

# Presenting international art study tours as an effective model for authentic learning

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## Introduction

Tertiary teaching and learning experiences have changed dramatically over the past 30 years with the reduction of face-to-face teaching and the greater expectations placed on students to undertake learning activities outside of the institutional setting. This paper seeks to determine the effectiveness of international art study tours (*Subject name: Independent study program Europe. Code AF2012:03*) in terms of authentic learning for students within the limits of academic and administrative time constraints and fiscal parameters.

## Literature

There is an established body of literature that deals with pedagogy associated with excursions and field trips; however, most of this material is related to the sciences, geography and anthropology. Mossa (1995) provides an overview of the motivation for instituting field trips and excursions in the discipline of geography, she evaluates the degrees of planning required to facilitate effective field trips and discusses the opportunities for students to ground theoretical understanding with practical experiences and emphasises the importance of oral discussions and follow-up work (Mossa, 1995, pp. 83-84). Gruver & Stamos (2000) provide some structural elements in their analysis of the interrelationship between field trips, group projects and internship related to teaching in business schools. In their teaching at the Bucknell's Institute, they highlight the importance of planning and execution of a typical field trip; citing the need for effective communication of professional goals related to the trip, preparation of reading materials, well designed schedules for activities during each day and the importance of question and answer sessions for the students to reflect on the activities they have experienced (Gruver & Stamos, 2000, pp. 22-23). This parallels the Australian research by Ostling (2008) where she cites the importance of Professional Practices at the Queensland College of Art. Here Ostling reflects on the importance of students developing a greater understanding of the art world, recognising that many students felt that our art schools failed to prepare graduates for options of practice and that many students had little idea of what the art world would be like upon graduation. Her research also highlighted international research exploring the importance of specific graduate attributes and skills related to the changing world of work (Ostling, 2008, pp. 3-4)<sup>1</sup>.

In one of the more sustained research projects related to the museum as the site of learning, Piscitelli & Anderson (2001) provide data suggesting 'children's positive perspectives of museums were grounded on correlations between encounters with exhibits and connections with pre-existing knowledge and understandings' (Piscitelli & Anderson, 2001, p. 269). The work presents data showing the increasing recognition within pedagogy, of student participation in museum field work.

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<sup>1</sup> Links to current discourse on Work Integrated Learning (WIL)

Although this research was based on primary school children's learning experiences it does mention some earlier research related to Museum visitation by adolescents; highlighting attitudes of boredom, being rushed through exhibition spaces, little opportunity for self-discovery and staff who patronised them (Piscitelli & Anderson, 2001, p. 270). The summation of the full paper revealed Museum visitation has positive effects on children's views of museums and where exhibits assist in providing recognisable contexts, children find the experience engaging and memorable.

Griffin & Symington (1997) provide a good overview of Museum visitation as a suitable pedagogical approach fostering informal learning yet hold reservations about task alignment in the planning process. Their work suggests the over deterministic nature of many excursions, with too much focusing on teaching and not enough opportunities for the students to learn through informal and observation based experiences (Griffin & Symington, 1997, p. 765).

### **Methods**

The literature presents a range of positive views of the effectiveness of field work and excursions to create authentic learning opportunities for students; it also makes recommendations for better practices and templates for planning. Most of the data presented in the literature is derived from observations, secondary sources, surveys and anecdotes; there is relatively little attention given to the methodology being employed to determine the effectiveness of such excursions. For this paper I propose to present three brief case studies based on international art tours conducted by the School of Creative Arts at James Cook University (SoCA) in conjunction with Griffith University Queensland College of Art (QCA). As the research largely follows a constructivist paradigm, I will be using a mixed method approach providing both quantitative and qualitative data. Comparing the inputs (time, energy, administration, costs to the school and students) and outcomes as seen by students and academic staff through the filters of cultural growth, community engagement, grades and graduate destination mapping.

### **Approach**

Following requests from students to engage with 'real art' rather than experiencing the reproductions of art works in slide/PowerPoint presentations, I was motivated to contemplate running an international study tour. In 2007, SoCA conducted a three-week international study tour in Europe focusing upon the Kassel Documenta, Sculpture Project Munster and the Venice Biennale. This tour allowed students to undertake a three credit point subject<sup>2</sup> based upon the study of Contemporary Creative Arts in a global context. Students would undertake field work in Europe concentrating on a major international contemporary art exhibition and making comparisons with traditional European art forms. Students were also introduced to flexible delivery formats allowing for AV presentation, discussion and other practical activities.

<b>Subject name: Independent study program Europe. Code AF2012:03</b>
<b>The Subject Learning Outcomes included the ability to:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• identify trends in contemporary art practices;</li> </ul>



<sup>2</sup> Students undertake 24 credit points per academic year

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• identify and discuss the major theoretical perspectives particular to the various disciplines in creative arts;</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• introduce candidates to a range of research methodologies, practice and theories;</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• use new technology to enhance the management, analysis and production of a research project;</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• enable candidates to locate their work within the framework of their discipline of contemporary arts practice.</li> </ul>	
<b>Assessment Items</b>	
Photographic essay (30%)	Formal collection of images that create a visual narrative of contemporary and traditional art presentation in Europe
Review (20%)	One formal review of any exhibition seen on tour (submitted online)
Tutorial presentation (20%)	Short PP on your positioning of current contemporary practice
Travel Diary (30%)	Notes and observations

Table 1 (Subject outcomes and assessment)

The success of this tour was built around the participation of 40 undergraduate/postgraduate students, members of professional arts organisations including the Perc Tucker Regional Gallery and a number of professional artists. The tour created great interest within both the University and the community<sup>3</sup>, articles in the local media monitored the progress of the excursion, the regional gallery conducted a discussion evening reviewing the major exhibitions visited and students provided reviews of major exhibitions for local arts publications. The study tour allowed students to complete one subject towards their degree and witness a significant chapter in the history of contemporary art.

### Data

The following data presents three case studies which utilise surveys, student grades and employment outcomes in order to assist art schools in the planning and development of worthwhile art based study tours.

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<sup>3</sup> ABC North Queensland undertook a review of the program before the students departed and conducted a series of telephone interviews with students whilst on tour

## Case study 1



Figure 1. Study tour group outside Rijksmuseum 2007 (Photo S. Naylor)

The first study tour conducted by JCU was ambitious and a huge learning curve. The project grew out of collaboration between an MBA student<sup>4</sup> who had needed to design a financial plan for one of her subjects and my Ph.D. research on the Venice Biennale. Following a lecture on the 2005 Venice Biennale one of the students suggested that rather than talking about art, maybe the students should be participating in it by visiting the Venice Biennale in 2007. This became the catalyst for an 18 month planning project which resulted in 40 students/community participants undertaking the grand tour of arts events in Europe in 2007.

Having only ever conducted national art excursions to the Sydney Biennale, Melbourne and Adelaide Festivals, it was a challenge to prepare an itinerary and design a formal study program for students to undertake whilst touring Europe. Initially I researched other study tour programs to determine a suitable itinerary; however, most of these tours were generic or highly specialised relating to a discrete course of study. The final itinerary was designed around what would be key events that a student who had never travelled to Europe, could experience in three weeks; completing subject assessment tasks and shared reflection. The tour would be a snapshot view of traditional and contemporary art segueing future study, employment opportunities and return visits to Europe. The itinerary included Frankfurt, Kassel, Munster, Amsterdam, Paris, Venice, Florence and Rome.

To manage the administrative component of the tour a local travel agency was contacted to provide a quote for the proposed itinerary. The local travel agency advised that the dimensions of the tour would

<sup>4</sup> Who was employed by SoCA undertaking the MBA part time

be more appropriately handled by travel agencies specialising in group tours. This led to the use of a group tour agency<sup>5</sup>, as they had a greater purchasing power for international flights, European hotel accommodation and domestic transportation. The group tour agency handled all financial and booking issues, with students paying deposits and instalments directly to the company, without creating burdens for the university administration. Management of student enrolments, subject management and student indemnification (insurance, passport, next of kin and contact details) were covered by the school and the tour leader.

In terms of inputs the SoCA provided administrative support (40 hrs) and approximately \$5500 for ancillary costs in conducting the European study tour, the workload time allocation for this subject was 39 hours from a standard teaching load. Each student paid \$6533.00 to cover transportation, accommodation, gallery entrances and some meals. Much of the initial planning was also incorporated in the MBA project; this would have represented at least a 50 hour commitment at no cost to the school.

To gauge the success of the tour a simple survey was designed to allow students to give feedback to assist in the evaluation of the 2007 tour and for future planning. This survey was administered online with results collated by an independent assistant. We received 23 responses to the Likert survey that recorded positive feedback on the tour.

Statements	lowest		neutral		highes
	1	2	3	4	t
How constructive was this event for you?	1			5	16
How effective was the event?	2	2	3	4	11
To what extent were your expectations matched	1		1	6	14
How suitable?		1	2	4	15
How useful and relevant for you?	1		1	1	19

Table 2 (Quantitative Survey outcomes for 2007 tour)

The survey also sought written responses which provided much greater contextual data which could be used in planning future excursions. Many of these comments reflected the positive experiences students had at the Venice Biennale and Kassel Documenta; however, most students recognised that we attempted to do too much.

What was the highlight of the event
The highlight of the event was actually experiencing those art galleries and events that you only read about in books, internet and newspapers. Actually experiencing arts on an international level with

<sup>5</sup> Used for all three European art tours

Documenta, Sculpture Project and Venice Biennale.
hm..hard one every day was better than the next - Vatican and Sistine if I had to choose
Hard to pick a highlight was all great but if I had to Venice Biennale it was the reason I went and did not let me down
People and events Documenta and Venice Biennale
Biennale closely followed by Documenta 12. Both were exceptional
Excellent value for money
Incredible breath of experience and saw a major slice of the world's best collections. More detail on each collection could have only been possible with more time which would have resulted in more costs
Seeing great works of art
Every day was a highlight. Experiencing the Old Masters, seeing contemporary sculpture, exploring cultural differences a great group to travel with
Many highlights, including the scheduled art events, but many unexpected bonuses, unique experiences and new friendships
Documenta, Kassel, meeting so many great people in our group

Table 3 (Qualitative responses 2007 tour sample only)

The general positive results from the survey based upon a > 50% response rate reinforced the importance of international arts study tours for the immediate benefit of students. Whilst data revealed an increase in academic performance<sup>6</sup> by participating student and a clarifying or exploring new career options based on experiences in Europe; it is difficult to provide quantitative data to suggest that the study tour was the only catalyst<sup>7</sup>. There has also been evidence, through the graduate destination survey, of a number of students moving into professional careers within the arts industry, notably in museology and arts journalism, revealing some additional contributions of these types of study tours. Opening up the study tour to staff from the regional gallery and other professional artists within the region<sup>8</sup>, enhanced the Schools' links with industry and the community. Without intentionally designing the tour with a work integrated learning component, the study tour created an alternative pathway for students working within the creative arts to gain authentic experiences in the international professional arts industry and provided real insights and anecdotes to those that have moved into the teaching profession or the national arts industry.

SoCA was also able to achieve some of its strategic goals of the internationalisation of its curriculum. The outcomes were numerous; although the tour did require a great deal of administrative organisation and a very intensive workload for the tour leader. The job required a 24 hour commitment for three weeks, with a great deal of organisation and pressures both pre-and post study tour. The School provided the staff member with a mobile phone and a *per diem* allowance; however, providing lectures, discussions, tour administration, financial management (including non budgeted items such as 'tipping' requirements for the group), liaison with travel agents and guides, organising

<sup>6</sup> 80% of students increased GPA scores following tour

<sup>7</sup> Subsequent conversations listed the tour as a turning point in many students study patterns and career aspirations

<sup>8</sup> Additional numbers increased viability

students to meet deadlines for departure, group discussion meetings related to assessment items, impromptu technical advice and eventually assessment for the subject, could be seen as a negative in planning future tours unless appropriate workload allowances are made.

### Case study 2



Figure 2. Study tour group at Brisbane International Airport 2009 (Photo A. Gorton)

Following the success of the 2007 European art tour SoCA again planned to conduct a tour for approximately 40 students. The 2009 art tour acknowledged the feedback from students and reduced the number of activities planned to focusing on two countries with the longer stays in each. A similar methodology for planning was used; however, the GFC made it impossible to gain sufficient numbers to run an exclusive SoCA group tour.

Following discussions with a colleague at Griffith University it was decided to collaborate with Queensland College of the Arts (QCA) running a joint study tour between the two institutions. This allowed two staff to attend the tour and took the pressure off the tour leader in managing the entire event. Due to the smaller cohort of 27 participants the cost of the 2009 tour was \$7,199; however, all accommodation was three to four star<sup>9</sup>, costing also included tipping<sup>10</sup> and additional ancillary costs, which reduced the direct contribution from SoCA by around \$3000 with a similar administration component. The inclusion of QCA meant that the project had cross institutional support and allowed students from both institutions to study together, generating opportunities to meet other art students, create economies of scale and better use of human resources.

This tour focused on the Venice Biennale and traditional museums and galleries in Italy to be contrasted with a Spanish experience ranging from the Prado Museum in Madrid through to the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao and visits to Barcelona and on to Figueres to view the Dali collection. Although this tour had small numbers it again received positive feedback and provided excellent opportunities for students to experience the art world first hand in a European setting.

<sup>9</sup> Much better than the accommodation for 2007

<sup>10</sup> Major un-budgeted issue in 2007



### Case study 3



Figure 3. Study tour group in Frankfurt 2011 (Photo S. Naylor)

In 2010 both SoCA and QCA collaborated in developing an international study tour building upon recommendations from the previous two study tours. Acknowledging student feedback and incorporating elements of the University strategic plan, this 2011 tour would focus on central Europe with an opportunity for students to undertake study in a German University for a block mode subject<sup>11</sup>. The tour would establish bases at Würzburg, Prague, Berlin and Venice using Frankfurt as the entrance to Europe and Milan as the departure point.

In recognising the importance of the need for students to gain international experiences as outlined in the James Cook University Academic Plan, this study tour was designed around accessing a DEEWR Study Overseas Short Term Mobility Program (SOSTMP) grant and OSHelp funding. As SoCA had an existing articulation agreement with Fachhochschule Würzburg-Schweinfurt (FHWS) it was possible to increase the internationalisation of our curriculum and develop greater reciprocity with future tours of German students undertaking study in Queensland. Students who opted to study at FHWS undertook two block mode subject *German Culture, Geography and Economy* (GCGE): 3 ECTS and *Design Project Photography* (GPAFO): 6 ECTS. These two subjects were cross credited back to the respective degree programs in the home universities and provided students with some insights into tertiary study in a German University. This also allowed students who were eligible to apply for loans

<sup>11</sup> Short courses undertaken outside of the main semester program



of up to \$5,611 against their HECs. Ten students from JCU<sup>12</sup> were also eligible for a \$2000 grant, based on successful application of the DEEWR SOSTMP.

As the tour leader no longer worked directly with the SoCA there was limited administrative support by the School, placing greater demands upon the staff member and the Faculty. The 2011 tour also required greater involvement from the University's International office and Faculty Registrar. Despite this, the successful \$25,500 DEEWR SOSTMP grant raised the status of the tour within the University and allowed students with limited resources to participate. Taking SoCA students to Europe exposed them to new cultural experiences, new languages, creative industries in Germany, Czechoslovakia and Italy and opportunities to view the latest technologies and innovations at the Venice Biennale.

Students were surveyed at the conclusion of the tour and asked to provide feedback on a number of key elements which incorporated questions on work integrated learning, cultural exposure, administration and organisation, alignment professional goals and links between theory and practice.

	NA	Far less than adequate	Less than adequate	Adequate	More than adequate
<b>The study tour allowed me to:</b>					
identify trends in contemporary art practices	2			6	20
observe traditional Europe creative arts and architecture trends	1			6	21
identify and discuss the major theoretical perspectives particular to the various disciplines in creative arts	1		2	18	7
be introduced to a range of research methodologies, practices and theories associated with contemporary art	3		1	17	7
locate my work within a framework of contemporary arts practice	3			10	15
contextualise my future employment opportunities within or in association with the creative arts	6		4	8	10
gain a greater understanding of other cultures relationships with the arts	1		1	7	19
develop confidence in independent study in an international setting	2			10	16
<b>The organisation of the study tour was:</b>					
effectively communicated with clear objectives	1		3	9	15
designed effectively to give breadth of			2	7	19

<sup>12</sup> Participants from Cairns and Townsville campuses

experiences and value for money					
effectively managed by Group Tour Agency			2	7	19
effectively managed by SoCA and QCA staff				7	21

Table 4 (Quantitative Survey outcomes for 2011 tour)

The survey provided clear evidence that students saw the benefits of international study tours in terms of experiencing authentic art world practices based in galleries, museums, international arts events and industry experiences. Whilst 5 of the participants were not enrolled in the formal study program<sup>13</sup>, >95% responded positively to meeting the learning outcomes of the tour and being satisfied with the organisation.

### Conclusion

The international study program was designed to create a holistic approach to learning, ensuring that creative arts students would be able to differentiate the Queensland experience/product from other creative industries throughout the world. The block mode approach, with self contained assessment tasks, allowed students to undertake study in an innovative and collaborative manner; reducing pressure on study plans and exposing students to new ways of learning. Using the three case studies as a data set, it is possible to see the potential of international study tours as providing a viable pedagogical model to increase the student experience in delivering authentic learning within the context of professional skills, contemporary and historic art knowledge.

If study tours are designed to accommodate university goals and to facilitate access to OSHelp funding, these approaches to subject delivery can have significant benefits to art students, staff and the strategic objectives of the school which offset some of the administrative and financial inputs.

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<sup>13</sup> Possibly accounting for the NA responses in the survey