A resource for studying abroad
Australian Learning & Teaching Council

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Resources
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**Instructions**

The resources in this document are intended to accompany the Instructor’s Guide provided for the module, Education and Culture. These materials should be easier to photocopy for students to support the re-entry workshop outlined in that guide.

The documents should be distributed prior to the meeting for the workshop.
Almost French

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.

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 – 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

PaPa Polski available at: http://tiny.cc/y1x8cw
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

‘Fresher’s week at University in the UK: New Experiences’ available at http://tiny.cc/jvt7cw
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

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
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
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
Video Resources

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/PapwA6n680E

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.

Morgan, Bringing the Learning Home (2 mins 13 sec)

http://youtu.be/1RuzTfniD1M

Photo by Sarah Stevens.
Empty grocery market shelves in Tokyo following 2011 earthquake.
Photo at: http://ozstudentsabroad.com/2011/03/26/when-the-earth-moves/
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 figure/hero and someone wanted to be a smartass so they did Hitler, the class’s German exchange student reacted by asking how they could joke about something like that, which is unusually mature for an average sixteen-year-old. In Germany, we learned, it is illegal to do a Nazi salute, and a Canadian who did it outside the Reichstag as a joke for a photo a few months ago is still in jail for it.

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/
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http://www.tlc.murdoch.edu.au/project/btlh/

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