

## **PRIME 2007**

### **Overview**

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

#### **Australia**

“Upon arriving in Melbourne, I was a little surprised by how multicultural it actually is. There are no ‘native’ Australian foods, and there are people from all sorts of different countries speaking different languages. It reminds me a lot of home, although it seems to be even more multicultural than Silicon Valley, where I am from. All the people here are very friendly, and we’ve talked to complete strangers on the train, in the hotel, random shops, and even on the street!”

“I was talking with my friend and he said, ‘Oh you are from America—where Superman, and Spiderman, and Super-Michelle live.’ It gave me the feeling that he thought because I am American that I have these ‘super-powers’. He knows that the superheroes are fake, but he associated their capabilities and powers with me. It kind of took me back for a moment. I guess it is good thing to think that I am smart and have a lot of potential, but the way he said it made me feel like the U.S. is this big shot who can do anything. That’s not me, but now I can see that because of my country’s actions Australians have reason to perceive me this way.”

“Australians, in general, are a lot more laid back and have that ‘no worries’ attitude, which has already been mentioned so many times previously... Too often in the U.S. we are too engrossed in our own lives and seemingly too busy to look out for others, but I think that all this stress and sometimes resultant shallow existence is unnecessary. People do just fine having a congenial attitude toward others, as evidenced by practically this entire country (or actually Melbourne, because I’ve only experienced Melbourne so far). Thus, I am very impressed with this aspect of Australian culture, and I will definitely try to integrate this valuable lesson into my own life when I leave.”

During a day tour to Phillip Island, the students in Australia rode on a tour bus. Their guide was a native Australian man from south Melbourne. One student recalls: “For the first five minutes I did not even understand that he was actually speaking in English. I felt right back to when I first moved to the U.S. Even after I got used to his accent, I still could understand only 20-25% of our conversations. I walked out of my comfort zone and

instead of going all the way to the end of the bus I actually sat right next to him as his ‘co-pilot’ for the entire tour. I tried to get him involved in conversations as much as I could, asking him questions about politics, people, Australia in general, and driving questions etc. Although I could only understand 30-35% of his answers (which was 10% better than at the beginning of the tour) I learned a lot from him. I always tell my parents to stop the conversation and ask questions when they don’t understand the language, but during this experience I learned that I don’t even do that myself. I never asked him one question twice even if I did not understand his answer to my question. I need to work on this!”

“Australia is friendly, but there are always some exceptions to the rule. Last night after returning from a long day at the lab, we took a train around 10pm. Two other PRIME students and I were talking and laughing on the train. During our conversation, an Australian man walked up and asked if we were from America. Having friendly encounters before, I replied with a happy ‘Yes!’ Then, he started to express his feeling about the war on terrorism and what he thinks of Bush. Once he finished about two sentences, I realized he was drunk and probably not the best person to talk to. He did not refrain from saying some rude choice words to one of the other students. I did not engage in this conversation and luckily our stop was up fast. It was the first time here where being from America was a bad thing. Everyone is entitled to their own opinion, right? It was just a new feeling to be on the other side—not in my home country—and being able to see what the world thinks of Big Bad USA. I’m not sure what to think myself.”

## **Japan**

“Easily the most unexpected cultural incident I have experienced so far was when we went to an onsen, a traditional Japanese hot spring. The atmosphere of the hot spring and surrounding hotel was remarkably beautiful, but I was not expecting the culture surrounding this practice. The baths are separated by gender, and once in the vicinity of the baths, there are no clothes whatsoever. It was something that I don’t think is done at all in America, so of course I was not used to it. On top of that, I am a foreigner—a blond haired, blue-eyed one—so it was even more nerve-wracking. However, it was an overall positive experience, and I’m glad I participated. I learned that I can handle strange new situations in foreign lands with an open mind, and at least enjoy the experience. The experience did not negatively affect my views about Japanese culture; in fact, it showed me how Japan still respects its traditional roots and spiritual practices.”

“Though America is a very open country, I don’t think most people would be comfortable with public baths. Our visit to the onsen was a really great, relaxing experience. This has changed the way I view Japanese culture in that I no longer view cultures as being open/conservative. There’s no definitive line between the two, and different cultures cannot be compared against each other. Earlier in the trip, I was comparing everything here with America. (‘Well in America, you do this, but why don’t we do this since it’s better?’ ...or vice versa). However, now, I realized that these subtle difference (e.g. vending machines, subways, supersized everything, Hollywood videos), define the culture. Now, instead of comparing everything, I try my very best to just absorb what’s given to me and appreciate it.”

“Japanese television is the most entertaining thing I have ever witnessed. Even though I can’t understand anything, it takes little skill to be aware of what is going on. My favorite show I have seen so far is called ‘Blonde Teacher’. The show puts Japanese people in difficult situations, such as in a ghost school, or cliff diving, and they must use English to survive. Afterwards, a row of blonde bilinguals will explain to them how they should have said things.”

“Since I am obviously very different from the average Japanese person, I am noticed a lot more than in sunny California. On subways and buses, the culture here is to usually keep to yourself and avoid eye contact, or text with your cell phone. That’s why I find it interesting how hard some people will try to sneak glances at me. When I ‘catch’ them in eye contact, their usual response is to avert their eyes as much as possible, blushing slightly sometimes. I actually don’t mind it at all, but it shows how Japan is a much more introverted country than America. I have learned that I have become more introverted in reaction, maybe my subconscious attempts to blend into the culture. I find my eyes looking away just as fast as theirs sometimes!”

“I was riding the bus to work one day, and this slightly creepy guy sits next to me—slightly unwashed, smaller than normal, just oddly creepy. I decided to do my hardest to simply ignore him, so I spent the entire time staring out the window and not at him. I glanced over at him a couple times, only confirming his creepiness. I wasn’t concerned, really, or in fear of my safety, but I thought he might have been some kind of street person. Turns out, as he was leaving the bus, his mom was with him, and he probably had some kind of Down’s syndrome or other type of developmental problem. I realized that in my ignoring the people around me who stare at me, I had ignored this mother who I should have given my seat up for. As they were walking away from the bus, the mother caught me watching her son, and gave me this odd half-disapproving half-sad look. I later found out through my own research that kids with disabilities are looked on as a burden, almost as a shame on the family in Japan. I felt bad for this mother, who has to deal with this sort of social pressure every day, and then to realize that foreigners are really just as bad. I feel even worse about it, because in a homogeneous society like Japan, I’m pretty much the example for foreigners. I think she interpreted what I had intended to be just a curious glance as something more sinister.”

“The most important lessons I have learned here are tiny, practical ones. How to correctly say ‘Do you accept credit card?’ in Japanese, when and when not to take off my shoes, what time coming into work in Japan is too late or too early—these are all examples of little lessons I have learned. Individually, they do not say much about my cultural understanding of my host country and my own views, but combined they paint a more telling tapestry. Learning how to purchase a month-long subway ticket from a slightly broken Japanese-only machine—now that is an important life lesson! There really is no lesson overlord that I look at and think it is the defining piece of information I have gained here. Rather, it is taking a step back and looking at how much I have learned about Japanese culture and myself that I can appropriately deem valuable.”

## **Taiwan**

“The most valuable lesson I’ve learned so far in Taiwan is surviving in a country where I do not speak their official language. The other PRME student staying here is usually busy with her own stuff during the weekend so a lot of times I have to go on to explore Taiwan on my own. This forces me to learn their language informally by listening to what they say and trying to comprehend it. It also challenges me to become more adventurous and independent. This has a big impact on my view of Taiwan because it makes it seem less like a foreign country, and more like home.”

“We usually get to work by taking the shuttle. It only takes about five to ten minutes to get to Taiwan’s National Center for High-Performance Computing (NCHC) by shuttle. However, it takes a good twenty minutes by foot. We go to the convenient store near the dorms quite often. In addition, we often go to the local downtown to hang out and have dinner. The downtown here is very different from the downtowns in the US. Downtowns here are the main attraction, and there are a lot of things you can do. Most importantly, it’s safe. People here are pretty nice and polite and they seem to be quite friendly. There is much less diversity here than in the U.S.”

“We talked with two researchers here about the difference between the research institutions and educational systems in the U.S. and Taiwan. They said because Taiwan’s educational system is still based on testing, most institutions cannot be like institutions the US. Instead they have a lot of student interns, so the progress of research is slower and cannot further develop at a large scale. I’ve also met some of my elementary classmates. I am jealous how happy and relaxed they are in college, but they are all pretty impressed and amazed that I need to think so much about my future (such as job goals or graduate school) and do a lot of stuff which only graduate students in Taiwan do (like finding internship opportunities).”

“Even though I originally came from my host country, there are actually a lot of things that surprised me. First of all, Taiwanese government actually puts good amount of money into research institutions. (Just like most students in Taiwan, I do not really like the government, and I’m upset every time new scandals appear on television.) The government actually promotes research, and hosts a lot of programs to enrich Taiwan’s education and research environment. Such as the migrate bird program, which provides internships for Taiwanese students who are born in other countries. This makes me feel a little better, and these programs also promote collaborations abroad, which I think is necessary for a small place like Taiwan.”

## **China**

“We mostly walk everywhere. First it was really scary since traffic is really scary. There is very little control about driving rules around here. Everything is really busy. I feel that the people here are a lot harsher. Like they don’t have many manners I feel. For example, I once saw two boys yelling at each other to communicate while going in their own separate

ways. I feel like they could have just kept it to themselves by just stopping for a moment and talking a couple feet away from each other rather than screaming.”

“While boarding the subway or getting in and out of an elevator, people on the inside want to get out as much as the people outside want to get in. The people outside crowd the doors and try to flood in while the inside group tries to push their way out. This clutters up the doorway with neither group getting in or getting out. If the outside group would give a little, the whole process would be a lot quicker! I can understand the urgency to get in and grab a seat on the subway, but the situation with an elevator makes no sense to me. I think that if people communicated more on the non-verbal level, things would be more efficient in China.”

“Here in China, I’ve actually experienced people in a way invading my personal space as they tried to communicate to me that they wanted to serve me while I was eating at a restaurant. Immediately after the other PRIME students and I sat down at a table in the restaurant, there were at least five waiters and waitresses crowding around us. Frankly, I was scared. And they were standing so close to us!”

“One big thing is China is saving face. In order to do so, sometimes they will come up with an excuse instead of the actual reason for something. For example, when we went to a restaurant called BeDaiHe, we ordered three bottles of beer. However, she told us that we shouldn’t drink beer because it wouldn’t mix well with our dinner (clams), and that she didn’t want to see us get sick. After we kept persuading her, she finally told us the truth—that she didn’t want us to get drunk. That was pretty interesting, as it just didn’t make sense to me why she didn’t tell us that in the first place.”

“It was interesting that some of my colleagues view students in the US as lazy compared to Chinese students, because Chinese students have to study very hard since the competition for education is so high here, and we don’t have the same competition in the US. Some of my friends here know about U.S. culture through watching American movies and TV shows. They pick up on the slang and some of them can talk to me much in the idiomatic terms I use.”

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

- Students should use their time before arrival to make all preparations possible for easier acclimation to new working and living environments. For instance, learning the language, learning computer and programming languages, having a concrete research plan, knowing who to contact for different services, being aware of time differences for communication purposes, and being clear on important financial and transportation details will prepare students to get directly involved in their projects with minimal setbacks.
- Students should visit the U.S. Embassy in their area if possible; one student from China learned by speaking to a representative to carry a photocopy rather than his actual passport with him, as many thieves target passports.

- Students should have sufficient knowledge about money handling issues specific to their host environment and their bank's regulations. They are strongly encouraged to understand their bank's credit card policies, rules, transaction fees, hours and locations, alternative locations for transferring money, the trade-offs of using cash versus traveler's checks, and the rent policies at their host country (some students were required to pay their entire rent in full, which they were not expecting).
- Students should be aware that they need to budget their expenses. In Australia, students realized after their first week they should not be eating out all the time, and that they wanted to "save their pennies" for more entertaining things like an Australian Football game.
- Students need to remember they are responsible for their project, and they should be assertive about the project's progression. Many students learned that while their mentors and researchers at the host institution were very busy, they were usually more than happy to help in any way they could.
- Students who will be using Nimrod programs may find the set-up process to be slow at first, as it may require collaboration between UCSD and Monash, so if possible, they should begin the process before arriving. Students should also look into MATLAB licensing issues and connecting to the PRAGMA grid.
- Reflecting on the amount of time spent in preparation for the program, one student says, "I find that even with the extra ten hours average time I have spent during Spring break to prepare for my research project before coming, I still wish that I could have done more so that I can get more done while I am in Osaka University."
- Students may have to wait up to a week for appropriate internet connections at the office, in which case a thorough research plan can provide them with other tasks to work on which do not require internet. Some students did not have internet connection in their apartment.
- In terms of using a telephone, students have found international phone cards to be very expensive in past years. Having a cell phone may be an effective alternative, and one student set up Skype account to talk to his family and friends in the U.S. free of charge.
- Students should know about policies regarding public transportation. One student in Japan recommends not bending a buss pas because card reader won't be able to read it.
- A student from Australia says, "Treat this trip as a new place to live for a while, rather than a little vacation or trip to see the sights. It won't be the same as 'home' back in the U.S., but realize that it will be important for you to disconnect from home for a while in order to fully enjoy your time abroad. Once you feel somewhat at home in your new surroundings, you will be able to get as much out of it as possible."
- Students should be prepared for new living conditions they may not be used to, and be ready to improvise in order to accommodate new situations. Students in Taiwan had very little hot water in bathroom and found bugs in their apartment.
- A student from Japan recommends: "Think about what would make you more comfortable if you were to be living in a hotel-sized room for nine weeks. And

bring some sort of entertainment for the nights, because it can get a little boring if you don't understand Japanese very well and you just have a TV in your room.”

- Students should always be careful about the food and water they consume.
- Students should bring clothes hangers and may consider one strap messenger bags, which are very convenient.
- Students traveling to Australia should bring warm winter items.
- Students traveling to Japan should bring at least one jacket and an umbrella.
- Students traveling to Taiwan and China should bring boots or rainproof shoes, be prepared for humid weather.
- While many students wished they had known more about what to expect in their host environment, they also realized it was good to have new experiences. As one student reflected: “I think that it was good not knowing everything about the country because that is a part of assimilating to the area. Some things you just need to find out for yourself and even when you explore them, you can't describe it.”
- Many students this year constructed blogs to capture their PRIME experiences, and a student from Australia recommends that students view the blogs of former PRIME students to learn more about what to expect.
- A student from Australia suggests, “Make sure you are open to criticism, a new style of living, new thoughts, and in general be open to change.”
- A student in Japan shares some advice: “I think all the next year's participants who come with open and enthusiastic minds will enjoy it to the full as we all have this year.”

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

#### **Anticipation of the program**

Many students were eager to experience new culture. A couple of students travelling to Australia hoped to get the most of their experience and wanted to “indulge” in new cultural experiences.

#### **Work Environment**

Students noticed many differences between the work culture of their host institution and American (U.S.) work culture. Most students learned new ways of working as they adjusted to their environment, and discovered that the busy American work ethic is not the only way to be productive. Here are some student reflections on experiences in each of the different work environments:

##### *Australia:*

“We probably work longer than the people here seem to expect—or at least they make jokes about it sometimes—but really they get just as much work done as we do. They

simply have an ability to completely put their work aside come lunch time and not feel the need to rush back to it immediately. I have noticed that when they work they are very focused and efficient. But when they are not working, they are relaxed and not stressed. I don't know if all of Australia is the same, or if our lab is unique in that regard, but I think in general Australia seems a lot less stressed out than America."

"People here are definitely a little more laid back and seem to enjoy life more than back at home. I say this because in America, we all try to be workaholics and basically 'try' to have no time for ourselves. Here, the work schedule doesn't seem to be as hectic, and people still get work done. I think this is a matter of the different approach ingrained in the culture of the two countries. When I get back, I presume that I may have a little difficulty getting readjusted to the hectic, always-on-the-move lifestyle that we have adopted."

Japan:

"Our workday, on average, goes from 9:30am to 7:30pm, so it can be pretty tiring for a person like me. All of our co-workers are really nice and pretty funny at times."

"I really feel that we have been very warmly and well received here in Japan. Even though many of the students and mentors are very busy with their own projects, they are eager to help us and go out of their way to come to our aid if needed. For this I feel very grateful. For the most part, I think many colleagues and host mentors here have been very excited that we are here."

Taiwan:

"My work place is good; our mentor treats us *too* well. People here are nice to help us, but they are also very busy. Since this is a public institution, everything requires a long process, so our lab work has been delayed since we are still waiting for proper set up."

"Since no one is directly in charge of what I am doing here, I have to plan my project myself. However, I have found many who can help me during these weeks, and have been meeting new people at NCHC, including librarian and office workers, and also an intern student from Vietnam. I think this week taught me how to meet and find people in certain field, so that I can pin point the problem and find people who can help in order to save time."

China:

"From my interpretation, the definition of time here is very different from the American definition of time. Americans view time as equal to money. If you are not working 24/7, you are losing money. However, the approach here is, you are given a task but you can plan your time accordingly to finish the task. Some people come in early and leave early, while others come in later and leave later. It is very different

from the American way requiring employees to show up on time at 9am and work until 5pm.”

“The most surprising thing about the culture here is the amount of freedom one gets at the workplace. In the American culture, the workplace is all about productivity. One would show up to work ready to put in work for the entire day and then take off at a specified time at the end of the day, usually not exceeding eight hours a day. Every cubicle is a person’s personal workspace. They do their work in there, but they also have personal agendas in there as well. At around 12-1pm, I see a lot of people sleeping on their chairs in their cubicles. Some have pillows out, others have air-filled neck pillows, and some even have eye patches on. Throughout the day, people start watching movies and TV drama on their computers. Streaming TV shows, going on YouTube, instant messaging, and talking on the cell phone is not uncommon here in the facility. I am just surprised at how different the work atmosphere is here in China.”

### **City Life**

Students in Australia learned that the country is very environmentally conscious. They learned that the government and state officials limit the amount of construction and growth of real estate in order to avoid destruction of nature, forests, ocean, and mountains. They found that most areas they visited in Australia were very well kept. A student also noticed the sophisticated fashion sense in Melbourne, and one student learned about how weather can also affect culture: “Since Melbourne is colder, especially in the winter, the people in Sydney say that Melbourne is not as friendly. It seems that there is a little rivalry between them, a little like the Nor-Cal/So-Cal rivalry we have back in the states. I have never gone to Sydney so I don’t know if this account is true.”

In Australia, students found there were not many ‘all you can eat’ restaurants in Melbourne, and there was no such a thing as free refill. “Compare this to my culture of ‘super size me’,” one student says. “I love this culture much better; it’s more convenient, healthier and more refreshing to live in.” Students also found Melbourne’s diversity to be refreshing and a convenient way to learn about many different cultures. One student reflects: “I think it’s a little different than in the United States, even though it is known as the melting pot of the world. Here in our work setting, living accommodations, and even on the streets we are indulged in different cultures. Sure at UCSD, and in California, there are plenty of different people from China, Germany, Mexico, India, you name it. But here there is a different feel to it. The blend of the cultures has become normal where as in the U.S. it still seems that there is some hesitation to new cultures. For example, for lunch each week I have a wide variety of food to choose from: Thai, Indonesian, Chinese, Japanese, Indian, and Sri Lankan. Each restaurant is family owned and authentic.”

A student in Japan felt that it was difficult to blend into Japanese culture outside of the lab: “In the lab, we’ve been very well received. In our daily commute, and in daily life, we’ve been less well received, but I suppose it’s understandable. Japan is very

homogenous. Luckily we work at a university, where there is more diversity due to exchange students, so at least around there we don't get very strange looks. Outside though, people look at you with all sorts of intentions. Honestly, I find myself watching other Japanese people sometimes, and staring at the other foreigners that I see. A few of the people in the lab have been to America, so they understand us at least a bit."

In Taiwan students had to adjust to a different transportation culture. They had to learn to jaywalk in order to travel by foot. One student reflects, "How this affects my view of Taiwan is that pedestrians and vehicles seem to work together to move the traffic." A student also noted: "The traffic rules in Taiwan are not as strict or as enforced as those in the U.S., which means less traffic tickets are given out. From what I can see so far, Taiwan seems to be pretty safe. It is also safe to walk at night. Crime seems to be pretty low. I've seen myself quickly growing accustomed to the new culture. It is not that difficult of a culture to grow accustomed to."

After his first week in China, a student noticed that the streets were messy and there was a lot of pollution. He also learned that you need to be assertive to get your order placed at restaurants, and tipping is considered rude. Students discovered that since Beijing is very crowded, personal space is very limited. "As for turn-taking," says one student, "it's basically first come first served. For example, in McDonalds, there are globs of people, not lines. You have to step right up in front of the line to actually order, because if you stand in line like in the States, you may never get the chance to. Even the employees at the cash register have this mentality, so they just serve whoever is first." A student notices that a lot of things built there were designed poorly. He says, "I mainly see this because everything was built to accommodate such a bustling population and economy."

### **Social Structure**

One student in Australia also noted that there were more traditional gender roles, which she would miss upon returning home.

Students in Asia noticed gender roles. When talking to a graduate student, a student in Japan learned that approximately 80% of doctors there were men and only 20% were women. He says, "This number has shocked me because I realize how many more men receive higher education here than women. But this was, again, not wholly unexpected, because coming from Korean-American background, I know many Asian countries have very similar conservative ideas about what the role of men and women should be. There are definite differences from those in Western world and here."

Students in China discussed social issues with coworkers. One student says, "Discrimination in China does exist, but it is a matter of social hierarchy. For example, farmers may be looked down upon by city dwellers because they work in dirty fields. Discrimination in America is structured according to race. Although the discrimination was very different in the two countries, we agreed that racism and discrimination is heavily based on economics."

A student in China noticed how division can affect Chinese culture: “What I feel has really affected me was how separated many Chinese are amongst each other. For example, I recently found out from many people that many Chinese see Shanghainese people in a negative light. They see them strictly as good businessmen, and because of that, they believe they are harsh. This I feel really divides many Chinese against each other. It is quite surprising to me, since I am Shanghainese. When I now think about it, many Shanghainese are good businessmen. And apparently when I went to an English Corner (a place where many Chinese talk to each other to practice their English), I learned from a friend that I impose myself upon others. I guess that sort of does stereotype Shanghainese people, but I still feel that this stereotype cannot be carried too far.”

### **Communication Styles**

While observing and interacting with others in their host environment, students experienced how different communication styles shape the ways people interact with one another. In learning about other cultures’ communication styles they learned to examine American communication styles more closely. Below are some student accounts on issues such as attention, word choice, gesture, eye contact, tone, and many other subtleties in body language and verbal communication:

#### Australia –

- “As far as personal space, eye contact, and the more physical aspects of the culture go, things are pretty much identical to how they are in America. People greet each other with handshakes or hugs, depending on the situation and familiarity of the two people.”
- “Heavy use of some words such as: mate(s), cheers, no worries, etc., reflects their friendly and relaxed working environment.”
- “Unlike the U.S., where the speaker in a group setting tries to get everybody in the group involved in the conversation, Australians usually focus on one person at the time and mostly look at the person who posed the question(s).”
- “Even if someone is really excited and has gotten an answer for a cryptic crossword, if others are still trying to figure it out, they will give time. Thus, I guess you can say that there is not so much underlying competition in the Australian culture, whereas in the U.S., if someone has gotten an answer, it is much more likely that they will shout it out with an attitude like, ‘Hey, look at me, I’m good.’”
- “I have not seen people greet, smile, or nod when they pass each other on the street. A few times I have smiled or said good morning to someone passing by, but they usually don’t say anything back or smile really. However, this difference does not mean that Australians are unfriendly—anyone seems willing to help if you simply approach them and start talking. People seem very open if you come up to them to talk, they just don’t typically come up to us.”
- “I think more notably we have had the opportunity to compare communication styles living in such a multi-cultural environment. For example, our Colombian

friends from the Claremont hotel are more open in terms of communication and space, whereas a Chinese girl and Indian guy we know are both much more reserved when conversing and will stand at a further distance from us.”

- “Everyone speaks softly to each other and in a gentle manner.”
- “The only time I’ve actually heard an Australian expressing anger (at her kid for doing something), even though she was scolding her child based on the words and facial expression she had, the language still came out quite pleasantly and not quite as rough as it would have in America.”

### Japan –

- “As Japan is an Asian country, the people are extremely respectful of each other and especially to someone in higher status or older. Bowing, lowering the eye, clasping hands together, and many other actions show their humility/respect to one another.”
- “Most of the time, I think as a foreigner, bowing and showing respect to others is the most important. Even if we have a language barrier, when I bow with sincerity, the people know that I express respect and gratitude. This has helped me out a lot in understanding the Japanese culture more. Coming from an Asian immigrant family, I knew the Asian culture to a certain degree, but I find myself realizing new Japanese culture daily.”
- “There is definitely less smiling here than U.S. but once we stop to ask questions, they are extremely kind and helpful, which has been very nice.”
- “It wasn’t uncommon to see women hold each other’s hands to gesture that they were friends. Actually, I see that all the time. It’s quite interesting how people hold each other’s hands in such a bustling and rapidly moving society.”
- “I’ve noticed that people stand a lot closer to each other in Japan when talking. Also when someone is talking, you tend to say “yes” (hai) a lot in response as they talk to show that you’re paying attention. In English it would sound like you’re intruding on their conversation, but in Japanese it sounds natural.”
- “Japan communicates in very indirect ways (as we learned on the Cultural Education prior to leaving), where saying a direct ‘No’ is considered very rude.”
- “I think that it may be a Japanese thing to not really tell us exactly what they expect from us. I know that we’re expected to work hard and get things done but they’re also very lenient on us as long as things get done. Kind of like a computer science lab back home, I think.”
- “Even if a Japanese speaker makes a very indirect suggestion, it usually translates to a firm request in America. For example, a student came up to me and said it would be good if I could briefly go over his English research paper, at my earliest convenience. An hour later, he approached me again and apologetically mentioned it was due the next day, and it was already night time!”
- “People here will open up to you more the longer you get to know them, which differs slightly from Americans who will act like themselves when they first meet you. I think this makes friendships more valuable, because you have to work to get to know who a person is, instead of knowing everything from the start. I’m really learning what things about myself to talk about when I first meet someone, and

what I should withhold until I know them better. For instance, it was a bad idea to tell people that I like anime within the first week. They all think I'm an anime otaku now (a special word, sort of like a nerd, for person who really, really likes anime)."

#### Taiwan –

- “People are nicer and more polite. They will also bow a little bit sometimes to you depending on each person. Aside from that, communication is pretty much the same as back in the U.S.”
- “There are usually no big gestures during conversation; I think it is because personal spaces are generally small due to crowdedness.”
- “There is still direct eye contact, but I think the eye gestures need to be less forward and direct than the in the US.”
- “Most conversations I’ve had with people are generally without pauses and silences because they are heated and exciting conversations.”

#### China –

- “When I talked to a person in my lab, he told me that all the people were aware of us being here, but many people do not talk to us since they are really shy. I feel this is quite interesting, since on the streets, many Chinese people are so harsh when talking (like really loud in the streets).”
- “There are a lot of people in Beijing which makes its streets more bustling and crowded. Pedestrians try to cross the street while many bicycles and cars want to go a different way. The best way to communicate to the pedestrians amongst this mass confusion is for the cars to constantly honk and bicycles/motorcycles to ring their bells. From this observation, I think that the Chinese culture here communicates in a very explicit way. I think this form of constant explicit communication stems from a culture that is most of the time impatient.”
- “People here in China communicate very differently from us in the U.S. For one thing, everyone I feel basically yells when talking to each other. In the U.S. we speak to each other as if we’re at arm’s length. If we are moving away from each other and talking, we usually stop to talk and come together or call each other. But here, people basically talk really loud, which I think can be quite obnoxious actually.”
- A Cantonese-speaking student noticed Cantonese and Mandarin (which is widely spoken in Beijing) are very different: “With experiences of not being able to speak with the locals, I now understand how important communication is. It is not as noticeable of a realization back in the U.S. since everyone around speaks the same language as I do. I have rarely encountered language barriers, but now I know how my parents feel not being able to speak English and constantly needing my sister and me to translate for them. It is a very frustrating feeling.”

### **Lessons on American Culture**

Students found that many of the people in their host country had a grasp of how American culture is portrayed by the media. Often, people in their host country would

generalize about American society based on the media or pop culture. Here are some examples of what students encountered:

- “In the hotel there are students from India and Columbia. When talking with them they expect us to be really smart and have a lot of money because we are from America.”
- “When we inform Australians that we are from California, they expect us to be surfers. I guess it is the same as thinking that Australia is filled with rugged outback people saying ‘Put another shrimp on the Barbie mate!’ I think it’s interesting to see how other cultures here perceive us. People here generally seem very open to new ideas, and talking with them after overcoming the stereotypes of our respective origins, has really helped me to experience what life is like in Australia.”
- “People here seem to know a lot more about the U.S. than I, or any of us really, know about Australia. Even the non-Australians have seen all the famous American movies and know the American actors and actresses...A few times, when I mention that I am from Orange County, people have asked me if it is like “The OC” (the TV show), which of course it is not so I had to explain that.”
- “Most of the people here in Australia with whom we interact on regular basis are very educated about America. But we have also made friends with students here whose knowledge about America is at the level of movies and TV shows.”

Students also encountered people who have more accurate perceptions about what life is like in America. Students enjoyed discussing these issues with others, as it also helped them understand their own culture. Here are some student reflections:

- “Japan in general has a sort of unspoken fascination of America, and the English language in general, but the people I work with do not display any direct opinion of America, except for possibly respect. The only reflection I have is possibly the reactions they have towards me.”
- “We discuss various American issues with our mentor so he could understand why things are a certain way in America. Topics included racism and stereotypes. A challenging question that was brought up was: Will Blacks and/or Latinos still be discriminated against if they make significantly more income on average? What would the U.S. be like if the roles of slavery were switched between the white and black races? There were quite a few intellectual questions that our Chinese friend brought up. It’s very interesting to see U.S. values and flaws from a different perspective.”
- A student in China says, “I was talking to a co-worker about his views about the U.S., and I feel that they are really realistic and in-line with our own views, including the reason for the U.S. going to Iraq for oil.”

### **Integrating New Cultures**

Students learned that while there are aspects of different cultures that they are not comfortable with, or even dislike, they can still take the opportunity to integrate new

ideas. They learned to become more tolerant of things they initially found were odd, different, or even offensive. A student from Japan states: “The one most valuable lesson that I have learned here in Japan, I think is having open mind and keeping positive about the culture. Naturally there is a sharp contrast in the cultures between U.S. and Japan. As we learned before departing, I realize that there must be something that I am not understanding or seeing—and I can’t shut my mind just because it is different from what I am used to or think should be right.”

Students also found many aspects of their host country’s culture that they hoped to incorporate into their own lives. A student from Australia reflects: “Basically, I find that many qualities of Australian culture are things that I wish I could have in my life, and I would like to integrate these and carry them back with me upon return to California. Because they seem so much more open and heartwarming here, I am hoping that I will be able to do likewise, and learn from their culture to make myself a more open person.”

A student from Japan summarizes eloquently how to appreciate cultural differences: “By seeing Japan’s homogeneity, I am more cognizant of America’s rich diversity and I now have a chance to truly appreciate it. However, this should not overshadow the beauty of living in Japanese society. There are a lot of common courtesies so integrated in this culture that are lost in America. In Japan, I am more inclined to be more inconspicuous in public and be respectful to the elderly. For instance, every morning at work, I would see the people downstairs working (who manage the supercomputers here), and I’d bow my head slightly to recognize their presence (and sometimes, even greet them with my terrible Japanese). In America, I think in the presence of others, I am more inclined to just smile casually as we pass each other by. This subtle distinction between American culture and Japanese culture is beautiful—and neither one is ‘better’ than the other. Being in Japan helps me appreciate American culture as well as respect and value other cultures such as Japanese culture. It most certainly makes me more interested in learning more about people and their values—something that I was not genuinely interested in up until now.”

## **Returning Home**

Many students felt anxiety about returning to America. Among the things they worried about were: having to say goodbye to friends and colleagues, uncertainty of when they would be able to return to the host country, talking about the trip with others who may not understand what they experienced or who cannot relate, missing the host country, having to return to private transportation, facing pressures of college, work, and graduate/professional school.

Students also felt relief about returning home, in that they could see family and friends again. Many students extensively captured memorable moments while abroad through pictures, video, blogs, and souvenirs. Some students planned to get together at least once a quarter when they returned to UCSD to keep their connection and maintain their friendships.

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

##### **Australia**

“Going to Australia, I had thought that my cultural experience would depend on that of Australian culture alone, but I have found that my newfound cultural experiences have come from those from other countries that we have met during our stay at the Claremont. While interacting with these people, I have come to realize what being American means to them as Germans, Colombians, Indian, and more. Furthermore, being the only Asian-American in this group of PRIME students has enabled me to come to terms with what it really means to be American while also allowing me to embrace my Asian background at the same time. These new perspectives, briefly explained, have greatly broadened my view of the world and how I personally fit into society and bring these new ideas back with me.”

“I think that I will integrate my new perspectives that I have acquired in Australia not in very extreme ways but in the little things I do. Being away from the United States for about two and a half months has opened my eyes to what our country represents and has made me think of what my views are on certain issues such as the war in Iraq. I think academically I will have a different mentality because I have seen how the things that I am learning apply to the world on the global scale. They are not just facts but more information that can help the research progress. Personally this experience has allowed me to grow. Before, my ideas and concerns were mainly focused on a national scale. Having traveled only through the U.S., I could only imagine things within the country. Now I see that the world is a big place that never stops...With the relationships made and collaborations between countries I see how international relations are necessary to accomplish anything. I am so happy I was a part of this program and can't wait for next year's students to experience the great things I was able to.”

“Personally, I will probably be a little more independent in how I handle things, and take more initiative where I see the need. This would apply academically as well. I realized on this trip that in order to succeed it takes a lot of personal drive to get things done on your own and not wait for people to tell you what to do. I hope to be more ready to seize any opportunities I come across to further my education without waiting to see if other people are doing the same thing. And lastly, I hope to take my perspective of the world as a place to explore and constantly create new relationships seriously and apply it to my life in San Diego as well. There are lots of places left in San Diego to explore I have never been to, and I hope to work on that during any free time I have. Leave no rock unturned and no nook or cranny unexplored!”

“Coming back to San Diego I hope to keep up this kind of time management, lose the technology I used to constantly be attached to, and take a step back to observe my own country a bit, and perhaps catch up on other goals I have in addition to educational/career aspirations. I’ve found that I accomplish more with a consistent schedule and am generally happier when there’s a few breaks in between—something that a lot of people here practice often...So perhaps the most valuable lesson I will come away with is of balance.”

“I look forward most to returning to UCSD with an open mind. I’m not sure how to say it best, but this opportunity has personally encouraged me to ‘take action’ opposed to being generally more passive about my goals in various areas of my life. As I think of returning to academics, I look forward to seeing collaborative research in a different light, and better appreciating all the work that goes into making global connections like PRAGMA successful. Over the next few months (as I enter my final year as an undergraduate) I have some very important decisions to make as I prepare for graduation, but in approaching these I know I will be integrating much of what I have learned this summer. Upon returning to university, I hope to continue the research I have been participating in over the last few months and hopefully see the project through to completion over time.”

“As far as academic and career perspectives go, working in research this summer has opened new doors for me, although I’m not quite sure if I would like to pursue research as a career. However, working in Information Technology and with the PRAGMA grid has allowed me to see how powerful computing is and how big of a role it will play in the future. Thus, in terms of career perspectives, my mind has also been opened, and I see that there are many more options that I would like to pursue, other than going to medical school. I hope that with continuing work on my research project on cardiac modeling and further coursework, I will be able to integrate these new perspectives gained from my work with PRIME and figure out what I want to do with myself and the future.”

## **Japan**

“I find that living in my environment brings many highs but also sometimes lows. For instance, missing my family or not finding what I expected to find can affect me to feel negative or even bit depressed at times. However, I realize that I need to take full appreciation of what’s around me and enjoy it. I think staying positive in all situations is really important and great method to not have any regrets when I head back home... I feel bit more mature and independent from being able to live abroad without any family/friends. This experience, without any doubt, has been one of the most amazing times of my life and I think that this experience will always influence my future decisions in various ways; it has truly changed me personally in many aspects.”

“In terms of applying my experience from Japan to my daily life, I will absolutely apply what I learned, and my new perspectives. Academically, I’ve learned a lot about programming, and the ins and outs of system administration, which I will use pretty much at any future job in some way or another. I hope to take what I got from this experience and use it to make better judgments in the future, after being immersed in Japanese culture.

Whether that includes the way I act or the choices I make, I think that being in a different country for that long is crucial to a better realization of myself, and my own country.”

### **Taiwan**

“The most valuable lesson I have learned in my host environment is the importance of collaboration between institutions and departments within the institution. NCHC’s projects mostly are collaborated with other institutions, providing an aspect of technical support. Therefore, collaboration and teamwork across different platforms is one the most important elements. Also, the will to learn new things other than specializing is necessary; many researchers I talked to need to do this. They learn about key medical processes and knowledge for medical grids, biology for bio grids, etc. However, most of them enjoy it a lot, because they gain new knowledge from the projects they work on.”

“I feel that life in Asia is very different from life in the Western countries. People seemed to be a lot more relaxed and nicer. Stress-free is something that I’d like to see more in the U.S.”

### **China**

“I hope to complete my senior year and enter the work force or research field. The work atmosphere that I have experienced this summer is very different from attending school. In school, the mentality is that everyone works for him or herself. There are no teamwork, motivation, or cooperation skills required. I enjoy the teamwork aspect of accomplishing a task and I hope to utilize the teamwork skills I have enhanced to better my academic and career preparation.”

“My most valuable lesson I have had here in my host environment is how much I have been given in my life. I have always complained before, saying, ‘Oh, I have to live in a double’ or ‘Oh, I have to walk two blocks’, but people here don’t even have a working toilet seat! Or at least I don’t. Supposedly we have gone through two toilet seats that are now broken, and it’s not because of our weight or any other actions that we might have bestowed on them. It’s interesting how I complain about not having a car sometimes, but many people here can’t even afford a bus. I think this is a really important lesson that I have taken into my life where I feel I am now more open to what’s out there, and it’s a rude awakening to how spoiled I’ve been in the U.S. This definitely impacts my view of my host country and my own country in the sense of materialism in our society and lack of needs in China.”

“I have grown a lot from this experience. I have gained a new-found appreciation for freedoms in our nation that I have previously taken for granted, like freedom of speech, freedom of press, and freedom to assembly. I am a lot more grateful for the wealth I have been given in the U.S. and I now feel spoiled on many different levels. I plan to live a much more humble life with much less materialistic desires. Academically, I have learned a lot in computer language and got a better understanding of virology and structural

biochemistry. I am still undecided on my career, but I have gained a better understanding of research and what it entails.”

## **Section 5: Students’ Comments after Returning Home**

Sections 1-4 draw from the students’ responses to weekly online surveys they completed while abroad. After returning to their home institution (UCSD), students participated in an in-person group exercise where they spoke about issues that were mentioned in their responses, and shared their experiences with participants in other locations.

The group revisited issues like communication styles, behavioral contexts, and issues such as concepts of time, gender roles, and hierarchy, which facilitated a multicultural understanding of the different cultures.

Below are some comments collected from students as part of this group activity:

### *Personal Impact:*

“I have become a lot more appreciative of the things that I have been given to me. I feel more humble as a person overall.”

“I definitely feel that I have changed as a result of PRIME. I think that I have developed more self-confidence and am also no longer as awkward when talking to people on a ‘higher’ level (i.e. faculty and industry personnel).”

“I try to maintain the friendly, laid back attitude in my interactions with other people because I think it makes them feel more willing to open up too. I also will be staying in contact with the friends we made overseas so I will not forget all the great experiences we had!”

“I don’t really know how I will incorporate these experiences into my daily life, aside from an overall cultural understanding of Japan that can be applied to choices I make here. I have definitely adopted their feelings towards hospitality, which I try to apply to guests and meetings I have.”

“Being immersed and working in a different culture has really opened my eyes and views to accept, understand, and connect more to the outer world than before. I am aware that as our world becomes more global, it is very crucial to have open eyes about other people and cultures. This unique summer experience has definitely given me more confidence and understanding that I need to approach another

culture and learn from it. Living abroad without any family/ or close friends has also given me more self-confidence, knowing that I can overcome bigger challenges and I feel more mature in many ways after the internship.

“The changes in me through the experience are not always immediate and obvious—but more and more I find myself realizing how much it has helped me to absorb, adjust, and understand new surroundings and experiences.”

“After the experience, I try to be more open, tolerant, and understanding of new things that I do not comprehend. This definitely takes effort on my part but I find it much easier after living in Japan, and I think that a new cultural exposure during summer has given me more of an open mind.”

“When I asked my family if they noticed any changes in me when I returned home, they said that although I have always been an independent person, they noticed it more now. I would agree with this because the experience has given me more confidence in my abilities and I am sure that this is reflected in how I act around other people. I also feel more assertive and forward in how I interact around people—I am less hesitant to speak up when I need to or when I am communicating what I think to other people. Also, I am more interested in what is going on outside America (especially in Australia of course) and feel more internationally conscious.”

*Impact on Future Goals:*

“Academically PRIME has given me the opportunity to participate in a real, practical international research experience. The program has opened doors for me to take on a project that I am very interested in, and pursue it even after the summer. I am currently still working with my PRIME host mentor and continuing the project.”

“While the research project was very interesting that I was working on this summer, for a career I would prefer working with something more concrete. I like seeing very real results from my work and seeing the direct product from my work, so for my personality I think a job that involves working with a specific product or device rather than general research would be more fitting. Thus, I was able to finalize my decision not to go into graduate school and start a job or internship with a biomedical company.”

“I am still interested in applying to graduate school, but I definitely have my concerns. Conducting research is a hard and sometimes painful task. I still believe in the valorous and prestigious ideologies that research entails, but I am nervous of the level of commitment and intelligence it requires to make a significant breakthrough in today’s research environment.”

“I’ve obtained many opinions and suggestions from researchers I worked with, and I think they changed what I think a research will be. Right now I think it is very important to find out what I really like to do before entering graduate school, instead of just having a fancy thought about it.”

“I certainly feel more strongly about my interest in research. After this experience, I still want to become a physician rather than a MD/PhD scientist. However, I know that I definitely want to pursue research during medical school, especially those related to human health and disease.”

“PRIME has rekindled my desire to go to medical school. Before, I was confused about what I wanted to do with my life; I’ve wanted to go to med school since I was little, but during this year, I was rethinking that. Now, though, I’ve realized that doing research for a career might not be my thing and I think that I enjoy more the application of research rather than doing actual research.”

### *Experiencing New Culture:*

“The people at my host institution have beliefs of the U.S. in the sense of politics and the Iraqi War that are pretty much in line with many of ours. But I feel that they just stereotype that everyone in the U.S. is rich, which isn’t necessarily true.”

“People seemed very knowledgeable about what is going on in the U.S. Also, Australia’s media is nearly all from Hollywood, which was interesting.”

“The host country seems to think that the United States is pretty oblivious to the rest of the world, and way more fast-paced. There are just different priorities in Australia, which are pretty good (i.e. spending time with family, work-family balance, etc.).”

“I was surprised how it seems that the whole world dislikes our government. There was even a big protest against Bush while we were in Sydney. However, people seemed friendly towards Americans, even though they do not like our government and its choices.”

“Most people from my host country still think students from the U.S. work harder and are generally smarter. I don’t know if this is true, but compared to my work load and my friends’ in Taiwan, I have to admit that being a college student in Taiwan is wonderful.”

“People from my host country also think that having a program like PRIME also indicate that how university in the United States is different. And also trying to find internships or jobs even in summer also indicates that students in the United States work harder.”

### *New Perspective of the U.S.:*

“I gained an invaluable sense of my place internationally, especially in Japan. I also looked at my home country a different way, almost with a sense of respect for the way it operates. The same concept applies to my feelings towards my host country.”

“I believe that the United States government is too critical of some values in China which are better, such as a family allowing an elder live in their house. I also think that we as Americans are extremely materialistic and have always and will always take for granted our freedoms.”

“I think that in general, the U.S. is very well-to-do and is pretty oblivious about the world. Watching TV in Australia, I was surprised by how much world news was broadcast and how closely they follow American news. I think I learned more about American news in Australia than I have ever had at home.”

“I have noticed people here seem to have shorter fuses, and get upset quickly. Also, America seems more paranoid—worrying about every little thing that could go wrong. But I was glad to get back to my life in the U.S. because I am very glad for all the opportunities I have here, and I love my friends and family here.”

“After going to Japan, I definitely learned to appreciate my level of work here in America. I do a lot of extracurricular activities that I would never have the time for in Japan, given their long, sometimes strenuous hours. Even though Japan has a remarkably similar overall culture as America, I definitely learned to appreciate certain freedoms and choices we have here.”

“I realize how blessed I am to live in United States, the most powerful nation in the world, where I have so many incredible opportunities like PRIME. I also realized however, that many Americans—including myself—do not know much of other culture and should make more effort to learn about other peoples’ lives in different countries.”

### *Sharing Experiences with Others:*

Some students shared difficulties in relating their experiences to others. They found that others seemed confused when they tried to explain their research project, and that in some cases pictures were more effective than words. A student learned that it was hard to make her friends and family understand how much missed her friends in Australia.

One student says, “I have basically told my friends and family about my adventures and what I have seen. I also, many times, pointed out the flaws that the Chinese

people have. My parents have pretty much been in agreement with me about this. Other parts of my family are still locked up in their nostalgic views of China.”

Another student says, “Overall, I think my blog (which is still need to finish) covers enough of the things I did and the thoughts I was feeling to convey to family and friends, so I really haven’t gone into exciting anecdotes with anyone, yet.”

A student who visited Australia found that people were either not interested or just mildly interested in her story, and says, “You can tell what ‘type’ of people they are by how they approach the question, ‘Oh, so how was Australia?’ I am definitely more interested in telling them about it than they are of listening to me.”

### Advice to Future Students:

“Prior to leaving for Japan, I worked on average about eight hours each week with my mentor regarding the project. But when I was in Japan; I still felt that if only I prepared more, I could have achieved more.”

“I think that having assignments with deadlines is always a motivating factor for students to prepare. It would be beneficial for students to create schedules of what they need to accomplish each week before they leave. Their mentors should definitely help them with this, because there is a lot of technical stuff that students might not realize they will need to know (such as simply knowing how to use grid computing, etc).”

“I want to clearly express this to the new students and highlight the CRUCIAL importance in being motivated and taking initiative before AND during the internship. The more one puts in, the more one will achieve. I know this phrase is obvious, but I wish that I realized that more strongly prior to departure. “