Exploration

A resource for studying abroad
Australian Learning & Teaching Council

Produced by Jan Gothard, Tonia Gray & Greg Downey

2012 Resources
The Bringing the Learning Home Team:

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The BTLH Students were exchange students from Macquarie University, Murdoch University, and the University of Wollongong.

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Additional resources

1. Student statistical profile
2. Student blogs: emotional expression
3. DFAT sites and English language media (see following page)
4. Student comments on experience in Austria
5. Marsupial ambassadors
6. Students talking about their arrival
7. Fitting in
8. Discovering, and being discovered, by others
9. Finding the foreigner in yourself

In the instructor’s guide, these resources are embedded in the suggested program (except for resource 3, which appears at the end of that guide). This collection is provided to facilitate this workshop, and additional supporting materials for download are available at ozstudentsabroad.com and http://www.tlc.murdoch.edu.au/project/btlh/.

Photo by Zhijia Lai.
A note on these resources

This materials book contains the readings and other resources used in the workshop described in the Exploration module’s Instructor’s Guide. Most of these materials are for either the instructor or for the students to use in the activities for the Exploration pre-departure workshop.

These materials are designed to be used in a range of ways. If the instructor is preparing a reader or collection of course materials, consider including them in this collection for students. If the Exploration workshop is being conducted as a stand-alone program, some of these readings can be photocopied for the workshop or emailed to students prior to the start of the workshop.
Student statistics – exploring the student cohort

The resource document below describes a survey undertaken by the BTLH team to gain some understanding of the profile of the Australian exchange student. The survey information is useful background before presenting this module, and could also serve as the basis of a class discussion about the composition of the class.

Resource 1: Student statistical profile

The Bringing the Learning Home project team which developed these teaching materials conducted two surveys (GLOSSARI-BTLH and ICEQ) of Australian exchange students to try and get a better understanding of their experiences, attitudes, and inclinations prior to departure, and to better understand who participated in exchange. The project team is continuing to collate and analyse the results of these surveys for future presentations but we are able to provide a clearer profile of students involved in study abroad in Australia.

We surveyed more than one hundred students using our Australian-adapted version of the GLOSSARI survey developed by the University of Georgia. Of these, 63% reported that they had never had a course or training program that had focused on ‘intercultural communication’.

The students indicated that 58% were of Anglo or British descent. The largest minority groups self-reported were Asian (11%), ‘Mixed’ (11%), non-British European (10%) and ‘Other’ (9%) (Note: Latin American was an option). No students self-reported as being either Pacific Islander, North American, or Aboriginal or Torres Straits Islander.

Almost half of the students (46%) indicated that they were ‘fourth generation or more’ Australian, suggesting a family heritage that is likely to be monocultural. A significant minority (20%) however were either born overseas or were themselves in-bound international students, suggesting that for many of our students, we cannot assume that ‘Australian’ is their primary cultural identity or background. Together, students born overseas and inbound international students who were also participating in out-bound study abroad included 24 students born in 16 countries, who had moved to or settled in Australia at an average age of slightly under 13, with a range from 8 months to 23 years.

Sixteen students reported that English was not the only language spoken at home; other family languages included Russian, Spanish, Vietnamese, Indonesian, Cantonese, Tamil, Mandarin, Turkish, Dari, Finnish, Norwegian and Sami. Only thirty-one had significant foreign language training at university level, but five had studied three languages or more. The lack of foreign language training
also seemed to influence students’ choices of destinations: two-thirds (66%) reported that they would be studying in countries where English is the primary language. Those headed to non-English-speaking countries included many staying abroad in countries that have substantial English-speaking populations (Sweden, the Netherlands, Germany); only a smaller subset chose countries where language skills were likely to be essential to daily life (Japan, Argentina, Turkey, China, etc.).

We asked the 37 students in our survey bound for non English-speaking countries to rank their proficiency in the host country language on a scale from 1 to 10. A surprising number reporting ‘no proficiency’ or knowledge of only ‘a few stock phrases’ (19 of 37 ranked their proficiency as either 0 or 1 on of the 10-point scale). Only one of the 37 students ranked their proficiency higher than ‘8’ (which was aligned to the category, ‘I’m not perfectly fluent but I’m comfortable in lectures and with writing’); this one student ranked their proficiency in Cantonese as ‘10’ (‘I sometimes get mistaken for a native speaker’).

Amongst the students, 58% reported that they had not lived overseas for any extended period prior to their study abroad experience. Of those who had lived overseas, a highly migratory group of around 8% of the total group surveyed had lived for an extended period in three or more countries other than Australia. Among students whose families had migrated to Australia in their grandparents’ generation or earlier, the proportion going abroad for an extended period for the first time climbed to over 71%. Approximately 9-10% of all students, with general uniformity across groups, had been on prior study abroad programs, some in high school.

The GLOSSARI-BTLH and ICEQ surveys included a range of other qualitative research questions which the BTLH project team is currently exploring. For example, the GLOSSARI survey was designed to test students’ knowledge and skills for interacting in other countries and across cultures, their awareness of global interdependence, their familiarity with comparative civics, and their knowledge of world geography. In every area but their knowledge of global geography, the Australian students were, on average, confident of their own ability and knowledge.

Interestingly, answers to other questions suggest that Australian students going on exchange most commonly interact at home with a group of friends and acquaintances who are very culturally similar to the students themselves; in other words, despite a (theoretical) awareness of Australia and of their university environment as multicultural, they do not interact cross-culturally in their everyday lives. Indeed some students do not seem aware of Australia’s diversity. As one Australian exchange student in Canada noted of her experience there: ‘Sometimes I find myself forgetting I am overseas, as everyone [here] is white like me.’
The countdown is on!

So it's 3 weeks until I leave for the USA and I couldn't be more excited! The amount of paperwork, the number of meetings and appointments and the constant anxious waiting is over and the adventure is about to start! Every single signature, application, email and planning is forgotten because it's going to be SO worth it. Where is everyone else heading? I'm heading to Wisconsin, USA. It's currently minus 21 degrees Celsius – that's going to be a little different... Good luck to everyone embarking on a new adventure this coming year. Can't wait to read everyone’s stories. Kyran B, 16.12.10

Los Angeles: The place where everything happens

I am in the process of making the final preparations for my departure to California and this will be my first (and last) post from home. I’ve heard a lot of crazy things about LA and the type of people who live there. Hopefully my future posts won't end up sounding like Hollywood gossip columns, but either way it will definitely be something new and exciting. I’m sure it will open my eyes in a good way. Of course, studying at UCLA will add a lot more diversity to my experience. I am soooo looking forward to it. Emily G, 17.12.10

Farewell Australia!

Well after one year of planning I am finally leaving! I had my farewell on wednesday at my favourite place and my favourite food – north gong $7.50 schnity:) I am going to the University of Victoria, Canada for a whole year. I am so excited! I just finished my last day of work. tomorrow is going to be christmas then i leave on sunday. First stop Hawaii then Alaska then Seattle where i will catch a ferry to Victoria. There are so many little things to do, that my mum always reminds me (thank goodness!). My mum is worried that something will go wrong so i have photocopied ever single document i can think of that she might need. She is worried i will meet a nice canadian boy and wont come home 😏 Rarely i start to feel a bit overwhelmed but then i remind myself that it is going to be amazing, i am going to meet sooo many new people, everything is going to be exactly the same when i get back, I have skype to keep in contact with people back home, and i dont think anyone has ever gone on exchange and thought “man, i really wish i hadnt gone on exchange, it sucked!”. That's about it for now, see ya in Hawaii 😏 Lisa R, Canada 17.12.10
Only a matter of days away

Hi everyone! I’m only 4 days away from the most incredible experience of my life so far! I’m leaving for San Francisco for a bit of travel before heading to Washington D.C. for my year of study at the American University! I am constantly nervous/excited/terrified and I don’t really think it’s actually kicked in that I’m leaving everyone behind so soon! After the continuous paperwork and fees I’m finally getting to the end and started packing yesterday! **How does one fit their life into a few bags?** Can’t wait to start this experience and read what everyone else is doing! Good luck everyone 😊

Danielle P, 23.12.10

2 sleeps.

The butterflies in my stomach WON’T GO AWAY! 2 sleeps and I’m on my way to America and all things grand! Good luck to everyone who are about to start or are already on their adventures! Have fun and live every minute! **Kyran B 4.1.11**

10 days and counting every minute!

It’s 10 days until my journey to Wisconsin-Whitewater and as previously stated, I am absolutely freaking out. This is going to be amazing. My whole family is getting sick to death of me talking about it, so I’ll just vent here. One of my friends (who posted below) left for San Francisco last night and I was always leaving 10 days after her so now that she’s gone, it’s my countdown! The only thing that sucks is that in order to get the cheapest flight available, I’m taking four different planes and three different airlines – not really crash hot about that considering that I’ve never traveled alone, let alone anywhere overseas other than Bali for crying out loud. So I leave Perth on the 6th of January at 2.55pm and arrive at 8.20pm on the 7th of January American time – so that’s about 9.20am home time – 2 days travel – so if anyone has any suggestions on stuff to do on the plane/while waiting in the airport I’d greatly welcome them! All I have left to do now is invest in some warm clothes, photocopy my info for my family, work out my itinerary down to a tee and I’m off. WOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!

Kyran B, 27.12.10
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A man called Viktor was driving from Villach to Bratislava, and I managed to get a lift to Vienna for only 10 Euros! (the train was 50 Euros). I was feeling pretty tired, as I had had a late night and a few drinks the night before. I was looking forward to listening to my music, staring out the window and perhaps having a little nap. Not if Viktor had anything to do about it. Viktor was a very inquisitive man, he could speak 7 languages and was thirsty for knowledge. He made it his mission to get out all the information I had on Australia. This involved 1000’s of questions ranging from what were some famous Australian icons/celebrities/brands/foods; the metric system; the Australian dollar; house prices; Australians’ average annual income; the distance between capital cities; the population and demographics; the weather… and the list continues. I had to make up a few things, but I’m sure he checked everything I said when he got home anyway. He had little interest for the 3 other Austrian passengers sitting squashed up in the back of the car. I guess there was probably nothing about Austria that he didn’t already know. Betty R
Resource 5: Marsupial ambassadors

I’ve noticed many weird things about Americans and their slightly skewed perception of Australia. The first thing is the fact that the kangaroo is the first thing that comes up in conversation. Kyran B, 7.2.11

Comment by Renae: Well spoken! When I moved to the USA as a kid, it was the time of the Sydney 2000 Olympics and Americans were seeing images of Australia and its people practically every day! It’s funny how, at the time, some of these images turned their ideas around (even the fact that the Australian Olympic mascots were not kangaroos or koalas – a deliberate move by the Australian organising committee), while others only reinforced previously established stereotypes. It was over ten years ago now, but some of the things you are saying remind me of that time. It’s a difficult thing for someone to reconcile what they know and have always heard, with what’s being presented. They probably need some time [a few months, maybe?] You might start to see a change during your exchange. I suppose, by meeting you, maybe they’ll consider visiting Australia and getting a different perspective! 😊Think of yourself as a catalyst. February 6, 2011 at 9:58 am

Australia Day in Miami

The 26th fell on a Wednesday in the States so a few of the other Aussie guys and I decided to go to the pub. We wore some Australian gear and set out to drink beer, (which Americans are terrible at brewing). We met some cool guys that loved Australians (like all other Americans) so we gave them some Aussie Tattoos and they cheered and partied with us! It was a really good night and they learned about Australian culture and we exchanged stories and gained memories. My first Australia day in the States! Sahil S, 1.3.11

Additional comment: One of my favourite things about America are the different reactions people have when they find out I am from Australia. At parties it’s so funny when we talk and people ask if we are Australian and we say yes they go crazy. I think America and Australia have good relations and because of the recent Oprah visit they love Australia more. Almost all of them say “I always wanted to go to Australia”. The stereotypes about Australia are so apparent when people start asking you questions like do you have Kangaroos in your backyard and other silly stuff like that. Americans are very gullible and believe anything you tell them which can be funny at times.

3.3.2011
I’ve found that to most Americans, Australia is seen as a great holiday destination with strange animals and friendly people. This is a very good reputation to have but unfortunately, it is these topics which make up the bulk of the conversations I happen to have with Americans.

The kangaroo usually comes up first in conversation which I don’t really mind. In fact I enjoy talking about what is unique about Australia; although I am starting to suspect that Americans are not really interested in my version of Australia. They are more interested in simplified caricatures and national symbols, that offer them a more comfortable albeit conventionalised version of Australia. I suppose this is something that I’ve found difficult to understand, because I am aware that I don’t exactly represent the quintessential Australian, but I offer some diversity that could potentially educate Americans about Australia, and relieve some of the simplistic views they might have of us. I think that a country is more than just the image it projects, but sometimes the image is all people care to consider. It is not bothering me so much right now, but it is starting to dawn on me. [Emily G. USA]
It was a looong flight to get there as i had to go to from sydney to LA which was like a 13 hour flight and then from LA to miami was another 5 hours. When i got to Miami it was about 9pm so i decided to book a hotel. I ended up staying at a hotel in South beach which is like the Bondi of sydney. I was absolutely exhausted when i got there and all I wanted to do was sleep. ..

With three hours sleep I woke up and got ready for orientation. Drained as I was I got up ate breaky at the hotel and then ordered a cab to UM. At orientation I met some of the other Aussie blokes and they said there was like 25 people from Australia on exchange here. I was the only one from [my university]. Towards the end of orientation I left and went to my room and crashed, having not slept in nearly 48 hours.

When I lay down on the bed I was SHOCKED! The mattress was literally made out of some sort of plastic and was sooo uncomfortable. At this point i was sleep deprived, angry lonely and really missed home as this was the first time I would be away from my family for so long. I lay there freezing and trying to sleep thinking how am I going to make it through the next three months. It was not a good feeling, I had never felt like this before, I just wanted to go home. To everyone that thinks exchange will be really exciting and a great experience, think again. Pre my departure I only thought about how good the experience would be and never even imagined how challenging it would be. Lying there I kept saying to myself its only you here, you have to be strong, I believed in myself, knowing that if i accomplish this i can do anything. This was a really good experience even though it was challenging, it gave me will power and strength.... So on tuesday I have been in the States for 3 weeks and 2 days. I have finally settled in and bought a lap top, mobile or cell as they call it here and all household items. [Sahil S, University of Miami, USA]
RESPONSE: The first day I arrived in LA I felt exactly the same. My first week here was the worst. I didn’t have an official orientation so I had to walk around campus and discover everything on my own (UCLA is a massive campus). I had arrived on one of the coldest days, and my room did not have heating. I lay awake in bed for most of the night thinking about home.

I guess prior to departing I thought I’d get a great big warm welcome from the university, but sadly that did not happen! It’s really quite a lot more difficult than I imagined, there’s a lot more independence involved and if you need help you have to force yourself to ask for it.

I mean, really this is a great experience but it’s not easy at all. I can safely say that not everyone is cut out for exchange! [Emily G., UCLA, USA]
BULA FROM FIJI!!! I realise that there are three things that are important to Fijians; Kava, Rugby and Church. What surprised me at the beginning was that Islanders can be very shy especially around international students. Many presume (and sometimes they are right) that the international students are more than happy to stay together and they are shocked when you actually show interest that you want to do more than just be acquaintances. Some of the highlights of the exchange experience is the moment where you transfer from being that Australian exchange student to being part of the group. And every time that it has happened, it has been while doing one of the three things mentioned above.

Yesterday I was playing a game of touch rugby with some friends and like usually failing pretty badly. Then it was announced that due to the fact that we had been playing for so long, the sun had almost disappeared and that no one was bothering to score that whatever team scored next would be the winners. The game went on and I was trying so hard not to completely stuff it up for my team, as the guys especially were getting extremely competitive. As I was concentrating on the guy who I was meant to be defending I surprised everyone (including myself) by intercepting the ball and charging towards the try line (or the invisible line between a pair of thongs and a fallen coconut 😁). Unfortunately my little legs couldn’t run fast enough and I was touched before I scored. But as I turned around every player was on the ground in hysterical laughter because I took everyone by surprised. As I left to go home every single one of them, including all the guys shook my hand and high fived me saying goodbye Katie. Suddenly I was no longer the white girl, I was Katie. [Katie B, Fiji]
Sometimes I feel like exchange is a bit like a balancing act. I’m still trying to figure out how to balance study and all the other things an exchange experience has to offer. Some weekends I choose to stay back in Suva to finish an essay and not go travelling with the other international students. I feel sometimes that I will end up regretting studying when I could be snorkelling on an island. But other times I realise how much I am learning and that studying human rights in the common room with a girl from Tonga and another from Vanuatu is experiencing the true life of a university student in Fiji. Other times it also is a balancing act between working hard to build friendships with Fijian and regional students or hanging out with the other international students. Sometimes I feel guilty that I am spending too much time with the other international students and therefore I am missing out on other cultural experiences. Then I realise that spending time with the other international students, who are mostly from the USA can be at times more of a cultural experience than hanging out with friends who live in Suva. I’ve learnt so much about Americans while I am here. Some of them I love and others are so different from me in their attitudes and goals for their time in Fiji. I’ve actually begun a list of crazy things other international students have said. At the top of my list, and my current favourites, are “is Wales in New Zealand?” and “Katie, why don’t you have an Australian accent?” (still don’t understand what accent they think I have).
My father, Wayne Greene, grew up in Macon, Georgia... But while you can take the boy out of the country, you can’t take the country out of the boy. Dad was Macon, distilled. I never realized how southern his English was until I was far from home. At graduate school in Oxford, when a friend from New Zealand visited my place, I pressed “Play” on my answering machine, responding to a blinking light. To my surprise I heard “Boy, what the hell you doin'? This is your Dad, callin’ to check up on you, but you probably out in one a’ them bars...” I explained sheepishly to my friend that he didn’t always talk that way. The next day, I called my mom. “Mom, has Dad’s accent gotten a lot stronger?” I was sure it had, but she said calmly, “No, I don’t think so.”...

Thousands of miles from Georgia, beginning that night in England, my dad became a foreign-language speaker to me – and I was utterly charmed by it. I had found the foreigner in myself; like so many Italian Americans, Irish Americans and so on, in my early adulthood I had uncovered an exotic background that I would cling to like a favorite shirt, one that everyone else thought was a bit silly or dingy. To me, my half-southerness all of a sudden meant the world. I probably started sounding a little bit more southern, then, in Oxford of all places, trying on a heritage I had only just decided to love.

— Robert Lane Greene, You are what you speak, Preface (p. xiv-xv)
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