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# Critical components in preparing students for short-term study tours to Asia



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Tracey Bretag, University of South Australia

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# Project team



Dr Tracey Bretag, UniSA



Dr Robert van der Veen, Oxford Brookes University, UK & Adjunct Research Fellow, ACAB, UniSA.



Prof Ying Zhu, Australian Centre for Asian Business, UniSA



Ms Sonia Saddiqui, UniSA



## Reference group:

- Prof Nigel Relph, DVC: International & Advancement, UniSA
- Prof Betty Leask, PVC: Teaching & Learning, La Trobe Uni
- Assoc Prof Jan Gothard, Murdoch University
- Mr Rob Malicki, Co-Director, Australian Institute for Mobility Overseas

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# Background



- 2012 ‘Australia in the Asian Century’
- 2013 Asia Bound Grants Program
- 2014 ‘New Colombo Plan’
  - Projected substantial growth in outbound student mobility to Asia
  - Universities need to provide effective support for students *and* staff to successfully engage in intercultural learning activities as part of outbound mobility experiences.

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# OLT projects on outbound mobility

2014-2015 Australian Office for Learning and Teaching (OLT) Strategic Priority Commissioned Projects:

- ❑ Classroom of many cultures: Co-creating support curriculum with international community partners (Greg Downey & Kate Lloyd, Macquarie Uni)
- ❑ Enhancing Programs to Integrate Tertiary Outbound Mobility Experiences (EPITOME) Project (Tim Hall & Tonia Gray, UWS)
- ❑ Global Canopy: Linking international inbound students with domestic outbound students for improved learning and global connections. (Patricia McLaughlin, RMIT)
- This seed project: *Ready for take-off: Preparing students for intercultural learning in Asia.*

# Impetus for this project



- Bretag & van der Veen pilot study 2012-13
- Pre and post-return focus groups with returned students from UniSA study tours to Vietnam, Malaysia and Indonesia.
- Factors hindering participation:
  - Cost
  - Responsibilities (e.g. family, work, sport)
  - Space within students' programs of study
- Main benefits of study tours:
  - increased confidence
  - enhanced intercultural understanding
  - improved interpersonal skills
  - clarification of career goals in relation to working overseas

# Project aims

To enhance the preparedness of students participating in short-term study tours to Asia by:

- Identifying critical components of preparation
- Creating associated learning resources
- Providing the research foundation for a national project



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# Why focus on short-term?



- Extensive research available on longer-term mobility experiences (1 semester or more)
  - Little research on short-term study tours (2-4 weeks)
- Intense nature of short-term experiences
  - Increased need for pre-departure preparation
  - Not enough time in-country to cover all the bases
  - Heightened anxiety by both students and staff
  - Convenience of taking short-term study tours may influence students' intrinsic motivation
  - Need to determine if goals of intercultural learning are achievable within time constraints

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# Why Asia?



- Importance of engaging with neighbours in the region for 'Asia literacy'
- Building blocks for future global networks
- Post-return opportunities for further engagement with Asian cultures and peoples
- Links with learning objectives of students' programs
- Pragmatic reasons: proximity, affordability, time



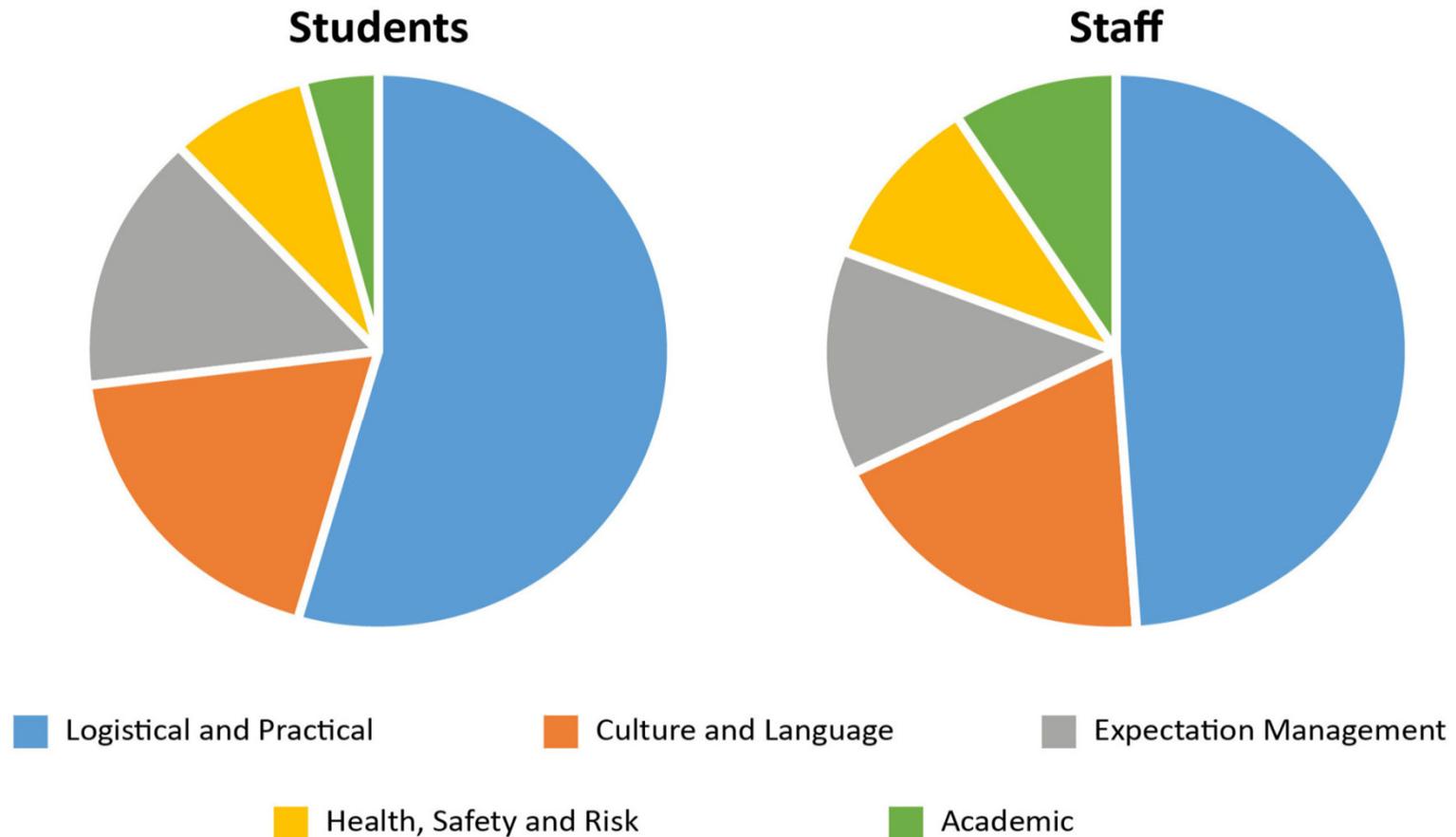
# Method

- ❑ Interviews with 8 academic study tour leaders & 3 support staff at UniSA
- ❑ 5 focus groups with returned students from short-term study tours to Indonesia, Cambodia, Malaysia, Hong Kong and China.
- ❑ 1 focus group with participants from placements organised by external agencies (China, Nepal, India and Fiji).
- ❑ Total number of students in focus groups = 37
- ❑ Asked students and staff about their thoughts and experiences regarding their preparation for study tours and placements.

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# Key findings:

## Five components of preparation



# Logistical & practical

- Key focus for both students and staff
- Critical aspects of practical preparation:
  - Pre-departure workshops & seminars
  - Resources (eg handouts and ‘survival booklets’)
  - Communication between staff & students, and between students
  - Liaison between staff and in-country hosts
- Students need more initiative for independent preparation
- Importance of appropriate training and experience for staff
  - heavy workload and responsibility (= stress)



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# Culture & language



- Staff focused on the history, culture and social norms of the host country.
- Students wanted to learn more about:
  - language, cultural norms, customs, etiquette and local foods.
- Key strategy: Speaking to friends and family who had travelled there before or connecting with people from the culture.
- General agreement that much more pre-departure cultural training was needed.

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# Expectation management



- Need to articulate expectations regarding academic responsibilities, student behaviour, socialising and cultural etiquette.
  - Imposed vs student-developed code of conduct?
  - Need for students to agree and 'own' code of conduct.
- Importance of group cohesion and community building prior to departure.
- Reiterate that study tour is inherently different to a 'holiday'
  - academic requirements, structured format, cultural immersion, opportunities for professional development, role as university 'ambassadors'.

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# Health, safety & risk



- Critical to provide advice relating to vaccinations, food safety, hygiene and personal safety, *well in advance of study tour.*
- Key role of information seminars, program websites, and support materials such as handouts and ‘survival kits’.
- Role of administrative support staff to oversee provision of health information prior to departure.

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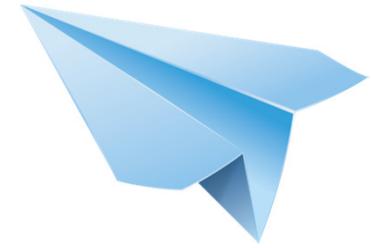
# Academic



- This preparation category was mentioned least frequently by both staff and students!
  - Included class responsibilities, readings, group work and assessment requirements.
- Academic staff members were responsible for all aspects of this preparation.
- Role of pre-departure information sessions to set expectations for students' academic responsibilities.
- Often overlooked due to heavy emphasis on logistical and practical preparation.

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# 3<sup>rd</sup> party providers



- Similar preparation, but less consistent across providers.
  - Included formal and informal preparation, websites, resources, etc.
  - More individual communication with students via phone and email.
  - Common problems identified by students:
    - poor organisation
    - insufficient cultural information and language preparation
    - Lack of practical information.
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# Recommendations



- Pre-departure workshops – more, not less needed; student-centred; address 5 key areas.
- Select appropriate staff and improve capacity
  - Develop a community of practice
- Manage student expectations
  - student developed code of conduct
  - Team-based solutions to authentic scenarios
- Provide opportunities for post-return reflection
- Ensure due diligence with 3<sup>rd</sup> party providers

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# Future research directions



- A national survey of staff and students to determine best practices in preparing students for mobility experiences in Asia.
- Interviews with staff and focus groups with students to explore (and extend) the five components of preparation;
- A survey of staff at key Asian partner universities to explore host perspectives;
- A survey of third party providers of student mobility experiences to explore their perspectives.



For research papers, case studies and  
learning resources from the  
Intercultural Learning in Asia project  
please go to:

<http://interculturallearningasia.edu.au/>

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# References



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