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Media, Tourism, Environment, and Cultural Issues in Australia: A Case Study of a Study Abroad Program

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A multidisciplinary study abroad program developed by a U.S. journalism school and cosponsored by a college of agriculture and natural resources interweaves the themes of mass media, tourism, environment, and cultural issues in Australia. This article traces the development and evolution of the faculty-led program and discusses its curriculum, logistics, and challenges.

INTRODUCTION

In 1999, the Michigan State University School of Journalism launched a multidisciplinary study abroad program that is both academic and experiential. Participants receive an overview of Australia’s media and how it covers public affairs, cultural issues, and the environment; explores Australia’s natural and cultural resources, their management, and their role in eco-tourism and cultural tourism; and assesses modes of interpreting natural resources and communicating those interpretations to the public.

The Australia press has devoted an expanded amount of space and air time to environmental issues. For example, the group manager of three Sydney alternative newspapers explained how coverage of global warming “had been marginalized” as the bailiwick of “lefty rat-bag-type publications,” but “there’s been a turning around of the issue. Now climate change is a mainstream issue” (Peken, 2007). An environmental writer noted, “Environmental journalism has moved as something seen as a backwater (career) route to front and center of the paper” during his fifteen years covering that beat (Woodford, 2007).

The program exposes students to such issues as climate change; impacts of drought, development, and sprawl; hazardous waste; air quality; habitat protection; and public lands policy. It addresses conflicts and relationships between tourism and protection of natural resources—such as the Great Barrier Reef—and between tourism and cultural values—such as access to Uluru (Ayers Rock), sacred to traditional Aboriginal landowners.

The director of MSU’s Knight Center for Environmental Journalism conceived of the Australia program primarily for communications-related and natural resource—and science-related majors. At that time, the school offered two faculty-led programs, reporting in the British Isles and photojournalism in the United Kingdom (later expanded to include the Czech Republic and France). The
College of Communication Arts and Sciences (CAS) also sponsored faculty-led programs in Europe, but the Australia program was to be the college’s first outside Europe.

Although many U.S. universities sponsor programs focused on environmental studies, there has been little scholarly research about them. An exception is a case study about a multidisciplinary “field course” on sustainable development in Costa Rica (Lessor, 1997). Similarly, there has been little scholarly writing about journalism and mass communication programs, with an exception for a program in Ghana that encompasses coursework and an internship; it was the University of Oregon’s first study abroad program developed for journalism students (Steeves, 2006). Thus, this article is intended to help fill those gaps.

This article reviews the history, pedagogical philosophy, and operation of the program. It begins with development of the program and its pedagogical goals, then discusses curriculum, academic content, and logistics. Finally, it suggests better evaluation of how well the program achieves its goals.

ORIGIN, DEVELOPMENT, AND PEDAGOGICAL GOALS

The concept emerged in 1997 through discussions among the director of the Knight Center and MSU administrators and faculty. The director envisioned a multidisciplinary program to explore three themes—media, culture, and environment—in integrated ways:

- We wanted to provide students with background in learning about Australia and the environment. We wanted them to learn about the Australia media system and how it differed from the American media system. We wanted them to learn something about environmental problems in Australia. We wanted part of it to be experiential as well, such as camping in Kakadu National Park.
- An important part … was for students to come away with real skills in designing their own Web site. In 1999, it was pretty early and most people didn’t know how to make a Web site and how to put photos and essays up on a Web site. …
- We also wanted to make it fun and exciting, so we built in some outdoor adventure experiences like rappelling and scuba. I wanted all of us to get those opportunities—for fun, but also to help market the course. (Detjen, 2007)

The director visited several Sydney-area universities and identified the University of New South Wales (UNSW) as the most appropriate host. Although UNSW had no journalism department, its Media and Communications program could accommodate MSU’s need for lecturers and computer facilities and had experience with U.S. study abroad programs.

Originally titled “Australia: Its Media, Environment and Culture,” the program was intended to improve participants’ writing, research, and Web design skills and help them understand public policy, scientific, and economic aspects of another country’s press infrastructure, environment and natural resources and multicultural society. Students would be expected to use analytical skills to compare and contrast Australian and U.S. systems, problems, and approaches while improving communication skills and understanding of ecological and multicultural issues.

The program was designed to meet six institutional goals: facilitate intellectual growth; contribute to professional development; accelerate personal growth; develop skills for relating to cultural differences; enhance self awareness of their own culture; and internationalize students’ home department and colleges (Ingraham & Peterson, 2004, p. 84).

The program, like most sponsored by MSU, is short-term and faculty-led. In 2006–2007, MSU sent 2,975 students abroad (including 174 non-MSU students), primarily in programs of eight weeks or less (Michigan State University Office of Study Abroad, 2009); 62% of participants were in such faculty-led programs. The Institute of International Education ranks it first among U.S. public universities in total participating students and first among U.S. public and private universities in
undergraduate participation (Institute of International Education, 2009).

There is a growing body of research into the actual and perceived benefits of study abroad. In the first large-scale national study of the long-term impact on participants (Dwyer & Peters, 2004), the Institute for the International Education of Students (IES) surveyed alumni of its programs from 1950 to 1999. The vast majority identified the experience as a defining moment in their lives that continued to affect personal development, academic commitment, intercultural development, and career development. There is extensive debate about the relative value of short-term faculty-led programs versus semester-long or year-long exchanges. According to what Dwyer calls the “conventional wisdom” (Dwyer, 2004, p. 151), many study abroad proponents assert that programs where students enroll in foreign universities for at least a semester are more effective in providing in-depth exposure to other cultures and teaching methods, promoting personal growth, and improving foreign language skills. However, the IES study found statistically little difference in the responses (Dwyer, 2004, p. 151). In another study, Chieffo and Griffiths concluded that short-term programs “are worthwhile educational endeavors that have significant self-perceived impacts on students’ intellectual and personal lives” (Chieffo & Griffiths, 2004, p. 174).

The Australia program also addressed a major practical problem for journalism majors. National accreditation standards cap the credits their majors can earn within the Journalism School and other College of Communication Arts and Sciences (CAS) departments. Because the Australia program offers eight credits, it was necessary to find a partner in another college to supply half those credits; thus Journalism partnered with the College of Natural Science.

That co-sponsorship solved the credit ceiling dilemma but created a financial quandary. Under MSU’s funding formula, sponsoring colleges share tuition surplus based on the total credits each awards. That made a one-sided marriage of convenience because Natural Science received half the surplus although its faculty were uninvolved in curriculum, instruction, and recruitment. Only a scattering of Natural Science majors enrolled, so that college provided only a shallow recruiting pool.

In 2006, the Department of Community, Agriculture, Recreation, and Resource Studies (CARRS) in the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources (ANR), replaced Natural Science as Journalism’s partner. It was a logical collaboration because CARRS includes parks, recreation, and tourism resources; agriculture and natural resources communication; and resource development. The CARRS co-instructor is an expert in eco-tourism, cultural tourism, and how environmental agencies and cultural institutions interpret natural resources. Although the program had included eco-tourism and cultural tourism from the beginning, it was renamed “Australia Media, Tourism, Environment, and Cultural Issues” to emphasize that thread.

One hoped-for result of the new partnership was a deeper recruitment pool with high interest from CARRS majors. That hope did not reach fruition because no CARRS students enrolled. Several factors account for that unexpected result: In the first partnership year, negotiations with new Australian host Macquarie University delayed recruitment for two months. ANR already offered an Australia program about food, environment and social systems scheduled for about the same time, so some majors were previously committed. CARRS also co-sponsored a winter-break “Environmental Science and Policy in New Zealand” program that appealed to some of the same prospective participants.

ACADEMIC CONTENT

The program does not primarily target journalism majors, and some years students in journalism and other CAS majors constituted a minority. In 2007, there were ten
undergraduates from journalism, communication, English, psychology, hospitality business, political science, electrical engineering, and marketing, plus three environmental journalism master’s students.

Students are instructed to tie the readings into their writing assignments, journals, field visits, and questions to guest lecturers. There is a heavy emphasis on writing for content and improved writing skills. Most assignments must be rewritten based on leaders’ comments. Leaders suggest thematic questions and issues to guide students into thinking analytically. They include:

- How are environmental, natural resource, and cultural decisions made?
- How do the media depict environmental and cultural conflicts and interpret environmental and cultural resources for the public?
- How does the media—press, film, television, advertising—shape stereotypes, cultural self-esteem, environmental awareness, and other behaviors?
- How do individuals, government agencies, and institutions balance competing values, such as technology against tradition; economics against aesthetics or environmental protection; and indigenous against imported cultures?

The curriculum has evolved, in part reflecting the leaders’ diverse interests, skills, and pedagogical goals, as well as the varying mix of majors and career aspirations. It also reflects the cumulative experiences and assessments of previous years. The original program included instruction in Web design, something that most participants now know already. Early students did small-group Web projects; now they do individual projects tailored to their major. For example, an environmental journalism student wrote a series of articles about global warming, while a hospitality business major did a project about wine industry–related tourism and a political science major researched abortion as a political issue. Other topics included Cape York as a potential UNESCO World Heritage Area, tourism’s impact on Aboriginal peoples, Australian film history, and fountains as public art. The most creative project so far came from a studio art major who displayed watercolors of Australian landscapes, wildlife, and people, with gallery-style exhibition labels.

Another major curriculum change occurred in 2006 with individualized two-day professional placements related to majors. In 2007, placements were extended to three days, with students assigned to environmental organizations, media companies, an antiterrorism research institute, a sports organization, and an events center.

Assignments

Leaders hold an introductory lecture and assign preliminary readings in late spring to build the foundation for content. There is a coursepack of briefing materials, journal articles, and magazine and newspaper articles. Students also selected one book from a reading list before departure and submitted an essay about it when they arrived in Australia.

Principal assignments have been:

- Academic journals integrating key points from lectures, field visits, and other group activities.
- Descriptive writing exercise: During the first week in Sydney, each student selected a place that reflects a distinctive aspect of Australian culture, history, architecture, lifestyle, or habitat. They observe, take notes, and write an essay.
- Solo experience: In Canberra, each student chose a place to visit and interview at least one non-American. They had three writing options: newspaper-style feature article; reflective essay; or opinion column.
- Professional shadowing: Before the placements, students are briefed on Australia business culture. At the end of the placement, they wrote a report describing the experience and comparing their expectations with the reality.
• Individual project: Students developed projects aligned with their academic and vocational interests, and intended to demonstrate analytical thinking. Before departure, they submitted a proposal and received feedback from the instructors. Working on a project throughout the six weeks helped students structure how they experienced all elements of the program, including the kinds of questions asked on field visits, during lectures, and while interacting with professionals and local residents. They conducted interviews, collected information and research material, questioned lecturers, and took photos. They met one-on-one each week with an instructor to review outlines and drafts.

Grading

The syllabus states: “All assignments should be treated seriously and done conscientiously. They are not busy work but are intended to help you better understand and assimilate the issues, experiences, and places we encounter. In other words, they should enrich what you get out of the program.” Evaluation is based on how well students complete assignments—quality of academic work—and meet deadlines (75%), as well as active participation (25%). There are no quizzes or exams. All university academic integrity rules and policies apply to study abroad programs.

PROGRAM ASSESSMENT

MSU’s study abroad operates as a matrix system in which academic departments and colleges design and control curricular components of their programs and are responsible for academic quality and faculty staffing. The Office of Study Abroad (OSA) provides centralized administrative, fiscal, recruitment, safety and health, and logistical support. Proposals for new programs undergo peer review within the university. There is no compulsory periodic review of academic quality and intellectual rigor, but colleges have the discretion to do so, and a 2008 university-wide task force recommended that all colleges do so every three to five years. Its report also advocated development of a statement of intended learning outcomes and longitudinal program assessment of participant learning and study abroad outcomes (Michigan State University Study Abroad Task Force, 2008). One area for future research is how well this program achieves relevant goals for environmental communication, multicultural understanding in foreign settings, and communication skills. Similarly, targeted assessment metrics would provide a basis for comparison of this program with similar multidisciplinary mass media-environment study abroad offerings from other universities and nonprofit institutions.

MSU’s assessment program is intended to measure the impact of study abroad on student learning (Ingraham & Peterson, 2004). OSA distributes student evaluation forms to be completed at the end of each program, before grades are submitted. However, it does not compare responses among programs or track individual program evaluations longitudinally. When participants in the Australia program were asked whether they were satisfied overall with the program, 94% (n = 16) answered yes in 2004; 100% (n = 10) answered yes in 2006; and 100% (n = 13) answered yes in 2007. (It did not run in 2005 for reasons discussed in the next section of this article.) Table 1 shows responses for selected academics-focused questions from those three years.

LOGISTICS

Faculty Leadership

The Journalism School’s practice is to rotate or share study abroad leadership opportunities
Table 1
Participant evaluations: Australia media, tourism, environment, and cultural issues 2004, 2006, and 2007*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Workload reasonable</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructor(s) effective</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>1.21</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2.33</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructor(s) available outside class</td>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2.91</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Well organized academically</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well organized logistically</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2.31</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfied with Academic Activities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lectures</td>
<td>2.76</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class discussion</td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutorials</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field trips</td>
<td>3.65</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sufficient Evaluation of Performance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Papers</td>
<td>3.53</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Projects</td>
<td>3.65</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journals</td>
<td>3.41</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentations</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prerequisites clearly stated</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2.58</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment criteria clearly explained</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment criteria fair</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2.82</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellectually challenging</td>
<td>3.24</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good use of host country resources</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3.08</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value of guest lecturers</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3.09</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic content more interesting than on-campus classes</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic content more challenging than on-campus courses</td>
<td>2.44</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1.92</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Worth time invested</td>
<td>3.94</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3.55</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worth money invested</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Evaluations use a four-point Likert scale: Strongly disagree; Disagree; Agree; Strongly agree. Respondents also could mark “not applicable” or “can’t answer at this time.”

Source: Michigan State University Office of Study Abroad.

Program not offered in 2005.

among willing faculty. Although that may make continuity and consistency more difficult on a practical level, such a policy bolsters institutional goals of internationalizing MSU and helping faculty to better prepare all students—not only those studying abroad—to succeed in an increasingly globalized media arenas (e.g., Holm, 2002). To smooth transitions, past instructors have worked closely with their successors on planning, curriculum, budget development, recruitment, identification of guest speakers, and other academic and logistical matters.

The Knight Center director led it the first year. The author led the program in 2000 and 2001 and co-led it in 2006 and 2007; three colleagues led the program for one year each. In the first two years of the CARRS partnership, a professor from that department co-led the program with the author. The program did not run in 2005 because of logistical problems and budgetary disagreements with UNSW that led to a new collaboration with Macquarie in 2006.

Study abroad advocates assert that there are potential career benefits for faculty leaders (e.g., Hornig, 1995; Hall, 2007). However, MSU’s experience is that some faculty are uninterested in leading or unable to lead programs. Family obligations or physical limitations may preclude participation. Financial considerations and career advancement pose more serious obstacles. Although leaders are paid a salary, expenses, and per diem, it is more remunerative
to teach an on-campus summer course. Planning, recruitment, review of applications, budgeting, syllabus development, scheduling, and arranging speakers and field activities are time-consuming before departure. While abroad, leaders handle not only academic duties but also students’ personal, behavioral, health, family, and relationship problems. Afterward, there are accounting and reporting obligations. Untenured faculty in research-oriented departments face another significant challenge: Promotion and tenure criteria often bestow little or no reward for leading study abroad, and some deans and chairs actively discourage such involvement, preferring junior faculty to seek grants and publish. The university-wide task force recommended: more effective incentives; compensation comparable to teaching on campus; more recognition in promotion, tenure, and merit raise criteria; and strategies to leverage study abroad leadership to support instructors’ research agendas (Michigan State University Study Abroad Task Force, 2008).

There are non-economic and creative benefits to leadership, however. For example, based on his research and field activities in Australia, the author wrote essays for an environmental journalism magazine about the extinction of the thylacine (Tasmanian tiger) and the role of fire and controlled burning. He incorporated a lecture about the Australian media into an on-campus course on comparative international press systems and made fruitful contacts with Australian professionals and academics.

After the 2007 experience and due to logistical complications, MSU decided against offering the program in 2008 and 2009 for three principal reasons: major changes in Macquarie’s International Office personnel and study abroad philosophy; past leaders’ other research and project commitments; and a desire to rethink program length, destinations, and strategies to control costs without jeopardizing academic integrity. Efforts are underway to resume the program in 2010 in collaboration with a different Australia host.

Itineraries

In its inaugural year, the program began in Darwin and Kakadu National Park, then traveled to Alice Springs and Uluru (Ayers Rock) in the continent’s Red Centre, Sydney, and finally to Cairns, near the Great Barrier Reef and Queensland’s rainforest. The next year it added several days in the national capital, Canberra.

The itinerary changed under the affiliation with Macquarie. Darwin was eliminated, while the time and number of destinations in Queensland increased. The 2007 itinerary used Sydney as the base for the first three and a half weeks, including three days in Canberra and two days in the Blue Mountains, a UNESCO World Heritage site. It then traveled to Uluru, Alice Springs, Cairns, Daintree Rainforest, and Townsville.

Planning

Traveling programs are more costly and difficult to plan than ones that remain in one location. Airfare is more expensive because of internal flights, and some destinations are served by few daily flights or competitive carriers. The original itinerary required three internal flights; dropping Darwin reduced internal flights to two. Traveling adds ground transportation costs: airport pick-ups and drop-offs, a train between Sydney and the Blue Mountains; and chartered buses in Canberra; Alice Springs and Uluru; and the Queensland coast.

Accommodations vary. Students stayed in downtown Sydney apartments in 2007 rather than the 2006 site on the Macquarie campus, a 45-minute bus ride from downtown. Elsewhere, the program uses university dorms, apartments, backpacker hotels, and an eco-lodge.

Cost

Cost is a major deterrent to participation. In addition to tuition and matriculation fees, the program fee for 2007 was about $3,300.
for housing, some meals, all ground trans-
portation, course materials, insurance, some
computer access, and public transportation
passes in Sydney. Roundtrip airfare between
Los Angeles and Australia, plus two internal
flights, cost about $2,000; students also paid to
get to and from Los Angeles. Other expenses
are the students’ responsibility, including en-
tertainment, most meals, and personal travel.
Many students use financial aid. OSA also
offers competitive essay-based scholarships, as
do the two sponsoring colleges.

The other critical financial aspect is that
participation costs students at least six weeks’
income from summer employment. They also
may be passed over for internships because they
are unavailable for the full summer.

Recruitment

Australia remains a popular destination for
U.S. study abroad students. In 2006–2007, it
ranked sixth among destinations for U.S. stu-
dents, drawing 4.8% of those studying abroad
(Institute of International Education, 2008).
Many Australian universities, including UNSW
and Macquarie, aggressively market themselves
and their country as potential partners and
hosts for U.S. and other international students.

Despite Australia’s appeal and the rele-
vance of the curricular offerings to a variety of
majors, several factors have made recruitment
difficult. Beyond cost, the six-week duration
is an obstacle for students who want to devote
most of the summer to jobs and internships.
While leaders regard its multidisciplinary
approach as a positive selling point that widens
the recruitment net, some students feel it is not
focused enough on their own disciplines. Al-
though the credits count toward the Journalism
School’s environmental journalism specializa-
tion, MSU lacks an Australian or Oceania stud-
ies program, and Australia falls outside other
area studies undergraduate specializations—
Asia, Africa, Caribbean and Latin America,
Europe, Canada, and Russia-Eurasia—that
earn an additional credential on transcripts.

There is competition with other MSU pro-
grams with environmental studies components.
Among them: “Environment and Development
in the Brazilian Amazon”; “Natural Resources
and Tourism Management in the Yukon and
Alaska”; “Environmental Studies in Costa Rica”;
“Ecology of the Mountains” (India); “An Island
Apart: Culture and Natural Resources of Mad-
gascar”: “Tropical Biodiversity and Conserva-
tion” (Panama); “Fish, Wildlife and Environ-
mental Issues” (Russia); and “Food, Agriculture
and Environmental Systems” (UK and Ireland).

The leaders use multiple recruitment av-
enues: twice-a-year study abroad fairs; informa-
tional meetings publicized by the leaders, the
environmental journalism listserve, and aca-
demic advisors from both sponsoring colleges;
presentations in relevant classes; mailings to
other universities; and word of mouth. Appli-
cants must write an essay and have a clean aca-
demic judicial record. Leaders review applica-
tions on a rolling basis rather than wait for the
end of the application period; if spaces remain
available, they solicit students on the waiting
lists of other programs.

CONCLUSION

“Australia Media, Tourism, Environment, and
Cultural Issues” provides one model for a
faculty-led interdisciplinary program. Its con-
tent does not replicate any on-campus courses,
and it relies much more heavily on field visits,
 experiential learning, and guest experts than
on traditional lectures and seminars. It strives
to improve writing and analytical thinking in
a foreign setting. Leaders are challenged to
keep students’ attention on the “study” com-
ponent of study abroad so it will be a valu-
able intellectual and academic experience, not
merely an expensive vacation that carries cred-
its toward a degree and a suitcase stuffed with
souvenirs. One area that leaders should purs-
ue is using more explicit program-related met-
rics and assessment tools to measure student
accomplishments and benefits, including surveys of the growing pool of program alumni.

For faculty leaders, organizing and heading this type of program requires a significant commitment of time, creativity, and energy, but such endeavors can provide opportunities for professional development, research, and curriculum enrichment.

REFERENCES


