facilitate campus internationalisation in their home classrooms.
simply by sharing their knowledge of international approaches to education. Further, we believe the returned exchange student in the Australian classroom can serve as a conduit between the local and the ‘international’ student: part of the ‘common ground’, in the parlance of the *Finding Common Ground* project (Arkoudis et al 2010) and a powerful means of facilitating interaction between those two groups of students.

However, while returned students can be encouraged by study abroad educators or supportive re-entry programs to look for ways to incorporate new ideas about different approaches to education into their continuing approach to learning, it is clearly difficult for students to drive this process without some active encouragement on the part of their classroom teachers. The Australian tertiary education sector has not yet developed a culture which values study abroad and exchange as a learning activity, and does not yet capitalise on the academic experiences of returned exchange students in Australian classrooms.

We recognise of course that enhanced campus internationalisation cannot be brought about by exchange alone, although we would strongly support universities in setting a goal for participation in exchange, at the very least. But the Bringing the Learning Home team believes that formalising and supporting the attainment of learning outcomes for study abroad and exchange, and *requiring* that the ‘learning be brought home’, can help facilitate this process. As part of this, a culture of viewing exchange as an academic learning opportunity should be fostered across campus, amongst students, international office staff and academic staff.

**Education and culture**

Our experience of education tends to be of something we take for granted, but it is a form of enculturation in all societies. This module draws on the students’ common experiences of studying both overseas and within the Australian education system, and encourages reflection on different approaches to education as an aspect of broader social and cultural difference. Students are asked to observe and reflect on the education system they have experienced on exchange and to use that knowledge to revisit their own educational institution and home culture.

As part of this, and as a follow on from Australian students’ time as ‘outsiders’ in their host country, this module goes on to consider the question of how the culturally-constructed nature of the Australian educational institution might be experienced by international students, with a view to promoting empathy for others’ experience on Australian campuses. Finally, the module encourages students to think about what elements of their academic exchange experience could be brought back to the home classroom, and to explore and implement concrete strategies for integrating that experience into their continuing tertiary education post-exchange.
Mode of delivery

The module is offered as part of re-entry. The suggested strategy is primarily discussion-based and is structured around students sharing their own experiences and reviewing the experiences of others as stimuli for reflection. The module may be set up in-country through facilitated questioning on a weblog, Facebook discussion, online discussion (such as with Blackboard or Moodle), or email. Online discussion should encourage students to observe and comment on the educational institutions where they are studying with a view to further reflection.

In country

In general, the activities included in this module do not require content during students’ sojourns abroad. However, in country discussion can prepare students for later reflection and analysis, and we encourage instructors to highlight and nurture discussions of cultural differences in education when they occur among students, such as in online exchange.

Re-entry

Most of the material is designed for a re-entry workshop focused on group discussion. Two hours should be sufficient time for this module, but students need to do preparatory reading. The relevant resources, which are included in the student handbook, should be circulated ahead of time. Optional out-of-class exercises or assessments are also suggested.

This module is supported especially by:

- Reflection
- Globalisation
- Cultural relativism

The content supports:

- Professionalisation
- Adaptation
- Transformation
Contents of this module

This instructor’s guide includes a discussion of the module’s goals, rationale and strategies, a thorough presenter’s guide for the workshop, additional resources and readings, and references.

Slides (in Prezi, Apple Keynote and Microsoft Powerpoint) are provided for the re-entry workshop on Education and Culture (see the Bringing the Learning Home website for links).

Student resources such as handouts and suggested readings are indicated. All are contained in the separate Student Handbook.

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Understanding education as one example of a cultural institution

Reflecting on educational differences

In-country discussion

The in-country phase of this module might include prompting students to make observations on the sorts of questions listed below. These are very specific questions and students may not respond in detail, but the questions should at least set up an attitude of inquiry amongst sojourners. The intention is to encourage students to think about the place where they are studying, not merely to react to it. Students are already experts in the culture of tertiary education because they are presently living it; exchange is therefore a great opportunity to study the host culture through the relatively familiar filter of the university. The education system can reveal a great deal about what society expects for and of its citizens and students will find many of their observations revealing, both of their host country and of Australia. We encourage students to make the most of this comparative opportunity.

Possible in-country prompt questions:

• What are your classes like? How do they compare to classes at home in terms of length, difficulty, nature of assessment, expectations of students and of teachers, classroom contact hours?

• How do you relate to your teachers? Do you address them by first or family names or by their title? Are they accessible? Do you see much of them outside the classroom?

• How much work are you required to do? Do you think your fellow students take study as seriously as/more seriously than do students in Australia? How do attitudes to study differ?
• Do students regard education as a privilege or a right? Is tertiary education elitist? How does this compare to attitudes at home?
• Do students pay for their education? How do costs compare with Australia?
• Do local students have jobs? Live at home? Live in dorms or apartments? Live on campus or locally?
• How does the age profile compare with your home campus?
• What sorts of degrees do undergraduate students do on the whole? Is there a focus on training for employment? Is the focus on a general education prior to specialisation at graduate level?
• What kind of public profile do universities and university students have?
• Are there any particular political issues relating to education in your host country at present?
Preparation for workshop

The workshop after re-entry is based very much on having students consider and learn from their own experiences, rather than through a process of ‘delivering information’.

Before students come to the workshop, ask them to do some preparation.

1. They should read the several student comments below, included under ‘Resources to be circulated beforehand’, for the first discussion on academic and social differences between Australian and exchange universities. You can print out these sheets (available at: http://www.tlc.murdoch.edu.au/project/btlh/) and circulate them prior to class.

2. Students should read a section from Marie-Claire Patron’s Diary of a French Girl. Surviving Intercultural Encounters. Pp.79-103 are appropriate, but any section would work equally well, and it is not necessary that all students read the same section. This reading, which is about the educational and social experiences of a French exchange student in Sydney should be circulated beforehand. It is not a difficult read, and up to one-third of it is in French (with translation).

3. Finally, students should bring to the workshop the guides for the units or courses in which they are enrolled. If these are not yet available, then the workshop presenter should obtain copies of ‘typical’ unit guide assessment criteria from the ranges of courses taken by the students.
Presenters with a particular interest in globalisation and international education might find the following short articles useful:


Some videotape versions of our own pilot workshops are available if presenters would like to become more familiar with the material prior to presenting it. See the Resources list at the end of this module for a complete list of these video clips.

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Part One

Reflection

Part one of the workshop should take about 45 - 60 minutes.

Start the workshop by explaining its purpose, namely:

- encouraging students to think about education as a cultural institution and to reflect on the differences between the education system in Australia and in their host country;
- increasing students’ empathy for overseas students in Australia; and
- integrating students’ exchange experience into home campus academic settings and continuing studies.
The exchange experience opens up to students the opportunity for cultural, personal and educational learning well beyond the ambit of the classroom. Indeed students might feel they learned much more outside the classroom than inside. In this module however, we focus on in-class and on-campus learning, on the formal educational component of studying abroad, with a view to students reflecting on and perhaps better appreciating how much they learned in the formal university environment, and enhancing their capacity to capitalise on that learning on their return.

You might want to point out to students their own university’s ‘graduate attributes’ statement relating to ‘global citizenship’, and to refer back to this where relevant to subsequent discussion. (Presenters could add this as a slide to personalise their PowerPoint presentation.)

Then have each student outline where, and what subjects, they studied on exchange. You may have already established this in earlier sessions but have the group remind one another of their international educational experience as well as what they are studying now they have returned.

The workshop’s first exercise involves having students share the educational differences they encountered overseas. This is basically following up the questions which were asked while students were on exchange. It’s an opportunity to remind them of how they felt at the time.

If any students answered any of those questions on line, collating responses and bringing them into class as a prompt is a good technique.

Start the discussion with a quick blackboard brainstorm session, calling for suggestions regarding things which were different about the educational system the students experienced on exchange. Students should have read the student comments, in the student handbook and circulated beforehand, which they should also draw on in this discussion. Presenters can use these resources and Morgan’s video clip as prompts for particular themes/questions raised.

An excellent introduction to this section is the video clip ‘Education /Tutorial Comparisons’ (2 mins 22 sec) in which Morgan, a returned exchange student, discusses her experiences in Ireland and Greece. http://youtu.be/PapeA6m680E
below if students do not volunteer examples. The PowerPoint slides remind students about some of the points mentioned in the student handbook.

N.B.: At this stage, steer students away from commenting on different approaches to their specific disciplines, as these will be dealt with in subsequent discussion.

Write up responses without elaboration at first, and divide into categories: the concrete (e.g., accommodation, assessment, timetables); and the more esoteric and attitudinal. This will likely elicit responses which fall into the following sorts of areas:

- Mode and amount of assessment
- Independent learning or rote learning
- Attitude towards things which in Australia we regard as plagiarism, collusion or peer support
- Expectations placed on students – do they have part time jobs? Do they support themselves?
- Level of fees? Cost of education and availability of financial support?
- Academic hierarchy – ways of addressing faculty
- Status of universities?
- National or cultural attitudes towards education in host country?
- Issues associated with education in the sojourning country, e.g. UK – new level of student fees and increasing politicization of access to education
- Mode of living for students, e.g. dorms, frats, at home with parents; commuter campus or live away from home?
- Student life on campus?
- Attitudes towards drinking, drugs etc?
- Role of sport in campus life?
- Campus ‘cultural’ life, e.g. talks, theatre, performances?
- Availability of resources, e.g. library opening hours?

Discuss each of these issues in turn, and encourage students to draw on the readings from other students.
N.B.: In these discussion it is important to encourage students to use the D.I.V.E (Describe–Interpret–Verify–Explain) model discussed in the Cultural Relativism module as a basis for their analysis of cultural and social differences. Students might find reviewing this model useful before the discussion.

Encourage national comparisons, across countries and with Australia.

If there is time for an extended discussion, raise larger questions such as:

- What is the role of intellectual life in your host country?
- Who are intellectual and academics regarded? Are they heroes or nerds, visible or invisible, or in between? How does that compare with Australia? Why?

Students may not have any answers or points of view on this question, but remind students of Luke’s comments (read before class; included in handbook) on how he believes Arts students are perceived in Australia and in Europe. Ask students whether they agree with him, that it’s easier or more prestigious to be an Arts student in Europe. What about in other countries? Why? What does that say about educational and cultural differences?

Students interested in this question could also be encouraged to read Almost French, pp. 17-20, comparing French and Australian attitudes to visiting art galleries and museums. This book is an amusing and very readable account of one Australian woman’s experience of cultural differences while living in Paris.
My indifference for the magnificent Louvre is not a laughing matter, it seems. Incomprehension is etched on Frédéric’s face. Chatting on the lovely terrace, our different attitudes to the Louvre reveal a wider cultural gap.

‘I’ve been going to museums since I was four,’ he states. ‘They were the highlight of family holidays. Whenever we arrived in a new town the first thing my parents did was take us to an art gallery or museum.’

‘Weren’t you bored?’

‘Oh no, I loved it,’ Frédéric enthuses. ‘I found it interesting.’

‘Kids in France must be a lot different from kids in Australia.’ And I describe our family holidays when my parents took my brother and sister and me camping – not in camp grounds but actually in the bush, near lakes, rivers or beaches. The action-packed days waterskiing and swimming, the myriad, mindless ways we would amuse ourselves in water for hours on end. I describe how we’d cook over campfires, how we’d carefully shake our T-shirts or shoes – anything that had been on the ground – before putting them on. He is captivated and I realise with surprise that to him my holidays sound exotic, dangerous even. He asks lots of questions about sharks, snakes and spiders. And why do I say ‘the’ bush if there are many bushes? I smile at his mental picture of a dry, barren continent inhabited by a valiant, solitary shrub. Overlooking the spectacular glass pyramid, we laugh at the sharp contrast between our childhood holidays: that while one was trailing maturely through museums, the other was in serious sibling competition to see who could keep their balance longest standing on a floating Lilo. And so our disagreement over the Louvre is swept aside by the flow of conversation. But that moment of mutual incomprehension had allowed us to get to know each other a little better, and I don’t think either of us had forgotten it.
Overall, what were the most problematic differences the student encountered in their educational exchange experience; why; and (how) did they resolve the issues?

All these questions, and their answers, illuminate aspects of culture. While there is only limited time to discuss these questions in the workshop, raising them is a starting point for future reflection on cultural differences between Australia and the host country.
In the next phase of the class, turn the discussion around and ask students to focus on the system of education in Australia.

Drawing on their own experiences as outsiders in a ‘foreign’ educational culture, have students think about how educational differences might affect international students studying in Australia. **International students in the group should be particularly encouraged to share their Australian experiences.**

- What is life and study like for international students sojourning in Australia?
- Students should have read the section from *Diary of a French Girl* before this discussion and should draw on Natalie’s observations in that book, as well as on their own experiences. What particular educational issues did Natalie encounter and why?
- How would a national from the country in which the students have studied find the Australian educational system? What would be strange and what more ‘normal’?

Have a general discussion on this point, including discussion of *Diary of a French Girl*.

Then go on to elicit suggestions on the following question:

- What could be done on the Australian home campus to make the experience of internationals students less alienating?
Write up these suggestions and discuss each in turn as a workable and effective strategy.

If a suitable list of concrete and practical suggestions is generated, this could be directed to the International Office on campus for consideration.

Additional exercise
Students might also be interested in becoming involved in implementing some of these suggestions, if this could be facilitated through the International Office. A staff member from the International Office could be asked to participate in a subsequent meeting with interested students to talk about what is actually available for international students and to see whether any of the group’s suggestions could be introduced.

In some universities, this kind of on-campus engagement can be formally recorded on a student’s non-academic or developmental transcript.

Assessment
A possible assessment exercise here would be to have students write a short paper examining the experiences of the Indian student in the ABC Radio program *Doosra: An Indian student in Australia*, and the French student in *Diary of a French Girl*. Consider issues such as:

- similarities and differences in students’ experiences in Australia;
- reasons for differences.

How do those experiences of Australia as a foreign educational system and foreign culture compare with the student’s own international experience?
Part Two should take about 45 – 60 mins to present.

**Generating effective strategies to integrate exchange experience into home campus academic settings**

Where do we go from here?

Moving on from the larger question about institutional differences and their impact, the workshop and discussion should now focus more specifically on content and disciplinary differences between the way subjects are taught in Australia and the host country. This is done with a view to thinking about concrete ways in which the academic insights students have acquired on exchange could be used in their home classroom.

Once students return to campus they face a range of re-entry challenges including the personal task of re-inventing themselves for friends and family and coming to terms with changes in themselves, friends and environment. These issues are dealt with in the Adaptation and Transformation models. However, as discussed in the introduction to this module, another issue for students returning home after an exchange experience may be that of ‘shoeboxing’ their experiences, including the academic.

Some students may not even realise this is happening, particularly if they themselves had regarded their exchange experience as an opportunity for travel – educational tourism – with formal education a minor part of that process. Apparent academic ‘indifference’ to students’ overseas classroom experience only reinforces their perception that travel, not the classroom...
teaching, was all that mattered.

This section of the module seeks to heighten students’ awareness of their own academic advances, and to encourage them to find ways to embed their learning and intellectual gains into their on-going education.

This section of the module starts with another discussion. Prior to this, students should have read the student blog entry resource on the Holocaust memorial in Germany (in the resource folder).

Start by asking the students to focus generally on the subjects they studied on exchange, and to think about the way in which those subjects are dealt with in Australia. Maths, history, politics, science, law, journalism, media: can the students identify any differences in the way their subject is treated in your host country, or how it is taught?

Students might have some difficulty articulating these sorts of differences at first so give them some concrete examples. History is the most obvious one, perhaps, but there are others.

- **Australian history:** In Australia, some instructors focus on teaching what is referred to as ‘black armband’ history, which can be viewed simplistically as a ‘warts and all’ approach to national history. In contrast, Australian history can also be approached in a celebratory or patriotic way, which has sometimes been referred to, critically, as ‘white blindfold history’. Some international students find a critical approach to national history odd, that we would look at the negative features of our own national culture. Some countries explicitly write out from their national histories those features of their past they would rather not remember, for example, Japanese history and war atrocities. On the other hand, the history of the Holocaust is a big focus of German national histories. Do students have any experience of how national histories are taught in the countries where they studied?

- **Anthropology:** University studies in anthropology in Australia concentrate almost entirely on culture and society, whereas in the United States, the focus includes more archaeology, biology and evolution. In many places, anthropologists study peoples far away, so local minority groups or indigenous groups may not be considered the most appropriate subject of study. These groups may have their own academic disciplines, areas of academic research that often include strong representation by scholars and students from these groups.

- **Politics/political science/government:** In the country where the students studied, was the approach one of studying a social science; or was it focused more on diplomatic training or training to understand or work in government?
• **Journalism:** In Australia the press is generally regarded as a watchdog and a safe
guard for the community, and part of the role of the media is ‘keeping the bastards
honest’. In some cultures however, for example in some more autocratic Asian
cultures (though don’t forget, India is the world’s biggest democracy), it is much less
acceptable to criticise politicians and government. The common good and
community harmony require a respect for politicians we might not accord to our
leaders in Australia.

The way the media deals with the personal lives and attributes of celebrities and
politicians is another example. In the United Kingdom, one is much less likely to
address or talk about politicians by nick names, for example, ‘Little Johnny’, ‘Kev’,
Julia, or ‘Big Ears’. The subject of Julia Gillard’s backside likely would not have made
such a media impact had she been the prime minister of the UK. On the other hand,
Australia’s media is dominated by very few players, which clearly affects its
‘independence’. All of these factors have implications in the journalism classroom.

**Discussion exercise**

The following is a good ‘pair and share’ exercise. Pair up students according to disciplines
they share if possible, and give them five minutes or so to make a list of differences they
noticed between the way subjects are taught at home and overseas. This is not about issues
such as ‘number of assessment items’, but more to do with the way the subject itself is
treated. Then have the students share their responses with the class. Depending on class size
and time available, a presenter could call for just a few responses and blackboard them.

The next step is to have students consider how this experience can be brought into the
Australian classroom. Is there anything students learned in terms of approach to their
discipline, the type of content dealt, with the types of questions asked, that they would like to
pursue back home, or which they think would be interesting to share with
local students?

Morgan, a journalism student who studied in Ireland,
then later in Greece, reflected on what she had learned
overseas and her belief in the value of sharing this
information, though she also found it difficult to do so
once she returned home. She talks about her experiences
in a short video clip.

Students should have brought with them to class their
unit or subject guides for the classes in which they are
now enrolled. Have them should look at their subjects
individually or, if more than one student is doing the
same or very similar subject, in small groups, and consider,

- What if anything is culturally specific about the approach used in each subject?
- How might that impact on the learning of a student from a different culture? (students might choose to ask international students studying in that area about this)

- (This is the major focus): How could students interpolate their newly acquired international knowledge (content, approach, assessment items, etc.) into the local syllabus, in terms of everyday participation?

If THEY were writing the guide or designing the course, can students see any ways in which they could, for example,

- Introduce comparative work, such as comparative essays or readings from a different national context?
- Compare content or approach across national settings?

Students should generate a list of their own suggestions based on their particular units (at least three per individual/group), and then share the results in a blackboard discussion.

What sorts of common suggestion emerge?

Create a list and share it with the class.

**Bringing the learning home**

The next step, and perhaps psychologically the hardest, is encouraging students to try and have some of their suggestions taken up by their teachers. Students will definitely have to take the lead on this, in letting their teachers know that they have just returned from exchange and would like the opportunity to capitalise on this in the classroom. Students might find the thought of this daunting, but in general, academic staff find it extremely gratifying to have students volunteer their own experience and inquire about appropriate ways in which this could be written into assessment, classroom work etc. The student is not, after all, asking a great deal, and is demonstrating a genuine interest in extending the boundaries of their learning in the teacher’s own area. Approaching a lecturer and asking about the possibility of introducing a comparative element into an essay or assignment, because of the student’s particular interest in international learning contexts, should elicit an enthusiastic response from a teacher and may even serve to heighten the teacher’s awareness of the potential of international experience in terms of classroom and campus
internationalisation. At the very least, the student’s approach will alert the teacher to the fact that a student in their class has particular international experience and is interested in developing it further in their classroom.

The facilitator of this workshop can of course offer the student support if necessary.

Before they leave class, every student should have generated a list of concrete suggestions about the ways in which they could incorporate some of their exchange learning into their home classroom, through assessment items or participation. Have each student outline their ideas and have the student group discuss them and offer suggestions and feedback.

FINALLY, discuss other possible student activities to facilitate curriculum and campus internationalisation, for example,

- Presenting a PowerPoint (individual or group) on aspects of students’ international, social, cultural and academic experience to a returning or pre-departure cohort of students, to international office staff, and interested academic staff.
- Preparing a poster session or PowerPoint for delivery at a study abroad recruitment fair.
- Working with faculty Learning Teaching committees and Student Learning on projects associated with internationalisation on campus.

While on completion of this module, students may well have a better understanding of how their internationally-acquired knowledge could be integrated into their Australian studies, their capacity to do so will still be contained by the overall interest of their teachers in campus and curriculum internationalisation. There is a limit to how far students alone can drive change. However campus and curriculum internationalisation is becoming more visible on university agenda, and students (and staff teaching this module) will find that academics and university Learning Teaching committees will increasingly welcome the interventions suggested in this module.
These could be used as assessment items for this module but could also contribute towards a student’s developmental transcript. These and other sorts of opportunities could be developed in concert with the International Office on campus.

**Other possible assessment item** (could be done as a group)

Prepare and present a PowerPoint or poster reflecting on cross-national differences in approach to a particular discipline/subject area and possible ways of incorporating internationalized content and approaches. Given sufficient interest, course coordinators from that discipline area, or members of learning teaching committees could be invited to attend a showcase of presentations.
As with so many European cities, Prague is a testament to its people’s value of the nonessential.
The bare functionalism of so many elements of society, of so many minds in Australia has been brought into contrast for me by my trip to Europe. I’ve been made to feel really defensive about my appreciation of art and my choice to do an arts degree by the attitude at home…

People in Australia are always talking about the uselessness of art and arts degrees, but you find less of that attitude over here, and their attitude shows up in the extra, nonessential details of their cities, like the legs of public benches, the lamp posts, the gates, the fountains everywhere, which I can never help myself walking up to and taking a photo of – I’m obsessed with water (features)! I’m beginning to wonder if the human race has evolved to find water beautiful and therefore want to live near it, because all the people who thought it was ugly wandered off into the desert and died.

PaPa Polski: The academic exchange experience

It’s the night before I leave Krakow and finish up my exchange experience. Obviously it’s time for a quick reflection.

I didn’t enjoy the university aspect of exchange much, I’ll be honest. I got through two subjects without reading a single academic article or piece of writing – I managed to write entire presentations and exams using Wikipedia and lecture notes alone. And to me, that is a complete joke and should never happen. Other classes I didn’t even bother turning up to because they were boring, because no one did the readings, because no one took attendance and it wasn’t mandatory and I didn’t feel obliged to sit through two hours of an old, fat jolly man enjoying the sound of his own voice while really teaching nothing we couldn’t read in a Norman Davies book.

And because I didn’t get the classes I’d organised to enrol in before I left Australia, my timetable ended up being five days a week, with the one class that attendance was taken for – Polish – being on Mondays and Fridays. No weekends away for me, really, I just skipped a couple of classes here and there but at the end of the day, I had to study and I had to pass. And again, it wasn’t terribly fun and sometimes I feel like I almost wasted my time here because I’ve only been to 6 countries, including Poland.

But 6 countries is still a lot more than a lot of other 20-year-olds I know at home have seen….

I don’t think I really got the ‘Polish’ way of teaching – because all my subjects were in English, my subjects were basically entirely created for foreign students and not really for Polish students. There were one or two Poles in a couple of my classes, but by and large it was all masters degree students from other countries or Erasmus students.

I guess perhaps the rationale was just to make it easy for everyone involved – lecturers don’t have to spend too much time marking really dense and complex work from foreigners and can focus on their domestic students who are here for a whole degree, and students don’t have to put much effort in and can focus on going out drinking or travelling or whatever else they want to do, so they won’t really say a bad word about the university when they have a cruisy time.

I thought it would be at least a little bit similar to Australia – PaPa Polski available at: http://tiny.cc/y1x8cw
I thought all subjects would demand at least one piece of properly researched & cited work, because I thought that would be the case anywhere I went. I thought the idea of research and inquiry being integral to academia was a fairly universal thing. But again, maybe exchange students are treated a little bit differently.

Lucy, Poland

**Freshers week: Social life & student accommodation**

Hi all. My name is Maureen and I am on exchange at the University of Lancaster. I’m still settling in but one of the things I wanted to blog about was things that have been new to me so far. It’s been a bit of a honeymoon period for me as of now because of all the fresher’s events on in the week… quiz games, bar crawls in Lancaster, Indie clubbing in Manchester and dress ups. All this stuff is obviously new because we don’t have freshmen in Australia.

However, the extra weird/new thing for me is that all the fresher events are organised by the college you live in. It’s like Hogwarts or something here. There’s about eight different colleges and the rivalry between each is really really intense. It’s like your whole university identity is defined by your college rather than your faculty (as it would be in Australia).

If a person is unfortunate enough not to live on campus (most people do), they get defined by the region they come from. Speaking of regions, there’s a lot of rivalry between regions too. My room mates tell me the North of England is practically a whole other country to the South. There’s one guy from Birmingham in my flat and he gets insulted all the time because he’s from the ‘posh’ part of the UK.

Finally, last new thing: sharing a bathroom, shower and kitchen with thirteen other people… this? New and not so fun.

Maureen, UK

‘Freshers’ week at University in the UK: New Experiences’ available at [http://tiny.cc/jvt7cw](http://tiny.cc/jvt7cw)
School spirit: Husky forever

I cannot write about my stay in America without mentioning School Spirit. At UConn, there is a slogan written all over the place ‘Student today, Husky forever’, and that is how I feel. Long after leaving there, I will still be a Husky, and I have all the merchandise to go with it! On any given day, half the students would be wearing UConn clothing, on game day, this would go up to 99%. The basketballers were famous around College, people would literally go up to them and ask for photos. The Co-Op sold UConn branded EVERYTHING, from Christmas decorations to dog collars to baby clothes. UConn wasn’t just our school, it was our life.

Kelly, USA


Canada: Small differences that make a big difference

University is like school. They don’t put the lectures online so it’s pretty much compulsory and they split up a 3 hour lecture into 3 1hr lectures. So I have to go to 3 classes for each subject, I have 4 subjects which also have labs and tutes. I feel like I’m back in high school!

Sophie, Canada

Academic differences

But… the lax timetable (eight hours a week). It’s really different academically here. The quality of teaching here, I think, is largely on par with [Australia], but the style of teaching I’m less keen on. It’s really self-directed, and there’s this attitude of, ‘By third year, we’ve taught you all we can and now it’s up to you’, which I find laughable because there’s ALWAYS something more to be taught. And you know, you pay a lot of money to get taught at uni, not to just do your own independent work. I also have to say I was expecting a higher quality of writing from my third-year Creative Writing class, just because of the university's reputation in Literature and Creative Writing, but it’s largely no better, if not worse, than the standard at home. I think it’s because they don’t have a full degree in Writing here like they do at
home, so they necessarily can’t devote as much time to honing the craft as you can at [home]…

But if the quality of writing coming out of the undergraduate program isn’t extremely high, the attitude to the arts and study is much better here. There’s a real culture of appreciating literature and art that just doesn’t exist back home, where you often feel embarrassed saying you’re studying Arts or Creative Arts. Never in my life have I met so many impassioned people, had so many amazing philosophical/religious/political conversations with truly intellectual people. I think at home we cringe if we talk too much about that stuff, or we worry people will think we’re wankers.

Luke, UK

‘University of East Anglia: a crytoscopophilic’s dream’ available at: http://tiny.cc/6ku7cw

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**Greek College Life in America**

At the moment life is crazy, I’m a pledge member of the sorority Alpha Epsilon Phi which is the best decision I have made here and perhaps one of the best decisions of my life. I’ve met so many people through this organization and have already found some friends that I know are for life not just a year… Heaps of the girls from my sorority have told me I can stay with them during the summer so it’s great for networking because I have a home now anywhere I want to travel. Being in Greek Life is probably one of the most American College experiences to have and I’m loving every minute of it. I also joined a student run dance group and we meet once a week and have a performance in about a month, it’s interesting to see the difference in dance style too. Living in the dorms is also a typical American experience, it’s great that it only takes a few minutes to visit friends!...

Classes are so different here and the work load is only getting more intense, however I think grading might be easier, let’s just say I had a small paper (only 2 pages) to write and I know it wasn’t my best work yet I still received an ‘A’ – however that might be that physically I’m doing much more work!

Danielle, USA

‘American college life’ available at: http://tiny.cc/xvu7cw


Field tripping: BULA FROM FIJI!!!!

It is so amazing to study development in a country described as “developing”, surrounded by students from all over the region. In the very first “Geography and Development in the Pacific” class I had, the lecturer told us that for our research project we had to do our own research. He gave the example that we could go to the squatter settlement just 200 meters from the classroom. Literally I can almost see a squatter settlement (and also the ocean) from my classroom.

One day I was sitting with a close Samoan friend talking about marriage and weddings. She casually stated that she wanted to wait until her father had passed away before she got married. I was shocked at the casual way she said this and asked her why. I ended up finding out that she is the daughter of a head Samoan chief who is also the associate Minister of Health in the national parliament. Because of this her wedding would be like a national event. She explained to me just some of the complex rituals that would have to take place. Sitting on the floor of the dorm at midnight just chatting to these Samoan girls was probably the most interesting anthropology lesson I have ever had.

One of the best things about this university is the field trips. The most memorable one so far has been a three day village trip for my “Agriculture and nutrition in the developing world” class. The first day of the trip we spent stopping along the way to visit different commercial and subsistence farms. It was so fascinating as I have never learnt much about agriculture and what a better way to learn then standing in a hot (never been so hot in my entire life) cassava field with a farmer, in the interior of Fiji. Arriving at Lutu village and meeting the family I was staying with was so wonderful. The next day I spent the morning with the elderly women of the village as they taught us how they weave mats. It included collecting the pandanus leaves, scrapping of the hard edges, drying, boiling the leaves, drying them again, smoothing them, cutting and then finally beginning to weave. They also explained to us the importance of the mats and how much they mean to women in Fiji. That afternoon one of the men in the village took a friend and me to his dalo (taro) plot, were we helped him dig up some dalo for dinner. Later that night us students held a cultural performance night. It was amazing to see dances from Tonga, Kiribati, Solomon Islands, Samoa, Fiji and French Canada, and they were all people in my class… Amazing!

Katie B.

‘Bula from Fiji’ available at: http://tiny.cc/w4u7cw
On different ways of looking at history

Excerpt from ‘Cool story, Hansel’
by Luke B

What was interesting was contemplating and observing how Germany has dealt with its history in the forms of these camps and memorials. Usually when historical sites are advertised elsewhere, it’s with invitations to fascinating historical insight, or appeal to patriotism, or even with a degree of insouciance permitted because of the historico-temporal distance of the event, as with a medieval torture museum or something, but for obvious reasons none of these options are available for German history of the twentieth century. The Sachsenhausen website, accordingly, is threadbare. It simply calls the memorial ‘an uncomfortable reminder of the past.’

I remember when I found out one of my best friends Jenny was of German descent in Year Four, I was like, internally, ‘But they were the bad guys … Awkward!’ I had to ask my parents if Germany was still bad now. But in my adult (adolescent + adult) life I’ve always observed in Germans a profound, sincere graveness when it comes to their own recent history. When my sisters’ class had to write a speech on an influential historical reconstruction of the death strip
All of this, I think, shows the world that Germany is serious about this issue. And it’s comforting that in a world where nothing’s sacred, something can be treated with such near-universal reverence by a nation. I’m glad it’s not like what I’ve heard the British history curriculum is like (from my friend Kim), awkwardly skipping over the fact that the British Empire screwed up the world wherever it went, or like in Australia where we learn about what we did to Aborigines (up until more recently than World War II, might I add, and to a lesser extent in continuation), but it’s not really treated with any reverence, perhaps because we learn SO MUCH about it that we’re kind of desensitised.

And that’s something that was interesting about the Jewish memorial we saw on the tour. It wasn’t didactic. It actively discourages desensitisation through its subtlety – it doesn’t proclaim itself even to
be a memorial. It is something to be happened upon and wondered over and investigated at leisure. Like all
good art, it invites the viewer to wonder what it is saying and thereby think about the issue. It doesn’t smack
you over the head with numbers that are so tragically large as to be incomprehensible. It also cleverly
sidesteps the debates and issues surrounding the holocaust – namely who that term refers to, whether or not
its victims deserve more attention and memorials than other victims, and (it’s sad that this is even debated,
but) whether or not it actually happened. It simply cuts to the issue.

And yet, in another way, it is desensitising. It encourages you to just incorporate this blight in history into your
everyday life, perhaps without even thinking about it. It looks almost like a gigantic playground, labyrinthine,
the kind of place kids would want to run around and play hide ‘n’ seek in, the kind of place you would want to
lie down in the sun with a book. ‘Oh, I’m just taking the kids down to the holocaust memorial for a picnic; I want
to finish my book and the kids love it down there,’ you might say. It seems this was the artist’s intention, but the
authorities have since imposed restrictions that contravene it. I’m not sure how I feel about it. It works as art,
but does it work as a memorial if it encourages laughter and games and, indeed the removal of emotion from
the equation? But then I think, there are plenty of normal memorials. Why not let this one be different as it was
intended? Why let the artist go ahead with his design and then change your mind and make ‘no laughing’
rules?

Original post and all photos by Luke B.
Available at: http://ozstudentsabroad.com/2011/06/27/cool-story-hansel/
Videos

Videos of BTLH workshops run by team members and other presenters.


Additional reading for instructor


References


**Credits**

Cover photos by Zhijia Lai (architectural details, Sagrada Família cathedral, Barcelona, Spain; left) and Emily G. (Venice Beach, California; right); Emily G’s photo is available at [http://tiny.cc/6l46cw](http://tiny.cc/6l46cw).

Photo of bicycles covered in snow in Sweden by Tom Nolan.

Photo of music scores in Venice by Zhijia Lai.

Photo of Alpha Epsilon Phi poster from the US by Danielle Poupart; photo and reflection available at: [http://tiny.cc/xvu7cw](http://tiny.cc/xvu7cw).

Photo of students drinking in East Anglia, UK, by Luke Bagnall; photo and discussion available at: [http://tiny.cc/6ku7cw](http://tiny.cc/6ku7cw).

Photos from tour of Berlin by Luke Bagnall; photo and full post available at:

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