

# Student exchange: is it worthwhile?

Joan McMeeken  
School of Physiotherapy  
Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences  
The University of Melbourne



## U21 Student Mobility Network

### Shanghai Declaration

- to increase student mobility
- 2004 1166
- 2010 2332

Katherine Beaumont UBC  
Coordinator of U21 Student Mobility Network



## Past results & future plans

	Term long exchange	Research Exchange	Short term	Total
2003				900
2004				1166
2005	1180	19	181	1380
2006	1407	41	208	1656
2007	1739	64	239	2042
2008	2062	80	269	2411



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
MELBOURNE

## How?

1. Establishing local targets
2. Expanding beyond undergraduate exchange
3. Identifying & reducing barriers
4. Increasing financial assistance
5. Increasing participation across universities
6. Promoting U21 student mobility
7. Measuring outcomes of U21 student mobility
8. U21 Student Mobility Webware development



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
MELBOURNE

## Beyond undergraduate exchange

- establish doctoral or research mobility
  - Joint supervision
  - Doctoral scholarships
- short-term
- e-mobility
- joint programs
- clinical placements



## Melbourne Physiotherapy

- Preparing graduates for the world
- 85% work overseas within 5 years
- Student global elective between Years 3 & 4



## A global program for all undergraduate students



## A global program for all undergraduates

- Philosophy of internationalisation - foster friends, colleagues & understanding world wide
- Undergraduates out of comfort zone - realisation of good life style & health care in Australia
- Develop maturity & experience in planning - they pay own fares, accommodation etc
- Learn from neighbours - share some of own knowledge
- Life changing for some individuals/may be only experience for others



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
MELBOURNE

## Universitas 21 - a semester or more

- Why go?
- What was best?
- What was most challenging?
- Where did you go?
- What advice for other students?
- How long to prepare?
- How comparable were the courses?
- Any ongoing benefits?
- How can Universities facilitate?



Qualitas™ and a  
T2E Environmental Development  
are needed to use this product.

## Why did you want to undertake an overseas experience?

'... meeting new people/ cultures & getting an understanding of how things works in other countries, to broaden my perspectives ... a perfect opportunity to come back to your country by living there during a year. Australia also has a very good reputation in physiotherapy'

'... I believed it would be a new and exciting experience, & would make me a more worldly person - plus I love travelling.'

'I saw this as a perfect opportunity to combine both study & travel'

'I wanted to learn more about physiotherapy & at the same time experience a different culture'

" I thought there would be many similarities between our physiotherapy service & I was eager to see how it works on the other side of the world. I was also looking for a new challenge & a change from routine. I was hoping to strengthen the link between Canadian & Australian therapists'



## What were the best elements of your overseas experience?

‘learning & becoming confident in my occupation by using English language, getting a few different ways of assessing & treating patients ... making new lovely friends & to get the opportunity to travel around & exploring new places considering Australia is far away from my home country’

‘The friends I made & the relationships formed’

‘Definitely the friends I made. I got to meet so many people from all over the world that I still keep in contact with to this day. I think I will have these friends for life. I’m planning to visit many of them within the next year and I have already had one friend from London & another from Canada come and stay with me in Melbourne’

‘I learnt a lot about myself & therefore I’m better at understanding my patients’

‘My 2 supervisors were extremely welcoming & eager to teach me all about their jobs ... As a traveller having a uniform also kept packing easier ... had a wonderful time exploring the city’



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
MELBOURNE

## What challenged you most?

‘The examinations. I loved to learn what I was studying, but it was also pretty difficult at times to do it at another language. I’m happy I passed them though ‘

‘Trying to study for exams when my mind was elsewhere - in the ski fields ... the adjustment to living with room mates that had quite different cultural values’

‘... difficult to settle into a new environment and still maintain a high level of commitment to your studies. ... it can be a bit of a shock to the system when you’re forced to fend for yourself & find your way around ... always so much happening - travelling, sight seeing, getting invited to a different party every night! - so it can be difficult to find time to concentrate on your studies’



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
MELBOURNE

## What challenged you most?

‘Actually, the language. My English was so good that people forgot that it was my second language. They didn't understand that I couldn't express myself the way I wanted to & how frustrating that was’

‘One of the most difficult elements was just how long it took for everything to be accepted & approved leaving little time to plan everything else ... I was fortunate to have family friends I could stay with or else accommodation may have been difficult as well’



## What advice would you give others?

‘My advice would to use some of the lovely friends you will make, who could support you if you need someone to for example look through your assignments & correct when the language is not correct.... Do not go with too many expectations, as quite often things are a little different to what you expect. Also, save, save, save’

‘Just do it! A lot of people think about it & never go through with it. It was without doubt the best decision I have ever made. You will have the time of your life & make friends all around the world. The only other advice would be to work out how much money you will need..... & then double it!’

‘Keep an open mind. Many things are the same as they are at home, but there are a lot of differences as well’

‘... be flexible with the differences ... you are also a source of information for them so read up & bring some recent work from your home country to share with them. Most of all, have fun & be thankful for the experience - make the most of it!’



## How long did it take you to prepare?

‘I think the process from my Uni took about 6 months, depending on when during the year you apply for it’

‘...not too long, couldn't wait to go’

‘I was a bit rushed as it was almost a last minute decision, but I would say that you need at least 3 months to plan effectively’

‘One year’

‘I was able to plan for my trip in ~3 months but I would have preferred to have 6 - 9 months for flights etc.’



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
MELBOURNE

## How comparable were the courses?

‘The courses was pretty similar ...though we did not do physiology together with the medicine students as you do. Also, we did not have anatomy tutorials, though I thought it was a good way of getting to understanding the anatomy by actually having a "closer look" at the human body’

‘Similar, but with enough difference to make it worthwhile. I think the worst thing you could do would be to have exactly the same classes as you would be taking at home ... I think it's a good idea to experience some classes that you may not get at home’

‘The physiology course was similar, but the course gave me a deeper knowledge. Physiotherapy prac was different since we use different techniques’



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
MELBOURNE

## Are there any ongoing benefits?

'I have been able to use my skills I brought with me from Australia, as well as the language when I have English speaking patients'

'Friendships formed that are ongoing today. And of course.....the memories'

'I definitely learnt to be a lot more tolerant of other people's beliefs & cultures through these experiences. I think I am a more rounded & better person for having been an exchange student'

'I do have some 'Australian-isms' I incorporate into my practice. My overseas placement was the best start to a year of travelling that was so important in my life that I look back on fondly. I'm hoping to one day supervise an overseas student of my own and perhaps work abroad for a while'



## How can Universities better facilitate exchanges?

'It was a bit stressful applying for a visa when they needed that (university) letter'

'Improve the communication between schools & students. Myself & the person I went with on exchange, had no contact with the head of the school in ... Nor did anyone at any stage check to see how we were going'

'I was satisfied with the level of assistance that I received from both Universities'

I spent months trying to get in touch with the international coordinator in ... & didn't succeed. She didn't answer any emails & ... lost my first application somehow. So I would say that the easiest way to facilitate the process would be to make it clear who is responsible for exchange students & make sure that it's easy to contact that person'



## What else?

‘I must say that I had the best time & I'm also planning on coming back to do a masters study at ...’

‘I've kept in contact with a couple of the students in my class. And hopefully...will do his global elective here in ... That would be great!’

‘Other benefits are my two jobs that I got thanks to my trip to Australia: Physio for an elite handball team & also I have a full time scholarship to do research on the athletes' heart in a research group ...’

‘I believe universities should encourage their students to study/work abroad as a means of international relations & improved global knowledge on physical therapy’



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
MELBOURNE

## Funding increasing

- £500 per student at Nottingham
- \$137,000 annually at Melbourne
- £18000 annually at Birmingham
- HK\$0.5 million annually at Hong Kong
- An opportunity to increase the current ‘low’ participation rate



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
MELBOURNE



## How we can help

- What is being taught - up-to-date subject information on websites that is easily searchable
- Information about:
  - accommodation
  - the process for being accepted
  - what to do to get visas
- Problems with U21 institutions:
  - semesterisation, or year-long subjects
  - quota systems or majors
  - exclusions - health sciences in UK!!!



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
MELBOURNE



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
MELBOURNE





