

The University of Western Sydney (UWS) has a distinct student profile: 44% are first in family to graduate, a higher percentage than the national average work whilst studying (79%), and the majority are from a lower socio economic background than Sydney's Eastern Universities. Students are generally reluctant to apply for overseas study/internships, which could be partly due to the opportunity cost of forgoing part time employment and lack of finances for the trip. To encourage students to travel overseas, the College of Business provides grants for five students annually to work on international internships during the summer vacation.

Professor Richard Broinowski, a retired diplomat, found that journalism students in general had limited knowledge/interest in Asian affairs. In 2000 he therefore arranged annual internships with English-language newspapers in Asia. He negotiated funding initially from the Melbourne Myer Foundation, and later, from the Australia Korea Foundation (AKF). Universities that have participated are University of Canberra, University of Sydney, Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT), and since 2006, UWS. Neither RMIT nor UWS students receive funding from Myer or AKF, receiving grants instead from their own institutions. Sixty five future Australian journalists have participated in this program.

This paper highlights the importance of international internships in the Asia Pacific region and describes the UWS experience.

Global advantage of international internships

An integral part of Australia's vision for higher education in 2020 is to produce "graduates with the knowledge, skills and understandings for full participation in society as it anticipates and meets the needs of the Australian and international labour markets" (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2008). Research indicates that two critical factors to prepare students for the global workforce are the internationalisation of the curriculum and the exposure to different cultures to develop intercultural and language skills and competencies (Australian Institute for Mobility Overseas, 2008). Australia is a key player in the Asia Pacific region, and it is particularly important to provide students with exposure to our Asian neighbours, who are also among our major trading partners (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trading, 2008), and for reasons of security, commerce and economics. Such exposure increases harmony and cohesion with a "pool of Australians who can work with the neighbours with ease, grace and understanding" (Jeffrey, 2006).

Australian universities have a number of outbound mobility programs to provide students with exposure to different cultures. This paper focuses on one type of outbound mobility, international internships, which account for less than 8% of all outbound experiences, the main types being exchanges with other universities, short programs and research assignments. Overseas experiences are primarily in Anglophone countries (USA 15%, UK 8% and Canada 7%) and Europe (39% including the UK) (Olsen, 2007). 31% of Australian students do travel to Asia, but mainly to China (10%) and Japan (5%) (Olsen 2007). In contrast, overseas enrolments at Australian universities are predominantly from Asia (71%) ("AEI International Student Data", 2008).

Outbound mobility is lower in Australia (under 6%) as compared with the US (13%) (Olsen, 2007). At the University of Western Sydney (UWS), outbound mobility is even lower than the national figure with less than 1.5% of its students participating in any outbound program. This could be due to the UWS student profile, which is different from that of the more established universities: 44% are the first in their family to graduate (Review of Student

Representation (UWS), 2008), 21% of domestic students are from a lower socio economic group (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2007) and over 79% of undergraduate students work whilst studying as well as work longer hours (Review of Student Representation (UWS), 2008; Universities Australia, 2007). Anecdotal evidence indicates that the main barrier to outbound experiences is the financial burden, which besides the actual finances required for an outbound experience, includes the opportunity cost of forgoing regular work. Even before cost can be considered, there is the added challenge of raising student awareness about the advantages of overseas programs. Students can become so overwhelmed with balancing work and study that they overlook information about opportunities or cannot find the time to submit a good application, or any application at all. Those who do apply opt predominantly for Anglophone or European destinations. This is consistent with research in the UK which indicates that finance and language are the two main barriers to outbound mobility and that students from a higher socio economic group are more likely to participate (King et al., 2004; Greenbank & Hepworth, 2008).

To increase the number of UWS students participating in an outbound experience, the Careers & Cooperative Education (CCE) unit offers international internship programs for Business and Journalism students. The program for Business students was started in 2004 when the College of Business approached CCE to arrange overseas internships for students during the (Southern Hemisphere) summer vacation as an extension of the established local placements programs. To make the internships more attractive, grants were offered to cover travel and miscellaneous expenses, such as insurance. However, students had to work voluntarily (although some were fortunate enough to receive a stipend) during the internship and pay for their own accommodation. Selection criteria included having a credit average or higher, returning to UWS for at least one semester after the internship and having access to \$3,000 to supplement the grant. Six internships were arranged: two in India and one each in Fiji, New Zealand, the Philippines and the UK.

The initial response was disappointing with only two applications received – both for the UK placement. After two more rounds of vigorous promotion over several weeks, 12 applications were received. However, five students applied exclusively for the UK or New Zealand placements and two students listed these countries as their first preference.

The six students who were selected successfully completed their internships, indicating it was one of their best life experiences and certainly their best at university. Unfortunately, the College of Business was unable to provide funding for grants in 2005. The program was revived in 2006, but a decision was made to arrange placements in only one country so that students could support each other whilst they were overseas. India was selected as it is in the Asia Pacific region, English is spoken by a significant number of Indians and, very importantly, personal contacts were available to assist with organising the internships. Despite extensive promotion for the next two years, less than 20 applications were received each year. However, in 2008 with India's economy booming – making it a more attractive destination for Business students – and returning students generating interest (hence the selection criteria which required the students to return to study at UWS after completing their internship) there was significantly more interest and 44 applications were received, most of which were of a high standard.

The program for Journalism students has been developed in collaboration with Professor Richard Broinowski, a retired senior diplomat who worked mainly in the Asia Pacific region and is now an Adjunct Professor at the University of Sydney. Broinowski was surprised by Australian university students' general lack of understanding or interest in the region. He was particularly disappointed that even Journalism students who aspired to be foreign correspondents generally had a superficial knowledge of Australia's neighbours, and what knowledge they had was primarily viewed through an occidental prism. Broinowski therefore decided to use his networks in the region to arrange internships for Journalism students with leading English language newspapers. His motives included providing Australian media with a corps of young Asia-literate journalist recruits whose work would enhance Australian media reporting and commentary on Asian affairs and Asia-Australia relations. Broinowski was able to negotiate

support from the Melbourne Myer Foundation in 2000 and later the Australian Korea Foundation to provide grants for students from the University of Sydney and University of Canberra. From 2006 he arranged internships for students from Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology and UWS, but these universities did not receive any Foundation grants, but provided their own grants to students.

Broinowski found that almost all of the approximately 150 students interviewed for the 65 Journalism placements since 2000, irrespective of which university they attended, were bright, talented and had exceptional communication skills. During the early years of the internship selection process, however, Broinowski found that a surprising number of students (including candidates of Asian origin) knew little about the countries to which they wanted to be assigned, such as capital cities, names of leaders, political characteristics and history. This correlated with Broinowski's initial observation and was one of the initial catalysts for the program. By about 2004 however, the word had spread throughout Journalism departments in feeder universities that Broinowski and his fellow interviewers would be impatient with ignorance. As a result, candidates made themselves better informed before their interviews. Of course, this did not necessarily give the applicants a competitive advantage if, at the same time, they showed little intellectual curiosity about their preferred country and others in the region, or if they were unaware of the dynamics of Australia's relations with those countries.

Through formal surveys and past data, attempts were made to ascertain the main factors which motivated students to apply for international internships and what they gained from the experience. The main reasons cited by the students were: to expand their student experience, to develop an understanding of a different culture and/or gain international work experience which would enhance their resumes and give them an edge when applying for graduate positions. In addition, journalism students indicated that an international internship would be invaluable to secure jobs as writers and journalists in the highly contested and crowded fields of print and electronic media.

All students said the internship enhanced their personal development. For the majority of the students it was an amazing experience with comments received such as: “It was the best decision I made ... you learn to step out of your comfort zone ... and see if you can survive [and] come out a better person”, “a fantastic experience especially since Asia is our geographic neighbour”, “my entire perspective on life changed”, “the most educationally valuable chapter of my study at UWS”, “my experiences in [during the internship] both personal and professional have not only enabled me to expand my knowledge of global issues and journalistic technique but also to change on a personal level”. The students who were currently employed (in excellent graduate positions) indicated the internship played a significant part in their selection. Two continued in further studies related to their internship, five went on overseas exchange programs and one student won two national awards for photojournalism.

Interestingly, eight of the 27 UWS students who participated undertook the internship in their country of origin. Seven had visited the country prior to the internship, whilst one had never been there before. In addition, all the students had previously been on overseas trips, with 15 confirming that it was in the Asia Pacific region. Based on the assumption that the majority of UWS students have not been overseas, it appears that the international internship program particularly attracts students who are already well-seasoned travellers (rather than those who have never been overseas) and also students who have family connections in Asia.

Considering the manifold benefits to the students and the needs of an international labour market, it is critical to continue these internship programs. However, from the UWS programs we can surmise that the students who participated may already have had the travel bug and would be likely to undertake other international experiences, whether through a formal university program or otherwise. To increase the number of graduates with some form of international experience, it would be advantageous to especially target students who have never been overseas. It is equally important to provide grants to make the internships feasible so that students can take advantage of these life changing opportunities.

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