

## **Section 1: Critical Incidences/Cultural Experiences 2005**

### **Australia**

A student went to a restaurant and ordered an entrée, which she found to be very well-priced. She was surprised when her order came because her portion was quite small. She then discovered that in Australia, “entrée” refers to an appetizer rather than a main course as it does in the United States.

Students were often wary of asking strangers for help especially when trying to find directions. However, one of the students asked an Australian family for directions and they talked for several minutes. After their short conversation, the family gave the student their phone number, email and address so when the students visited their town they could show them around. The students learned to be less wary of strangers and were exposed to the friendliness of the Australian culture.

A student was traveling on a tram and witnessed a group of loud teenagers heading to a footy game in the city. An older man approached one of the teenagers and the student expected him to ask them to be quiet, but instead he said that he hoped it was going to be a good game and to have fun. One of the teenagers and the man had a brief, friendly conversation even though they had not met before. This situation reflects the laid back, friendly atmosphere in Australia.

A student did not expect to attend Synagogue with an Australian researcher during his travels. The student had the opportunity to experience traditional Judaism. The Synagogue was considered Orthodox, where the men and women sat in different sections of the room separated by a curtain. All the men wore Kippas, the Jewish cap. Children were free to roam the area and after the prayers were over there was a symbolic drinking of wine and grape juice. Later, the students went to the host researcher’s home to have a traditional Jewish dinner. Despite the fact that Jewish culture is very present in America, the student’s travels opened up the opportunity to experience Judaism firsthand. The student felt that his travels made him open-minded and eager to experience new cultures.

I learned the most important lesson in an unusual way. On a Sunday, I visited a Ford dealership to look at the Australian cars. Because it was just about closing time, they had spare time to have a conversation with me. After a while, one of the salesmen, Chris, offered to give me a ride home and told me to wait for a few minutes. Because he kept having customers to deal with, I ended up waiting almost an hour before we left. While we rode in his car, I discovered that he only lived two minutes away from the car dealership. He was kind enough to drive twenty minutes out of his way to drive me home. He said that reason he was so willing was because I seemed like a very nice person, contrary to what he expected from an American. This situation taught me a valuable lesson about the kindness of strangers.

I was unfamiliar with the special laws in Australia about riding the train. I was putting my feet up on the seat next to me when several men in large green coats came up to me and asked me for my identification. Apparently, it is against the law to put your feet up on

seats and the penalty is a \$150 fine. I was shocked and became the “ignorant American”. Once they realized I was new to the country they let me off the hook. I learned that Australia, while laid back most of the time, can have some interesting laws that try to maintain the cleanliness of the city.

When I first came to Australia, much of Melbourne did not seem very different from America. There is a large population of South East Asian students and immigrants that is very similar to the demographic of California. The language and accents were not very thick and classic “Australian” as I assumed they would be. I thought the Australian culture had thoroughly been changed over the years to conform to American values. It took a bike trip to prove me wrong. We just had to get three hours outside the city and onto an old railroad bike trail to realize that the Australian culture and its language differences are still alive in the rural countryside. If one is to really experience a country’s original lifestyle they need to travel outside the cities and look into small towns.

### **Japan**

Students witnessed a system of “academic politics” where graduate students tried to please their advisors and those with higher academic standing. Students were suspicious if graduate students actually wanted to participate in activities with them or if they were doing so just to please their advisors. The students did not want the graduate students to feel obligated to do things such as go to dinner or explore the city with them. Students pressed the graduate students to answer if they really wanted to participate in activities with them and eventually when the graduate students, became more comfortable with the students, they would say no when they were too busy.

A female student who was walking with two male students found that people associated her as either of the male students’ girlfriend. Japanese people do not tend to travel alone with members of the opposite sex unless they are dating. The female student found that she had to correct people and tell them that she was not one of the male students’ girlfriends when they would make assumptions.

During our first weekend, the three of us went to eat at a local udon shop and were treated to beers. Once we had our fill we went back to my apartment to hang out. The landlady had heard us and knocked on my door. In a very polite manner she basically said that there shouldn’t be boys in my room after around 8pm. I learned that life in Japan for women is very different from that of men. I informed my landlady the next morning that the boys were my friends from America and she seemed to be more accepting.

During my first month in Japan, touch was generally avoided, especially because I am a female working in a mostly male environment. But after the people at BioGrid and CMC had got to know me better we became closer friends and “touch” (defined as hugs or pats on the head/back) is not that uncommon, but it still is not excessive. In Asian societies touch is something to be embarrassed about.

Be careful when trying to read people’s intentions and character while in Japan. There was a neighbor whose character I completely misread. He seemed very friendly and concerned

for my safety and even bought me saran wrap as a gift. He also seemed to be on good terms with the landlady. I didn't read his character well and when he came knocking on my door saying he wanted to talk, I opened the door. He proceeded to let himself in, but I soon started to become uncomfortable as he tried to look down my shirt while talking to me. This experience has impacted my view of the culture and affirmed what I already knew. The society is very secretive and suppressed. The massive conformity and secrecy makes it difficult to identify people who behave like my neighbor. Following this incidence I went to the room of UCSD schoolmates and made sure that people knew about the situation.

When going bowling, men have to knock down ten pins to get a strike, however women only have to knock down nine pins to get a special prize. The general response to this situation when asked why is "because you are a girl". This situation is illustrative of the difference in gender treatment in Japan.

I was late to my first presentation. The people at the lab who were attending my presentation were not mad. It may be the culture here to avoid confrontation, but all the guilt was felt by me. It wasn't caused from someone else telling me that I did something wrong. This surprised me in many ways and to me seems just as, or probably even more effective than having someone really scold me, which probably would have occurred in America.

### **Taiwan**

Several times I've had a person walk up to me and get my attention, once by actually grabbing my shoulder and physically turning me around just to try to talk to me and get a good look at me. This has generally only happened on weekend excursions to places where the people apparently do not see many tourists. This is surprising when you come from America where even in areas that are considered homogenous you can find at least some people of most races. I found this reaction surprising because I have never really seen anyone other than a child react in such a way to seeing a person of a new skin color or dimensions.

I have the habit of smiling and waving at people I don't recognize at my workplace and I try to introduce myself to them. This has been met with two very different responses, most of the time people will stop and talk to me for a bit, but other times people just put their head down and keep walking. People in public spaces seem to move around completely ignoring other people unless they happen to know them, which is quite different from America.

Many girls don't participate in physical contact sports such as basketball. The first time we played with the NCHC people, they were surprised that I was going to actually play in the game and not just shoot around. I acted as I normally would and played in the basketball game. My peers from UCSD were not afraid of playing normally around me (such as blocking, boxing out and general physical contact) while Taiwanese co-workers gave me more space. This experience taught me about the defined gender roles in Taiwan.

I grew up with the Chinese culture at home, so there isn't anything particularly shocking to me here in Taiwan. But there are little things that I found amusing such as Americans almost always have to have some sort of drink along with their meals, but in Taiwan they don't usually serve drinks during meals. My fellow students and I have had to adjust to having our meals without a beverage.

### **China**

When we were in Changchun, one of my male hosts was distraught over a girl who had rejected him. "I'll introduce you to a girl," I said, "Well, it's probably better if you got to know a girl no one else knows. If you're introduced then you're pressured by others to make it work and if you make a bad impression it might affect how friends look at you." They gave me a weird look. "Then how do you meet girls?" the hosts said. "I don't know . . . you see someone you find attractive, someone that seems to fit your style and you try to cleverly spark a conversation," I responded. "Just some random person?" the hosts asked. "Uhh, I guess random as in you've never met her before," I responded. This led to a conversation discussing interesting things like "If you look at a girl more than once or longer than a second she will probably think you are a sex fiend." I realized I can't help but notice when an attractive girl walks near me and that I am probably a sex fiend in the eyes of my team.

Whenever we needed any kind of help, the host researchers will be there to help us. We went to buy bikes and the host researchers showed us specific things we needed to look for on the bike and finally helped us bargain the price. We learned that Chinese people care a lot about quality while keeping the price low. They will make sure we are paying the right price for the right product. Even when an item wasn't even \$1USD, the host researchers would bargain for us. If not for the assistance of the host researchers, we may have paid more for a lot of items.

### **Section 2: List of Improvements/ "What to Expect"**

- Students should extensively prepare for their research project prior to going abroad. Students should be aware that time and patience for self-study and self-motivated work while abroad is necessary.
- Students should learn about attitudes towards women in the countries students are visiting, especially Asian countries. Be sure to know proper safety. In Japan, Taiwan and China members of the opposite sex usually do not travel together unless they are dating. Women are subject to much stricter standards than men.
- China: Girls should be careful about the conservative culture. Tank tops are very high cut in the front and that is as provocative as women's clothing gets.
- Students should be prepared for cold weather in Australia. Be sure to bring winter clothing. Also be aware of shorter days. Students who traveled to Australia wished that they would have brought nighttime activities such as video games, cards and board games.

- Students found that exchanging money was critical, but most did so with little trouble. Most found using an ATM to be the best method. It is also advisable to bring some traveler's checks, especially in Japan.
- Students expected to discover more differences in the people in their countries. Students were able to relate to others with much less effort than expected.
- Students found that prices of items differ in their country as compared with the US. For example, in Australia a load of laundry costs \$6, while passion fruits are very inexpensive. Food in Japan is quite inexpensive, but the portions are smaller.
- Students should plan some extracurricular activities prior to their travels. Students wished they would have planned out their free time before their travels. They wish they had done research online about places to visit so they would have been able to see more places and make the most of their time.
- Students used the Internet and MSN messenger as their primary means of communication during their travels.
- Students in Japan should prepare for very warm, humid weather. Students should bring bug spray.
- Students should be aware that summer is typhoon season in Taiwan.
- Students should talk to last year's students for information on restaurants, shopping, clubs and sightseeing.
- Students wished that they would have known that they would be responsible for finding outside activities. Many students thought that host researchers would have taken them out more.
- It is convenient for students to bring medicine, especially stomach medicine which can be helpful when getting accustomed to a new diet, and a handheld Chinese-English or Japanese-English dictionary.
- Students in China found it handy to carry toilet paper with them.
- Students in Taiwan might find it convenient to bring bags with them when they go shopping. Convenience stores charge extra for bags.
- Students in Japan may want to carry pepper spray. Past students found that pepper spray allowed them to feel safer.
- Students found that in the lab people dress very casually. There is no need to bring a lot of formal wear.

### **Section 3: Analysis of Student Experiences**

#### **Public Transportation versus Car Culture**

Most students grew fond of the reliance of their countries on public transportation. Many saw it as an escape from the car culture of America. Students found that using public transportation allowed them to experience the culture more fully than if they had had to rely on a car. Using public transportation allowed them to observe people and interact with new people. At first, some students had anxiety about learning how to use public transportation, but quickly learned and settled into a routine. Despite the fact that students enjoyed the new experience of using public transportation, many students expressed a desire at the end of their trip to return to the freedom that a car allows.

#### **New Perspectives/Lifestyle**

Students gained a new perspective on life and vowed to make changes in their lifestyle when they returned home. Students in Australia learned to take life less seriously as a result of the laid back culture. People in Australia are casual, interrupt in conversation, are not fearful of strangers, and less stressed out. Many students saw their travels as an opportunity to escape from their stressful lives in America, despite the fact that they were conducting research while abroad. Most found that their travels gave them a new perspective. Students, especially those who studied in Australia, found that their experience abroad gave them a new, more relaxed view of life. Instead of studying all the time, students had a new urge to try new things once they returned home such as cooking, camping and exploring California. The students found that life does not have to be fearful as the culture of America often emphasizes. Australians were not afraid to walk the streets at night or strike up a conversation with a stranger on the train. In America, people are often scared to walk the streets at night, especially in metropolitan areas. Competition is emphasized much less in Australia than in the dog-eat-dog culture of America. Australians are not found of competitive or superior attitudes. Food is a major part of culture. Prior to their trip abroad many students were excited to try the local cuisine while abroad. A student in Taiwan found that locals were very excited when they talked about food that is local to California such as chips and salsa, which is an everyday, regular item to students. The student found that exchanging information about American food and culture with people in their host countries allowed them to connect to people. Students who traveled to all the countries returned home with a new sense of independence and confidence.

### **Individualism versus Collectivism**

Students noticed the difference between the individualism of America and the collectivism of Asia, especially Taiwan. In Taiwan people tended to be centered towards their families rather than centered on the individual like in America. Taiwanese culture emphasizes putting the good of the family or the collective before the good of the individual. In America, people tend to focus what is best for themselves and the good of the family or the collective is secondary. In Taiwan, students discovered that universities have an extensive “big sibling” program within academic departments. Even though many American universities have similar programs, students found that the programs in Taiwan are much more ingrained into the culture. Americans value independence and pulling yourself up by your bootstraps to succeed, while Taiwan values promotion of the collective good.

### **Communication Style**

Students learned that communication styles can differ greatly from the American standard of directness. Students, especially in Japan, found that their host researchers and coworkers were reluctant to say “no” when the students invited them to participate in activities outside of work. In America, people tend to give their opinion freely. If an American does not have the time or desire to participate in an activity outside of work they feel fine to say “no”. Students found that the Japanese researchers would say “maybe” in order to avoid saying “no” to an invitation. Japanese indirectness was difficult for students to deal with. The students wanted to believe that the Japanese researchers genuinely wanted to help them or spend an evening with them, yet they had

a difficult time reading the Japanese researchers. Eye contact is considered rude in Japan and touch is considered something to be embarrassed about. Students in China, Taiwan and Japan had the challenge of traveling to a country which speaks a different language. While a few of the students had knowledge of the new language, many did not. Students found that they were able to combine a limited knowledge of the foreign language with people in their country's limited knowledge of English with hand signals to communicate effectively. In China, people keep a good distance, unless they are friends, while talking and touching is uncommon. Individuals tend not to make eye contact and ignore people unless they know them. Also, people are not comfortable having conversations that deal with sex. In Taiwan, students found that people are generally mild-tempered and do not raise their voices. Taiwanese people tend to be more reserved, less animated and are uncomfortable with touch in conversation than Americans. In Taiwan, people tend to ask more personal questions than in America, but do not talk about their personal relationships. In Australia, communication style is very similar to America in terms of eye contact, gestures and personal space. Students felt that they did not have to make any adjustments in their communication style. Students learned a few Australian slang terms, yet this would have also been necessary if the students were traveling to another region of the United States.

### **Dealing with Stereotypes of America**

Many foreigners get their images of America from stereotypes on television shows. A student researching in China found that the male researchers did not know much about American culture. However, the women watch many American television shows, such as "Friends" and were constantly laughing when they saw students behave similarly to television characters. Also, students found that in China people thought that Americans had a much higher standard of living and eat at McDonald's frequently. One researcher was surprised to discover that many American students rely on financial aid to fund their educations, since there is a wealthy image of Americans. In Taiwan, people's image of American culture included individualism, freedom of expression and a high quality of life. This image of America is very present in global media. In Japan, there is a perception that Americans are very hard working. Many of the researchers in all the host countries have traveled to the United States on multiple occasions and as a result they have a more accurate image of Americans than people whose image of Americans is solely from media.

### **Globalization**

Students were surprised by the amount of globalization. Students expected their countries to be dramatically different from America. However, students found that there were more small differences than major differences. A key reason for the similarities is globalization. Students were at Universities in major cities where American/Western influence is great. Students also found that people in their host countries were very familiar with American sports, movies and music, which they learn about their television and the Internet. In Australia, students found that there were great differences in terms of development and globalization between urban and rural areas. Rural areas hold on to the traditions of the country longer than urban areas. China is modernizing and globalizing extremely fast, however many are left behind. In

their quest to become part of the global society, many Chinese have been left behind and are poor. Students found that in the lab, people dressed very simple and plain, however when they traveled to shopping areas they found that the young people of Beijing were very similar to the young people of Hong Kong.

### **Urban versus Rural Difference**

Urban centers tend to be more diverse and global than rural areas. Rural areas tend to hold on to the traditional culture of the country longer than urban centers. In Australia, the urban centers have many individuals originally from other countries, particularly from Asia. Also, city dwellers tend to have a lighter accent or the accent of their home country. However, in the rural areas, there are few people from other countries and the accent and language is more pronounced. In Taiwan, people in areas outside the city were surprised to see people of a different race. One Caucasian student had several experiences where a person would walk up to him and try to get his attention, once by actually grabbing him and turning him around just to try to get a good look at him. The student was quite surprised by this reaction coming from America where seeing a person of a different race is not alarming.

### **Gender roles**

In Asian countries, gender roles are quite defined which American female students found surprising. Although there are gender roles and stereotypes in America, women have much more equality than in many of the Asian countries students visited. In China, female dress is conservative. Tank tops are the most provocative female clothing and they are cut very high in the front. In Taiwan, a female student discovered that women do not participate in contact, physical sports such as basketball. Host researchers were surprised when she wanted to play with them and they were skittish while playing with her. A female student in Japan discovered that men and women do not tend to travel together alone unless they are a couple. People assumed that she was the girlfriend of male students when she would explore the city with them. In America, this type of assumption would not have been made. Men and women travel together frequently without the assumption that they are a couple. This female student experienced disapproval from her landlady when she had the male UCSD students in her room after 8pm. In Japan there is leniency towards men and strictness towards women. American women do not have to deal with strict behavioral standards. It is quite common for women to have male friends over without being subject to scrutiny. Sexual harassment is not taken seriously in Japan. Police seem more concerned with stolen bicycles than sexual harassment incidences. In America, sexual harassment is taken very seriously and companies go to great lengths to ensure that their employees behave themselves.

### **Anxiety about returning to America**

Students also seemed to worry about how their relationships with people at home would change when they returned. They worried that they may have changed too much and their friendships would suffer. For many students, the summer abroad was the first time they had traveled abroad alone for a long period of time. Many students worried that the time apart would weaken their friendships and relationships with their

families. Students also tended to feel that they had changed during their time abroad. Students worried about how their families and friends would receive them upon their return.

#### **Section 4: Effects of Program on Students' Future: How has this experienced changed you and your goals for the future?**

##### **Australia**

"The most important changes I have experienced have been my perspectives on life. I hope to integrate into my daily life by being able to look at things a bit differently after this experience. It will help me make better decisions when I am home again, being more knowledgeable about myself and my aspirations."

"I've gained a new perspective on academics and know more of what I'm looking for. What I have also learned while being here will help me with my planned course work in computer science. Also, I plan to continue my project when I return to California."

"I think one of the most important things that I've realized here is how much I tend to get wrapped up in my schoolwork at UCSD. I look forward to coming home with a much more active attitude. I want to take advantage of all the things that San Diego and California have to offer. I've realized that there are many places and experiences right at home that I've missed out on until now."

"I have gained a new understanding of how I behave in an entirely new environment. I now have a better idea of the types of activities I wish to do in my free time and the amount of company I desire. I hope to implement such understanding back home in order to make the most out of daily life."

"I came to realize how much of a Californian I am since I missed the warm weather more than I initially expected. After living in Australia I gained some new perspectives on the world. Since Australia broadcasts new channels from around the world, you feel more part of an international community. In America you feel more confined to an American perspective of world events."

##### **Japan**

"I would like to integrate a new sense of awareness of my surroundings and new sense of independence into my life. I feel as though I have been too sheltered and have been living a very structured life. I would like to break that mold. I would like to teach English in a foreign country at some point in my life and have gained a new sense of introspectiveness for my own feelings."

##### **Taiwan**

"Some new perspectives that I hope to integrate into my academic and career life include the possibility of going to graduate school and getting a job in Taiwan. Personally, I have seen a lot of cultural differences between Taiwan and the United States. One example is

that in Taiwan I have gotten the impression that everyone is more centered around their family. My trip to Taiwan has influenced my view of the importance of family and I hope to integrate this into my life when I return home. This new perspective had influenced my thinking of my future career choice as well. My mom had been pushing me to become an optometrist since she is an optician and has two optical stores. Before going to Taiwan, I did not really consider this as an option for my future career (since I think the American mentality is to get out on your own and make a living and move away from your parents), but now I am considering this career path after seeing how close families stay together in Taiwan.”

“My experience with Taiwanese culture and ethics would help me communicate more efficiently in the global workplace.”

“I hopefully will be working with the people from Taiwan a lot in the near future. Hopefully my experiences will make that cooperation better in some way. I learned that people are all the same. I was expecting people to have different political views or moral values, but for the most part things are much more similar that I would have expected. Globalization at work? Maybe, but the end result is that I can understand where people are coming from with little effort, which can only be good.”

### **China**

“Going through this program really opened my eyes to how possible it is to transform a basic idea to a working project, research or organization. All it takes is strong effort and determination . . . and maybe a little funding to support it. If an opportunity or an idea crosses my path, I should very aggressively pursue it. With good networking skills, anything can be achieved if you know the right people.”