

**Culture on Campus: Intercultural Competency as a Motivation to
Study in Australia.**

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1. Executive Summary:

As part of the project *Intercultural learning at home: Promoting Internationalisation on Campus*, a qualitative interview was conducted on the 1st of April, 2015 with an international student at UWA. The research was intended to determine the extent to which cultural experience was a motivation for international student's decision to study at UWA. I found that although cultural motivations are not the primary motivation for study, they are inextricably linked to the desired outcomes of study abroad and the experiences of international students.

2. Introduction:

As a result of globalisation interconnectedness between countries has increased dramatically, permeating into every aspect of people's lives. In addition to countless other areas of living, the way we are educated in an international world has also changed. Increasingly, students are opting to pursue education overseas, either on institutionally sponsored student exchange or on study abroad. These activities, along with other international practices of tertiary education institutions have been placed under the umbrella term of 'Internationalisation'(Amit, 2010 p8). While many university activities have international dimensions, most notably with respect to research, other dimensions are more likely to be gathered under this grouping, notably the recruitment of international students (Amit, 2010).

There are countless motivations for students choosing to get an international education. Barnick (Barnick, 2010 p21) argues that study abroad was a way of merging the domains of

tourism, work, leisure and education into a single travel experience for Canadian students. Studying abroad allows students to gain international experience and skills, and arguably new approaches to the disciplines they've been studying (Amit, 2010 p10). Greater employability as a result of a foreign education is also presented as one of the key motivations for student exchange, although claims that international students gain employability are largely unsubstantiated (Amit, 2010 p11).

i) *The Cultural Motivations of International Students:*

Within the project of *Intercultural learning at home: Promoting Internationalisation on Campus*, this report seeks to understand the extent to which cultural knowledge and experience is a motivating factor in international students decisions to study in Australia. Undertaken at the University of Western Australia in Perth, I interviewed "Deepthroat", a 24 year old student currently completing postgraduate education on campus. At the time of the interview, he had been in Perth for two months, studying and living in a nearby apartment. Previously he lived in small town America, completing his Bachelors degree then deciding he wanted to go on exchange to UWA.

Because of his American citizenship and his decision to study in Australia, Deepthroat represents the majority of students who go on exchange where they can speak their mother tongue, such as North American students studying in Australia and the United Kingdom (Amit, 2010 p11). I chose Deepthroat to explore his motivations, why students from North America come to Australia, and if cultural experience has anything to do with it.

ii) *Background Literature:*

One of the biggest stated outcomes of international exchange is 'Intercultural Competency' which for the purposes of this report is understood to have five components: world knowledge, foreign language proficiency, cultural empathy, approval of foreign people

and cultures and the ability to practice ones profession in an international setting (Deardorff, 2006 p247). In a global world, with global connectedness in almost all aspects, it is desirable and necessary for people to be aware, tolerant and sensitive of other cultures. Minimising a person's ethnocentrism and trying to understand another culture is a skill that being immersed in a foreign country may encourage. This is one of the reasons why employability is said to benefit from international education.

There are three types of intercultural competency according to Gertsen (Gertsen, 1990) The first is the cognitive aspects, which include general knowledge and consciousness of cultural differences, knowledge of a region and its social organisation, knowledge of characteristics of the foreign culture, knowledge of communication and knowledge of interaction patterns in a culture (Behrnd and Porzelt, 2012 p215)The second is the Affective aspect which encompasses a positive attitude towards the foreign culture, respecting the customs of other cultures and accepting cultural differences. And finally, the "conative" aspects reflect consciousness and knowledge of different communication styles and non verbal communication.

Cultural competency can be measured, and although it is best done with mostly qualitative techniques such as interviews and case studies, a variety of methods should be used to determine it (Deardorff, 2006 p258). According to Behrnd (Behrnd and Porzelt, 2012 p220) their exploration of the correlation of intercultural competency and study abroad programs in three studies showed it to only be slight. However a possible explanation for this could be that some student's stays were only short.

Dwyer (Dwyer, 2004 p155) found that the benefits of study abroad on intercultural competency required a full year. Firstly, students studying for a full year were found to be much more likely to live with host country nationals. Secondly, Full-year students represent a

self-selected group that has more interest in studying abroad to begin with, and the experience then serves to reinforce this commitment. And finally full year students were also more likely to use the criterion of studying abroad to select their undergraduate college. Also, Students with ten months experience abroad showed higher affective intercultural competence (Behrnd and Porzelt, 2012 p221) and furthermore, students that went on study abroad benefited more from subsequent intercultural training. Students, however, need to be encouraged to explore the host culture in a broader sense, if they are to assure optimal learning and cultural exchange (Stier, 2003 p79).

3. Methodology

Besides the previously mentioned reasons for interviewing Deepthroat regarding his demographic situation he was chosen mainly because of convenience. I met Deepthroat previously through mutual friends at a bar we both frequent near UWA. We had already been introduced, drunk together and had conversations several times. As he is one of the few international students I know, we had previously established a rapport, and because he is part of the group of students I wished to concentrate on he was the perfect interviewee. I asked him one afternoon if he would like to help me with my research, to which he replied that he would. I then sent him an email with a participation information sheet and my contact details.

The interview was set to take place on the 1st of April, 2015. I had a number of timeslots and rooms to do the interview in, and Deepthroat had previously mentioned to me that he was free all day. I chose the biggest timeslot available to me, between 1pm and 3pm in the Anthropology Conference room at UWA. We met up on Campus, smoked cigarettes and had small talk before finding the room.

When we arrived we sat down at a table in the corner of the room. I sat adjacent to Deepthroat, and gave him the participation information sheet to read over as I set up my

laptop. I assured him that his identity would be made anonymous, that I would use a pseudonym when referring to him, that if he wanted to he could close the interview at any time and that he wasn't obliged to answer questions if he did not want to. I asked him if he wanted use any particular pseudonym and he chose Deepthroat. I then tested my laptop sound recording program, asking Deepthroat where he was from, his age and other demographic questions, which I played back to ensure it worked, which it did.

I then began the interview which was qualitative and semi-structured. I prepared questions beforehand relating to cultural experience, finding friends, and living in Australia and kept them brief, intending to use follow up questions to foster a discussion about the themes of culture in Australia. As it turned out, Deepthroat provided me with sufficient answers and I reached saturation at 48 minutes and 43 seconds.

After the interview I stopped the recording device and thanked Deepthroat for his participation. I told him that I intended to transcribe the interview and write a research report, and that he could contact me anytime if he decided he didn't want me to use the information he provided. We then went to the bar where I bought him a couple of beers. The next day, I transcribed the interview, took notes and categorised the transcript into its themes. When transcribing, I decided against including filler words as much as possible, because they were not particularly relevant to my analysis.

4. Results

i) Finding 1: Language Competency was Integral for a Good Education

Deepthroat first and foremost wanted a good Education from going on exchange, in the hopes of securing a good job. He was sure that he would not get a place at "Columbia school

of journalism”, but that he could still get his masters at a “top 100 universities in the world”. In addition to going to a well ranked university, it also had to be English speaking. Deepthroat did not want learning a new language to get in the way of his studies. I= Interviewer, P= Participant.

I: You said English speaking. Why was that a factor?

P: I didn't really want to go someplace where language was going to be a hindrance to my education. My mum studied in Finland and she said that was the worst grade she ever got.

Language competency is a big factor in intercultural competency. Deepthroat decided against the possibility of learning a new language for ease of communication with the people in his host nation, to increase his cultural competency. Deepthroat wanted something “that was different from what I'd grown up in” but not too different. He prioritised his ability to communicate over a more rich cultural experience. He does believe that it would be useful to know another language, stating that “they say the more languages you know the more parts of the brain you use”. He is not against being competent in other languages, but that it doesn't pertain to his future job expectations as he believes “I don't plan on working for a newspaper or newsagency that's not English speaking”, and increasing his employability his his most desired outcome of studying abroad.

Deepthroat's English language competency may have also impacted his ability to make domestic friends at university. Deepthroat has many domestic friends, a few international friends and no American student friends. In this respect he is quite unique. Some international students have issues adapting to life in a new country. Deepthroat has had no trouble finding friends, no confrontations and tries “to be friendly and polite” saying that “that gets you a long way in terms of meeting new people.” Again, language competency and thus intercultural competency may have facilitated his ability to gain friends, possibly limiting his

isolation, loneliness, anxiety and therefore making his study abroad experience more pleasurable and comfortable.

ii) *Finding 2: Intercultural Competency Fostering Employability.*

In addition to the desire to study where he can speak his mother tongue, Deepthroat also mentions the effect that his international study will have on his employability. Here Deepthroat mentions why he believes going to UWA would help his job prospects besides it being a prestigious university, suggesting that his experience as an international student will make him more employable in the global workplace.

P: Yeah I mean they could very well send me right back and say like “you’re our new Australian correspondent” or “you’re going to London because they’ve kind got that influence in Australia” or “you’re gonna go over there” or something like that. I don’t really know what to expect.

This quote clearly highlights how Deepthroat’s perception of the intercultural competency of studying abroad would lead him to become more employable. Because of his full year of study in Australia, he is now more capable of being a professional working in an international capacity. His desire to study overseas was influenced by its ability to give him experience working in an international setting as a professional. Being an aspiring travel reporter, Deepthroat states that it is necessary to have these intercultural skills:

... Most of the time you’re going to have to be travelling... And uh I found that staying there would have been a hindrance to that because I mean who’s going to look at a resume and be like “yeah you want to be a travel reporter but you stayed exactly where you were” that doesn’t make any sense to me.

In this respect, learning intercultural competence, or understanding culture was a motivation for Deepthroat insofar as he could secure a job because of his competence.

iii) Finding 3: Australia represented a Unique Cultural Experience.

As mentioned previously, Deepthroat wanted something different, but not too different. This was not hard for him, as he grew up in small town America. Although he could speak English in Australia, it was a world apart from what he experienced back home. This was certainly a motivation for coming to Australia, the fact that the culture and environment would be different to his experience back home. He could achieve that unique experience back home as “city living versus country living”, but in Australia he could do the same with the cultural aspect. Originally, Deepthroat planned to go to the United Kingdom or Ireland. He suggests that these destinations are popular with American students wishing to study abroad. Australia, he believed, was a “unique factor” for American students. Once more, the unique Australian experience, he hoped, would put him ahead of other students who predictably study in Europe and the UK, making him “stand out a little bit” compared to other students resumes.

iv) Utility of results:

My interview with Deepthroat provided a wealth of information. He answered questions openly, honestly and with a desire to help me with my research. He provided long answers, and with only a few exceptions he mostly stayed on topic and answered my questions. He also had no problem understanding my questions and had no issue with answering them.

5. Further Directions

Interviewing international students from culturally diverse backgrounds may provide different results. Although Deepthroat’s experience is relevant to intercultural learning, it seems likely that student’s from ethnically diverse backgrounds may have different

motivations for studying abroad, notably to achieve English language competency. Further research on intercultural competency might like to explore the experiences of ESL students with Australian culture, relationship with domestic students and the English language.

My own research may have been enhanced in a couple of ways. During the interview, I felt that my list of questions was inadequate, and I found myself repeating questions, only slightly changed. My follow up questions were ill prepared also, and I was relying quite heavily on Deepthroat's ability to be a good conversationalist. His talkative nature also meant that in some parts he went off track. I tried to redirect the conversation as best as possible and I believe this wasn't a massive issue for my interview.

Deepthroat's desire to help his friend in his research report may have also affected the results. The wealth of information he provided may indicate his desire to help me as much as possible, to avoid possible disappointment. However, I believe I avoided suggesting answers as much as possible with the way my questions were framed, and my follow up questions sometimes sought to challenge his answers or ask for clarification.

6. Conclusion

The effect of Australian culture is obviously present in the case of Deepthroat, but whether it was an intentional motivation before arriving in Australia is a different situation. Primarily his decision to study in Australia was motivated by benefits of postgraduate education at a prestigious world renowned institution, and the possibly benefits of study abroad on his future job prospects in international journalism. Being in an English speaking country was also a motivation, as was the perceived uniqueness of exchange to Australia. Whether he was aware of it or not, Deepthroat's intercultural competency was imperative to his future job prospects. His desire to be an international journalist would be hindered if he were not studying abroad. This was therefore a cultural motivation for coming to Australia.

Although he could have achieved this cultural learning elsewhere, it was still a necessary condition of his education that he had intercultural competency experience overseas.

Depthroat's desire to study somewhere unique was also symptomatic of his cultural motivations. He could easily gain experience of an urban setting as opposed to the rural setting he was used to, but he also thought it would be better overseas. Australia's uniqueness was also contrasted with the popularity of study abroad in Europe. His English language competency and desire to avoid new language experiences may seem like he is also avoiding intercultural competency, but his ability to communicate has aided his associations with domestic students, and therefore his ability to empathise, explore and understand the values, attitudes and behaviour of Australians.

Appendix A:

Interview Schedule

INTERVIEW PREPARATION:

- Find interview participant, male or female but either of English speaking heritage and European or non-English speaking and non-European.
- Email them interview information sheet, ask them if they have any questions and answer them accordingly.
- Arrange date, place and time for interview during the 1-4th of April.
- Prepare page of questions, propose possible follow up questions and leave space for note taking.
- On day of interview, run through the interview sheet with the participant present, clarify any questions. Ensure they are comfortably seated and as relaxed as is possible.
- Give them the consent form, explain that they will be anonymous and state your desire to use, with their permission, a recording device and take notes during and after the interview.

THE INTERVIEW:

- Begin interview with broad personal questions regarding interviewee's age, place of birth, nationality, heritage etc.
- Bring that into a discussion of their home university, what they studied.
- Ask them of their travel elsewhere in the world. Is this their first time in Australia? Is this their first time in an English speaking nation?
- Discuss their main motivating decision to come to Western Australia. Follow up on these questions depending on their answer, E.G. I came here because X, did you get what you hoped for, did you get other benefits.
- Was learning about a new culture a factor. If yes, what specifically did they want to discover/learn, if not, was the lack of want of cultural learning a deciding factor in coming to Western Australia.
- If they are non English speaking, how has adapting to speaking English been? Has time in Western Australia facilitated English speaking? Did they come to Australia to enhance their English?
- If they are English speaking, was the fact that Western Australians speak the same language a motivating factor in choosing UWA.
- Why did the student choose to come to Australia, as an English speaking country?
- Begin a discussion of Australian culture; perhaps get the interviewee to describe what they found most striking about their arrival in Australia.
- Discuss any culture shock that may have occurred on arrival.
- Ask them about the standout features of life in Australia, what strikes them as most distinct from their country of origin.

- Regardless of motivations, has their time in Australia been a cultural experience. Would they recommend study abroad on the basis of the cultural aspect of it?

QUESTIONS:

1. How long have you been in Australia for?

Are you enjoying your stay?

2. Where is home?

Have you lived there for most of your life or have you lived elsewhere?

3. What made you decide to come to Australia?

What made you decide to come to UWA?

4. Have you ever been on exchange before?

If so, where?

5. Can you speak any other languages besides English?

Are you interested in learning another language?

6. Do you think Australia has a particular culture?

Would you say Australia has a particularly strong sense of culture?

7. Has your stay in Australia been comfortable?

Has your stay been difficult at all?

8. Has it been easy to adjust to life in Australia?

Have you experienced any issues with adjusting?

9. Do you have any international student friends?

Would you say they are similar to you? If so, is that part of the reason you are friends?

10. Do you have many English speaking friends at university?

Do you have many friends that speak English as a second language?

11. If you had to answer one way or the other, is student exchange for you a holiday, or education?

Why did this influence your decision to come to Australia as opposed to other countries?

12. Do you think Australia is similar to your home country?

Is this part of the reason you decided to come to Australia?

13. Do you believe cultural experience is an important part of travelling overseas ?

Was cultural experience not a factor in coming to study in Australia?

14. Have you had a unique cultural experience in Australia?

What kind of cultural experience have you discovered since coming to Australia?

15. Has studying in Australia in English made adjusting easier?

Is this part of the reason why you chose to come here?

16. Do you ever feel that being in Australia as opposed to other countries in the world has meant that you miss out on cultural experience?

If so, what parts of your experience do you think you have missed out on?

POST INTERVIEW:

- Close interview with a debrief, explain that you will now transcribe interview; take notes immediately after and remind them that you will use a synonym for them.
- Thank them for their time and remind them they can contact you with any questions, offer them a copy of the transcript of interview.

Appendix B:

Qualitative Interview Transcription:

I: How old are you?

P: 24

I: And where are you from?

P: I'm from [...], in the United States.

I: Okay, um, how long have you been in Australia for?

P: Ahh just a little under two months.

I: Two months, and how long is your stay here?

P: For one full year.

I: Okay, do you reckon that's long enough or?

P: I'd say so, it gets my masters degree done.

I: Yeah, and have you spent most of your life in America?

P: All of it.

I: And in Pennsylvania as well or?

P: Pretty much always in Pennsylvania minus two months in Maryland.

I: Right.

P: Though I have travelled abroad before but not for very extended periods of time, a month or less.

I: Oh where to?

P: Uh France, Italy, Malta, Taiwan, uh Beirut Lebanon.

I: Oh and you went to Lebanon?

P: Yeah, it was right at the start of the Syrian Civil War.

I: Oh, right was that 2005?

P: Uh, let's see, it was two years ago, I was 22, or 23, so 2013.

I: ah okay, why'd you go there?

P: To visit my buddy actually, he goes to the American University of Beirut. We grew up together.

I: Cool, and um, ever been on exchange before?

P: Nope, first time.

I: And your first time in Australia?

P: Yep.

I: Right, can you speak any other languages?

P: I can speak a little bit of Spanish.

I: Okay, what sort of influenced your decision to come to Australia?

P: I was searching for journalism schools, and I was looking for English speaking countries. And then one day Australia popped up and I realised, nice weather, pretty girls, girls

outnumber guys, and uhh yeah I just, one of the top 100 universities in the world. So I figured if I was going to do international journalism I might as well do it internationally.

I: Well yeah, that's right. You said English speaking. Why was that a factor?

P: I didn't really want to go someplace where language was going to be a hindrance to my education. My mum studied in Finland and she said that was the worst grade she ever got.

I: Yeah true, I guess that's quite popular with people doing exchange. And that was part of the reason you came to Australia?

P: Yeah I was looking at primarily Ireland and England, but as soon as I saw Australia it kinda just popped in my head as a unique place to go.

I: Is it comfortable in Australia? Do you think it's easy to stay here?

P: Yeah so far I mean I've had no excuse to pay my rent this time, had no problem communicating with people, besides like you guys kinda use the UK version of uh, grammar and stuff like that. So you know, I spell colour C-O-L-O-R, where you guys use the O-U at the end.

I: Yeah adding the U and other small things I guess. But um, Has it been difficult here at all?

P: Minus getting to know people and stuff like that, obviously I showed up here and didn't know a soul. So uh, just living by myself I suppose is the only difficult part. But I'm an only child so I'm kinda used to that.

I: What about meeting people, have you met a few people now that you've been living here a couple of months?

P: Oh yeah, I've met a few people down at [...], and through Timmy especially, and then I met you and Jim and Harry, and all them, it's been pretty nice I've met other people within my work pretty close within my international journalism courses. Everybody seems to have the same classes together so we tend to get a little friendly. And you go to the [...] on campus here on Fridays or "Friyay".

I: The what?

P: "Friyay"

I: What's that?

P: I guess it's just a term for getting a drink after class on Friday.

I: Oh yeah right haha. What about other international students met a lot of them?

P: I met a girl from Hong Kong, she's also in my course. I've met a couple of Chinese, who are my neighbours.

I: Okay, and they're studying here as well?

P: One goes to Curtin, and the other girl she studies here.

I: A lot of the time international students might find it difficult to make friends with local people or they might stick to being friends with international students or people that are culturally similar to them. Do you have many American friends?

P: I haven't met a single other American minus one guy that ironically was from Pittsburgh Pennsylvania, who asked me if he could roll a cigarette.

I: And that's it?

P: That's pretty much it. That's the only other American I've met.

I: But you would say that you've got quite a few Australian friends that you're not having much trouble fitting in with the Aussies here?

P: No not really I haven't had any confrontations or anything like that, I try to be friendly and polite, feel like that gets you a long way in terms of meeting new people.

I: And you'd say most of your friends here are English speaking as well?

P: Some of them English wouldn't be their first language.

I: What do you think about Australian culture? Do you think Australia has a particular culture?

P: From what I've found, certain things are rather unique, I almost correlate it to ahh, I did a study on ancient history back home, we studied the Vietnam war conflict, and I almost correlate it to the Vietnamese culture, not that they're similar in any aspects but I found that Australians tend to, they pride themselves on being particularly Australian. Even though they have that British heritage. But they try to separate themselves from Britain in saying like "We're Australian, we're not necessarily British, I mean we have that heritage" like the Vietnamese also have a lot of influence coming from China but they're very distinct in saying "we're not Chinese, we're Vietnamese". So I find it a lot like that.

I: Do you think Australia is, I mean obviously you said Australia being English speaking was a factor for you coming here, did you come to Australia because, I mean a lot of people would say its Western and its culturally quite similar to the US?

P: I'd say there are a lot of similar aspects yeah but some different ones as well. Nothing's really coming off the top of my head as to very distinct besides maybe phrases, slang stuff like that. You can get that anywhere you go in the states, in the North we have a very different slang, vocabulary than if you were to go out west or down south or something like that so. I find it's just something you need to, figure out anywhere you go.

I: That's true, have you had trouble picking up the slang or understanding the Slang?

P: The first couple of days yeah, but that's just because I was at Varsity bar and everybody's pretty drunk, starting talking slang like crazy.

I: Starting swearing a lot more probably.

P: Yeah

I: So you think there are quite noticeable differences between Australia and the U.S?

P: Yeah I'd say the first couple of weeks here coming from the U.S you notice a lot more differences, im picking it up a lot more now so it's not as noticeable.

I: Would you say you had culture shock?

P: I suppose you could say that, I don't know like I said I've travelled a bit so I try to avoid culture shock at all costs. Kinda embrace whatever's around me and if you let yourself get involved in culture shock you get a lot more homesick than if you just embrace what's around you.

I: What really stood out for you when you came here? What did you notice the most?

P: driving on the left side of the road, that was different for me. I went to cross the street and I was looking left to right and here you've kinda got to be looking right to left. Because the cars are coming at you different.

I: did you have any pre conceived ideas about what Australia would be like?

P: My friends did, when I go some place I find that having preconceived notions often will leave you either feeling let down by what you already thought, or kinda disappointed in a way. So you know all my friends are like "Oh yeah throw another shrimp on the barbie" and all that crap, and you guys don't even call them shrimp here. But yeah everybody's saying different things that I was going to expect here and stuff like that but I just decided that I was going to toss that all out the window and take it as it came.

I: But didn't you have motivations for coming here, didn't you want sort of an Australian feel?

P: Yeah absolutely I wanted something different from the states, like growing up in Pensyltuckey my entire life, its basically like close minded conservative republican rednecks, you know they've got like shotguns in the back of their pick up trucks and stuff like that. Very much looking forward to coming here and seeing what the culture would be like. But im only here for a year so even if I was let down by it I wasn't going to let it get to me.

I: but you had a notion that Australia wouldn't be like that sorta thing?

P: Yeah I'd kinda saw that. I'd seen different websites and whatnot that this was one of the more friendlier countries in the world. I think it was like top ten friendliest countries, I think its like number 10. In the most recent CNN finding, Australia is the top ten happiest place and friendliest place.

I: Yeah I've also seen a few of those, and also most liveable I think Melbourne and stuff rate quite highly on those lists. Were you surprised? I mean you say you didn't have any, you

didn't want any preconceived ideas because you didn't want to disappoint yourself or but when you got here did you find it the stereotypes or ideas were kinda true?

P: I'd have to say I've not seen any stereotypes come through I was invited to one barbeque so far and uh its basically what we'd call back home a cook out where you'd get some lamb and some vegetables on the grill and you just sat around drinking beer that's real big in Pennsylvania.

I: What you'd do back home sort of thing?

P: Yeah like call somebody up and be like "Hey im about to throw some steaks on the grill with some hotdogs and hamburgers want to come over and drink some beer"? "Yeah I'll be over in ten".

I: and they've got an American bar here so I mean...

P: That made it a lot easy to acclimate actually, most of the bartenders know me by name.

I: ahaha nice. So you go there a lot? Is that because it's an American themed place?

P: It's the closest walking distance bar that's not the Tav on campus. That was actually a huge difference from back home. You couldn't step on to campus with even booze in your belly otherwise you'd be charged with uh open container because your stomach would be a container for alcohol. It's a strict no alcohol policy on campus in the States, most campuses I'd say. And here to have a bar right on campus that was uh, little bit different.

I: Yeah.

P: Plus I found drinking in itself was a little bit more socially acceptable here, whereas in the states you've got your people that drink and then you've got people that don't. religiously, like my folks, unless they're like at a family holiday, they don't drink. Whereas me and my friends we tend to drink, we're the bargoers.

I: Do you reckon that's got to do with the drinking age?

P: uhh I'd say I've seen more people that don't drink later in life were like people that drank in like 16-21 because the drinking age is 21 in the states so you're more likely to binge drink when you're young, its kinda the taboo thing. Like ask an older brother to get you beer then you'd just slam as many as you can as fast as you can before mum and dad walk in and notice it.

I: yeah exactly, that's similar here I think. But do you think binge drinking is a bigger thing here? Or just more acceptable?

P: I'd say its almost more socially acceptable, or like unless you live in town you're not likely to walk to the bar so everybody's got to keep it cool so they can drive home. And cops are everywhere in the States, and they tend to sit outside bars more often than not to see who's stumbling out to the car.

I: and in Australia you don't think that's the same?

P: I haven't seen, but probably two cops since I've been here. I haven't been into the city so I don't know what it's like there.

I: You haven't been to the city yet?

P: No, except I catch the 106 to play basketball with Trilo sometimes.

I: Okay so you just went through.

P: Yeah pretty much.

I: What's your primary motivation for coming to UWA?

P: Well I didn't think I could get into Columbia school of journalism, which is one of the top ones and uh, and I saw that UWA was ranked like 88th, that's what they told us during orientation. That's what they had on the website, I look it up on several university rankings and it said it was one of the top 100 universities in the world. And I figured go to one of the top 100 universities in the world it promised you a job placement. Would be a very a very prestigious thing for both my resume, my record, myself for learning and also uh help me get a job.

I: Okay, I can see how it would be good for your resume, going to a university in the top 100 sort of thing but what do you mean by "yourself"?

P: uh you know kinda to let myself know I put myself up to a challenge and could go through it, put myself up to the gauntlet, it's the same reason anyone does anything challenging.

I: But you mentioned that it's not particularly challenging?

P: Well Australia itself I haven't found particularly challenging, everybody is really friendly. I've had no problems with people whatsoever. But its just uh...

I: or the language...

P: or the language really, minus picking up slang. Like I've never heard of a cigarette referred to as a "durrie" before. What do you call a barbeque over here we just call it a grill back home. But uh, I'd say like coursework and stuff like that, like I've never had a four hour class or five hour class. And it's a lot more intensive than It would be in the states.

I: That might be because you're doing postgraduate though.

P: yeah but a lot of my neighbours did postgraduate work back home and that was a lot more like, we called it like "grad assistant", and stuff like that were you its more like you have one or two classes per semester and then it was a lot of on campus work where you'd work for, like for instance my buddy did sports information so he worked with sports information council on campus at chippensburg. And he would like go to games and record information and update it onto the website or if you were doing journalism which I don't know if they did

postgraduate in journalism in particular but communications but you actually work for the on campus, we had a TV station for, what's that called? Like community TV. And stuff like that and they'd actually have students doing what they do for professional sports where they sit there and comment on everything and they've got to know player numbers and all that and they broadcast football games and basketball games. And they'd give their own free news thing called SE TV, there was also the Slate which is the on campus paper.

I: More practical or?

P: yeah there was a lot of practical application when we were doing postgraduate work. Here I find it's a lot of both in and out of class studies, at least so far.

I: But it's very different?

P: Yeah from what I'd say the postgraduate work would be in the states.

I: And that's challenging?

P: A little bit yeah.

I: Not so much cultural acclimatizing?

P: Not up to this point I mean, by the time I end my stay here I might have something different to say about it but as of now I've found it kinda delightful.

I: Do you have any regrets for coming to Australia? Do you sometimes wish you went somewhere else?

P: Um, sometimes, it's mostly I miss my friends, miss my family, miss my car. My dog, it's mostly, car most of all. I'm very limited to where I can and cannot go right now based on bus routes and cost of cabs and stuff like that and walking distance.

I: Is culture an important thing? Do you want to experience new cultures?

P: Yeah I like that actually that's part of the reason why I got into journalism to begin with, I like travelling, meeting new people, seeing what their take on life is, how they view the world.

I: Because a lot of people might say that Australia's not really too different from other Western English speaking countries, you might say that if you went somewhere else, say backpacking through Asia for example you might be more culturally immersed?

P: Yeah actually I did that, not necessarily backpacking but my buddy is from Taiwan. So we went to Taiwan and stayed for like a month, month and a half or thereabouts and we actually lived with his family. So I had to learn like little bits and pieces of mandarin Chinese. His grandmother kept shoving food at me so I had to say [Chinese Phrase] which meant I was very full. Had to say [Chinese phrase] which meant thank you.

I: So you feel like you've had a bit of cultural learning going to other places in the world?

P: Yeah a little bit, yeah. Lebanon was a huge one, I almost ripped a guy off a moped actually, from what I understand from what Lebanese people told me its kinda like what came first? The chicken or the egg? Are guys assholes because they want the girls to notice them because they're so withdrawn or are girls withdrawn because the Arab guys are assholes. And yeah there was just a lot of, they grab at girls and stuff like that, they're very, very forward when it comes to relationships and stuff like that.

I: And that would be a completely different world to the...

P: Oh yeah, it's a good thing I went there to see my buddy and not my parents and I went there because my dad would have ripped that guy off that moped and he would have come back with his cousins and an AK-47.

I: I mean that would have been a cultural experience but I mean I guess it's kinda convenient to come to Australia because, would you say that the education is the most important part of coming to Australia, like getting a good education?

P: Yeah getting a good education absolutely, and in a way I wanted a place that was a little similar. Just because too much of a culture shock for an entire year especially while trying to get a good education would be quite difficult in my eyes. Because I'd be experiencing culture shock while trying to focus on my studies. And I feel like they could have kinda been conflict whereas here, its just different enough to get out of that Pennsylvania routine but similar enough that I don't have any problem communicating.

I: So it's that in-between, best of both worlds kinda thing?

P: Everyone is English speaking and the only thing I have to catch up on is the slang.

I: Do you think Australia is unique?

P: I tell you there's a lot of unique things about Australia. First thing that comes to mind when I say that is the wildlife, where back home we've got like, the things that will kill you are the big things. Here I find the things that will kill you are the small things like redback spiders, snakes, lizards.

I: Australia is infamous for that sort of thing. But you're here for a total of a year. What do you think you've missed out on by coming to Australia?

P: Besides like, experiences back home. Like, you know Im going to have to catch up on a lot of stuff when I get back. Between what's on TV and general local news and whats been going on in my friends life, my parents will be a year older by the time I see them next. The only thing I kinda worry about is that because im studying my Masters of Journalism here I might miss out on some of the particular rules that pertain to America, where like you guys might have a journalistic rule here but at home it might be a little bit different. Though I did do my undergraduate and got a minor in journalism so I did get a lot of the basic rules down for American style but I just worry that maybe if I go to get a job someplace I might get passed up by someone that say, did go to Columbia school of journalism. Or something like that, that

was there in America because they think I might have learnt different things here that might not necessarily pertain. But at the same time good because they might say like “we need a travel reporter” and you can actually go someplace and learn things and obviously write about them so we’re going to send you someplace where we might not send that Columbia kid.

I: There are probably benefits and constraints from studying overseas, I mean one of them, maybe they don’t accept or think that international degrees are really the same for the work that you’re doing in America. So you intend to go back there and do journalism in America?

P: Yeah I mean they could very well send me right back and say like “you’re our new Australian correspondent” or “you’re going to London because they’ve kind got that influence in Australia” or “you’re gonna go over there” or something like that. I don’t really know what to expect.

I: You mentioned time constraints, your parents are going to be a year older and you’re gonna miss out on things in the U.S. Would you have liked to spend less time here and not miss out on those things?

P: I also think that might have been part of the reason I came because its only a year. Where most postgraduate work is two years in the states so say I would have gone to NYU or something like that I would have been in New York city for two years versus just one year staying here.

I: Would you say it’s more efficient with your time?

P: Yeah absolutely, if I were to do post graduate work back home I would have been studying til I was 26. Where here ill be getting out at 25, that gets me into the workforce that much sooner. And that gets me out of the pockets of mummy and daddy so I get to establish myself just a year earlier.

I: Well yeah, besides other benefits as you’ve mentioned sort of having that international perspective which could be quite useful for journalism. do you sometimes wish Australia spoke a different language?

P: Honestly I was kinda hoping to meet someone from Spain just so I could practice my Espanola, I took three years of it in my undergraduate and I would kinda like to speak to someone in it. They have that Mexican party going on on campus, and I was walking towards Varsity and this guy had on this big sombrero and poncho and he’s drinking [Mexican beer] and I was like “Hola mi amigo” and the kid just looks back at me and says “Hola mia”. So he basically said “Hello, my name is here”. I was like all right Im just going to keep walking.

I: Back to culture, do you think it was one of the bigger reasons for coming here was learning something new because a lot of people come here to learn about culture, or they do exchange to do culture or to be immersed in something else. Would you say that’s applicable to yourself?

P: Oh a little bit yeah, obviously I wanted something that was different from what I'd grown up in.

I: But not too different?

P: Yeah I didn't want it to be say do a year in China, where you're just totally lost with people screaming mandarin at me the whole time. I like the idea of coming here and knowing that if I said "excuse me, wheres the bathroom"? Somebody could be like "oh its right down the hall there". Or its "go down the stairs, hang there and its right". You know?

I: well its obviously quite difficult to be in another country and not be able to communicate with people but I mean there would be advantages to that don't you think?

P: Yeah probably in some aspects I mean I'd probably pick up chinese a lot faster that's for sure.

I: Do you think it would be useful to know another language?

P: absolutely, they say that the more languages you know the more parts of the brain you use. So there's that but im pretty comfortable speaking English and uh I don't plan on working for a paper or newsagency that's not English speaking. Although they may send me someplace where its not English speaking but they'd probably send me with somebody who could either speak the local language or set me up with an interpreter by the time I got there.

I: And you don't want that to, you don't want your learning time to affected by really accommodating to like a different culture sort of thing?

P: yeah exactly, I thought it would hurt my learning and my ability to get done in a year or two even if I went some place where it was just totally different. Because culture shock, learning local customs all while trying to get an education.

I: But for a lot of people that's part of going on exchange, immersing yourself in something different. But if Australia isn't too different don't you feel like you're kinda missing out on that aspect?

P: not really, most people here when they say "you came to Australia? Most people go to the states to get an education if they're going to go abroad" and I could have stayed in the states for postgraduate work but I don't think I would have learned a different culture or anything like that I think I would have just learned city living versus country living. And I feel like I can kinda get that here this place is way more urban than anywhere I ever grew up in. we've always had at least a decent amount of property, big backyard you know. Everyone knows there neighbours, you have a truck for winter, lot of woods, sports, stuff like that. Hiking.

I: So you're from the country?

P: Oh Yeah.

I: It's like rural Pennsylvania?

P: Real rural. I grew up on 55 acres of land. Had four wheelers, dirt bikes, cut down trees to feed the furnace during the winter.

I: So I guess Australia isn't too culturally distinct from America at large but from where you're from?

P: Oh yeah especially from where im from. Im from real rural, we call it "Pensyltuckey". Because it's a bunch of dumb rednecks.

I: Right like in Kentucky?

P: Yeah, which I guess is an insult to Kentucky people but.

I: So you still feel like you're getting that cultural learning?

P: Yeah, obviously I mean, Australia and Pennsylvania are very different, in a lot of aspects. Not too different that it becomes a hindrance. Or a burden or, not enough to make you really homesick.

I: What other factors influenced you coming here? Besides education or culture, were there any other reasons why you wanted to come to Australia?

P: No snow.

I: No snow?

P: Yeah I really liked the fact that it doesn't get too cold during the winter. We had a blistering winter. All my friends posts on facebook are just snow, snow, snow, snow, snow. Schools getting closed and your parents have to wake up early so they can shovel snow out of the driveway before they go to work, stuff like that.

I: Yeah I have a friend from Pennsylvania and a lot of her photos around Christmas time are just, whereas here in December. Her photos are of her inside and show outside, stuff like that.

P: before I left at the airport I gave my mum my winter coat and she gave me a light sports jacket. So I got here put on flip flops and facetimed my parents and they've come on with rosy cheeks and gloves on.

I: Does that kinda make you miss the snow or the temperature.

P: No not at all. My buddy Nate put it the best. Snow is great when you're a kid in middleschool, high school because you know schools gonna be closed or theres the possibility of school being closed or something like that and the second you graduate highschool it just becomes one thing you've got to scrap off your car before you go to work.

I: Yeah and the Magic is lost. What about Australia over say, you said you were thinking of going to Ireland or the UK. What influenced you coming to Australia rather than there?

P: Honestly it was just kind of like I had never considered Australia before, and every time I typed in "journalism schools abroad" and stuff like that it would always come up with

Ireland, UK and stuff like that or Scotland or Europe basically in general. And then one day Australia popped up and it was just such a unique factor for me. I don't know a single other person who has come here to study. And I just thought that could be a unique trait that could, get a bunch of resumes on a desk at a newsagency and "oh they studied in America, they studied in America, they studied in Europe, they studied in Europe. They studied in Australia? That's a little different". So just make me stand out a little bit.

I: Yeah you've got something that other applicants might not have.

P: Yeah exactly. Not to mention also that, top 100 university.

I: But once again it was more the prestige of coming to Australia or UWA.

P: Yeah.

I: But you did look at Ireland and the UK?

P: Yeah first, that was the first place I sought because I've got Irish and English heritage so its kinda like, I wanna go back to the home country or just see where my ancestors lived and stuff like that. At least where I'm from its like where people go for vacation there like "oh we're going to London" or "oh im going to Dublin" or something like that. Or exchange programs, or not exchange programs but uh school trips or stuff like that that you can take with the university if you want a bit of time off in between semesters. They always go to Europe, and then they do a whole Ireland Scotland round to England or to Germany or something like that. Where I never once in my undergraduate saw that there was a school trip going to Australia.

I: Right, well I mean its not popular to come to Australia?

P: I know people that have come on vacation. There's a westpoint grad and retired colonel in the army that lives in my parents development and he's real big on scuba diving and he came here for the great barrier reef. But you know he kinda came, stayed a week and went home. Whereas I don't know anybody who's stayed a year.

I: Why Perth? Just for UWA?

P: Yeah, actually that's exactly the reason. I get that question all the time because I've been here, "Okay I get Australia, why Perth"? Just seems very unique to me I don't know why. Sydney and Melbourne are like I guess are the popular places to go. And I kinda like the idea of being, I think they pride themselves on that. Whereas the other side you have the most isolated city in the world.

I: I've heard that, not sure if its true but I'd say so. We get, who was it? I think it might have been. I was talking to an American and we were talking about trying new flavours of stuff. And um a new flavour of Doritos came out here, Ranch flavoured, and we've never had that before.

P: Really?

I: Yeah, my friend was like “we’ve had that for years and years and years in the States”.

P: Yeah that came out in like the 90’s.

I: Yeah exactly, that’s part of the isolation. But you wanted that?

P: A little bit yeah.

I: Did you look at any universities over east? Like Melbourne or Sydney?

P: No actually, UWA popped up and just kinda went for it. Had a good gut feeling that’s kinda how I’ve done things my entire life. Gone to Chippensburg university, had a good gut feeling. Applied, got in. found UWA good gut feeling, applied, got in.

I: Fair enough, do you have any second thoughts about Australia over say the UK?

P: In that aspect no, I really don’t. It would be cold there all the time. No, over the UK I absolutely don’t.

I: Well the climate I guess, is more similar to the US.

P: Yeah exactly.

I: Colder. What about other international students, you said you knew a few. Do you know about how they were finding living in Australia?

P: They seem to be getting along fine uh, My buddy Mao, he’s my neighbour, we play videogames together and stuff. He’s got a TV I don’t. He said after a year of being here I may not find it as charming as I do now, I’ve only been here almost two months.

I: Why’d he say that?

P: He just said that its boring, or that’s how he found it. He said theres not much to do in Perth. He also said it depends on what kind of life you’re looking for. You know coming from a country background and that sort of stuff this is way more exciting than say, sitting in somebodies backyard around a campfire drinking beer.

I: yeah, you said early that you’re not really used to the urban setting.

P: Yeah.

I: So I guess like, this might be miles ahead of that in terms of excitement being in a city but, still not.

P: Yeah the town I live in is small, we’ve got two gas stations and a bank. And the closest town big kinda, I think its called a borough, versus a town is Carlisle, and they’ve got two main streets and a handful of bars. So to be able to look across the river and see skyscrapers is a lot different. Biggest building we probably had was maybe four or five stories high.

I: What about in terms of your time here being, a holiday?

P: I think it does kinda feel that way, in a lot of aspects. I mean, im away from home, I got parrots flying around me and peacocks in the courtyard there. It does feel a lot like, almost like a work vacation kinda thing. Where I get to study on the one hand but at the same time, while everybody is covered in snow and shovelling it im walking around in a T-shirt and shorts.

I: Yeah you're getting stuff done, you're working. But at the same time it's a holiday.

P: In a lot of aspects. Yeah my apartment, just because of how bare it is, seems to feel a lot like a hotel at times. It's like a hotel where I have to change my own sheets and do my own laundry.

I: Lets continue on in that's sort of vein, was that a motivation before you came here sort of thing?

P: That would have been pretty much anywhere I went. My parents have always prided themselves on they worked as hard as they did their whole lives so that way their children wouldn't have to pay for an education. They wouldn't have to take on the burden of like student loans and things like that so that way. They know people who are still today trying to pay off their student loans from 20 years ago, 30 years ago. And they didn't want that for their children. Lucky me I was the only child. So I knew from the get go I wasn't going to have to pay and they planned to make sure that I was able to come here and do this if I wanted to.

I: Things are different in the United States with education, student loans. Are they more expensive or?

P: Yeah I know friends that have to pay off like 50,000 dollars second day they leave and get a job.

I: Would you say it's a break from what you're used to, taking time off?

P: Yeah it's definitely a break. Spent 25 years almost in Pennsylvania, just need to get out for a bit. Getting a little overbearing.

I: Do you live with your parents in the States?

P: Uh I had an apartment where I went to college in Chippensburg university that was 30-35 minutes away from my parents house. So I lived in a small town there, live there while I was doing my undergraduates studies for four years then uh, I'd only moved in with my parents for a month and a half, two months before I came here. And that was only because I'd graduated, I had already got my bachelors degree there was no reason for me to stay living there or working in the restaurant I was working in so I moved back in with them to save money but when I move back I hope to live in Washington and work.

I: But you were independent before coming here you would say?

P: Yeah the last two months but that was really just to save money, have a roof over my head, not paying rent. I've been paying it with my back, helping shovel snow.

I: Where do you want to go in Australia? Because you get breaks do you want to travel around or?

P: I would love to travel around yeah, maybe find some other people who'd like to, I don't know, go to the outback or something like that or, I've been poking my head in the travel agency down in Broadway just seeing what they kinda have there for school breaks and stuff like that, maybe there's a group I could join that's gonna go some place different. Just to kinda check it out because I feel it would kinda be a loss to come here and spend an entire year on a different continent in a different country and only experience the suburb and city that I'm studying.

I: Yeah, that's true so you want to explore kinda thing?

P: Yeah, absolutely. I've got to get a picture of me near a kangaroo, otherwise I'll go back and just get belittled by everybody.

I: Yeah it would be a bit of a shame to come to Australia and never see a kangaroo. For sure. Where in particular do you want to go? Just the outback?

P: Yeah I really want to see the outback, experience the desert. Because I flew over it, I came from LA to Sydney, Sydney to Perth. And I'll tell you, I've never seen desert like that. I've been to Vegas and the Grand Canyon, wait not the Grand Canyon, Hoover Dam and stuff like that and Pennsylvania, wait not Pennsylvania the United States has like a bit of desert but I've never seen desert like the kind over here. Where the only shadows you see are from the clouds.

I: Sorry what?

P: The only shadows I saw from the plane were coming from the few clouds.

I: Yeah, very flat. Quite different. So you think that you've already been immersed in different cultures and that you want to prioritise your education say over other aspects of coming to Australia?

P: Yeah absolutely, if I were to have gone like somewhere in Asia, different places in general. Somewhere that didn't speak English I feel like it would be more of a vacation versus education. Where here I certainly have that kind of feel I'm on like a bit of a holiday and seeing different things, nice weather, pretty girls, drinking beer having fun but at the same time I can still focus on my education that's like the main part of why I'm here. Where other places if it was too vastly different from the states I'd find myself sitting around smelling the roses a little bit more than you know hitting the books.

I: Than doing like work?

P: Yeah.

I: And that's the main reason for studying here.

P: at least in an English speaking country.

I: Do you think that's a popular idea? Like when you spoke to people in um other people that were thinking of going on exchange.

P: Like in the states?

I: Yeah

P: Most kids actually just, a lot of them just stayed at Chippensburg. And did there postgraduate work where they did their undergraduate work. And I saw that as kinda a hindrance you know? Especially doing journalism where you know a lot of the times you wont just have like a studio position where you're in the news room working or gathering news from people who are out there. Most of the time you're going to have to be travelling. And go to where the news is, get footage, report on it. But if you're a producer you've got to be standing there behind the camera kinda like queueing up the guy who's in front of the camera and telling him what to say and stuff like that. Being a photo journalist I want to travel and take pictures and write about it later. And uh I found that staying there would have been a hindrance to that because I mean who's going to look at a resume and be like "yeah you want to be a travel reporter but you stayed exactly where you were" that doesn't make any sense to me.

I: What about people that are studying abroad. First up you're paying for this degree, you don't get a loan?

P: Yeah.

I: You have to pay for it. But what about people that were also going to study overseas?

P: I knew one kid from London. Wait not from London but going to study there, I think it was Manchester university or something like that? You cant quote me on exactly where he was going but I know he was going to England. He was just excited to go. I guess I didn't really know too many people doing study abroad. People in Pennsylvania are pretty complacent.

I: Yeah, I think that's probably good for this interview.

P: Okay, hope you got everything you wanted.

I: Oh no worries man!

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