Exploration

A resource for study abroad
Australian Learning & Teaching Council

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Program goals

- To encourage the development of a greater sense of exploration among students sojourning overseas.
- To stimulate students to acquire concrete knowledge about the country they will be visiting.
- To heighten students’ curiosity about their own country.
- To encourage students to return to their own country with a greater awareness of and ability to reflect on their own culture.

Rationale

This module prepares students in concrete ways for their time overseas by, for example, requiring them to undertake research into the country where they will be spending time. It gives them skills and introduces them to resources for undertaking this. The module is also premised on the view that exploring another culture is more effective from a position of some knowledge about one’s own culture and nation; in fact, as TS Eliot has intimated, explorers may well find ourselves learning more about their starting point than they anticipated. The exploration module, then, is about preparing students to visit a new country, but it also anticipates that students will return home seeing aspects of their own country in different ways.

Exploration also means accepting and learning from getting lost. This module will attempt to provide students with a metaphoric compass, in the form of research tips, to guide them through this process.

Cultural exploration involves skills of observation, interpretation, and explanation, which are discussed in the module on cultural relativism. The exploration module also foreshadows some of the themes of the module on globalisation and cosmopolitanism.
**Mode of delivery**

The module is largely presented through activities and discussions pre-departure, as students practise the skills of the explorer and accumulate information about their destinations. Pre-departure is also an opportunity to set up some of the themes and questions to be re-visited on re-entry through the globalisation module. The module is supported in country through reflective and prompt questions on a blog, or through facebook discussion or email.

The module package comprises notes which take the presenter through the presentation, including in-class exercises; suggestions for supplementary exercises which could also serve as assessment items; and a resource pack comprising blog extracts and other literature which could be given to students as a hand out before the class, though this is not essential. All the material in the resource pack is already included in context in the presenter’s notes, below.

**Note:**

1. **Students should be encouraged to bring laptops to class with them to undertake some basic online research (wireless access in the classroom is necessary to facilitate this), as well as tablets and smart phones to download apps in class.**

2. **Students should be sent an electronic version of the table of DFAT and media sites (see resources) before class.**

3. **Students need a hard copy of the Robert Lane Green passage in class. They could be sent electronic versions of all the resources before class if wished.**
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 pre-departure workshop (see OzStudentsAbroad website for links).

Student guide (available if the Module will be run through self-study).

If you are preparing your own reader to accompany study abroad, the student guide materials are all made available under a Creative Commons license. You are free to incorporate the materials into your own reader or course package as long as you clearly attribute the origin of the work (see Creative Commons license). The creators also include in the license the option of using the work for commercial gain, although we respectfully ask that the material not be republished and sold (we hope that the workshop materials will be useful to both university-based and commercial providers).
Instructor’s orientation

The recommended approach is to work through the slideshow or Prezi presentation – the instructor’s notes and comment below, suggested exercises and additional resources, will give sufficient background to develop one’s own ‘script’.

The slides (or Prezi) and exercises would take two to three hours to deliver, if all the exercise were incorporated. Slides can deleted as appropriate for the instructor’s own agenda. Presenters may wish to shorten some exercises or to skip or have very minimal ‘blackboard’ exercise where these are suggested. One of the proposed supplementary exercises takes place outside the class, with students preparing a report to deliver afterwards, which would require a second meeting with students. This exercise could be done on campus with immediate reporting back, but would be less effective. Some of the exercises could be refigured as possible assessment items.

The important things for students to get out of this module are:

- the value of concrete preparation before departure
- the importance of understanding something about one’s home country before departure
- ways of acquiring information

The Bringing the Learning Home team believes that, although self-reflection and personal growth are often among the most important benefits of international exchange, students also need to be strongly encouraged to explore their host cultures. Students can sometimes be reluctant to push themselves outside their comfort zone, and may tend to pass much of their time abroad with fellow international students. Some out-bound exchange students will already have a fascination with their host culture, but many will have chosen their destination because of the availability of their majors, ease of travel, or quite superficial reasons. Some out-bound students may not even have indicated their destination as a first choice, so they may have little interest or even ambivalence about where they are heading.

Encouraging a spirit of exploration can help motivate students to reach outside the community of international students, to venture more deeply into the host culture. In the long run, we believe that these ventures will provide both lasting memories and opportunities for intercultural learning and skill development (see both the Cultural Relativism and Professionalisation modules). Moreover, greater exploration will lead to a growing awareness of the complexities of globalisation.
For all these reasons, this module encourages pre-departure study of the destination country as well as the setting of exploratory goals for the overseas sojourn. In the process, students will also be encouraged to explore their home culture more deeply and recognise that ‘travel’ across great cultural distances may sometimes require very kilometers of physical travel.

**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.’
**Section 1. Introduction (Slides 2 - 3)**

Ask students what this quote from T. S. Eliot means to them and whether they think it has any relevance to the experience they are about to undertake.

We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And to know the place for the first time.

*Little Gidding*

One of the ideas we want to convey in this module is that by exploring another place, students can learn more about their own. The study abroad sojourn or time overseas is not ‘just’ a tourist trip; it is the beginning of a personal and cultural adventure which is likely to change permanently the way students view themselves and their home.

Introduce student to the program goals so they have a map of where the module is taking them. We hope it will:

- encourage the development of a greater sense of exploration among students sojourning overseas;
- stimulate students to acquire concrete knowledge about the country they will be visiting;
- heighten students’ curiosity about their own country;
- encourage students to return to their own country with a greater awareness of and ability to reflect on their own culture.
Section 2: Emotional exploration (Slides 4 – 7)

Before a student departs for an international sojourn there are a multitude of things to deal with. In concrete terms, visas, class enrolments, accommodation, travel, and insurance all have to be negotiated. This might be further compounded by the need to earn money before departure. At the same time, the student is juggling with the prospective emotional wrench of leaving friends, family and home.

Discuss what the students are experiencing as they prepare for departure; and ask them to give examples of their feelings (have them write down a couple then ask them to volunteer examples).

Ask for both positive and negative examples. These will range over both emotional and practical issues: flights, visas, finances, language, accommodation, homesickness, family, boyfriends and girlfriends, exhilaration, anticipation, excitement…

Resources below comprise comments from students preparing for departure. The same themes recur: enormous excitement; anxiety about their capacity to cope; anticipation that this is going to be THE most wonderful time they have ever experienced. For some, those emotions are coupled with trepidation about how things will be when they ultimately return home. One student (below) reassured herself:

    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... (Lisa R)

Maybe not!

It is worth raising this issue with students:

- are they prepared for change, not just in themselves, but in others, when they return?
- Or do they agree with Lisa, that everything is going to be exactly the same when they get back?

Danielle also makes an apt point:

    How does one fit their life into a few bags?
As the students will become increasingly aware – when they depart, they will be leaving a lot behind them.

Some of the posts below, which all come from the BTLH blog www.ozstudentsabroad.com could be printed out and given to students as handouts.

You could also point students to the blog and indicate that, though it is no longer active, they might find it a good resource – it is accessible thematically and is an excellent repository of information, ideas, advice, feelings, which students might well want to exploit as part of the process of pre-departure exploration. If they have laptops, they might want to have a quick look at it straight away.


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
Whatever students are feeling – as the comments (above) and class room discussion demonstrates, they are not alone.

**Section 3: On getting lost (Slides 8-9)**

The main thrust of this module is not emotional exploration however (which is dealt with in modules such as reflection, adaptation and transformation), but practical and research-based exploration
An essential part of every student’s baggage should be some knowledge of their destination. Preparing beforehand, finding out something about the place they are going to call home for the next few months, can make a critical difference to a student’s engagement with their new life. After all, they are not going ‘just’ as tourists; they are going as university students and this experience is a part of their education.

Encouraging students to see their sojourn in these kinds of terms is not the easiest of tasks, but it is an important one.

Our data from the GLOSSARI survey of more than one hundred Australian exchange students (an edited version included as resource 1 for teachers) suggests that, on the whole, they feel very confident that they are prepared for their overseas sojourn, both in terms of their knowledge of their destination and their knowledge of Australia.

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 Fransisco 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. WOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!

Kyran B. 27.12.10

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
While it is important not to dampen students’ confidence in their ability to cope, international research into culture shock suggests that it can be more profound when it is least expected. As one Australian student said of her time in Canada:

*It’s really confusing – you think, ‘Why can’t I function? Everything seems so similar, we speak the same language. I am perfectly capable of doing what I need to do here so why does it seem so difficult?’ Something is missing but you don’t know what it is.*

It is therefore useful, in encouraging exploration, to raise the possibility that students might not know as much as they think.

In her book *A field guide to getting lost*, Rebecca Solnit talks about exploration as a state of always being lost, because one is in a new place. Yet explorers take with them ‘a sense of optimism about surviving and finding their own way’ and optimism and openness to being lost is one of the attributes we want students to carry with them. Getting lost, for Solnit, is about ‘the unfamiliar appearing’. When you get lost, ‘the world has become larger than your knowledge of it’. It is an opportunity for growth.

[Solnit, chapter one, ‘Open Door’ pp.3-26, is a good chapter for students to read as a way of reflecting on the process of getting lost]

So we encourage students to embrace the concept of getting lost: learning to see the unfamiliar appearing; carrying a sense of optimism about surviving.

**Section 4: Starting to explore (Slides 10 - 11)**

Before students go overseas, doing some basic research into the country they are going to visit is a seemingly obvious but sometimes overlooked activity. Not doing so can simply prove embarrassing, especially if students are planning to take subjects relating to that country’s history, politics or society. Learning ‘on the spot’ can have its limitations. No one expects a visitor to know everything about the place they are visiting before arrival, but finding out a little bit beforehand will make things easier, in the academic arena but also as a tourist.
So where to start?

A good place for pre-departure research is the Australian government’s Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) website. This site provides an outline of individual countries, in terms of basic information like population, economy, trade, etc. In addition, DFAT discusses the country’s relationship with Australia, which is essential information for a student to carry.

Students could also be encouraged to start the process of cultural immersion before they leave Australia. A simple way to do this is by reading the local media, available online.

The resources for this module include a table which lists two DFAT sites (fact sheets and economic briefing), for each of the countries where Australian students typically undertake exchange, as well as a table of English-language media for each country.

[see Resource 3 – DFAT sites and English language newspaper sites]

Students might also consider finding and downloading an appropriate app to their phone or iPad so they can access ‘local’ news on a daily regular basis. Students can also access the table of links in class via the BTLH website, under this module’s resources.

Even getting a feel for the daily weather can help kick start the process of acclimatisation before students arrive.

Exercise One

Pre-departure country briefings

If students have laptops or apps, ask them to access DFAT sites and relevant news media. Research weather conditions, main news items for country they are visiting, and the main links between their host country and Australia. Students going to the same country could do this as a group and pool information, either in class or as an outside activity depending on class structure. Present brief feedback on findings to the whole group, who should be encouraged to ask questions about the countries being presented. What did students learn about individual countries that they didn’t already know? What could they follow up?
Section 5: Exploring home (slides 12 - 15)

Learning a little more about Australia before departure can be as important as learning about one’s destination. Some Australian students, even those who have travelled before, may know relatively little about their own country. (And don’t forget that quite a number of students going on exchange from Australia are in fact international students – so don’t assume ‘Australia’ is home. Encourage student to explore these international connections as widely as possible.) Many students live in localised bubbles; but exploring and becoming globalised means learning more about your own home, too.

Have a look at the DFAT website under ‘Australia’. This site provides basic official information on issues such as population, trade, education climate, geography, and economy.


[Have students link to this site for later – it is a useful reference point if they need information on Australia when travelling]

Students should also reflect on how Australia is perceived internationally.

Ask students to think about what Australian issues might be of particular interest or which people in your host country might know about/have an opinion about. Blackboard this by country – it requires thinking about how Australia is perceived, and what sorts of things about Australia might make the press in your particular host country. You may not come up with any suggestions at all.

Resource 4: student comments on experience in Austria

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
Some people can be surprisingly well-informed or curious about Australia, for example, Viktor, in this example above. But students should also be prepared for the fact that some people prefer to think about Australia in terms of cute and cuddly animals, crocodiles and kangaroos.

As one student wrote:

*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.*

This is the same kind of image of Australia promoted by writer Bill Bryson, and students will find that for many North Americans at least, Bryson is their bible on things Australian.

Bill Bryson on Australia (inside front cover, *Down Under*):

*Insofar as I had accumulated… expectations of Australia at all…, I had thought of it as a kind of alternative southern California, a place of constant sunshine and the cheerful vapidity of a beach lifestyle, but with a slightly British bent – a sort of *Baywatch* with cricket…*

**Quick blackboard activity** – ask students what they think you might need to need to know about Australia before they go, and why they think those particular topics are important.

Examples might include:

- Indigenous issues
- Migration and refugee policies
- Racism?
- Compulsory voting? [Australia is one of about thirty countries in the world...*}
which have compulsory voting, and one of about fifteen which actually enforces that requirement)

It is not necessary to give student the answers to all these questions, but at least raise questions for them to explore further.

Section 6: Being prepared: international (mis-) perceptions of Australia (Slides 16 - 20)

Students on exchange commented at length about how Australia was (mis)perceived internationally. Having a degree of factually-based information at hand is the great way of preparing students for these sorts of comments, by enabling them to add information to misinformation.

Some students grew a little tired of the stereotyping, though others enjoyed reinforcing it.

The following comments come from the blog – students could be given these comments as a hand out ahead of time.

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 cheers 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]
Ways to broaden the ‘kangaroo’ conversation:

- Remind students that not only do we cull our national emblem in large numbers, we also eat it

This is an interesting sideline for students to throw into the inevitable conversation about ‘cute marsupials’: kangaroos (and cuddly bunnies) can be a pest in an agriculture environment. Knowing more about this and the reasons for it (whether one agrees or not) can enable students to move a conversation away from stereotypes into a real discussion.

Students could spend some time reflecting on the sorts of stereotypes they will encounter, but this is dealt within greater detail in the stereotyping module and it is not necessary to dwell on it here.

Exercise two

Australian international relations

Before they go abroad, each student should be aware of the following things, most of which they can pick up from the DFAT site:

- Are there any particular relationship or trade issues between Australia and the country the student will be visiting?
- Do we have many nationals from that country living in Australia?
- Any particular ongoing cultural/historical/political/economic relations?
- Is there any particular point about Australia which might interest people in your host country?
- Any points of conflict or potential issues?

Students could be asked to write a page on these points as an in-class or out of class exercise. Again, this could be done in greater depth in small groups.
Section 7: Exploring differences between countries and societies (Slide 21)

Ask students about what measures they would use, as observers and explorers in the country, in comparing different countries and societies. Remind them to focus not just on differences but on similarities, as they can be equally revealing, both of the host country and of Australia.

Some factors to consider might include:

- Language spoken
- Migrant population and proportion of speakers of different languages? Impact of foreign/migrant cultures on host culture
- Style of housing
- Physical environment including climate, and relationship to land
- Role of religion in society
- Sport and recreation
- Diet
- Architecture
- Public transport
- Voting, system of government
- Position of women
- Indigenous populations
- Health care facilities - state or private
- Education system – state or private
- Evidence of globalisation (this is an important issue which is developed in the globalisation module on re-entry)
- History

All of these factors differentiate cultures and all are things which the students might focus on once they arrive. Their engagement with their host country will be a lot deeper if they are primed ahead of time regarding what to look for and what sorts of things to question.
Exercises three

Either of these two exercises — three or four — could be used as the basis of assessment items.

**Becoming a flâneur**

To introduce students to some of the ideas in this module, a useful exercise is to have them act as explorers in their own environment. Both Robert Gordon (2010, 202) and Darren Kelly (2009, 26-27) have used this type of exercise effectively in other programs. Students are encouraged to explore a particular area of their own town as tourists or visitors, in pairs or singly. They should observe, take photographs (if possible, being aware of not intruding on people’s privacy), take note of geography, places where people congregate, social profiles, use of space, natural environment, architecture, recreation, religion etc. They should do so in areas which they don’t know well and think of themselves as ‘foreign’ observers or explorers. Findings should be presented to the group as a photo-based PowerPoint travelogue introducing the area and should include some discussion of what students learned through their observations, in terms both of content and process.

Before undertaking this exercise, have students read the piece on The Flaneur (resource 11, reproduced below): [http://elliptic.typepad.com/elliptic_blog/2003/01/the_flneur.html](http://elliptic.typepad.com/elliptic_blog/2003/01/the_flneur.html)

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**The Flâneur**

Let’s start with a discussion of what it means to be a flâneur. A simple definition would be "one who strolls aimlessly through urban spaces." Often, being a flâneur is associated with idleness and with the decadent luxury of having enough time to take those meandering strolls.

Though the original use of the term might have applied to folks that were decadent dilettantes with plenty of idle time, several writers, theorists and philosophers have appropriated the term and have used it to refer to a more complex activity. Walter Benjamin, in particular, has done the most to bolster the meaning of the term. Instead of assuming that those who have the time to wander aimlessly through urban landscapes are only engaged in a cursory and leisurely survey of their environment, Benjamin brought attention to the cognitive value and pleasures associated with urban strolling.

A flâneur, under this interpretation, becomes an active sociologist or reader of the environment around him or her. As urban landscapes become more dense and the
architecture more complex, opportunities to observe and interpret events and objects have increased in number and complexity. Unfortunately, this has occurred in tandem with accelerated industrialization and the entrenchment of the capitalist work-ethic. More often than not, we spend time in our cities commuting to and from our work places; too preoccupied or tired to take note of the visual complexities around us. We rarely have time to pause and admire small details in the architecture or to pursue a reverie caused by some stranger's facial expression. Our workplaces have also become barren environments where, more often than not, visual complexity has been replaced by monotony — all in the name of economic efficiency (i.e., cubicles).

This lack of engagement is worrisome since we are not exercising our cognitive skills to read our environment. Whether it is the result of the pressures of commuting, of our inane habit of completing errands at break-neck speeds or of simple laziness, our visual intelligence is becoming rusty. Whether it should be deemed an aesthetic and/or political movement, it is time to rekindle our abilities to engage actively with our immediate environment and resist the tendency to let it pass unnoticed as the rhythmic swaying of our bus or train lulls us into a stupor.

“The street becomes a dwelling for the flâneur; he is as much at home among the facades of houses as a citizen in his four walls. To him the shiny, enamelled signs of business are at least as good a wall ornament as an oil painting is to a bourgeois in his salon. The walls are the desk against which he presses his notebooks; newsstands are his libraries and the terraces of cafés are the balconies from which he looks down on his household after his work is done.” — Walter Benjamin, “The Flâneur”
Exercise Four

Questioning the normal

Questioning ‘the normal’ can be a useful starting point for cultural exploration. Students could be asked to read a section from one of the books below, e.g. on food, and then to reflect on their understandings of the meaning of food, diet and eating. What influence do culture and geography have on these ideas? How does the food and eating experience within the class group differ? This discussion could serve as the basis for research into a short paper on attitudes to food and eating in the country the student will be visiting.

Possible texts:

- E. N. Anderson, *Everyone Eats: Understanding Food and Culture*
- Alan Beardsworth and Teresa Keil, *Sociology on the menu: an invitation to the study of food and society*

Alternative text, on ‘home’:

- Withold Rybczynski, *Home. A short history of an idea*

Brewer and Solberg (2009, 47) use the idea of ‘cleanliness’ in this manner in a class taught at Beloit College, USA.

Examples of exploration

Below are three examples of students exploring their new environment:

The old and the new

For me, the most interesting thing in coming to Europe was the sheer age of the places. On the way to Sweden I travelled through Krakow, Poland, a city with cobblestone streets, marketplaces, a castle and lots of ancient-looking statues. The paths and streets were probably older than any in Australia, possibly built before our country was even colonised. They also looked like they had not been maintained for this same length of time.

I have some interesting photos showing the age of that city. This is not a photo of Krakow, though, since I have seen the same thing here in Umeå, but with an even more interesting twist:

For centuries, Umeå was a fairly small town in the sparsely populated north of Sweden. It was only in the past 50 years that it was strategically built up into a bigger city around
this University where I am exchanging. The centre of town is thus filled with many delightful juxtapositions of old and new architecture as well as culture. This photo is showing a restaurant with a big spinning neon sign, which is built amongst several medieval-looking buildings like the one seen in the background.

There was an even bigger shock, though, regarding the intermixing of old and new; This came when I was admiring the large cathedral-like stone building in the centre of town. It had huge wooden doors and arched windows, pointed towers at the corners and a big clock tower in the middle. I asked a local what this building was: the church? Town hall? Nope, it’s a nightclub.

There is so much history to be seen and experienced in Europe. I have met people from so many countries around here, and they continually talk about events that happened hundreds of years before we had any recorded history.

I’m having a strange multicultural experience here in Umeå. It is a town completely filled with University students. The population has grown from about 40 000 in the 60s to over 100 000 now, since this University became a major institution. A lot of them are not Swedish, so rather than experiencing one culture, I am experiencing loads of them.

And of course everyone here rides bikes. They thought it was the strangest thing when I told them that people rode bikes for exercise in Australia. Around here it is solely for transport, and pretty much a necessity of life. Much more fun than driving cars everywhere.

— Steven W, 3 Sept 2010

Streets for feet, not cars

Walking around in the older parts of Sitges, a small town on the Spanish Mediterranean west of Barcelona, I was struck (as I had been before) by how different pre-automobile streets are from the ones I’m more familiar with in Australia and the US. How different to walk around in spaces that were not built to accommodate two lanes of traffic! I’m so used to urban space and even house design dominated by the needs of our machines that the shift in scale, distances between buildings, sharpness of turns, the distance that we
can see — everything about the built environment — brings me a kind of odd happiness. The space makes me, as a pedestrian, feel like the centre of attention instead of an after-thought or interloper on what is really ‘car space.’ Even ‘pedestrian malls’ in the US and Australia are more like ‘temporarily taken away from cars’ spaces if they’re outdoors; no community seems convinced enough of the pedestrian nature of space to actually make streets that are physically impassable in vehicles.

I’m not convinced it’s a ‘cultural difference’ between Spain and Australia, but I know that the difference in space gives a very different feel to most activities, including shopping, dining outside, sight-seeing...

— Greg D, 8 June 2010

Switzerland

Ok you may find this amusing but one thing that shocked me the other day is I walk past a porn shop, which had a shop window, which contained things that would be considered an outrage in Australia, if displayed. Luke C., 6.2.11

Comment: Variations of the ‘porn shop window’ can be seen in Sydney and Melbourne such as at ‘Lucrezia & De Sade’ in Brunswick St. Fitzroy Melbourne. Sometimes when we travel overseas we see more than we do when we are at home. 6.2.2011


Discussion online at: http://ozstudentsabroad.com/2011/02/06/switzerland2/
Section 8: Exploring the micro – getting ready for arrival (slides 22 - 27)

Thinking about things like first impressions and culture shock, at a more micro level students might want to learn more about the campus they are going to, and in particular their living conditions.

- Ask students if any of them have looked at their host university’s home page for information about how things work
- Will there be any kind of orientation when they arrive, or are they expected to be self-sufficient?
- Are students prepared for their arrival?
- What do they think they might need?
- What support structures are in place?
- What accommodation do they have lined up – dorms, home stay, apartment?

[ask individual students for responses to raise awareness that they need to know these things]

Some students on exchange found they were not at all prepared for their arrival, and that can be where culture shock first manifests itself.

Resource 6 - students talking about their arrival

University of Miami:

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 at brekky 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

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 soo uncomfortable. At this point i was sleep
deprived, angry lonely and really missed home so this was the first time I would be away from my family for so long. I try these 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.

SIM, USA
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 laptop, mobile or cell as they call it here and all household items. [Sahil S, USA]
recreational or cultural interests (have them name some) and before they leave Australia, and to explore the facilities for pursuing them in their exchange location.

**Sarah joined the swimming club** – partly because she was already a swimmer but also because she wanted to participate in Japanese club culture (see Sarah’s story in the Adaptation module). In addition to the benefits of meeting other people and practising her Japanese – and getting fit – Sarah also found the club an enormous support when she was homesick or lonely.

As well as familiar activities like Sarah’s swimming club, being overseas is a great opportunity to try out local recreational and sporting activities that we don’t have the chance to pursue here.

Any activities might students wish to take up on exchange?

Ask student to name some e.g. martial arts in Japan; dancing in Brazil; ice hockey in Canada; dog sledding and more in the Arctic Circle…

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This is a photo I took whilst on a dog sledge in the Swedish part of the Arctic Circle during my exchange experience in Sweden. It was an amazing and surreal experience to be driving a dog sledge and racing through the arctic wilderness in temperatures averaging negative 25 degrees celcius. This image represents the sense of freedom and adventure that … gave me the confidence to embark on adventures such as dog sledding, snowmobiling, toboganning on the Salzburg winter olympic track, horse riding in Iceland and snorkelling in the crack between the Eurasian and North American tectonic plates to name just a few!

— Megan, 2011
Katie took up playing rugby in Fiji.

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]

So – exploration is about:

- encounters with the news and the unexpected
- getting lost
- facing the challenges
- but that doesn’t mean you don’t need to plan ahead

Resource 7: Fitting in

exploration

development a taste for discovery

encountering the new & the unexpected
getting lost
but that doesn’t mean you don’t need to plan ahead

exploration
Section 9: Constructing a bucket list (slides 28 – 32)

Final exercise – ask students to research their Exchange bucket list:

Ask students to quickly list five or ten things they really want to do in their host country (can be done with groups of students going to same country, or could be done as a blackboard exercise).

Then ask students to create a list of things to do and see that they would recommend to people visiting Australia (group exercise). Their brief is to provide visitors with a balanced overview of Australian society, culture and way of life.

Consider:

- How much will visitors learn about Australia from visiting nothing but tourist destinations?
- What sorts of impressions would students want visitors to take home from Australia if the intention is to give them a ‘balanced’ view?
- What sorts of things should they experience?
- How is it possible to ‘know’ a place?

After this exercise:

Have students reflect on what the bucket list they created for their own international destination looks like.

Does it comprise tourist destinations? places to visit?

Encourage students to think about including things like:

- Meeting people from their host country
- Meeting people from different countries
• Visiting homes
• Meeting new acquaintances
• Having different cultural experiences
• Gaining even limited familiarity with a different language

Look at some comments from one student whose expectations about what she should and shouldn’t be doing shifted in the course of her exchange experience:

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. (Katie B)

The other side of this too is being ‘explored’ and discovered by others

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). (Katie B)

Resource 8: Discovering & being discovered by others

The above two quotes are both included in resource 8 for students, copied below.

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).

— Katie B.

Section 10: Exploring re-entry (slides 36 - 37)

To return to the starting point of this module, T. S. Eliot suggested that exploration meant:

...to arrive where we started
And to know the place for the first time

It’s possible though, that students will start to explore and revise their understandings of ‘home’ even before they return, as author Robert Lane Greene did. In the preface to his book *You are what you speak*, he wrote of the experience of ‘hearing’ his father’s Southern US accent for the very first time while he was studying in the UK.

Resource 9: Finding the foreigner in yourself

Students need to have this or it needs to be read out in class.

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-southernness 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)

Ask the students to think about any changes they think they might notice when they return home. Do they think, like Lane Greene, that they will ‘[find] the foreigner’ in themselves? What do they think Lane Greene meant by that, and what do they think it might mean to them?

And if they do ‘find the foreigner’ in themselves, how do they think this foreigner might fit into Australia when they return?

**It is not necessary to get the student to discuss or propose answers – it is enough to pose the questions.**

This module raises a lot of questions, and offers few answers, but it **does give the student concrete suggestions about preparing to explore, and some tangible approaches to research and investigation.** It lends itself naturally to re-entry modules on globalisation and overarching module on **reflection.**

**In-country follow-up**

Possible prompt questions for in-country interaction:

- How is ‘your bucket’ list going? Have you rewritten it at all?
- How prepared were you for comments on Australia?
- What do you wish you had known before you arrived and how would you advise others before arrival?
- Has your perspective on Australia changed at all? How and why?
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). Handouts to facilitate this workshop, and the exercises, are available for download at ozstudentsabroad.com and http://www.tlc.murdoch.edu.au/project/btlh/.
### Links to English-language media

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RINGING THE LEARNING HOME
Cover photos by Megan Camp of dogsledding in the north of Sweden (left); and Morgan Petterson (right) floating near Mykonos, Greece.

‘Peak hour traffic’ of cyclists in Sweden by Thomas Nolan.

Photo of fan with Chinese flags by Sandy Chen.


Photo of Sitges, Spain, by Greg Downey.

Photo of pornography in shop window in Switzerland by Luke C. available online at http://ozstudentsabroad.com/2011/02/06/switzerland2/

Photo of plant sprouting in snow by Zhijia Lai.

Self-portrait in ruins by Chris Brunero; photo of Alaskan outhouse by Lisa Redwood.
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