

# **MONASH PRATO STUDY ABROAD RESEARCH PROJECT**

## **FINAL REPORT**

**2011-2012**



**Professor Loretta Baldassar and Dr Jane Mulcock**

## **CONTENTS PAGE**

Acknowledgements	<b>3</b>
<b>PART 1: BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW</b>	<b>4</b>
Introduction	
Funding	<b>6</b>
Research Project Overview	
Aims of the Study	<b>7</b>
Research Methodology	
Participant Observation	
Qualitative Interviews	
Online Surveys	
Textual Analysis	
<b>PART 2: STUDY ABROAD AT MONASH AND BEST PRACTICE</b>	<b>9</b>
Monash University Study Abroad Programs	
Promoting Study Abroad at Monash: Institutional claims	
The 'Monash Graduate Attributes Policy'	
'Study at Monash' and 'Study Abroad and Exchange'	<b>10</b>
'Explore the world'	
Monash Abroad 'Explore'	
Review of Best Practice: intercultural learning in study abroad outcomes	<b>11</b>
Types of Study Abroad Programs	<b>12</b>
Defining Local Engagement in the context of Tertiary Study Abroad	<b>15</b>
A model for the evaluation of intercultural outcomes in study abroad programs: Formal curriculum, Informal Curriculum and the role of 'Being There'	
<b>PART 3: STUDY ABROAD IN ITALY AT MONASH AND WARWICK</b>	<b>17</b>
Introduction	
'Being There' for staff and students at MUPC	
Faculty of Arts and Faculty of Art, Design and Architecture: Being in Italy, Being in Prato	<b>18</b>
Faculty of Law: Being in Europe, Being in Florence	<b>23</b>
Study Abroad at The University of Warwick: Being in Italy, Being in Venice	<b>25</b>
<b>PART 4: KEY ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<b>26</b>
Achieving intercultural learning outcomes	
Pressures on Melbourne-Based Teaching Staff	<b>27</b>
Student Needs	
- Length of stay	<b>28</b>
- Accommodation	
- Language and Culture knowledge	
- Student preparation	<b>29</b>
- Student behavior	
Community and Local Engagement	
- Site visits	<b>30</b>
Long term outcomes of MUPC programs	
<b>REFERENCES</b>	<b>31</b>

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

We would like to acknowledge the assistance of the many Monash staff and students and associates of Monash Prato who have contributed to the research that underpins this report.

The Global Engagement team, the Faculty of Arts and the Bill Kent Foundation provided essential support for the project.

Monash University Prato Centre Staff generously shared their experiences of working with Monash students and their reflections on different program formats in interviews and through regular discussion. They also facilitated Mulcock's visits to Prato.

Melbourne-based teaching and administrative staff also participated in the project by taking part in interviews and informal discussion. The insights offered by these staff members were based on their direct experience of running and managing the Prato programs.

Special thanks to the academic staff who taught programs in Prato and who provided valuable support and input - often under time-pressured circumstances.

Thanks most of all, to the Monash Prato students who completed online surveys, volunteered to be interviewed (thereby sacrificing precious time away from study or leisure), and accepted the presence and questions of the participant observer anthropologist.

We are also grateful to University of Warwick staff and students who collaborated on the comparative study, in particular Dr Loredana Polezzi (Director, Warwick Venice).

The final version of this report benefitted from valuable feedback from presentations to the Bill Kent Foundation Board, the Faculty of Arts Prato Group and staff at MUPC. Special thanks to Rae Frances, Cecilia Hewlett, Peter Howard, Susanna Scarparo, Michael Simmonds, Rita Wilson and, in particular, Narelle McAuliffe, Loredana D'Elia and Cathy Crupi.

## PART 1 BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW

This project was initiated and coordinated by Professor Loretta Baldassar during her term as Director of the Monash University Prato Centre (2009-2011). Dr Jane Mulcock, a consultant anthropologist, was employed to conduct the research and co-author this report. All the Monash Prato and several Monash Melbourne staff contributed to the research process.

The main motivations for the project included:

1. To examine how the Monash Prato Centre can become more actively involved in the delivery of both academic and intercultural learning outcomes (in addition to administrative support).

The Centre has grown consistently and significantly since its inception a decade ago and there is much potential, and arguably a real need, for it to provide more than administrative support. The development and expansion of specialist roles for Monash Prato staff (including Academic Programs Coordinator, Research Officer, Network and Systems Administrator, Receptionist, Admin and Accommodation Officers etc)<sup>1</sup> has enabled the Centre to contribute to the core business of student programming. Further development of Monash Prato staff roles would have the benefit of alleviating some of the strain on Monash Melbourne staff coordinating the programs as well as helping to enhance the overall experience and study outcomes for students, particularly in the areas associated with intercultural learning.

2. To evaluate staff and student experiences in order to better plan for future development of the Centre. Identified areas of student-related needs include:

- more extensive and formal processes of pastoral care and support (especially after hours);
- improved and targeted preparation for the study abroad experience to ensure students and staff can make the most of their time in Prato, particularly short courses;
- scaffolding and better linked academic and intercultural learning outcomes; increased options for students to extend their study abroad experience; access to Italian language and culture course content.

Identified areas of staff-related needs include:

- more support for coordination and provision of academic content for programs in Prato;
- assistance with duty of care responsibilities for students, including assisting students with VISA and stay permit issues in the case of extended programs;
- specialist input to achieve appropriate intercultural learning outcomes.

3. To assess the ways in which Monash Prato programs are responding to university aims and objectives around intercultural learning; academic standards and student satisfaction.

The Monash Prato Centre Study Abroad programs are generally promoted, along with all Monash University study abroad options, as important opportunities to deliver student outcomes around internationalization. For example, the 'Monash Promise' to prepare its graduates to be responsible and effective global citizens includes the key graduate attribute of 'cross-cultural competence'. The study abroad experience is routinely equated with forms of intercultural learning including developing an international perspective and a chance to experience new cultures. However, overall, at least with regards to programs at MUPC, there are very few specific initiatives and course development supports to achieve or monitor these intended outcomes. This research report offers some key recommendations in this regard.

4. To ensure Monash Prato students are better prepared for the experience of living in Prato and Florence, given the particular social and political context that characterizes these provinces today. Prato could be described as something of a 'hot spot' in Europe today in terms of social integration issues. Of 188,011 inhabitants, 28,402 are resident immigrants (15.1%), more than double the national proportion of immigrants (7%). Most of these people have arrived since the mid-1990s. Chinese immigrants now make up 41.8% of the resident immigrant population of Prato and 6.3% of the total number of inhabitants in Prato (Ufficio Statistica, Comune di Prato, 31.12.2010). Changing economic and political conditions have added to the social and political tensions of rapidly changing population dynamics.

---

<sup>1</sup> Previously there were relatively undifferentiated staff administration roles only.

For many decades, Prato has been a world-renowned centre for textile production. In the 1970s it was 'the main woolens manufacturing centre in Italy and one of the largest in the world' (Beccatini, p.164) and held two international textile expos per year (p.134). However, this industry is now in serious decline in the town, especially since the global economic crisis. At the same time it is undergoing a shift in focus as Chinese immigrants, who initially worked in the textile factories, have begun to develop a new successful sector in the industry known as 'ready made fashion'. These factors have led to a crisis of identity for the town, with recent elections in Prato resulting in a change from 65 year centre left government to centre right on a wave of anti-immigration and anti-Chinese protest. As a consequence, Prato is now experiencing an increased military presence and a crackdown on immigration. From time to time Monash Prato students, particularly those of Asian background, get caught up in these social dynamics.

This context makes Prato an ideal location for a Monash study abroad centre because it is a particularly apposite example of contemporary Europe. Given its social characteristics, it is becoming less and less easy to sustain the myth of romantic cultural Italy when visiting Prato. Although interviews with students suggest that this is still possible to some extent for those who do not speak Italian and do not venture very far outside the walls of the historic town centre. Monash students were more likely to comment on the overt interest that they felt Italian men showed towards Australian women rather than on any ethnic tensions – beyond noting the presence and persistence of African street vendors.<sup>2</sup> In fact, there were several instances in 2011 where male students felt threatened by young men they identified as Italian.

Some of the American programs in the region attempt to shelter their students from the reality of the increasing cultural diversity of Tuscany. The extent to which Monash students are sheltered depends in part on the structure of their courses and accommodation is a central issue here. Whether students are all living in shared college type accommodation or if they are living in the community in smaller groups. Whether they are chaperoned by their course coordinators most of the time or whether they do a lot of independent travel.

In order to better prepare students for the realities of life in Prato today, there have been important developments and improvements to the processes around pre-departure and orientation on arrival for all students visiting Prato. Baldassar submitted an application for a Depth Unit to be offered to all Prato students to further facilitate their intercultural learning and academic experiences. The findings of this research project were intended to inform the development of this unit. While the application was unsuccessful, Faculty of Arts staff, Rita Wilson and Sarah McDonald, have redeveloped an existing depth unit on social inclusion and connecting communities. This kind of unit could provide a structured learning opportunity that would assist students to better understand and reflect on their positive and negative experiences in Prato and deliver specific intercultural learning outcomes. This report provides relevant research data and a rationale for the importance of this kind of curriculum.

As an aside, Monash is involved in a number of local engagement and academic leadership initiatives that respond to the social inclusion issues and migrant presence in Prato including a Memorandum of Understanding between MUPC, Prato Province, the Prato branch of the University of Florence (PIN) and Wenzhou University in China. MUPC has hosted a series of conferences on the Chinese in Prato, the first two of which produced an edited volume, Johanson, G. et al. (2009) *Living Outside the Walls: The Chinese in Prato*, which has since been translated into Italian by the Prato Province and into Chinese by Wenzhou University. This volume has become the key English language text on the issue. Wenzhou University and MUPC now take turns to host annual conferences on this theme. In 2011 an international conference on *China in the World* was jointly hosted by MUPC and partner institutions, the proceedings of which are in the process of being published. A very successful writing competition for second generation migrants was jointly launched by MUPC and Prato Province and resulted in a published collection of short stories. Scholars at the European University Institute have expressed an interest in co-hosting with MUPC a conference on *China in the EU neighbourhood* in 2013.

---

<sup>2</sup> Some Monash students came very close to witnessing the shooting of African street vendors by an Italian gunman in Florence.

## **Funding**

Funding for the project was received from:

Monash University

- Office of DVC Global Engagement
- Bill Kent Foundation
- Faculty of Arts

University of Warwick (Comparison with Warwick Venice and Erasmus models)

- Institute of Advanced Teaching and Learning

## **Research Project Overview**

The project was originally designed to run over 6 months, encompassing the Prato Law Program (April – July 2011) alone and funded by the MUPC Director's initiative fund. However, we decided to value-add to the project by collecting additional data on the Archeology and Art and Design programs run in June and July, since these overlapped with the end of the Law program and Mulcock's presence in Prato. Important differences in student experience across the programs were immediately evident from the additional data collected, confirming to us the value of working with as many of the Monash student groups as possible. We then extended the project to incorporate groups visiting Prato from July 2011 – February 2012 and were granted further funding by the Bill Kent Foundation and the Faculty of Arts. This allowed us to monitor a full year of courses and activities at the Centre, a total of nine academic programs.

There has been no prior systematic evaluation of student experience at the Prato Centre (outside of formal academic course evaluations). This project has collected evidence about student expectations, opinions and experiences of studying at the Monash University Prato Centre. One hundred and forty three Monash students completed pre-departure surveys about their expectations and preparation for the Prato programs they participated in. Sixty three students also provided feedback about their experiences in Prato by taking part in interviews or focus groups. In addition, 49 academic and administrative Monash staff involved in the programs were interviewed about their experiences of working with students at the Prato Centre.

Some comparative data was also collected on study abroad programs run by the University of Warwick In Italy (64 survey responses and 19 interviews with students and staff). This additional component of the project was also conducted by Dr Mulcock, in collaboration with Dr Loredana Polezzi (Director, Warwick Venice) and Prof Baldassar. This initiative grew out of a Monash-Warwick Strategic Initiative grant 2010-11 (Baldassar, Burns, Polezzi, Scarparo, Wilson) at the suggestion that the Monash Prato study be repeated for Warwick Venice. The Warwick Venice study was funded by a grant from Warwick's Institute of Advanced Teaching and Learning. It focused on two term-length programs in History and Art History at Warwick's Venice centre. Italian Language students participating in the 'Year Abroad', part of the Erasmus program have also contributed to the Warwick study. Their experience provides a valuable comparison to the shorter Monash programs that are not based on Italian language development. A report on the Warwick project is currently being prepared by Mulcock, Polezzi and Baldassar.

## **Aims of the Study**

The overall aims of the study are captured in the following four points.

- To understand how the existing courses offered at Monash Prato are perceived and experienced by students and staff in order to better understand how the Monash Prato Centre can best support them.
- To conduct an ethnographic case study examining the expectations, opportunities and outcomes of study abroad programs offered at Monash Prato, including
  - Student perspectives
  - Staff perspectives (both Monash and Prato staff)
  - University perspectives (broader institutional agendas around study abroad as an element of internationalisation).
- To develop recommendations based on findings, in particular for Monash Prato staff, to ensure the Centre is meeting its responsibilities to students and staff.
- To produce research and publication outcomes based on the data collected.

Our initial proposal, prepared in January 2011, included several additional aims (and projected outcomes), which we report on briefly below, but which are not considered in detail in this report because they are ongoing and have been taken up by other Monash staff.

- The development of a more extensive orientation program for Prato students  
Initially, this was conceived to include the offering of a Monash Prato Depth Unit. As noted above, the Faculty of Arts is managing the development of this kind of unit. However, partly as a response to this research project, the orientation process at Monash Prato has been significantly revised and strengthened over the past two years by Monash Prato Staff under the guidance of the Monash Prato Board. Important legal and duty of care issues have been considered and a more extensive program of orientation is now offered at the Centre, including detailed orientation packs, formal staff and student Agreements as well as some intercultural learning content. Since June 2012 the Centre offers weekly conversation exchange meetings that have so far proved very successful with students (both Monash and non Monash) and the local community.
- The development of a cross-institutional cultural literacy unit with the University of Warwick.  
This idea grew out of the Monash-Warwick Strategic Initiative Project coordinated by Baldassar, Burns, Polezzi, Scarparo and Wilson. The findings of the Monash Prato and Warwick Venice projects will contribute to the further development of this initiative, which has been taken up by Polezzi and Wilson.
- The development of a series of processes and forums through which it would be possible to track the longer-term outcomes of Monash programs.  
Logistical factors, such as lack of support and funding to access the Prato alumni network, meant that we were not able to pursue all of these plans. However, they remain important considerations and are noted in the recommendations of this report.

## **Research Methodology**

A mixed-methods approach was undertaken with an emphasis on qualitative open-ended interviews and participant observation. An on-line survey was also designed and implemented. Ethics approval was obtained from Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (MUHREC, project number CF11/0503 – 2011000206).

Dr Mulcock spent two three-month periods at the Prato Centre (11 April - 9 July and November 18 – February 17) and also interviewed staff and students during three visits to Melbourne in March, August and October of 2011. Data was collected on nine of the Prato programs: law, art, design, architecture, archaeology, history, cultural studies, and music programs in 2011 and the Italian Studies program in January - February 2012. Five alumni who participated in 2010 programs were also interviewed.

**Participant observation**, in particular, provided an important opportunity to gather informal feedback from students and to build an understanding of student experience outside of the classroom – especially during site visits. Of particular interest to us were the cultures (e.g. of study, interaction,) that students bring with them to their study abroad experience. Participant Observation greatly enhanced our ability to interpret comments and reflections offered in interviews and survey responses. This strategy of collecting data was also an important avenue for building the rapport necessary for securing and conducting meaningful qualitative interviews with students. It also allowed us to customise our questions to reflect specific events and unit content, and to explore matters of greatest importance to students and staff themselves.

Notwithstanding the benefits and strengths of this methodology, it is important to note that the relationship between Dr Mulcock as researcher and the students must be contextualized within the broader ‘us-them’ division between undergraduate students and university staff.<sup>3</sup> The researchers fell clearly into the category of staff. Mulcock worked part time as an administrative assistant and exam invigilator as a way of increasing her involvement in the law program. This strategy had the benefit of providing detailed knowledge of the running of the Centre but also further identified Mulcock as a member of staff. Ideally, the researcher would have actively engaged in the courses as a fellow student, in order to counteract this division. However, funding and time constraints made this impossible.

In addition, communication with academic staff was sometimes limited due to the pressures of teaching and assessment schedules, pastoral care demands, and the daily challenges of organizing field trips and other educational activities whilst in Prato. Mulcock interacted with students during these and other organised events (e.g. language exchange meetings). She also participated in classes when possible.

**Qualitative interviews** were conducted on a voluntary basis (students were self-selecting for the most part) and it must be noted that those who chose to contribute to the project are not necessarily representative of their respective groups. Many of these 63 students indicated that they were naturally reflective and often appeared to be more engaged in the academic experience than some of their peers. Several student participants also observed that being on a study abroad program automatically led to an increased amount of self-reflection as they negotiated the daily challenges and pleasures of being in a new location. The 49 interviews conducted with Monash staff provided valuable context for the student feedback and allowed us to collect some anecdotal information on patterns of student experience over time. These semi-structured, open-ended interviews provided excellent opportunities to draw out diverse student and staff perspectives. However, tight timetables and other student priorities, particularly in the shorter arts programs, sometimes made it difficult to access students. A small number of students and staff volunteers involved in the July Cultural Studies program and in the September Architecture program were interviewed at Monash Melbourne in August during the period that Mulcock was back in Australia.

**Online surveys** were designed to be administered to each student group pre-departure. However, this proved logistically difficult in some cases. For various reasons, the timing of the survey for the arts programs resulted in students trying to complete the online pre-departure surveys after they had arrived in Prato. This was further compounded by their limited internet access and competing academic and social commitments whilst in Italy. This said, the 143 surveys that were submitted do provide some important insights into student expectations of Prato programs – even if response rates for some individual programs were relatively low.

**Textual analysis** has also provided an important foundation for this study. We have collected and considered a range of information and promotional material produced by Monash University, including websites, brochures and documentation relating to study abroad programs. This material has allowed us to develop an overview of the institutional expectations of study abroad programs that are presented to students and the wider community.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> This division is less evident with mature-aged students. These older students tended to interact more confidently with the researchers and volunteered more readily to be interviewed.

<sup>4</sup> We have gathered a large amount of rich information in the course of this project and would like to be able to prepare individual reports for each of the nine programs we worked on. However, the time required to process this amount of



## PART 2: STUDY ABROAD AT MONASH AND BEST PRACTICE

Monash University is Australia's largest university and its most international, with campuses in Malaysia and South Africa and centres in Italy and India. New centres are also being developed in China and the Middle East.

### Monash University Study Abroad Programs

Monash offers a variety of study abroad programs including:

- Semester long intercampus exchanges at Monash campuses in Malaysia and South Africa
- Study abroad and exchange programs at 'more than 130 partner universities in 28 countries' (Monash University 2010a)<sup>5</sup>. These programs allow students '...to study overseas for one or two semesters and to earn credit towards their Monash degrees without adding time to the length of their degree'.<sup>6</sup>
- More than 50 short term international study programs, at least one in every faculty, which usually consist of Monash units taught intensively by Monash staff over two – eight weeks outside of Australia (Monash University 2010a). The programs run through Monash University Prato Centre fit into this category.

### Promoting Study Abroad at Monash: Institutional claims

Monash University, in keeping with current trends in tertiary education, makes clear statements about its commitment to delivering opportunities and outcomes around internationalization for its students. This Institutional priority is highlighted in The '**Monash Graduate Attributes Policy**', available on the University's website in 2011 and 2012.

Monash University prepares its graduates to be:

1. responsible and effective global citizens who:
  - a) engage in an internationalised world
  - b) exhibit cross-cultural competence
  - c) demonstrate ethical values
2. critical and creative scholars who:
  - a) produce innovative solutions to problems
  - b) apply research skills to a range of challenges
  - c) communicate perceptively and effectively<sup>7</sup>

This statement is also included on the second page of all Monash unit outlines underneath the unit-specific learning outcomes.

For the purposes of this report, we draw particular attention to the first point – responsible and effective global citizens – in relation to the potential benefits of Study Abroad programs, especially the reference to cross-cultural competence. However, the second point – critical and creative scholars – and each of its components is equally relevant; responsible, engaged global citizens become effective by being ethical, critical, creative,

---

qualitative data is considerable. With provision of funding to cover the costs of interview transcription and additional time for integration and analysis of data we would be happy to produce comprehensive reports for each program.

<sup>5</sup> Monash University, 2010a, 'Explore: Studying Abroad: Opportunities for Monash University students to study offshore'.

<sup>6</sup> Monash University, 2010b, 'Monash Abroad application form: outgoing Exchange and study abroad'.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.policy.monash.edu/policy-bank/academic/education/management/monash-graduate-attributes-policy.html>

Accessed November 17, 2012

innovative and perceptive in their approaches to all the challenges they encounter. Ideally, the intercultural experience of studying abroad should provide students with opportunities to develop all of these attributes.

### **'Study at Monash' and 'Study Abroad and Exchange'**

The Monash website strongly promotes study abroad opportunities. From the University's homepage, the **'Study at Monash'** tab leads to a list of options, the second of which is **'Study Abroad and Exchange'**. Clicking on the study abroad link brings up a statement about Monash's 'global network' which is said to give students 'a global perspective'.<sup>8</sup> Three options for studying abroad are described: Monash students can undertake one or more semesters at international Monash campuses (Malaysia and South Africa); international exchanges with Monash's partner universities; and 'short-term' or single semester 'international study programs'. There are 77 short term international study programs listed across the University, 21 of which run through the Prato Centre<sup>9</sup>. Most of these short programs can be credited towards Monash degrees. They run for between 2 and 8 weeks, many during university holidays so that students can experience studying abroad without extending the length of their degree (Monash 2010a, p.5). Travel grants are provided to assist eligible students to take up these opportunities. Monash even has a Bachelor of Arts (Global) which includes a compulsory study abroad component.

The University also employs student testimonials to promote its Study Abroad programs. The Study Abroad link from the Current Students page leads to an online video entitled **'Explore the world'**.<sup>10</sup> This video presents testimonials from Australian Monash students studying at the Sunway campus in Malaysia. They refer to the 'great support' provided by Monash, the opportunities to 'develop an international portfolio and demonstrate versatility to future employers', 'to travel in the region and meet people from other cultures', to experience a 'different lifestyle', see new things, change career directions, 'broaden horizons' and view the world differently. These students describe their experience of studying in Malaysia as 'amazing', 'wonderful', 'exceptional', 'fantastic'. One student also makes the point that the campus is 'really similar to Australia', which she identifies as a significant advantage.

The 2011 **Monash Abroad 'Explore'** brochure includes similar testimonials that emphasize how much fun it is to study abroad. A student studying in Mexico promises readers that they will 'have a ball' in Monterrey; a student at the Sunway campus reports that she is 'having the time of [her] life'; and a student at the South African campus states that he is having 'the most amazing time...the best experience of [his] life' (Monash 2010a, p.3) The brochure states that 'Monash actively encourages students to fulfill their potential through overseas study' and that 'Students who choose to study abroad acquire a deeper understanding of other cultures, a new network of International colleagues and learning that extends far beyond the class room.'

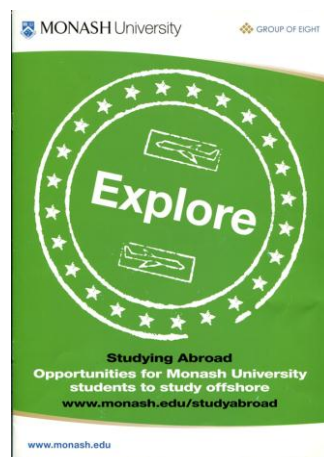


Figure 1: Monash University Study Abroad Brochure, 2010.

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.monash.edu.au/study/options/more/abroad.html>, Accessed November 17, 2012

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.monash.edu.au/students/studyabroad/programs/facultyinformation.html>, Accessed November 17, 2012

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.monash.edu.au/students/studyabroad/video.html>, Accessed November 17, 2012

## Review of Best Practice: intercultural learning in study abroad outcomes

Although there is no explicit link made between study abroad and graduate attributes, the promotional material and program information contain a series of implicit assumptions about the developmental potential of the study abroad experience, and more specifically, of travel. For example, the brochure for the Study Abroad program offered by the Australian Centre for Jewish Civilisation employs the slogan '*Travel... Learn... Change*'. The increased mobility and diversity that characterizes the world today has led universities to identify a responsibility to ensure that graduates are competitive in the global labour market. The promotion and facilitation of study abroad opportunities seems to be a widely accepted strategy for achieving this. Taken-for-granted views about how international travel delivers positive life experiences that expand one's understanding of one's self and the world, thereby enhancing cultural competence, seem to provide the foundation for this approach. Anthropologist, Vered Amit (2010, p.16), observes, for example, that '...a long-standing belief in the educational value of travel, from the European Grand Tour of the seventeenth century to recent forms of youth travel, appears to be underpinning the faith of some committed advocates of internationalisation that student mobility has an intrinsic formative value regardless of the actual practices and motivations of student participants'. She argues that the '...Western view of travel as a vehicle for self-cultivation and transformation' is reflected in the widespread assumption that study abroad is valuable 'in and of itself', regardless of 'countervailing or unavailable evidence' (Amit 2010, p.13).

Research on the experiences of American students in Europe (Gmelch 1998, p.475) supports the idea that travel contributes to personal development because it requires students '...to continuously make decisions and deal with the demands of daily life in new and unfamiliar settings' but Gmelch also reports that '[w]hat the students learn about other cultures is often superficial' (p.475). This is a missed opportunity according to Franklin (2010, p.181-182), whose longitudinal research demonstrates that the attributes most appealing to employers about graduates who have studied abroad are associated with linguistic and cross-cultural competencies.

While a great deal of emphasis is often given to the objectives and outcomes of study abroad in the process of promoting it, very little, if any, information is provided about **how** these objectives, outcomes and attributes are achieved, what type of learning is required and how it is facilitated during the student's time abroad. Inherent in the rhetoric of internationalisation is the assumption that these outcomes will automatically occur as a consequence of studying abroad – or 'being there'. Lutterman-Aguilar and Gingerich (2002, p.42-43) draw on John Dewey's philosophy of experiential education and the work of a number of other scholars to argue that experience can only become knowledge through reflection, analysis and synthesis. They point out, for example, that an opportunity to Study Abroad, like any other experience, can just as easily be 'mis-educative' if the student perceives it in a negative light (e.g. by creating or reinforcing cross-cultural stereotypes or prejudices rather than challenging or extending them).

Clearly, some study abroad programs have more overt emphasis on intercultural learning and personal transformation than others, depending on the nature of the academic subject under study, the preparation of the student, and the opportunities for cross-cultural engagement. The Monash study abroad programs organised by the Australian Centre for Jewish Civilisation take students to visit places of conflict that have powerful historical significance and which are likely to have intense emotional impacts, including South Africa, Jerusalem and Krakow. In this case the promotional slogan of '*Travel... Learn... Change*' may be more closely and predictably linked to the actual outcomes of the study abroad experience than a study abroad program with an academic focus that is not particularly relevant to the location.



The ACJC offers three overseas study intensives (each 12 credit points)

**Seeking Justice: South Africa and Rwanda (July 2011)**  
ATS3314/4314

This two-week winter intensive unit will bring together students from Monash campuses in Australia and South Africa to study the contemporary histories of post-genocide and post-conflict societies.

**Israelis and Palestinians: Between War and Peace (November 2011)**  
ATS3287/4287/APG4287

This intensive Study Abroad Unit, offered in partnership with George Mason University, explores peace, conflict and reconciliation. Based in Jerusalem, it examines the complexities of Israeli and Palestinian society. Students will investigate current attempts to mediate peace between Jews and Palestinians through political, social and educational institutions.

**Final Journey: The Life and Death of European Jews, 1900-1945 (July 2012)**  
ATS3286/4286/APG4286

This intensive Study Abroad Unit, presented in conjunction with the Jagiellonian University in Krakow, explores the pre-war life of European Jewry. It will take students to sites that mark the rise of Nazism. They will study the Final Solution through lectures, museums, memorials and meetings with European students grappling with the legacy of the past.

For further information visit [www.arts.monash.edu/acjc](http://www.arts.monash.edu/acjc)

**MONASH University**  
Australian Centre for Jewish Civilisation

**MONASH University**  
Australian Centre for Jewish Civilisation

Figure 2 : ‘Travel, Learn, Change’

### Types of Study Abroad Programs

Engle and Engle (2003) argue that Study Abroad programs, despite their diversity, can be grouped into five general categories based on the extent to which they provide students with opportunities to develop their cross-cultural competence, identified by these authors as the ideal outcome for all study abroad experiences (p.7). Engle and Engle propose a hierarchy of five levels (see figures 3 and 4 below) based on the following seven ‘interlocking and interacting’ factors, which they identify as of key importance to student development of cross-cultural competencies:

1. Length of student sojourn
2. Entry target-language competence
3. Language used in course work
4. Context of academic work
5. Types of student housing
6. Provisions for guided/structured cultural interaction and experiential learning.
7. Guided reflection on cultural experience.

Program Components	Level One: Study Tour	Level Two: Short-Term Study	Level Three: Cross-Cultural Contact Program	Level Four: Cross-Cultural Encounter Program	Level Five: Cross-Cultural Immersion Program
	<b>Duration</b>	Several days to a few weeks	3 to 8 weeks, summer programs	Semester	Semester to academic year
<b>Entry target-language competence</b>	Elementary to intermediate	Elementary to intermediate	Elementary to intermediate	Pre-advanced to advanced	Advanced
<b>Language used in course work</b>	English	English and target-language	English and target-language	Predominantly target-language	Target-language in all curricular and extracurricular activities
<b>Academic work context</b>	Home institution faculty	In-house or institute for foreign students	Student group or with other international students	In house student group	Local norms, partial or complete direct enrollment
<b>Housing</b>	Collective	Collective and/or home stay	Collective, home stay visit, home stay rental	Home stay rental or integration home stay	Individual integration home stay
<b>Provisions for cultural interaction, experiential learning</b>	None	None	None or limited	Optional participation in occasional integration activities	Required regular participation in cultural integration program, extensive direct cultural contact via service learning, work internship
<b>Guided reflection on cultural experience</b>	None	Orientation program	Orientation program	Orientation program, initial and ongoing	Orientation program, mentoring, on-going orientation or course in cross-cultural perspectives, reflective writing and research

Figures 3 & 4 : Engle and Engle 2003, p.10-11.

The authors emphasise that these levels are not equivalent to quality, but rather to the claims that can be made about the outcomes of the study abroad program. The programs run at the Monash University Prato Centre fit most comfortably into level one (Study Tour) and level two (Short-term Study). This positioning has implications for the potential of the programs to meet the intercultural learning and personal transformation outcomes identified in the Monash Graduate Attributes Policy. Engle and Engle 2003 point out that universities should be clear about what kinds of study abroad courses they are offering, with realistic and clearly defined expected outcomes that are linked to actual course content and programming.

Even a very quick literature search reveals that there is extensive international scholarship on personal transformation and the development of intercultural competence associated with study abroad experiences. This research provides a rich source of data, analysis and ideas for maximizing the benefits of study abroad. Laubscher (1994), for example, offers a range of strategies for using ethnographic methodologies and understandings about experiential learning to support students studying abroad to become more aware of cultural differences through their non-curricular experiences. Jackson (2010a) provides a useful overview of this scholarship in her chapter on 'Intercultural and Global Competencies'. She states that '[m]any assume that [opportunities to study abroad] will automatically lead to enhanced intercultural understandings and greater proficiency in the host language' (p.ix) and questions whether this is really the case. Her ethnographic research on student experience led her to '... emphasize the merits of experiential learning and systematic critical reflection to promote interculturality and intercultural communicative competence' (p.xii) amongst students taking part in study abroad programs.

There are also a large number of practically focused resources including handbooks on intercultural competence and communication (e.g Jackson 2010b, Deardoff 2009, Byram, 2006 Landis, Bennett & Bennett 2004) and a range of instruments designed to monitor and measure intercultural competence (see Figure 5 for a list of examples presented by Alvino Fantini at the Intercultural Horizons conference on best practices in intercultural competence development, held by the International Centre for Intercultural Exchange in Siena, Italy, in May 2011).

## Instruments to Monitor and Measure the Development of Intercultural Competence

<b>Cross-Cultural Assessor</b>	A personal navigator for successful communication across cultures. This multimedia program measures, builds and manages cross-cultural skills and characteristics, through the use of exercises and questionnaires.
<b>Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI)</b>	This 44-item questionnaire assesses intercultural development along a continuum ranging from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism (SIT learning assessment tool).
<b>Cross-Cultural Adaptability Inventory (CCAI)</b>	This self-assessment questionnaire measures adaptability in the four dimensions of Emotional Resilience, Flexibility/Openness, Perceptual Acuity, and Personal Autonomy
<b>Assessment of Intercultural Competence (AIC) (in a YOGA Format)</b>	This self-assessment tool charts students' own development (SIT learning assessment tool; Alvino Fantini, "A Central Concern: Developing Intercultural Competence, pg. 31).
<b>Success Factors Chart</b>	This chart can be a valuable tool in the selection process when evaluating candidates for intercultural assignments ( <a href="http://www.highcontext.com/Articles/srp/Chapter5EffectivenessofCr.php">www.highcontext.com/Articles/srp/Chapter5EffectivenessofCr.php</a> ).
<b>Australian Second Language Proficiency Ratings (ASLPR)</b>	This scale, developed by Ingram and Wylie in 1982, groups various components of language use together in a single band descriptor to assess second language proficiency.
<b>Questions, Comments, Concerns (QCC's)</b>	This student tool monitors and evaluates progress for the day or for a current task ( <a href="http://www.netc.org/classrooms@work/classrooms/peter/assessing">www.netc.org/classrooms@work/classrooms/peter/assessing</a> ).
<b>Cultural Competence Self-Assessment Instrument</b>	This instrument helps identify, improve and enhance cultural competence in staff relations and client service delivery (Washington, D.C., Child Welfare League of America Publications; 1993; Catalogue number 5065).
<b>American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) Proficiency Scale</b>	This scale assesses the level of language attainment achieved (Liskin-Gasparro, 1982; Alvino Fantini, "A Central Concern: Developing Intercultural Competence, pg. 31).
<b>European Language Portfolio</b>	This tool, developed by the Council of Europe in collaboration with the Common European Framework, uses three parts (a passport, a language biography, and a dossier) to self-assess of intercultural competence (Karen-Margrete Frederiksen, "Foreword: Intercultural Competence).
<b>Cultural Self-Awareness Test</b>	This simple three question test helps identify high- and low-context characteristics in those who take it (The Management Center, Graduate School of Business, University of St. Thomas, Minneapolis, MN).
<b>Culture-free Scale</b>	This instrument, developed by Chen and Starosta, measures intercultural sensitivity.
<b>Intercultural Competence Questionnaire</b>	Test your intercultural competence with this questionnaire ( <a href="http://www.7d-culture.nl/Content/cont053b.htm">www.7d-culture.nl/Content/cont053b.htm</a> ).

© Fantini Brattleboro, Vermont, USA, 2011

Figure 5: Instruments to Measure and Monitor the Development of Intercultural Development. (Fantini 2011)

For the purposes of our discussion, we propose that the seven interlocking and interacting factors identified by Engle and Engle (2003) as central to the development of cross cultural competencies can be usefully collectively discussed as components of local engagement. Overall, the relevant academic literature concerning best practice in study abroad highlights the importance of local engagement to facilitate intercultural learning outcomes.

## Defining Local Engagement in the context of Tertiary Study Abroad

While there appears to be no specific definition of local engagement in relation to Study Abroad at Monash, the University has a 'Community Relations Framework' (2010) which states that, "Through our engagement, outreach and partnerships, Monash University's goal is to make a demonstrably positive impact on the communities that it serves" (p 3). The Framework identifies four key principles: Social responsibility, Institutional development, Personal self-advancement and Translation of research, innovation and knowledge exchange. In addition, the Monash University, 'Community-Campus Summit on International Students' canvassed a range of issues on best practices and international student welfare. While these documents are not directed at study abroad, they contain many principles that could be applied to student local engagement and the development of cross-cultural competencies.

Rotabi, Gammonley & Gamble (2006) point out that while study abroad has become a common experience for tertiary students, 'there is little guidance for facilitation of such courses in an international context' (p451). They present a conceptual model for the development of cross-cultural competencies through local engagement, which includes 'facilitated learning in a safe environment and integrity' (p451). After reviewing the relevant literature, Fleischman, Lawley & Raciti, (2010) propose a definition of community engagement as it applies to the international student experience, as follows:

the mutual creation of knowledge and value networks on a personal and professional level, via international student involvement and participation in unique university facilitated community experiences; which enriches the international student experience, assimilates local and global cultures, and yields superior value for the student, the university and the community (p1).

A related field of research examines 'service learning', which could be described as a highly structured form of local engagement. Annette (2002) defines it as

'an experiential learning program where students learn through engaging in service in partnership with a local community. It involves reflective learning activities which enable a student to develop key skills and capabilities, and a greater sense of civic awareness and active citizenship. The experience should be of sufficient length to enable students to benefit fully from it, and they must be challenged to be reflective and to link their learning to their college curriculum (p83).

It is worth highlighting that a common theme in the research on local engagement for study abroad is that student learning should be 'facilitated' through specifically designed learning activities (see also Bringle & Hatcher 1999).

In the following sections we report on our research findings to consider how intercultural learning outcomes and local engagement are approached by the staff and students who participate in programs at the Monash Prato Centre. We begin by introducing the model used by Elspeth Jones (2011) as a useful tool for understanding the different components of the study abroad experience. We extend Jones's model to provide a way for academic staff to evaluate their programming in terms of intercultural outcomes and think through additional strategies for facilitating these.

### **A model for the evaluation of intercultural outcomes in study abroad programs: *Formal curriculum, Informal Curriculum and the (Potential) Power of 'Being There'***

Jones identifies two key methods that facilitate intercultural learning. Integral to these methods, as explained above in the best practice literature, is the role of local engagement in the sense of engaging with different localities, and encountering different people and places.

1. *Formal curriculum* refers to the inclusion of specific activities, learning modules, and/or assessments designed to develop intercultural skills. These comprise guided self-reflective exercises linked or parallel to local engagement activities, including projects, essays, journaling, etc, that are formally assessed for marks towards the final grade. Formal curriculum corresponds to Engle & Engle's (2003) interlocking and interacting factors (6) provisions for guided/structured cultural interaction and experiential learning and (7) guided

reflection on cultural experience. (For more discussion of the role and value of reflective practice, see Spalding and Wilson 2002, Hubbs and Brand 2005, Boud 2001, Loughran 2002).

2. *Informal curriculum* refers to local engagement and other activities, events and programs which are arranged by the university or course administration but not accredited within the main program of study and which are not guided by academic staff. Examples include celebrations, events, festivals, films, exhibitions. There is no formal self-reflective requirement structured into these activities. However, unit programmers often assume that self-reflection will be a natural or automatic outcome for student participants.

In addition to these two methods, we feel it is important to introduce a third element that facilitates intercultural learning which we refer to as the '*being there*' factor. These include the extra-curricular elements of the experience.

3. 'Being there'

*'Just being here is amazing!'* – or expressions of a similar sentiment – were commonly reported by both students and staff interviewed in Prato.

The notion of 'being there' links to the common sense, taken for granted ideas about the benefit of travel discussed above. 'Being there' is also a specific component of the study abroad experience that is often glossed in the promotional material as 'having fun', when in fact, the study abroad experience is also fraught with difficult, challenging and experiences that are not (always) 'fun'.

'Being there' is inherent in both formal and informal curriculum and also characterizes the entire duration of the study abroad experience. 'Being there' refers to the potential intrinsic to learning through first-hand experience, exposure to new environments, negotiating across linguistic and cultural differences and so on. It is also a core concept in anthropological methodology (e.g. Watson 1999, Bradburd 1998, Hannerz 2003)

The importance of 'being there' is often implied in the institutional rhetorics, (as in the examples above) that studying abroad – that is, simply 'being there' – in another country, automatically guarantees intercultural learning outcomes. This glosses over and erases the different ways of *being* and types of *there*, as well as the variety in content and forms of study. The assumed value of 'being there' can work as a kind of magician's hat or sleight of hand that carries significant credibility because it is a widely held view and collectively shared belief about the power of travel as a catalyst for learning and transformation. 'Being there' is a taken for granted, common sense notion that deserves to be carefully unpacked.

It is true that 'being there' has enormous potential to deliver intercultural learning. This is indeed the basis of the anthropological method of participant observation. Although, the anthropologist, unlike the student, has (presumably) studied and 'learnt' the relevant methodological and theoretical tools necessary to conduct successful participant observation in order to learn about the people and places under study. In contrast, the student is often simply expected to gain from the study abroad experience simply through 'being there'. Student learning from 'being there' is likely to be more complex and in depth the longer the being there and if the experience is scaffolded with formal and informal curricula.

'Being there' also has the potential to deliver a negative and potentially traumatizing experience. It has the potential to reinforce stereotypes and misunderstandings. This risk is greater without the scaffolding of formal and informal curricula, in particular, opportunities for guided reflection that encourage students to question their experiences and challenge their interpretations.

One of the most interesting findings from our research was that while the institutions and staff are (at least in theory) focused on the highest standards in academic and intercultural learning outcomes, the students often have a separate set of learning outcomes and objectives linked to global youth culture, developing peer group networks and having fun.



In summary, 'being there' delivers a wide variety of outcomes and certainly not necessarily the ones implied in the institutional rhetorics and perspectives.

Overall, our research findings suggest that the Monash Prato programs are generally characterized by an approach to intercultural learning outcomes as an implicit outcome of travel, delivered through 'being there'. In the remainder of the report we analyse the learning involved in travel abroad programs at Monash Prato from the perspectives of students and staff.

## **PART 3: STUDY ABROAD IN ITALY AT MONASH AND WARWICK**

### **Introduction**

While the units offered at Prato are limited, the Centre has grown significantly since its inception a decade ago and there are plans to expand and consolidate its programs. The Prato Centre is also a strong advertising or marketing tool for Monash University courses. Our findings confirm that a proportion of students do choose to study Law, Fine Arts, Music and Arts degrees at Monash over other universities because of the opportunity to undertake a study abroad program at Prato. For example, when asked about this in the pre-departure survey, 17 of 44 (37%) respondents from the law program agreed that the opportunity to study in Prato had influenced their decision to study at Monash.

Most of the Monash Prato Study Abroad programs in 2011 were, to varying degrees, 'excursion' based.<sup>11</sup> Students were taken on site visits to locations in the region of relevance to the themes covered in lectures, tutorials and studio projects. History students studying Dante visited his tomb, Art and Design students visited significant art collections and key religious artworks, Archaeology students visited excavation sites and museum collections. The Music and Architecture programs used Prato itself as their site; the former performed in local venues and had classes at the local music school; the latter used local public spaces as case studies for their projects. The Law program is the only program that does not include organised excursions.

All Prato programs are coordinated and taught by individual Monash faculties for full course credit. Students travel with Monash lecturers in class groups and stay together in Prato in accommodation organized by MUPC or Australians Studying Abroad (ASA - Arts and Art & Design use this contractor to organise the logistics of the program). The Law program is an exception to this because students are required to find their own accommodation and almost all choose to commute to Prato from Florence. A brief overview of programs is provided below.

### **'Being There' for Monash staff and students at MUPC**

In general, all academic staff share the view that 'being there' is both a key feature and intrinsically valuable aspect of study abroad programs. This said, the institutional rhetorics around study abroad outcomes are interpreted differently by various faculties and individual lecturers. Some do not refer to intercultural learning outcomes in the course outlines at all, others make a deliberate effort to develop formal or informal curricula around intercultural learning outcomes in their programs. Certain disciplines are characterized by academic content (themes/foci) that lends itself more explicitly to these intercultural learning outcomes.

We found almost as many different approaches to intercultural learning outcomes as there are individual lecturers. There does not appear to be any university wide set of guidelines or suggestions offered to academic staff to help them develop this as an explicit component of their courses. What does exist is the university rhetoric we describe in some detail above. But there is no 'how to'. Partly this is because the university has absolute faith in their academic staff to deliver excellent academic courses, which they do. However, many staff focus on academic learning outcomes and leave the intercultural learning outcomes simply and entirely to

---

<sup>11</sup> Donohue-Bergeler (2011) discusses ideal models for using excursions in language-focused Study Abroad programs -

the 'being there' factor. Further, there is a wide degree of variance between staff about just how well they understand the theory and methodology of delivering intercultural learning outcomes.

Like staff, the students also represent a variety of perspectives on study abroad. Students reported a variety of reasons for undertaking a study abroad experience. They each bring different interests and experiences with them and want different outcomes from the experience. Some are primarily interested in opportunities to travel and 'have fun', others hope to get through their course quicker. Very few identified doing the course specifically for intercultural learning outcomes. For many, Prato is valued as a convenient place from which to visit Europe, rather than for its specific Italian content. Several students have travelled before and some are very well travelled.

In the next section we provide an overview of the law program and the various courses offered in the arts and fine arts programs providing a brief comparison of institutional, faculty and student perspectives. We consider (and compare) in particular how local engagement and intercultural learning is approached in each course.

### **Faculty of Arts and Faculty of Art, Design and Architecture: Being in Italy, Being in Prato**

In general, the Faculties of Arts and Architecture, Fine Art & Design offer courses at Prato whose academic content and teaching approach is very closely aligned to many of the central aspects of intercultural learning outcomes. The disciplines in these faculties often employ processes of reflection as an integral part of their methodology and teaching practice. The reflective process is emphasized in the arts and humanities in general as an important methodology and teaching tool.

In addition, most of these programs involve small groups of students and the coordination of the whole experience is undertaken by the academic staff member in close association with students. They often travel together as a group and share accommodation together. Most of their informal activities outside of course time are shared together. This structure can produce a 'bubble effect' where students and staff work and socialise together, creating a space for themselves that is somewhat sheltered or partitioned off from the outside.<sup>12</sup> Some students experience this as a reassuring and safe way to undertake a study abroad experience. This is especially useful for students who have limited experience of travel and living abroad. For others, it was felt to be somewhat limiting and restrictive. Overall, students appreciated this course structure as very conducive to productive academic learning. A factor that is closely related to this issue of course structure and the 'bubble effect' is accommodation. The type and style of accommodation can have an enormous impact on the overall study abroad experience. Having access to quiet and comfortable study spaces is imperative to facilitating the best academic outcomes. Accommodation that is located in the community and that contains smaller groups of students can offer increased opportunities for informal local engagement. College dormitory style accommodation can increase the 'bubble effect' as well as limiting effective academic study.

As discussed in the literature review of best practice in study abroad, activities and exercises that involve guided self-reflection through local engagement are an integral part of achieving intercultural learning outcomes. Courses of language, history, art, music, architecture and archeology all, to varying degrees, require students to participate in local engagement activities and reflect on their experiences. This said, there is a wide degree of variance in how closely aligned the disciplinary or academic outcomes are to the intercultural learning outcomes. Some lecturers focus only on the academic outcomes and leave much of the intercultural learning to simply 'being there', although the self-reflection and local engagement involved in the academic curriculum might well facilitate intercultural learning outcomes. Other lecturers are actively involved in developing formal and informal intercultural learning curricula that more specifically facilitates the academic learning outcomes and vice versa.

---

<sup>12</sup> There is a quite extensive literature on expatriate communities in foreign countries and the experience of 'living in a bubble' (e.g. Fetcher 2007).

On the Faculty of Arts web pages (at the time of doing this research) there were no explicit/overt references to intercultural learning objectives in the Arts Monash Prato website pages. However, there is a reference to making the most of being in Prato – *‘taking advantage of all that Prato has to offer’*.<sup>13</sup>

On the Faculty of Art & Design web pages the following comments appear:

*‘Also integral to all faculty studies is the cultural experience, being part of a medieval city, complete with walls, churches, palaces, and winding cobbled streets. A living museum which brings history alive and makes it part of daily life. ‘mythical Italy’.*<sup>14</sup> The Faculty also encourages students to take an Italian language course at the first introductory meeting.

Evident in both Arts and Art and Design at the Faculty level is a lack of reference to the intercultural learning outcomes which feature in the university rhetoric. However, clearly evident in both, especially art and design, is the fascination of historical/mythical Italy and an interest in visiting local sites. Neither make reference to Prato as home to one of the largest Chinese communities in Europe, or to the significant social conflicts over migration and social inclusion within the region.

Because there are no university wide or faculty wide guidelines (at least none that the staff are familiar with) around best practice in the delivery or facilitation of intercultural learning outcomes, the success of this aspect of the program appears to be entirely left to the individual academic staff member. (As noted in the Introduction, one of the motivations for conducting this research was to increase the involvement of MUPC staff in supporting Melbourne staff to achieve these outcomes.) In many ways, this is not surprising, as while the vast majority of academic staff are engaged in teaching, very few have any formal teaching qualifications or have studied teaching per se. As a consequence, knowledge and understanding about intercultural learning theory and practice varies widely between staff, with most staff having a limited specialist knowledge or expertise in this area. This is compounded by the strongly and widely held view that intercultural learning can be achieved simply by ‘being there’. There is currently no requirement for Monash staff offering study abroad programs to undertake any training in the preparation of study abroad courses.

Academic staff implicitly acknowledged their belief in the ‘being there’ factor when, for example, they would reflect on how some students were ‘more ready’ than others for the study abroad experience. Certain students were described by staff as being ‘more open’ or ‘more mature’ and therefore more capable of making the most of the study abroad ‘being there’ experience. Some staff held a deep philosophical view that it is important to allow students the opportunity explore without too much structure in their own time. Other staff felt it was important to provide some formal or informal scaffolding and actively pursued local engagement activities that facilitated both academic and intercultural learning outcomes.

## **Courses**

The courses in Arts and Art and Design lend themselves easily to local engagement, given their academic focus on Italian content, even without knowledge of Italian language. However, they are all short term, intensive and highly structured programs that often create a ‘bubble effect’, factors which limit potential for local engagement because of time pressures. The other side of this is that they include site visits that might involve full day trips to places and sights beyond Prato. In many of these units the intercultural learning outcomes are closely tied to the academic discipline outcomes. For example, the practice of music and art involves engaging with people and place in order to produce/perform the work.

## **Art and Design**

The Fine Art units offered at MUPC have academic curricula which encourage students to reflect on the social and historical contexts of visual art and architecture. . In this sense the study of art has very clear links to local culture.

---

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.arts.monash.edu.au/prato/>, Accessed 17 November, 2012

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.artdes.monash.edu.au/design/italy.php#>, Accessed 17 November, 2012

The 2011 unit guide for the drawing unit entitled 'Visual Investigation Overseas' (DWG 2784) asked students to consider 'Prato as a unique site' which they needed to document in order to explore the significance of 'site specificity, historical context, perception and cultural difference' for 'contemporary art practice'. The guide also states that '[t]hrough an awareness of experiencing 'the alien' (ie a newly encountered culture) ... students should develop a reservoir of material that can inform their major studio practice, as well as a greater familiarity and facility with a diverse range of visual languages'. This approach primes students to think critically about their encounters with, and responses to, place in a very deliberate way and makes reference to the 18<sup>th</sup> Century 'Grand Tour of Europe', the pre-cursor to the contemporary idea of 'artist-in-residence'. Students were encouraged in their 'subject outline' to bring 'an open mind' to their work and to avoid carrying 'preconceived ideas about Italy from Australia into Prato'. They were also provided with a list of questions to guide their explorations including the following:

- What initially strikes me about my experience of Prato?
- What would I like to find out about Prato?
- Does the information I have collected tell me anything about myself?
- If travel 'broadens the mind', what have I discovered in Italy that is new to me?

The unit also provided students with formal opportunities to present their work to each other and to discuss their observations and experiences of Prato in class with input from their lecturer who spoke fluent Italian and had extended experience of living and working in Italy. These discussions offered a forum for debriefing and seeking clarification about cultural differences.

Most Art and Design students visiting MUPC participate in 'Contemporary Art & Cultural Meaning' (TAD2136). This unit includes a rigorous itinerary of site visits around Prato, Florence, Siena, Pistoia, Arezzo, Ravenna, Venice and Padua. The 2011 unit guide explains that the program is designed to offer students insights into the 'historic, cultural and conceptual sources' of contemporary art and that lectures and seminars conducted on location during site visits are 'aimed at providing an awareness of Italian art and design and its social and cultural contexts...' Although this unit did not include the same explicit focus on reflective practice as the Visual Investigation unit, it did emphasise the value of experiential learning and the importance of cultural context for meaning-making.

The Design units incorporate a very practical component where students are required to engage with local businesses to source art materials and resources or to access spaces they need in order to meet their design briefs. These interactions provide excellent informal curricula for intercultural learning but as a rule they are not guided experiences with support from academic staff. This kind of guidance is potentially a contribution Monash Prato staff could provide through structured learning activities designed to complement the academic units. For example, Art and Design students responded very enthusiastically to a local engagement project called, 'Off the Wall' introduced by MUPC staff. Students were invited to produce a postcard of Prato on the theme of social inclusion. The idea was to encourage students to become more aware of, and reflect on, the significant social issues facing the town, mentioned in the introduction to this report. The best images were used to produce the MUPC 10th anniversary calendar.

The Art and Design course incorporates many site visits in which students are taken (or encouraged to go) to see historically and culturally significant works of art and buildings and locations. Student assessment and study involves varying degrees of active reflection on personal responses to the things they have seen. In this way, self-reflection is part of the formal curriculum, although it may not be designed specifically around intercultural learning outcomes. It is also important to note that the teaching staff have considerable combined experience of working in Italy and also deliberately invest a lot of time in providing pastoral care to students where necessary. This approach also has the potential to contribute to intercultural learning at an informal level.

In keeping with the Art and Design courses, the **Architecture** course offered at Prato contains both formal and informal intercultural learning curricula with a focus on engaging with place. The Architecture course features a project that requires students to redesign the local piazzas in Prato. Students must study the local contemporary social, economic and political context of Prato in order to understand the role of the piazza in daily life. They can engage with local architects and exhibit their work to locals. While there is no curriculum

specifically designed around intercultural learning, the academic content of this course is closely aligned to these outcomes.

## **Music**

The Discipline of Music promotes the Prato study abroad experience as an opportunity to ‘immerse yourself in a different culture, develop your intercultural appreciation and understanding’. Students are encouraged to go for the following reasons (taken from website):

*Broaden your experience, deepen your knowledge and understanding, immerse yourself in a different culture, develop your intercultural appreciation and understanding intensive courses are challenging but very rewarding. They are a unique opportunity to commit yourself fully to music for three weeks with like minded people it's fun!*<sup>15</sup>

The music program contains both formal and informal intercultural learning curricula with a focus on engaging with people. The courses are structured in such a way that brings Monash students into direct contact with Italian students and musicians and requires them to collaborate. Students are encouraged to attend local music performances and to participate in joint concerts with local musicians. There is also a reflective component in the form of a journal which students are required to submit for assessment. While the journal assignment is focused on technical learning, it does provide a formalised opportunity for students to write about engagement with place and people. An advantage of music is that even if students cannot speak Italian, they can engage with local musicians through the common medium of performance, be it as audience or performer. Not surprisingly, the music program explicitly identifies intercultural learning as an objective of the program because students are expected to share their music practice and experience with local music students and practitioners. This is partly explained by the discipline of music recognizing music as a cultural and social practice. Making and sharing music involves collaborating with people in a cultural process. The music program organized joint performances with Italian students. The musical task allows them to transcend the language barrier and a genuine working together experience allows for a genuine cross cultural competencies develop.

The Monash Prato music program benefits enormously from the excellent collaboration through a formal Memorandum of Understanding with the local Prato Scuola Verdi School of Music which not only makes available resources and teaching staff but also actively fosters joint projects and exchanges. This collaboration represents a very involved form of local engagement including working with local students to plan and develop performances, negotiating and learning about each other's similarities and differences in a very applied way.

## **History**

The History units run at MUPC incorporate a number of visits to key sites, similar to the model used in Art and Design units. These visits are intended to complement the material presented in lectures and tutorials but are sometimes constrained by the accessibility of sites. Churches featured significantly in the itinerary for the students participating in ‘Dante's Medieval World’ in 2011, partly because they are often open to the public and do not charge substantial entry fees. In addition to its historical focus on cultural, political and religious life in the region, this unit also included a reflective journal as part of its formal assessment. Students were asked to write about their daily encounters with place and culture and, ideally, to link those experiences and perceptions with issues raised in the unit. One of the themes that came through strongly in the journals we had access to was the unfamiliarity with Italian Catholic religious beliefs and practices. Exposure to religious relics – body parts – was especially confronting to some students. At the other end of the spectrum a number of students reflected very positively on their ability to relate to the material presented about day-to-day lives and relationships in the Datini household. Student encounters with local people, however, were mostly limited to incidental meetings in shops and restaurants since there were no opportunities for interaction structured into the unit.

---

<sup>15</sup> [artsonline.monash.edu.au/music-study/international/](http://artsonline.monash.edu.au/music-study/international/), Accessed 17 November, 2012

## **Italian**

Despite the academic outcomes being so complementary to intercultural learning in the case of Italian language studies, there were no formal curriculum devoted to these outcomes. Overall, students reported significant pressure associated with the amount of academic work, making the experience time-pressured and relatively stressful but also limiting the time available for opportunities to consolidate language learning outside of the classroom. Students explained that the classroom focused academic demands of the course made them feel they were not making the most of the experience of being in an Italian speaking environment. They would have liked to have conversation exchange with local Italian students as well as teaching experience in Prato classrooms. Italian speaking students are best placed to participate in local engagement experiences. MUPC staff could actively seek out local engagement opportunities, including host family accommodation arrangements.

## **Archaeology**

The Archaeology program in Prato ran for the third consecutive year in July 2011. The unit provides second and third year students with an introduction to archaeological fieldwork and basic excavation methodologies. Students majoring in Archaeology are given first preference, but the unit is also open to other majors. The student group was close and shared accommodation and ate most meals together. They were discussing their future reunions in Melbourne within the first week of the program - even though no-one knew anyone else before it began.

Three pre-departure meetings are held in May outside of the formal curriculum. These include an introduction to archaeological methods and instruments, a lecture on relevant archaeological theory, and an information session run by ASA that incorporates testimonials from students who participated in the previous year's program.

The student group travels together with the Monash Melbourne lecturer coordinating the program from Melbourne to Rome, where they spend the first three days visiting key sites before travelling to Prato. The unit is highly structured and includes ten days of excavation work, from 8.30am – 5.00pm Monday – Friday, at an archaeological site 30 minutes out of Prato. This work is conducted in collaboration with a team of local archaeologists. Students also attend seminars at the Monash Prato Centre in the evenings from 5.30-6.30pm and complete coursework (mostly with an Etruscan focus). Visits are organised to Etruscan and Roman sites around Prato on weekends. Students have free time in the evenings and three unstructured days at the end of the program.

Course work consists of a presentation in the second week of the program, which each student is expected to prepare prior to departure from Melbourne, plus a written assessment. Students are expected to draft the latter in Prato and submit it two weeks after returning to Melbourne at the beginning of semester 2. Finally, students are required to maintain and submit a reflective fieldwork journal documenting their excavation experience. In 2011 the unit was presented in combination with an international archaeology conference on 'Housing and Habitat in the Mediterranean World'. Student participation in this conference was compulsory.

The academic coordinator of the program is Italian and can therefore provide translation support for students and academic liaison with archaeological colleagues in Tuscany. He acknowledged that the preparation period for the program is intense and requires a sacrifice of time for staff and students. Site visits and excavation access are logistically difficult to organize from a distance and must be managed around Melbourne teaching commitments. The timing of the Prato program requires the lecturer to travel to Italy immediately after the completion of first semester exams, returning just before the beginning of semester two. He pointed out that, although this schedule is exhausting and he receives no extra payment for running the program, he continues to do it because of the unique fieldwork opportunity it provides for students. The lecturer sees this opportunity to undertake fieldwork outside Australia as very important for Monash Archaeology students given that the department focuses on Egyptology – and only a minority are interested in fieldwork in Australia. He acknowledges that the program schedule is very rigorous. In his words, it is "more like boot camp than a

holiday". He is aware that students would like to have more free time but also feels it is important to get as much academic benefit out of the experience as possible.

The ten days of fieldwork at the excavation site offered an opportunity to work closely with the local archaeologists. Students laughed and joked with the Italian archaeologists as they negotiated the language barriers – the latter passing on knowledge and guidance to the former as best they could with the help of hand signals and a phrase book. This observation seems to support the idea that the opportunity to collaborate on meaningful tasks of mutual interest with local community members tends to enhance student engagement. It also confirms the need for at least a basic understanding of Italian.

## Faculty of Law: Being in Europe, Being in Florence

The Monash Prato Law Program is the longest running program beginning the year the Centre opened. The Program won a prestigious National Australian teaching award in 2010. It has the largest enrolment of students of all Prato programs with 120 Monash students and is so popular that enrolment numbers must be capped. It includes participation of lecturers and approximately 60 students from 6 partner universities (Bar Ilan, Israel; Windsor and Osgoode, Canada; Tilburg, Netherlands, Arizona State, USA, and Paris IV, France). The program is spread over 13 weeks and is the only full semester program offered at Prato. The length of the course also relates to *permesso di soggiorno* rules in Italy and difficulties of obtaining a visa for stays longer than 90 days. New laws (since 2009) make overstaying your visa a criminal offence. Students select from a variety of units on offer and there are no extra curricula activities that involve site visits or day trips that bring all students together as happens with Arts and Art and Design students.

### University perspectives - Law

In contrast to the Arts Faculty website pages and the general Monash University study abroad rhetoric, the Law Faculty web pages make no claims about intercultural learning outcomes in their Prato program beyond the professional benefits in legal contexts;

*'Internationalise your law qualification by including the international study program in your Monash Law degree. This is a unique opportunity to learn about different legal traditions, systems and procedures. In a globalised world, lawyers are increasingly expected to be able to solve transnational legal problems and to utilise opportunities beyond their home jurisdictions...The objective of the Monash Law international programs is to tackle these challenges by internationalising the law curriculum. These programs offer students the chance to acquire and develop skills and perspectives that they will need as lawyers operating in a modern legal environment. By providing a multicultural and transnational setting for teaching and learning, the programs give students the unique opportunity to learn about different legal traditions, systems and procedures, allowing them to gain skills and perspectives that will characterise their future years of learning and developing in the legal profession.'*<sup>16</sup>

### Law Faculty perspectives - Being International

Staff are heavily invested in supporting and maintaining the Monash Prato Law Program. They point out the competitive edge over other universities in attracting students that the Prato program delivers and approximately 40% of student survey respondents confirmed this when asked whether Prato was a factor in their decision to study Law at Monash.

Leading faculty are quite candid about its benefits for students and these coincide with what students identify, they are just not linked to intercultural education outcomes. Staff were clear that there are a set of explicit and formal aims and objectives of the law program in keeping with the learning outcomes reported in detail on the website. The notion of Institutional global citizenship was translated into professional context rather than general personal development and as such it was clearly structured into both the formal and informal curriculum through the offering of units by lecturers from international participating universities as well as units

---

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.law.monash.edu.au/current-students/study-opportunities/overseas-study/>, Accessed 17 November, 2012

on international law. They claimed that the course provided the opportunity for Monash students to interact with students from the participating universities but due to logistical factors associated with conflicting Australia-European academic calendars, this interaction is largely limited to the classroom context and students reported a general lack of contact. They wanted to internationalise their students not increase their knowledge of Italy and Italian culture. This raises important challenges for relevant local engagement.

Staff spoke of how the program had increased in academic rigour and credibility over the years and was currently a serious and challenging program with a focus on academic outcomes. Several staff also acknowledged a commonly shared understanding about a set of benefits for students that are not part of formal reporting.

The law degree is a very demanding one, described by one staff member as “academically intense and dry”. For some students, Prato becomes a motivation as an opportunity to ‘take the lid off the pressure cooker’ and was ‘something to look forward to’. The emphasis on having a fun time was in this way condoned and supported as positive. An essential factor in being able to enjoy this opportunity was that it enabled students to ‘have a break’ while not extending their degree, which is already long and very competitive and expensive. Students would be unlikely to undertake a study abroad unit if it resulted in an extension of the time it took to complete their degree. Hence, this is a very important feature of the Prato program. In addition, doing exchanges in international universities is also not very feasible for most law students because the units cannot be accredited to their Australian law degree due to jurisdictional specificities.

Staff are very open about their lack of interest in intercultural learning outcomes, but primarily due to the academic requirement to run units that can be accredited to the degree. The Faculty does organize an optional Italian language evening class for students prior to departure, but due to time pressures associated with academic and paid work commitments, very few students enrolled. One Italian legal studies unit at Florence University was offered as part of the curriculum, but only 2 students enrolled probably because this unit is not accredited to the degree. This said, students are not encouraged to overload so that they are able to maximize the benefits of being in Europe by having time to travel.

*Law Student perspectives* – *travel and fun and being a grown-up / being in Europe*  
- ‘It’s all about partying’ – a good time and a break from hard degree

Students overwhelmingly identified a set of outcomes from their Prato experience that had little to do with intercultural learning, as defined by the literature. They were primarily interested in ‘packing in as much travel as possible’, ‘partying hard’ and ‘being independent’ as well as developing friendship networks with their peers. An important outcome is the opportunity for students to build relationships with other Monash law students that may be important to them in their future professional careers.

Students often planned their travel well in advance and tightly around their academic commitments. This created significant problems if lecture timetables changed and meant any informal curriculum offered that was not compulsory was very poorly attended if at all. Students were not always aware of the visa and permit of stay regulations and this created some difficult situations for the Monash Prato Centre if they were contravening Italian law. It was not uncommon for students to travel to several European countries over the course of their stay during weekends and in between units. The focus and dedication to this endeavor sometimes made the academic commitments seem secondary and had the potential to create tension with the international teaching staff in particular. Students complained and some felt overwhelmed about the demands of the course work as this conflicted with their objective to travel.

There was a strong discourse about the experience of travelling away from home as an opportunity to ‘be’ a grown up and gain independence. Students commented on factors such as living away from home with friends, sharing apartments, travelling without parents and having to cook and clean and keep house as ways of developing independence and feeling grown up. A large part of this is the tradition of law students living in Florence, rather than in Prato, and having to find their own accommodation and dealing with landlords.



Although the vast majority of law students stayed in Florence and organised their own accommodation, the tendency to share travel and leisure activities meant that the program had a “bubble-like” quality to it. Students reported that it felt like a very ‘safe’ study abroad option, they benefited from the protection of a cohort and felt their academic credits were assured. Many of these students were already well travelled although most had travelled to Europe with parents rather than with peers.

The focus on having fun and packing as much travel in contributed to the students displaying what has been described in the literature as a ‘sense of entitlement’ and ‘privilege’. Students seem to feel it was their right to have fun in Florence, even if this meant disturbing the peace (in some instances it appeared to be linked to loud, visible behavior). Rotabi, Gammonley & Gamble (2006) associate this kind of behavior as one of the risks of not providing adequate cross-cultural facilitation during international study abroad programs. Students’ propensity to engage in this kind of behavior was further encouraged by the existing American student youth culture firmly in place in Florence.

When asked about intercultural learning outcomes, students expressed a degree of cynicism, in particular about the global citizenship outcomes, describing this as little more than a marketing tool. Presumably students would be less cynical if the program contained clearly defined content focused on intercultural learning outcomes. In the absence of such content, some were overtly critical of the stated outcomes.

### **Study Abroad at The University of Warwick: Being in Italy, being in Venice**

The University of Warwick provided funding through its Institute of Advanced Teaching and Learning that allowed us to gather comparative data on the Warwick Venice term-long study abroad programs run by History and History of Art and the Erasmus Year Abroad program run by the Department of Italian. This project was called “Intercultural Capabilities and Study Abroad: Student Perceptions and Experiences. A Comparative Project in Collaboration with Monash University” (IATL reference 11-12/ST/Polezzi).

Online pre-departure surveys were adapted from the Monash Prato surveys in consultation with relevant Warwick staff from the three participating departments. The adaptation of the Italian Studies survey was also informed by a focus group discussion conducted by Mulcock at Warwick University in June with students who had already completed their Year Abroad. Mulcock spent four weeks in Venice in October and November working with staff and students from the History and History of Art programs. Mulcock undertook participant observation (by attending seminars, lectures, site visits and other events at Palazzo Pesaro Papafava) and conducted a total of 19 interviews with students and staff on-site (18 recorded).<sup>17</sup> This included three students from the Department of Italian, based at different Italian partner universities through the Erasmus scheme, also who visited the Venice Centre to meet with Mulcock.

The project also incorporated an online reflexive journaling component and a research practicum for which students participating in the three programs listed above were invited to volunteer. Three 20 hour qualitative research practica were developed in consultation with teaching staff and offered to students as part of the IATL project. The student researchers collected additional data from their peers in the History of Art and Italian Studies programs using interviews, participant observation, auto-ethnographic reflections and a focus group.<sup>18</sup> Polezzi and Mulcock also set up the reflexive online journal project for Italian Studies Year Abroad students.

Polezzi, Mulcock and Baldassar will prepare a report for IATL detailing the outcomes of the online journaling exercise, the research practica, and the results of the comparative research. This will be made available to Monash staff if permitted. They will also contribute to the preparation of one or more jointly authored

---

<sup>17</sup> Due to budget limitations interviews will not be transcribed as proposed; the possibility of providing transcription had been left open in the proposal, but finding additional funds has not been possible. Recordings will, nevertheless, remain available at the end of the study.

<sup>18</sup> The History practicum did not proceed to completion because the student volunteers had other time commitments and were unable to attend briefing meetings.

publications. With the assistance of Polezzi and Mulcock, the three Italian Studies students who participated in the research practicum, have already written a report of their own and submitted a paper for publication to *Reinventions*, the Warwick/Monash online education journal. The three Italian students who took part in the Venice visit and practicum also attended a writing workshop at the Monash Centre in Prato.

Valuable points of comparison:

Obvious contrast with long term experience of Italian Studies Year Abroad Erasmus students – these students offer reflections on the experience of studying in Italy that provide useful context for understanding the experiences of short-stay students, in particular the difficulties of local engagement.

Venice History and History of Art programs operate in a very similar way to Prato and have similar strengths and weaknesses. Interestingly the requirement to study Italian for two years prior to the Venice program does not seem to greatly enhance student confidence or ability to connect with the local community – this ability/interest seems to be more dependent on other characteristics that students bring with them – e.g. natural curiosity about cultural difference etc. (see Shannon 1995 for further consideration of this significant issue).

## **PART 4 KEY ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Key Issue: Achieving Intercultural Learning Outcomes**

Currently, most of the courses offered at the MUPC do not reflect the emphasis on development of intercultural competency presented in the Monash Institutional promotional material and recommended in the study abroad education literature. For all courses other than Italian language, there is no or only a limited language component and many of the courses tend to produce a 'bubble effect'. In general, intercultural competency outcomes are assumed to be attainable through the 'being there' factor.

The risk in this scenario is that students have an inadequate source of knowledge within which to make sense of their experience and this can lead to a somewhat superficial analysis that often reinforces stereotypes rather than challenges them. Clearly, there is much room for debate here about the need for historical knowledge and context to achieve the objectives of the courses. We can report that a number of Arts students commented on their inability to understand and 'read' the religious and cultural language of the artistic landscape before them. Many certainly expressed a clear awareness that they lacked the historical and cultural understanding to interpret all of what they saw in context. This limited knowledge was occasionally commented on by students from other disciplines. For example, a group of renaissance history students from a Monash partner university attended the exhibition of a MUPC art course and began to debate, amongst themselves, the value of the technical expertise evident in the works against what they saw as a lack of historical knowledge.

We might argue that to conduct 'gold standard' study abroad courses in Prato, students need to first study language, history, culture etc. A long term vision of MUPC might be to provide the breadth of specialist courses needed to provide this kind of depth of study. This is not to undermine the value of less comprehensive courses, although one constructive intervention might be to foster a set of academic and intercultural learning objectives for Monash Prato that encourage a more productive and meaningful intersection between academic and intercultural learning outcomes and an increased awareness and sensitivity to what is required to really make the most of being in Prato.

Overall, in summary, there is a strong belief and/or implicit assumption held by staff members that cultural competencies and intercultural learning are best delivered through 'being there'. While these outcomes are arguably being delivered at various levels and degrees, there is a risk that stereotypes are reinforced. This is missing the opportunity to formally organize and integrate academic goals with intercultural learning outcomes. To produce effective cultural competency outcomes, they need to be thought through and included in the formal curriculum of each course and not left to informal curriculum, this is particularly important for short-stay

programs. Courses that include a guided reflective component for assessment are more likely to deliver effective cultural competency outcomes.

### **Findings:**

1a) Tendency for intercultural learning outcomes to be overlooked or given limited importance. Most staff are focused on academic (and discipline-based) learning outcomes. A focus on academic outcomes is prioritized over intercultural learning outcomes and they are seen as separate. Courses are so time pressured with academic outcomes that staff feel there is no time to incorporate intercultural learning outcomes.

1b) Many staff are inclined to assume that intercultural learning outcomes can be achieved simply by 'being there'.

1c) Most staff (Prato and Melbourne based) recognize potential for expansion of programs – especially in the area of intercultural learning and the development of formal and informal curricula to facilitate local engagement. All can identify areas for development and improvement.

### **Recommendations:**

1.1) Consider how academic and intercultural learning outcomes could be integrated in a value adding process. As mentioned above, a constructive intervention might be to foster a set of academic and intercultural learning objectives for Monash Prato that encourage a more productive and meaningful intersection between academic and intercultural learning outcomes and an increased awareness and sensitivity to the type of course content needed to make the most of being in Prato.

1.2) Facilitate awareness that intercultural learning outcomes must be scaffolded into the formal and informal curricula and it cannot be assumed that they will be achieved simply by 'being there'.

1.3) Ensure intercultural learning and local engagement curricula are structured into the timetable of the program and where possible become part of the assessment of the course. Extra-curricula initiatives, particularly those organised by MUPC without the collaboration of course and program coordinators, run a high risk of not being worth the time and resources that are needed to run them because students fail to participate.

1.4) Request Monash University develop best practice guidelines in the delivery of intercultural learning outcomes and local engagement and offer training preparation for staff who coordinate study abroad programs. Encourage peer and student review of this aspect of course content.

1.5) Develop recommended intercultural learning outcomes specific to Prato context with input from MUPC staff.

## **Key Issue: Pressures on Melbourne-based Teaching Staff**

### **Finding:**

2a) Limits on Monash Melbourne staff time is one of the factors constraining the integration of intercultural learning and discipline-specific curricula. Staff who run these programs are enormously stretched in terms of preparation time and the pressures of being 'on-the-ground' including managing day-to-day logistics, pastoral care, and very full teaching programs, often during semester breaks.

### **Recommendations:**

2.1) Foster a close collaboration between Melbourne and Prato staff and formal recognition of intercultural competencies curricula. Promote a role for MUPC staff in developing formal and informal intercultural competency and local engagement curricula for Prato courses.

2.2) Provide greater 'on-the-ground' support for teaching staff, including funding for a pastoral care support role provided by MUPC for the duration of each program.

## **Key Issue: Student Needs**

The vast majority of students who were interviewed expressed overall satisfaction with their experience – even though they identified components that could further enhance their programs. For most, 'being there' was immensely enjoyable and valuable despite perceived challenges and limitations. There were considerable

differences between the experiences of Arts students staying in Prato and Law students staying in Florence. Both were mostly satisfied with their location for different reasons.

Factors identified by students as impacting on their experience of the study abroad program:

**Finding:**

3a) Length of Stay:

Some students complained about not having time for 'being there' and also not having enough opportunities to meet local people (especially Italian students) structured into their programs. Some Arts students expressed frustration at the length of programs in terms of possibilities for local engagement (although for others the short length was what made the programs appealing and accessible). Some students wanted to stay longer to get more value out of the experience.

**Recommendations:**

3.1) Ensure expectations of outcomes are realistically matched to the length of the stay.

3.2) Offer units across the year for students to enroll in.

3.3) Offer Italian language and culture units regularly throughout the year. This could include formal and informal curricula for intercultural learning and local engagement to better prepare students for their stay and studies in Prato. (See Recommendation 3.7 below)

**Finding:**

4a) Accommodation

It is difficult to underestimate the importance of appropriate accommodation to support the best study abroad experience possible, especially for short intensive programs. For many students the joint objectives of having fun and keeping up with academic work often created competing tensions between house mates. Students need more access to quiet working spaces and internet to minimize the stress of intensive study commitments. Finding a balance between meeting academic commitments and taking advantage of the informal learning associated with being in Italy was constantly identified as a source of tension. Students in apartments valued having cooking facilities. Students in single rooms valued having a space to retreat to. Students in hotels outside of the historic centre often felt they were missing out on an 'authentic' Italian experience.

Students need:

4b) safe accommodation (so they can walk home safely after dark), preferably centrally located to facilitate local engagement

4c) kitchen facilities to keep costs down

4d) access to quiet study spaces, particularly if they are in shared accommodation.

4e) reliable wifi internet access which allows them to work at night on their research assignments.

**Recommendations:**

4.1) Offer a range of accommodation options that meet student needs as outlined above.

4.2) Promote and facilitate the use of the Prato public library as a suitable study space with wifi access. Free guided tours of the municipal library are now part of the orientation sessions of most programs (Law, Art and Design).

4.3) Provide funding to facilitate greater access to MUPC building in evenings and on weekends for those who want a quiet working space and internet access.

**Finding:**

5a) Language and Culture knowledge

Best practice in the Study Abroad literature emphasizes the importance of language and cultural knowledge. Most Monash students have limited or no Italian language. This significantly reduces the likelihood that intercultural learning will occur spontaneously. Many programs promote and recommend students do a language course before they leave, but it is not formally required or structured into the curriculum, which automatically undermines the value of doing this. A few students indicated that they were surprised at how little English was spoken in the Prato community. Most students agree that it would be helpful to have some basic introduction to Italian – but time availability before and during the programs is a major factor. They say that

they can get by but that more language and culture knowledge would greatly enhance the experience. As mentioned above, since June 2012 the Centre offers weekly conversation exchange meetings that have so far proved very successful with students (both Monash and non Monash) and the local community.

**Recommendation:**

5.1) Offer Italian language and culture courses all year round in Prato. These courses could include intercultural learning curriculum as well as have a pastoral care function (e.g., monitoring of students etc.). The best compromise may be to formally schedule basic language and culture lessons into all the programs (i.e., to formally allocate time in the academic timetable and actively encourage students to attend – even one or two hours a week).

**Finding:**

6a) Student Preparation

Orientation and preparation of students for being in Prato and Italy is inconsistent, in particular with regard to gender issues and local political issues. MUPC has a responsibility to help ensure students are prepared for the experience of living in Prato. As mentioned in the section on AIMS above, the orientation program provided by MUPC has developed significantly over the past few years. Important legal and duty of care issues have been considered and a more extensive program of orientation is now offered at the Centre, including detailed orientation packs, formal staff and student agreements as well as some intercultural learning content.

**Recommendations:**

6.1) Increase formal processes for preparing students better, including pre-departure.

6.2) Expand the MUPC team to include the role of Student Services and Duty of care officer.

**Finding:**

7a) Student Behaviour

As noted above, the focus on having fun and packing as much travel in contributed to the students displaying what has been described in the literature as a 'sense of entitlement' and 'privilege'. Students seem to feel it is their right to have fun, even if this meant disturbing the peace (in some instances it appeared to be linked to loud, visible behavior). Rotabi, Gammonley & Gamble (2006) associate this kind of behavior as one of the risks of not providing adequate cross-cultural facilitation during international study abroad programs. Students' propensity to engage in this kind of behavior was further encouraged by the existing American student youth culture firmly in place in Florence.

**Recommendations:**

7.1) Foster increased consideration of the impact of programs on the local community.

7.2) Consider making self-reflection of Australian student and youth cultural practice a part of formal curriculum around intercultural competencies.

**Key Issue: Community/ Local Engagement.**

**Finding**

8a) The tendency for MUPC courses to create a 'Monash bubble' effect is experienced as very positive for some and frustrating for others and may be linked to the extent of their prior travel experience.

An analysis of survey responses indicates that several students had previously lived away from home for extended periods. Some have a language other than English or Italian and some report having basic Italian language skills or that they are learning Italian. A number of the respondents had also visited Italy at least once before participating in the Prato program. Notably, many students had previously travelled overseas, some quite extensively. This information about prior travel experience and levels of independence is significant given that many staff assume that most of the students in their courses have probably never travelled before. The assumption, therefore, that one of the benefits of this study abroad model is that it provides a safe first time experience for many students, requires some additional consideration. Interviews indicate that this is certainly

true in some cases – but it is possible that those students are in the minority rather than the majority. It is also possible that the students who enroll in MUPC courses are more likely to be confident and engaged travelers with a heightened interest in cross-cultural encounters. This pattern supports Daly's (2007) argument that many students who choose to participate in study abroad programs are already predisposed to travel and open to cross-cultural experience (see also Churchill and DuFon 2006).

**Recommendations:**

8.1) Clearly identify the type of program and anticipated learning outcomes, including intercultural learning objectives, so that students can better choose between them. Consider how to provide more information about those factors in the program that impact on student experience. Recognise the value of different types of programs and identify and acknowledge the different priorities of students. Some students will do better in programs that foster a 'bubble' experience, others in more open programs.

8.2) Move beyond the 'bubble' model by introducing a compulsory or elective unit for academic credit specifically designed to support intercultural learning [perhaps with a workplace/career development focus].

8.3) Introduce faculty supported extracurricular program that is reported on student academic transcripts, e.g. some kind of community engagement volunteer program with associated opportunities for formalized reflective learning

8.5) Provide more social facilitation early in program to build bridges with students from partner universities.

**Finding:**

**9a) Site visits – engagement with place e.g. Churches**

In the Arts programs, there were many visits to Churches (well preserved cultural sites). Extensive exposure to Catholic religious imagery/material culture without much context is often confronting and alienating, and sometimes even psychologically disturbing, for students with no religious background (especially for international students). Religious images of torture and suffering and the role of saint's relics (body parts) could be better contextualized for students in advance when program co-ordinators expect to have site visits to multiple churches. Some students asked for a preparatory lecture on the key ideas of Christianity and Catholicism. Some students do not know Italy is a Catholic country, especially International students, who reported 'zoning out' as they could not follow the discussions, which often presumed considerable prior knowledge about Catholicism.

**Recommendation:**

9.1) Recommend program coordinators provide more background and orientation information about site visits before the visit.

9.2) Provide a list of background reading and resources about relevant religious and historical information related to site visits.

**KEY ISSUE: Long term outcomes of MUPC programs**

**Recommendation**

10.1 Follow up and data collection with Prato alumni to examine the long-term outcomes of studying at MUPC.

## REFERENCES

- Alomes, S. 1999. *When London Calls: The Expatriation of Australian Creative Artists to Britain*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Amit, V. 2010. 'Student Mobility and Internationalisation: Rationales, Rhetoric and 'Institutional Isomorphism''. *Anthropology in Action*. 17(1):6-18.
- Annette, J. 2002. 'Service Learning in an International Context'. *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*. Volume 8:83-93.
- Barnick, H. 2010. 'Managing Time and Making Space: Canadian Students' Motivations for Study in Australia'. *Anthropology in Action*. 17(1):19-29.
- Bradbud, D. 1998. *Being There: The Necessity of Fieldwork*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press.
- Bingle, R. and J. Hatcher. 1999. 'Reflection in Service-Learning: Making Meaning of Experience'. *Educational Horizons*. Summer:179-185.
- Boud, D. 2001. 'Using Journal Writing to Enhance Reflective Practice'. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*. 90:9-17.
- Churchill, E. & M. DuFon. 2006. 'Evolving Threads in Study Abroad Research'. In DuFon, M. & E. Churchill (eds), *Language Learners in Study Abroad Contexts*. Second Language Acquisition Vol. 15. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters Ltd.
- Daly, A. 2007. 'Outbound Student Exchange at Australian and New Zealand Universities: The Effects of Pre-Departure Decision-Making, In-Country Experiences and Post-Sojourn Outcomes'. PhD Thesis. Griffith University.
- Deardoff, D. 2009 *Handbook on Intercultural Competence*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. n.d. 'Outbound Mobility Practices at Australian Universities: Key Findings of the 2008 Institutional Survey of Outbound Mobility Practices at Australian Universities'. Canberra: Australian Government.
- Donohue-Bergeler, D. 2011. 'Beyond Sightseeing: The Learning Effects of Excursions within a Study Abroad Context'. *Neues Curriculum: Journal for Best Practices in Higher Education German Studies*. 2. [Http://www.neues-curriculum.org/papers/donohuebergeler-2-2011.pdf](http://www.neues-curriculum.org/papers/donohuebergeler-2-2011.pdf).
- Engle, L. & J. Engle 2003. 'Study Abroad Levels: Toward a Classification of Program Types'. *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*. Volume 9 :1-20.
- Fechter, A-M 2007, 'Living in a Bubble: Expatriates' Transnational Spaces', in *Going First Class?: New Approaches to Privileged Travel and Movement*, ed. V Amit, Berghahn Books, New York and Oxford.
- Fleischman, D., Lawley, M., & Raciti, M. (2010) Community Engagement and the International Student Experience: A Definition. ANZMAC Proceedings. Available online, accessed 17 November, 2012 <http://anzmac2010.org/proceedings/pdf/anzmac10Final00179.pdf>
- Franklin, K. 2010. 'Long-term Career Impact and Professional Applicability of the Study Abroad Experience'. *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*. 19: 169-190.
- Gmelch, G. 1997. 'Crossing Cultures: Student Travel and Personal Development'. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*. 21(4):475-490.
- Hannerz, U. 2003. 'Being There... and There,,, and There!: Reflections on Multi-sited Ethnography'. *Ethnography*: 4(2):201-216.

- Hubbs, D. and C.Brand. 2005. 'The Paper Mirror: Understanding Reflective Journaling'. *Journal of Experiential Education*. 28(1):60-71.
- Jackson, J. 2010a. *Intercultural Journeys: From Study Abroad to Residence*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Jackson, J, (ed) 2010b. *Handbook on Intercultural Communication*. Oxford, UK: Routledge.
- Jones, E. 2011. 'Internationalisation, Multiculturalism, a Global Outlook and Employability. *Assessment, Teaching and Learning Journal (Leeds Met)*, 11(Summer):21-49.
- Landis, D., J. Bennett & M. Bennett (eds) 2004 *Handbook of Intercultural Training*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Laubscher, M. 1994. *Encounters with Difference: Student Perceptions of the Role of Out-of-Class Experiences in Education Abroad*. Contributions to the Study of Education. Praeger.
- Lingnan University. 2010. *Faculty Handbook: A Teacher's Guide to Service-Learning*. Hong Kong: Office of Service-Learning, Lingnan University.
- Loughran, J. 2002. 'Effective Reflective Practice: In Search of Meaning in Learning about Teaching'. *Journal of Teacher Education*. 53(1):33-43.
- Lutterman-Aguilar, A. and O. Gingerich. 2002. 'Experiential Pedagogy for Study Abroad: Educating for Global Citizenship. *Frontiers:The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*. 8 :41-. 82.
- Malouf, D. 1998. *A Spirit of Play: The Making of Australian Consciousness*. Boyer Lectures. Sydney :ABC Books.
- Monash University. 2010a. Explore: Studying Abroad Opportunities for Monash Students to Study Offshore. Melbourne: Monash University.
- Monash University. 2010b. Monash Abroad Application Form: Outgoing Exchange and Study Abroad. Melbourne: Monash University
- Monash University. 2010c. Pocket Statistics 2010: University Planning and Statistics Melbourne: Monash University.
- Monash University Community-Campus Summit on International Students (2010): Best Practices - Student Welfare. Sarah Robinson, Samantha Blair, Eugene, Sebastian. Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Global Engagement).
- Monash University Global Engagement Framework (2010)
- Pesman, R. 1996. *Duty Free: Australian Women Abroad*. Melbourne :Oxford University Press.
- Rotabi, K., Gammonley, D., & Gamble, D. 2006. Ethical Guidelines for Study Abroad: Can We Transform Ugly Americans into engaged Global Citizens? ' *British Journal of Social Work*. 36(3):451-465.
- Shannon, E. 1995 'Reflections on the Meaning of Study Abroad'. *Frontiers:The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*. 1. Retrieved from [http://www.frontiersjournal.com/issues/vol1/vol1-05\\_shannon.htm](http://www.frontiersjournal.com/issues/vol1/vol1-05_shannon.htm).
- Spalding, E. and A. Wilson. 2002. 'Demystifying Reflection: A Study of Pedagogical Strategies that Encourage Reflective Journal Writing'. *Teachers College Record*. 104(7):1393-1421.
- Ufficio Statistica. Popolazione straniera residente per cittadinanza, fasce di eta e sesso al 31/12/2010. Comune di Prato. Retrieved from <http://statistica.comune.prato/it/>
- Watson, C.W. (ed) 1999. *Being There: Fieldwork in Anthropology*. London: Pluto Press.