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# Have Passport Will Learn: Policy to Pedagogy (internationalising the curriculum with study abroad tours)

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*Abstract: Student study tours have long been part of the pedagogy of the agricultural business management course at Charles Sturt University (CSU) in Australia. The majority of these tours have been within Australia and concentrated on Australian agricultural practices. The tours reflected the constructivist educational philosophy which purports that students learn best through a process of personal discovery. In recent times this learning has been elevated to a new level with the introduction of study abroad tours. The stimuli for international tours has been twofold: at the macro level, internationalising the curriculum has become a major focus and requirement for Australian universities; and at the micro (subject and course) level, understanding Australian agribusinesses have global links and therefore the need to expose students to that world beyond Australian shores. In addition, there was a perceived need for students to further enhance their professional capabilities (e.g. diplomacy, negotiating with people from varying backgrounds, understanding cultural norms) that can only be realised through travelling to and experiencing another country and its culture. The need to internationalise the curriculum is well documented. However, little has been written, in recent times, regarding the soundness or legitimacy of study abroad tours in realising this process in Australian universities. This paper explores the pedagogical soundness of the study abroad tour and its contribution in meeting the policy demands for internationalising the curriculum. The paper reports on a case study of the Bachelor of Agricultural Business Management at CSU and its study abroad tour to Argentina.*

*Keywords: Internationalising Curriculum, Pedagogy, Study Abroad Tours*

## Introduction

**I**nternationalisation has been a key focus of Australian universities since the early 1990s when Australia's 38 universities, with only one exception, included explicitly a policy of internationalisation in mission statements (Back, Davis & Olsen 1996, vii). Since then the focus has been mainly on policy development with the aims of growing the number of international students in Australian universities and in the export of higher education services (Sanderson 2011; Pimpa 2009; Leask 2005). However, most universities now have graduate learning outcomes or attributes which embrace the development of 'global perspectives, cross-cultural communication perspectives, intercultural competence, world knowledge etc' (Leask 2012, 10). Charles Sturt University's (CSU) Strategy 2011-2015 document states that it will offer a Course Profile that reflects student demand and meets workforce needs by strengthening Australia's participation in the international community by, among other items, including international learning experiences within courses.

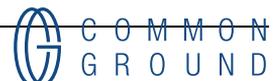
At the pedagogical level, academics have been internationalising courses with graduate outcomes focused on preparing students for work in an increasingly globalised society (Barker 2011; Marcotte, Desroches & Poupart 2007; Leask 2005). Whilst these have been the main drivers for internationalisation of higher education, the study abroad tour has also played an

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important part in achieving these outcomes. A literature search has identified that little has been written, in Australia, on the contribution of the study abroad tour and its role in internationalising the curriculum. A study abroad tour can have many benefits for staff, students and the institution in meeting policy and pedagogical demands (Deardorff 2006; Harman 2005). However, unless there is academic rigor based on sound pedagogical strategies, the study abroad tour is at risk of lacking rigor (Lumkes Jr, Hallett & Vallade 2011) or being deemed a 'Contiki tour'. This paper reports on the use of a study abroad tour, as an integral part an undergraduate agribusiness degree, to address these challenges.

## **Internationalisation within higher education**

The concept of internationalisation within higher education conjures up a wide variety of government and university policies, activities, teaching and learning strategies and approaches to curriculum design. An increasing volume of literature outlines the significance of an international curriculum and the difficulty of coming to any agreement about the 'purpose, meanings and practices of internationalizing the higher education curriculum' (Welikala 2011, 7-8). It is difficult to find a concise definition of internationalisation that covers such a broad spectrum of actions as Knight (2004, 6) stated that 'internationalisation is interpreted and used in different ways in different countries and by different stakeholders'. Soderqvist offered this definition of internationalisation of higher education institutions as:

... a change process from a national higher education institution to an international higher education institution leading to the inclusion of an international dimension in all aspects of its holistic management in order to enhance the quality of teaching and learning and to achieve the desired competencies. (Soderqvist 2002, cited in Knight 2004, 6)

Most of the current literature returned to Knight's (1995; 1997, 29) definition of the internationalization of higher education as 'the process of integrating an international/intercultural dimension into teaching, research and service of the institution'. In 2009, Leask defined the internationalization of the curriculum as 'the incorporation of an international and intercultural dimension into the content of the curriculum as well as the teaching and learning arrangements and support services of a program of study' (Leask 2009, 209).

Universities have emphasised the importance of study abroad programs as the demand for a globally aware workforce grows by designing policies aimed at increasing student understanding and awareness of ideas, cultures, customs and institutions of other nations (Barker 2011; Lowe, Dozier, Hunt-Hurst & Smith 2008; Marcotte et al. 2007, 656). Policies have transposed into activities such as student exchanges, study abroad agreements and internships in overseas countries. Growth in these study abroad programs has been pronounced in the USA and United Kingdom universities (Lowe et al. 2008). At CSU there are opportunities for students from a wide range of disciplines and courses to be involved in study abroad programs.

Sanderson (2011, 154) recognised that while classroom education is valuable in teaching technical and background information on foreign countries but study abroad tours add a significant extra dimension and important contextualisation that can only be actualised by travelling abroad. The pedagogical reasons being involved in these include: the experience of living and studying in different cultural, political and economic context exposes them to best practices in other countries and better prepares them for their career. Oddou, Mendenhall and Ritchie outlined the teaching and learning benefits:

travel abroad can be leveraged as a strategic learning tool for the development of such important global differences, developing inquisitiveness and curiosity to propel further learning about foreign business environments, stretching one's mental maps, managing uncertainty, increasing openness and understanding of differing viewpoints, and

building flexibility in seeing things from new perspectives. (Oddou, Mendenhall & Ritchie 2000, 161)

## **Issues pertaining to study abroad tours**

Three concerns have been raised pertaining to study abroad programs and the associated assessment (Lumkes Jr, Hallett & Vallade 2011; Vance, Sibeck, McNulty & Hogenauer 2011; Lowe et al. 2008; Boud, Keogh & Walker 1985): the level of academic rigor; minimal cross-cultural interaction; and the challenges of reflective writing.

### ***Academic rigor***

Critics say tours lack academic rigor (Lumkes Jr, Hallett & Vallade 2011) but others say the participants 'grow' in other ways (Vance et al. 2011). For example, these 'other ways' were identified by Vance (2005, 375) as: helping students develop international business competencies required to compete in an increasingly global marketplace; practical application in a specific industry context; cross-cultural sensitivity; relationship building; and more effective problem solving.

Effective teaching strategies were an important focus in maximizing the learning opportunities associated with the tour context. Harman, in Ninnes & Hellstein (2005, 41), identified six key principles of high quality teaching and learning in higher education and these provided a framework for the pedagogical design of the study abroad tour (see Table 2). To address the concerns of lack of academic rigor careful design of the subject involved was important to ensure constructive alignment between the learning objectives, teaching methods, and assessment. The assessment for this subject included a reflective journal; group work and an oral presentation at Buenos Aires University at the end of the tour. All assessment work was completed and marked during the tour as a strategy to maintain student focus.

### ***Minimal cross-cultural interaction***

The limitations of short term study abroad tours can be the participants keep mainly to themselves and travel as a 'homogenous bubble' (Lumkes Jr, Hallett & Vallade 2011). Travelling as a group can often mean minimum cross-cultural interaction with people in the host country if they only stay in hotels designed for them and that separate them from the realities of local businesses and culture (Oddou, Mendenhall & Ritchie 2000). With this particular tour, two academics from University of Buenos Aires University, not only organised the land content but also accompanied the group on the tour. They organised industry visits to local business and agricultural enterprises that were from three hours to one day in length. This gave the students time to experience, absorb information, ask questions and provide feedback to the Argentinian co-operators. Even with these intensive industry visits, the overall level of immersion was minimal as the group stayed together and travelled together for the entire trip.

### ***Challenges in reflective writing***

Travelling abroad does not necessarily create a global learner. What assists the study abroad tour's intercultural experience for both academics and students is their process of reflecting on the experience (Welikala 2011). O'Connell and Dymont (2006, 672) stated that 'journals can be a useful instructional/ learning strategy that allows students to reflect critically on material, to ground their learning in their lived experience, to develop their writing skills and to demonstrate their knowledge/understanding in a non-traditional manner'. Benefits also include bringing the responsibility for learning back to the student (constructivism), and getting students actively involved in the reflective process.

Most students had not been required to do this style of writing before. In completing their reflective journals students could write using their own writing style and could use their own format. Through the reflective writing exercise students were able to identify what was important to them at the time and what was relevant to them for their course and for their personal development.

## **Bachelor of Agricultural Business Management (BABM) tour to Argentina**

### *The course, the subject and the tour*

The CSU Degree guidelines state that the main purpose of incorporating an international theme into the undergraduate degree is to set the subjects in their global contexts. The degree will give students opportunities to investigate the similarities and differences of knowledge, traditions, ideas and practices – both within Australia itself and between Australia and other countries. Such opportunities will assist student development as a global citizen in an increasingly international world; and initiate their appreciation of social and cultural factors which may facilitate their employment both in Australia and overseas.

The BABM contains science subjects and business subjects, all within an agricultural context. The Argentina tour was partially funded by the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) through the Study Overseas Short-term Mobility Program. One requirement of this funding was that students had to be enrolled in a subject to participate in the tour. The subject that the majority of students enrolled in was *SCI301 International Practical Experience*. The preamble for this subject is:

*This subject will allow students to develop as professionals and further expand on their understanding of the range of ethical and moral responsibilities underpinning their future careers in global terms. The subject incorporates a period of study abroad or an equivalent international experience. It will provide the students with the opportunity to become more culturally aware. It will provide an opportunity to discover new strengths and abilities, conquer new challenges and solve new problems, thus enhancing generic communication and problem solving skills and allowing them to develop new ideas and perspectives and a deeper understanding with respect to themselves and their chosen profession.*

In designing the study abroad tour program and associated assessment, the common ground for the academics leading the tour was a strong commitment to quality teaching and learning outcomes emanating from the belief that learning is a meaning-making process, i.e. a constructivist approach to learning (Bone, 2008). In constructivism, ‘learning is an active process in which meaning is developed on the basis of experience’ (Bednar et al. 1992, 21). The onus of the learning is placed on the student.

The students attending the tour to Argentina were a mix of ages (19-60 years), modes of study (on-campus and distance education), from a variety of agribusiness backgrounds and at differing stages of their degree. However, all students had a sound knowledge of agricultural business management. Thus, they had the potential and the ability to apply this existing knowledge to new situations experienced on the tour and integrating new knowledge gained. It was up to them, as they worked in their groups to prepare their oral presentations, to make sense of their real world experiences and to construct their reality. The academics’ role in this process was to assist the students with this construction (Cochrane et al. 2002). On tour, this involved debriefing each visit, answering queries, and talking with each group as they worked on their final presentations.

The 21 day tour had 24 students, three academics from CSU and two academics from Buenos Aires University. The program involved intensive 16 hour days visiting a variety of agribusiness situations: dairy farms, agricultural research stations, feedlots, horticultural enterprises (blueberry farm, stone fruit orchards, olive farms, vineyards), beef cattle grazing

properties and cultural visits. All students had a sound knowledge of current Australian agriculture and agribusiness practices and trends. One assessment item was to compare an Australian agribusiness enterprise with the Argentinian equivalent. Students were randomly allocated to a group of five, before the tour, and given an area of study, e.g. red meat, dairying, cropping, issues in business, or horticulture. Students liaised with each other by internet, phone or face-to-face, time the preparing background information on their topic area, e.g. marketing, trade, climate, location, growing/breeding methods etc. They were well-versed in the specific 'Australian situation' of their area of study by the time the tour began. This pre-tour exercise worked as an 'ice breaker' by getting students who did not know each other 'connected'.

## Methodology

The academics leading the tour adopted a case study approach to study the social and academic elements. This involved comprehensive description and analysis of the single situation (the tour) and data was collected using a structured post-tour survey, reflective journals, observations, peer feedback and feedback gained in briefing and debriefing sessions before, during and after the tour.

## Summary of findings

Soderqvist's (2002 cited in Knight 2004, 6) definition of internationalisation of higher education highlighted several outcomes that could be achieved through internationalising the curriculum and these included: a change process; the inclusion of an international dimension; to enhance the quality of teaching and learning; and to achieve the desired competencies. The findings from this study aligned with these outcomes. The results confirmed that a high level of internationalisation in the curriculum was achieved by running a pedagogically sound study abroad tour.

### *A change process*

Evidence of the change process in the students was gained from their reflective journals; a post-tour survey and observation by the academics from three different perspectives: an intellectual perspective; international perspective; and personal development (see Table 1).

Table 1: Outcomes for students from an intellectual, international and personal perspective

	Feedback from students participating in the tour	Observations from academic leaders
Intellectual perspective	<i>Increasing knowledge and understanding of agribusiness industry in Argentina</i>	<i>Improving level of analysis and evaluation of current situations</i>
International perspective	<i>Discovering another country</i> <i>Knowing another culture</i> <i>Experiencing life abroad</i>	<i>Comparative analysis between Australia and Argentina</i>  <i>Knowledge of international issues</i>
Personal development	<i>Developing intercultural competence</i>	<i>Developing cultural awareness/ sensitivity</i>

	<i>Reflecting on their life, career aspirations</i>	<i>Increasing tolerance of people who are different</i>
	<i>Becoming more self-confident</i>	<i>Ability to work with a diverse group of people</i>
	<i>Rising to academic challenge</i>	
	<i>Meeting new people</i>	
	<i>Planning their career</i>	

### ***The inclusion of an international dimension***

By their very nature, study abroad tours automatically add a significant international dimension and important contextualisation to the higher education curriculum. The students were required to complete a comparative analysis of an enterprise in Australia with the comparable enterprise in Argentina. The presentation at the Buenos Aires University allowed the students to demonstrate their level of attainment of these skills.

From a personal perspective one meaningful outcome of internationalisation was the development of culturally competent students (Deardorff 2006). It was found, through the actual experience of the tour and through reflection, that the students improved their knowledge of self and of others; increased empathy and understanding of others' values, beliefs and behaviours; and improved communication skills to relate and interact with people from differing cultural backgrounds. The academic leaders gained knowledge of the students' intercultural competence by observing student interactions; reviewing their reflective journals and from the results of the post-tour survey.

### ***Improving pedagogy by enhancing the quality of teaching and learning***

The study abroad tour offered the challenge and the opportunity for the academics to explore different ways of teaching and learning. The tour was a different learning situation for the students and the academics. It was an intensive 21 day overseas tour with all assessment to be completed whilst on tour. Effective learning is highly dependent on the relationships between students and academics and among students themselves. The challenge was to move the emphasis away from individualised model of learning towards one which emphasised that a great deal of learning takes place in groups and communities, and this learning becomes part of the process of enculturation or initiation into "communities of practice" (Lave & Wenger 1991). Ninnes and Hellsten (2005, 5) stated that 'internationalisation and globalisation provide opportunities for creating new kinds of teaching and learning in universities.' The academic leaders were cognisant of past criticisms of such tours and were intent on designing a pedagogically rigorous tour. The teaching strategies, as outlined by Harman, in Ninnes & Hellstein (2005, 41), identified six key principles of high quality teaching and learning in higher education and Table 2 shows how the principles related to the study abroad tour.

Table 2: The effective teaching principles and how related to study abroad tour

<b>Principle of teaching and learning</b> (Harman in Ninnes & Hellstein, 2005, 41)	<b>International study tour to Argentina</b>
1. Student motivation	<i>Subject credit, timely assessment, intrinsic and</i>

	<i>extrinsic motivations, Argentina seen as an 'exotic' location</i>
2. Active engagement of the learner	<i>Relevance, interesting, group work, oral presentation, active participation on each visit, asking questions, making presentations to co-operators</i>
3. The modification of students' cognitive maps of subject domains	<i>Most students in 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> year of degree so they had strong knowledge of agribusiness in Australia. Argentina challenged this knowledge with new models and information with the places visited</i>
4. The use of feedback to students	<i>Detailed and timely feedback on group work and oral presentations whilst on tour, presentation on reflective journals. Peer feedback on group participation and oral presentation skills</i>
5. Effective peer support	<i>Group work, task and role maintenance, time to meet and collaborate, peer feedback</i>
6. The use of context variation in developing transferable learning	<i>Students were from various modes of study (on-campus and external) and from various agricultural and business backgrounds to a common study context (the tour)</i>

### ***To achieve the desired competencies***

Actively participating in the study abroad tour to Argentina, satisfactorily completing the assessment items and reflecting deeply on their experiences allowed the students to discover new strengths and abilities, conquer new challenges and solve new problems. In addition, they were enhancing generic communication and problem solving skills and allowing them to develop new ideas and perspectives and a deeper understanding with respect to themselves and their chosen profession. Many of these competencies were mentioned in the subject preamble and further identified as learning outcomes in the *SCI301 International Practical Experience* subject outline. The students received feedback from the academics as well as from peers on their presentation skills and their group participation. The following statements from the students' reflective journals supported these findings:

*The experience has already been used as my agricultural understanding has broadened to another country's processes, ways of life, production and management.*

*In the future if I move into a career in exports, I'll have more of an understanding of Argentina; why and how they get their product to the standards they are at and a few of the politics behind it!*

*I learn best through practical experience, so to go to another country and experience it provided me with a greater understanding!*

*The experiences and information received have helped me gain an understanding of different business and agricultural practices in a different country. These will be beneficial to me when I begin working and if I am posted overseas.*

*Gaining a broader understanding of agricultural systems, productions, economies through practical experience and achieving a cultural understanding of another country.*

*I have spoken about my experiences with my colleagues and family. It has enhanced my learning and professional development.*

## **Conclusion**

Students have not been the only ones to benefit from the study abroad tour. Our research has found that the academic staff, and the institution as a whole, have benefited from the experience. Internationalisation filters down to all levels of the university. Staff have not only become global travellers and thus broadened their field of experience and cultural competence, they have become 'makers of difference' (Ninnes & Hellsten 2005, 1) as they have been instrumental in giving student the opportunities to grow and develop with the international experience.

In particular, the study identified that a study abroad tour, carefully designed, has a legitimate role in the curriculum that aims to internationalise higher education. This has been achieved by having students enrolled in a subject related to the tour; that subject designed with constructive alignment between the learning objectives, teaching methodologies (pre, during and post tour) and the assessment. In addition, the staff adhered to the guidelines for effective teaching.

The study has found that internationalisation provides opportunities for creating new kinds of teaching and learning in higher education. Internationalising the curriculum can be achieved by study within the traditional classroom environment, e.g. by using case studies and international textbooks, or it can move outside of the formal learning environment to involve the international movement of students and staff between countries, e.g. on study abroad tours. Important in this process has been to align the policy developments at the university level with the pedagogy at the course level. The course and associated subjects have been able to achieve varying degrees of internationalisation but our major focus for this report has been the development of a pedagogically sound study abroad tour to achieve internationalisation outcomes.

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