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Teaching Offshore

Acknowledgement

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Teaching Offshore – Design and Preparation

This resource is designed to help you think about the various aspects related to practicalities, preparation, curriculum development and teaching in non-Australian contexts.

Practicalities:

When preparing to teach offshore you may wish to know:

- how you register your details when you are travelling overseas on university business
- what support resources are available at Flinders University
- where you can find out more about the cultural traditions, safety, etc. of the country you will be visiting
- how to best prepare yourself in relation to climate, clothing, health, etc.
- what may be required or expected of you (gift giving, knowing about naming systems); support available to offshore students and staff working offshore
- policies and procedures that need to be followed.

Flinders University runs programs in a range of [offshore locations](#) and has been sending staff to teach in them for a number of years. Systems, which include a number of [staff with responsibilities for the University's international](#) operations (both on-shore and offshore) including faculty contacts for International programs, have been set in place to support you as you prepare to teach offshore.

Gaining an insight from other academic staff who have taught offshore may also be useful. [Some comments](#) from staff who have travelled offshore to teach has been included in this resource but you may also wish to talk to colleagues from within your faculty. Your [faculty contact for International programs](#) or your program coordinator should be able to provide you with the names of staff who you can contact.

There are also a number of websites that provide a variety of information about other countries. These include:

- the [Culture Crossing Guide](#) which provides details on greetings, communication, eye contact, gift giving, taboos, socialising and much more
- the [Lonely Planet Guide](#) which includes an overview of most destinations and details on weather, best times to visit as well as much more practical information
- the [BBC Country Profiles](#) which provides information on news stories, politics, history and more
- the [Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade](#) (DFAT) site where 'Country, economy and regional information' provides an alphabetical list of countries where facts about the land, people, history, government, political conditions, economy, and foreign may be found
- the DFAT [Smartraveller](#) site which provides a travel advisory and consular information service. The site includes links to travel advice, travel tips, travel health as well information about visas, passports, embassies and consulates. This site is also the

official Australian Government site for travel warnings and information about potential risks of travelling to a particular country. It includes an up-to-date list of destinations that it is advisable not to visit and suggests a list of destinations that should be reconsidered.

Details on Flinders University policies and procedures about setting up an offshore program, organising travel and accommodation and other practical and University required aspects related to offshore teaching are available from the [Offshore programs at Flinders](#) website managed through the [International Centre](#).

Course preparation, curriculum and delivery

There are many considerations when developing and teaching courses in offshore contexts. These include, but are not limited to:

- cultural dimensions, such as considering whether your examples and presentation are relevant to the teaching and cultural context
- language considerations, such as avoiding the use of Australian (or even English) specific slang, idioms, metaphors
- an understanding of how to [internationalise the curriculum](#)
- ensuring Flinders' strategic objectives and Graduate Qualities are addressed (as indicated in Sections 5 and 6 [Flinders New Course Proposal Part C - Course Outline documentation](#)).

Teaching

When designing offshores teaching topics and courses it is also useful to think about:

- whether you will be teaching with translators and how this will be managed in practice
- the knowledge, skills and confidence you will require to teach in this environment
- different learning and teaching practices used in the country you are visiting and how your teaching may be different; what strategies do you have to manage these differences and ensure successful engagement and learning for your students?
- your awareness of '[inclusive teaching](#)' practices
- aspects of assessment – as with teaching, will your planned assessment be of a format the students are familiar with? If not, how will you manage this?
- the possibility that you may experience [culture shock](#) as you may be working outside of your own 'comfort zone'. Your students may also experience it because they are not accustomed to the educational setting or teaching style
- providing feedback in cross-cultural contexts - how will you address this?
- academic integrity and how it may differ in different cultural contexts – how will you manage these differences and communicate your expectations.

This document and the [CDIP Toolkit's Theory Into Practice Strategies: Teaching offshore](#) address many of these issues.

Teaching Offshore - Intensive Teaching Strategies

In the context of offshore teaching 'intensive teaching' refers to the blocks of time spent teaching those students who are enrolled in our [offshore programs](#). Intensive teaching most commonly takes the form of direct face-to-face and concentrated interactions between teachers and students which occur over a short period of time (e.g. seven or eight hours/day for two to five days). While some aspects of the design and delivery of intensive teaching sessions in offshore contexts may be similar to teaching a topic onshore (in Australia), intensive teaching in offshore contexts poses some specific challenges as you may be:

- working in a different cultural context
- teaching and experiencing a culture outside of your comfort zone
- tired from travelling
- required to use an interpreter.

Enhancing learning outcomes in all contexts requires a deliberate and reflective approach to teaching that engages all learners. Learning outcomes can be enhanced through the use of [inclusive teaching](#) practices which are [student-centred](#).

Some strategies include:

- small group exercises and in-class activities that encourage students to collaborate
- involving students in activities such as student presentations, simulated games, role plays and debates
- using [group work](#) or other peer-to-peer activities which encourage students to learn from one another
- taking a [Problem Based Learning](#) (PBL) approach.

In each of these instances it is essential that expectations are clearly explained to students and that they are taught the skills and abilities they will require in order to engage effectively in the tasks. For example, where students are required to debate a topic it is important that the reason this particular strategy is being used is explained to them (i.e. it may be to develop critical thinking, analytical and problem solving skills; to aid in English language development; to support the development of group work skills and/or to help students develop their confidence when presenting in front of others). You also need to be very explicit about what you expect them to do and how they will be assessed - if they have not participated in a debate before they will also need the rules explained to them. Where they have participated in debates it will still be helpful to:

- assign them to specific teams and identify the argument they are required to defend
- provide clear guidelines about how you wish the debate to be formatted
- ensure the students are provided with time to develop their arguments and discuss their strategy before the debate takes place.

Students who are chosen to be in the audience must also be given clear guidelines and instructions so they are aware of what they are required to do while the teams conduct the

debate. All students in the class need to clearly understand why the task is being undertaken, what is required of them and how they will be assessed.

When teaching offshore particular care needs to be taken to:

- ensure students' understanding and confidence in using English is considered
- their prior learning experiences are incorporated
- the cultural relevance of examples is taken into account
- sensitivities in relation to customs and local protocols are addressed.

The [CDIP toolkit](#) provides a range of resources that can support you in ensuring your classroom is inclusive and addresses cultural sensitivities.

Culture Shock

Feeling out of place in an unfamiliar environment broadly describes culture shock. The CDIP toolkit, [General Information Folio 2: Understanding and supporting people experiencing culture shock](#) offers a discussion of the various phases related to culture shock and suggests that understanding each of the phases and the feelings associated with them can help you to manage it. Whilst most of the information refers to the experience of students who travel to Australia to study, it is still relevant for staff teaching offshore.

Other definitions of culture shock date back to the 1960's (Oberg, 1960 in Pyvis and Chapman, 2005) and have been associated with a range of feelings including confusion, disorientation, fear, frustration and depression. These are all significant and, in contexts where programs are run offshore, may be experienced by either the academic staff who are teaching in a new and different environment or by the students who are being taught in new and different ways. While it is useful to appreciate the various phases of culture shock, where a student or an academic staff member is only in the unfamiliar environment for a very short time the phases may be minimised but may also be intensified. Pyvis and Chapman (2005) suggest that the kinds of teaching adjustments that may support students experiencing culture shock as a result of traveling to Australia to study may not be as effective in offshore contexts.

It may be possible to alleviate your own experiences of culture shock by ensuring that you are as well prepared as possible for your trip. Find out as much as possible about the country you will be visiting. You might start by exploring the various resources that are accessible from the [Practicalities](#) section of this resource, finding out more about the country you will be visiting and talking to as many colleagues who have travelled to the country as possible. Being prepared for the type of [teaching](#) you will be undertaking is also crucial.

Teaching Offshore - Comments from Staff

The following suggestions and comments are compiled from staff with experience of teaching offshore, ranging from staff who have taught offshore many times over a number of years through to staff who had recently returned from their first offshore teaching visit.

General comments:

"It's useful to talk to people who have taught at the university where you will be teaching, as they can give you some background information and ideas about what to expect and what to look out for"

"I think the importance of meeting with colleagues from the same department who have just returned from their overseas trip cannot be emphasised enough, that is assuming a department sends a group of staff at different times of course"

Comments related to travel:

"Make sure you have all of your travel documents and travel arrangements sorted out well in advance - be mindful of the Visa requirements of the country you are travelling to and any vaccinations you may need and any health or other travel warnings related to that country"

"When you arrange the booking it should also trigger all the necessary information in relation to your per diem and insurance, and you should receive an email about these - if you do not get the required email talk to the International coordinator for your faculty or your program director - but make sure these details are sorted out before you travel"

"If possible arrive in the country a full day before you begin teaching this will help you acclimatise, get oriented, manage any travel delays and have time to rest from the journey before you begin teaching"

"If possible arrange to have someone meet you at the airport when you arrive at your destination (with a sign that has your name on it) so that you do not have to spend time negotiating how to get to your hotel"

"Be aware of the airport you are arriving at and its proximity to where you are working and staying, it is important to check these details out on [GoogleMaps](#) before you leave, as it is possible that there is a long journey between the airport and the location where you are staying and teaching. It is important to factor these issues into your planning."

"It may also be useful to check the map of the airport website so that you can have a better idea of where you are going when you get off the plane"

"In some countries you may be required to pre-pay the taxi before you get into it, make sure you know the protocols"

"If you are not comfortable with the way the taxi driver is behaving - the radio is too loud; they are driving too fast; the air-conditioner is too hot or too cold; etc - you are within your rights to tell the driver that you have a problem. Also, it is ok to use sign language if they cannot understand you."

"Always carry a card (or the location details) for the hotel where you are staying and make sure it is in the local language- this can be handed to non-English speaking taxi drivers and may be useful in case you become lost"

"Be aware of the time zone you are travelling to, as this may impact on jet-lag and attempting to communicate with your family and colleagues at home"

"Be careful about what you eat"

"You are there on university business and therefore are entitled to be comfortable (accommodation, food, travel etc)"

Comments related to classroom teaching:

"It's useful to have a fall back plan in case something goes wrong in the classroom (IT etc are problematic)"

"Arrange to have an enrolment list - that includes the students' photographs on it (if possible) this way you can be sure they are in class and it may make identifying them easier when marking"

"It is essential that when teaching offshore that you maintain the integrity of Flinders University courses and its reputation"

"Be aware that students have other priorities and that you will be required to work with them"

"Breaking through the culture barrier is best done in a personal one-on-one basis (at least in Asia). This takes some skill and patience, but the usual, caring, approach and showing interest in the lives of one's students seems best."

Comments related to helping the students learn:

"Have students prepared - arrange for them to do the plagiarism quiz and other preparatory work before you arrive"

"Relationship building is imperative - encourage the students to talk about their families and about personal issues, as this provides opportunities for the students to get to know each other and to get to know you"

"Make sure you stick to teaching the fundamentals - you will need to allow at least 50% more time for each of your sessions as you need to ensure students have understood"

"Have at least one personal conversation with each student so that you can determine their level of English"

"Encourage students to ask questions to make sure they have understood you and are learning"

"Ask each student to prepare at least one oral presentation, as it may help to break down some of the cultural issues around learning"

"Be mindful that students have different approaches to learning and that you may need to be flexible in approaches and expectations (students may not prioritise your visit)"

"Make sure you are knowledgeable about their context - demonstrate what you know about their country, its history and culture and about how what you are teaching might fit into that"

"It is useful to be controversial as that can get the students talking to you and asking questions, but you need to be careful not to overstep any cultural, religious or other boundaries that may be taboo"

"Provide a standardised approach so that you are consistent in what you do"

Comments related to working with an interpreter:

"Working with an interpreter will slow the lessons down as they need to have time to tell the students what you have said"

"Be mindful of what the interpreter is interpreting - speak to them about how you would like to be translated - provide them with all the resources you will be using before you meet them"

"Make sure they are interpreting what you are saying and not embellishing it and that they are not answering the student's questions for you or changing what you are saying so that it loses its meaning"

References and Recommended Resources

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