

## **La Trobe Exchange Reflection Paper 1**

**Fall 2007**

### **Bundoora Campus**

My experience abroad began a week after I finished the spring semester at JMU, seemingly I could not wait to get to Australia and see what it had in store for me. I had lived in Ashby, the International Dorm sophomore year and had heard lots about my future country of residence, therefore as you may imagine I had big plans for myself when I got there and could not wait to arrive...

I had always wanted to study abroad but was never sure where. After meeting some fabulous Australians through Ashby International I decided I wanted to visit them and, that is how I ended up in Australia. I was picked up at the airport by a great friend and continued to reside at his house for the duration of my stay. There was a period when I lived in a closet sized room in the heart of city for \$180 a week but moved out quickly due to housemate controversy. I found it difficult to find affordable housing in good locations so I would recommend future exchange students greatly weigh the pros and cons of living on or off campus. I consider myself very fortunate to have lived in an authentic Australian household and truly get to experience an 'exchange'. I caught up on the lingo and had delicious home-cooked food on a regular basis. I was lucky and only found myself eating 'magi noodles' the Australian version of ramen on a few occasions but I did, however, often catch myself asking "What's for tea?"

I think one it is important to note the diversity in the university systems. I found La Trobe to be different from what I expected and what I am used to here at JMU. Most classes only met once a week with an hour or two hour lecture followed by a tutorial, the professors expected you to keep up with your work and no one was really there to remind you when the next assignments was due. When the semester first started I was excited about having a four day weekend and had huge plans for those weekends, but I soon learned that if those days were not spent studying it was very easy to fall behind quite quickly. Furthermore, since most Australian students do not live in on campus housing there was a commuter feel all around. It was easy to strike up conversations within your tutorials but it was not so easy to spend time with those same students after school but do not get me wrong, Australians tend to be very friendly and it's very easy to make friends in other settings. Overall I learned to appreciate my education more and to really have confidence in my ability to succeed. I had to keep up with my readings and complete projects on my own, but I learned a great deal about my major and came out with good grades, in the end the small things I did not like about the system were greatly outweighed by the rewarding experience I had.

Moving on, the city that I spent most of my free time exploring was Melbourne, (note: pronounced "Mel-ben"), a city that I fell in love with time and time again. I know that sounds cheesy but in all seriousness I did, Melbourne is incredibly diverse and cultural and each day it had something new to offer. I could go on forever, but I will try to limit myself to a few favorites. First one must check out the laneways, which were, without a doubt my favorite part of the city. Creeping behind back alley's and stores, filled with graffiti and other random pieces of art, these laneways create a unique subculture within Melbourne. Majority of the laneways are filled with eclectic cafes, funky vintage clothing stores, and the most popular, a wide range of specialty bars. I could spend a day getting lost in the laneways, discovering places like St.

Jerome's, a cheap, dirty, graffiti-filled very popular bar or the Chinese restaurant that had no name and every meal was six dollars. Not to mention, Melbourne's variety of educational, historical and other fun places, such as the Royal Botanical Gardens, the Vic Market, St. Kilda and the beaches. Melbourne was full of interesting locations to make the experience even better and to top it all off the public transport is fairly impressive. Aside from being occasionally late the Connex train system has four underground stops and runs to most all major suburbs and then there is also the classic "tram". A tram is more or less a type of electric cable street car that runs on an expansive grid network throughout the city center and to various inner suburbs. With all the excellent public transport it makes it fairly easy to explore for a very low cost. I discovered so many unique and fun things about Melbourne; it was such a nice change from the slow-paced life in Harrisonburg.

To sum up my experience overseas I have a few words of advice. But first, I will say it is really difficult to fully explain what I experienced in a few short pages, and it is hard to truly express what I saw and felt while I was in Australia. My endless stories will never give justice to the **real** experiences and challenges I encountered. I enjoyed every minute of my time spent in Australia, whether I was backpacking and scraping for cash, studying or working I learned from it all and have memories and friendships that will last a lifetime. I never imagined that at the age of twenty one I would have already gone snorkeling in the Great Barrier Reef, camped out in the rainforest in tropical North Queensland and lived in a land where the beer is plentiful (and good!) and the people really are as laid-back as the movies make it seem. The sun is warm and the beaches are beautiful and I am so fortunate to have spent nine months there. I learned so much while I was traveling, about myself and others but there are a few things that I will NEVER forget about my time in the "land down 'unda". Therefore I can confidently advise future visitors to do (or don't do) the following:

- In the summer, ALWAYS wear sunscreen (even if its raining)
- Make sure you try 'lemon lime & bitters' at least once
- Watch out for those round-a-bouts
- Learn the rules of cricket; AND appreciate the game
- Avoid taxis at all cost
- Enjoy a cocktail at 'Cookie' on Swanston Street
- Only pack enough clothes for three nights (no matter how long your trip is) because that's really all you need
- Drive along the Great Ocean Road in Victoria
- Grocery shop at Aldi and the Vic Market
- Federation Square will grow on you
- Australians like to make jokes – laugh
- And finally, explore everything!

Cheers.

**La Trobe Reflection Paper 2**  
**Spring 2008**  
**Bundoora Campus**

## Always Remember Where You Leave Your Passport

So this paper is supposed to guide you, direct you, teach you. Well I studied abroad in Australia and I want to go back! It has everything you need: beautiful coastlines, the rugged outback and lovely beaches-why would someone go anywhere else?

*Location/Accommodation:* Since I did not know much about Australia and the city of Melbourne I wanted to live on campus. La Trobe University is located in Bundoora, a small suburb of Melbourne, about 45 minutes outside the city on a tram, Melbourne's means of public transportation, or about a 20 minute drive. Living on campus is probably the best decision I made entering into a foreign country-you get to meet so many people and while it cost more because of the convenience –the events that the dorms put on for you and the people make it all worth the cost.

*Classroom/Teaching:* As a James Madison student we know tough classes - well in Australia their teaching is much more laid back, however that does not mean that you can not work. I still worked my tail off to make sure that I did alright. At La Trobe the teaching is up to the student so one can either put it off until exams (not my recommendation) or learn as you go along. The classes are split up into lectures and tutorials, a one hour session a week with a smaller group. These are necessary to attend and should be because it is an opportunity to get close to the tutor and the other kids in your class. Another random tip-make sure you change your Word settings to English (Australia), they spell many words differently and you do not realize it until you are there.

*Friends:* The people in Australia are beautiful both inside and out. The friends that I made will be life long friends and I am already planning when I will be back (it has only been 5 days since I have been back). Australians are very welcoming and friendly, they make sure that I felt comfortable and always invited me along, anywhere. Saying good bye was one of the hardest things that I probably have ever done because I am not sure when I will see them again, hopefully soon, but who knows. Two full carloads took me to the airport and we all cried. It was a very emotional experience but it was worth it. You will make friends that last a lifetime whether you see them again or not.

*Food:* Now I know what you are thinking, the food cannot be that much different and well it really was not, but a few random tips. Australia has a huge Asian influence because of its location so the amount of Asian and Indian food in Australia is absolutely incredible. If you like those foods you will love Australia. However for me, I like it but not all the time, but the good thing is I did not have a problem eating food that I liked, they still have fish and chips (a huge favorite over there), chicken schnitzels and other food that is more common to Australians.

*Public Transportation:* Trams are what Melbourne is known for. Melbourne's public transportation is great-I always knew that I had a ride no matter where I wanted to go. There is a tram which is kind of like a rail car and there is a stop right out in front of campus. Another would be the bus which has a stop on campus. The third and final way to get around would be the train which the closest stop is about a 25 minute walk from campus. If you get

a concession card it is much cheaper and it just about cuts the cost in half. Public transportation is cheap and convenient and it really is great in the city and surrounding suburbs of Melbourne.

*Impact:* To put it simply I want to go back as soon as possible. This experience has been absolutely amazing, from the traveling to the people to the country-it is unbelievable and I would highly recommend everyone to go abroad, even if it is not Australia. Not only do you get this once in a lifetime opportunity but you get to learn about others while also learning a lot about yourself. Yes, of course you will think of JMU people, parties, sports, games and exams but never once was I homesick. I would highly recommend this experience. I will never be able to re-do this experience but the impact that it has had on myself and others is tremendous. Go. Do. Experience. Live. I did and it was wonderful!

### **La Trobe Reflection Paper 3**

#### **Spring 2008**

#### **Bundoora Campus**

Studying overseas at La Trobe University was the most amazing experience! Ever since I was younger I always said I wanted to go to Australia. Studying abroad seemed like the perfect opportunity and I am so happy I was fortunate enough to take advantage of it. I have been home for about a month and already miss everything about my trip so much. It seems so hard to put such an incredible experience into words and nothing I could say could really do it justice.

At first, Australia seemed so similar to America. There isn't too much missing with all of the McDonalds and Subways everywhere. However, the cultural differences seem much more obvious after living in Australia for 5 months and returning home. The culture as a whole was just so laid back and stress free that I can honestly say there was not a single time I was stressed there.

On top of absolutely loving Australia I am really happy with the program I chose to do. The exchange program provided the perfect opportunity to experience all aspects of Australian culture. I met so many amazing people from all over the world and I really believe that choosing an exchange program made this possible.

La Trobe University was a great choice for me. Melbourne is such a great city with so much to offer. Being the 'cultural capital' of Australia it has everything you could want! My friends and I tried to take advantage of any opportunity to go into the city and although it seems small we were always finding out new things about the city.

I would really recommend living on campus to anyone studying at La Trobe. I lived in Glenn College and wouldn't have wanted it any other way. As an exchange student, convenience seemed to be my main goal. Living on campus made everything easier since all of my classes were no more than 5 minutes from my room and breakfast and dinner were included. Living on campus also had an awesome social atmosphere. I met so many people living in Glenn. I know the friendships I made there will last a lifetime. The colleges at La Trobe are like small communities and everyone becomes really close. I still talk to my friends from Glenn

College almost every day online. The public transportation in Melbourne and around La Trobe was also really helpful. It was so easy to get everywhere from campus and the city itself was very accessible.

The whole “Uni” system is very different then the American system making the classes and expectations very difficult. It was a little hard to adjust at first but it was definitely manageable. The classes meet as both really big lectures a few times a week and much smaller tutorials (discussions) once a week. The tutorials are the most important part of class to attend and are very helpful! It is really easy to fall behind and slack off as most classes only have papers or 1 or 2 tests. One of my classes had one test worth 50% and one final worth 50% which seemed very intimidated to me since I was used to having a lot more grades go towards my final grade!

I really did enjoy learning material from a different perspective, especially since Australians compare themselves to Americans in every single subject! Other then classes, I found I had a lot more downtime then I was used to. I had four day weekends every week so when I did not have any work to do it was the perfect opportunity to travel. As much as I loved Melbourne, Australia has so many other parts to offer. My friends and I traveled up the east coast which was beautiful. We also took a lot of day trips from Melbourne to the surrounding areas.

For any American students traveling to Australia it is important to know Australians are very sarcastic. They love to make fun of or “take the piss out of” Americans. Everyone I met really did love American’s though. I found the Australians knew just as much if not more about my own country then I did.

The advice I would give to anyone studying abroad would really be to just take advantage of any opportunity. Australia is such a friendly country and everyone I met was very concerned about showing me a good time and showing off their country. So travel to as many places as possible even if it is going home with a friend for the weekend. Also if it is in season, going to a Footie game is a must. I am not a huge sports fan but AFL is hands down the most intense and enjoyable sport I have ever watched. It might sound stupid but it is really important to try and pick up aussie lingo! When I first arrived I felt like people were speaking a different language even though it was all English. Even up until the day I left I couldn’t understand half the things my friends were talking about as they didn’t know what I was talking about either.

Also on I guess a more serious note, I never experienced culture shock but I know some people who were homesick for a little while. I probably didn’t go through any of that because two of my good friends were on exchange with me. I think I actually experienced cultural shock when I got off the plane in JFK airport and everyone was rushing around all stressed out!

**La Trobe Reflection Paper 4**  
**Spring 2008**  
**Bundoora Campus**

## Australia: State by State

The first question that all my friends and family asked me when I returned from Australia was: what was your favorite part? My answer was always the same... EVERYTHING!! Now that doesn't mean that everything went perfect or that there was never doubts in my mind; it just means that everything I did affected my life and I am ever changed for the better because of it.

From the minute I stepped off the plane and was greeted by a witty driver who was bringing us to our new home at Glenn College, I knew I was going to love this country. After reaching Glenn College and being the only students (that we knew of) in the buildings my feelings changed a little bit. Now I was with two of my friends entering the university but being scattered between three different buildings the first night was somewhat lonely. One thing I definitely learned from this trip was don't judge a book by its cover. Although Glenn College seemed somewhat old and lonely at first, it ended up being the best way to meet people. Although to some, the thought of living in the dorm does not seem appealing, I definitely suggest it. It is there that I met so many people that I do and will continue to stay in touch with for years to come. Getting to be friends with the Australians not only gave the experience of meeting people from that culture but they also were a great help in finding my way around the city and just little learning fun and helpful facts about life in Australia.

So living in the dorms was helpful and fun (especially considering all the parties sponsored by the college) but what definitely made my trip was all the traveling that I did. On my way to Australia I stopped for a week in Fiji. Do it!!! Take advantage of the flight offered by Qantas and try to stop somewhere else on the way. It is an amazing opportunity. My next trip was to Torquay on a surf trip sponsored by the university. Do it!!! I had never surfed before in my life but it is now something I will continue to do (I am currently in the process of buying a surf board). The trip was three days of now stop sight seeing, surfing, swimming and partying with a group of awesome people from all over the world.

The next big trip was flying up to the sunshine coast, renting a car and spending a week driving down the coast to Sydney. Once again, do it!! I definitely suggest renting cars and seeing the sights. Although it was a long drive I found it much easier and relaxing to be able to come and go as I pleased. Fill the car up with people and the price isn't too bad either. The beaches are beautiful and are so worth it. We stayed in hostels the whole time which some were better than others but all were an experience! I could go on forever about the things I did while on my trip but no one has the time for that so instead I will leave you with a few words of advice so that when you return your favorite part will also be EVERYTHING.

- Go to the beach but always where sunscreen...the sun is stronger!
- Use public transportation...it sometimes takes a little longer but is so cheap and fun!
- Get a concession card

- Travel, travel, travel...see as much as your money will let you...and when your dead broke...go home!
- Go to Tasmania...No matter what joke Australians may have about it, Tasmania is definitely one of the most beautiful places I have ever been
- In Tasmania, hike to wine glass bay...its life changing!
- Buy a cheap sleeping bag your first week and bring it on every trip you can...your sheets will always be nicer than theirs!
- Go to the city as many times as possible...there a huge sense of satisfaction in having visitors and knowing your way around
- Bring a map...just in case you don't know the city as good as you think...

There is so much so say but basically what made my trip was making friends and not being scared of trying new things. Be open to everything because this is a once in life time experience. On my trip I laughed, cried, ran, sat still, made new friends, pushed some to the side, I tried new things and left behind some old things. Most importantly I experienced as much as I could and that is something no one can ever take away. Australia is amazing...so enjoy every moment!!!!

**La Trobe Reflection Paper 5**  
**Spring 2008**  
**Bundoora Campus**

Going to Melbourne on exchange was an exciting adventure that I probably wouldn't trade for the world. Taking the risk of going across the world with a couple of close friends is an opportunity that I will most likely never receive again, and one that I will cherish for the rest of my life.

After a relaxing vacation on the Fiji islands, we finally arrived in Melbourne in the middle of the night. I was so excited, and nervous about what the next day would bring. It turned out that the next two weeks of orientation were extremely helpful as far as learning your way around, scheduling classes, and learning Australian customs (including some very strange words). Our dorm, or 'college', also hosted a variety of fun, themed parties to help us get to know everyone. With the drinking age being only 18, orientation week definitely did not compare to the cheesy activities that our JMU R.A.s subjected us to.

For the next few weeks, almost every day was an adventure. Melbourne is such a clean, safe city with so much to do. Coming from New York, Melbourne appeared very small at first, but its size was perfect for a study abroad experience. It was easy to learn your way around, and it was fun to explore the alleyway and underground bars and shops that Melbourne is notorious for. The transportation system within Melbourne, and even into the suburbs, is extremely convenient and reliable. It is definitely more efficient than any other city I've been to. This small detail turns out to be really important, especially when you don't have a car.

Traveling throughout Australia was also pretty easy to do. Classes are pretty flexible, so it is easy to schedule them so you can have long weekends. Through STA, we took some local day trips, and we also found pretty good flight deals to other parts of Australia. Researching the internet helped us find some pretty cheap hostels that turned out to be pretty nice (for a hostel, anyway). We took a week exploring the east coast, which was beautiful. The beaches were amazing. I would recommend traveling to the Sunshine or Gold Coast to anyone interested in Australia. Another place I would recommend seeing is Tasmania. It was extremely beautiful. We hiked mountains and saw some incredible views like Wineglass Bay, which anyone would love to see.

The people in Melbourne were really friendly and eager to show us around. Staying at Glenn College helped me meet so many people. I would definitely suggest living on campus to anyone interested in LaTrobe University. At Glenn, everyone ate breakfast and dinner together every day, and the R.A.s organized a bunch of events that people actually attended. We had many themed parties throughout the year, trips to the footie game (Australian football), scavenger hunts, sporting events, pub crawls, and even a ball.

Living with new people was really exciting. I made a lot of friends that I still continue to talk to since I've been home. It was definitely hard to say goodbye to everyone, but having this experience was definitely worth the tears. I would return in a second if I had the chance. To anyone considering going to Melbourne, I'd have to say, "Just do it!" Invest in some heavy sleeping pills for your flight, grab your sunscreen, and be sure to watch out for the drop bears!

**La Trobe Reflection Paper 6**  
**Spring 2008**  
**Bendigo Campus**

Before traveling to Australia I had not had much experience or interest in knowing or learning about other country's cultures, histories, or politics. I just never was interested in geography, politics, or history. So I went to Australia knowing very little about the aussie culture. I think that this is something that I would change if I ever get another opportunity to travel to another country. I think that is important to know something not only about the country you are traveling to, but also be knowledgeable about what is happening in your own country. Australians in general are more aware of what is going on in the rest of the world, and I always had people that wanted to discuss or hear my views on political figures or had questions about how the government works. I had not idea, and this did not help their picture of Americans as ignorant and self-centered. I could also not get into informed discussions of their political system; I spent much of my time asking questions to learn rather than increasing my understanding through debates and discussions.

The university that I went to was in the country. I was asked a lot why I didn't choose to go to university in a bigger city; how big of a city I was going to study in was something that I didn't consider before choosing which campus to study at. I liked the country setting but this may not be the right place for everyone; I would suggest that students looking to study overseas

do research into what the atmosphere and location of the uni is. I found that the classes were about the same difficulty that I would have had at JMU, but presented in a slightly different format. For each class La Trobe generally scheduled each student one to two lectures and one tutorial a week. I really liked this format because it gave you a chance to interact and work with the material that you were learning and reading about, and ask the lecturers/tutors questions in a less pressurized and formal setting.

One thing that really surprised me was that it was actually a new and different culture. I guess I assumed that since they speak English, Australians would have a life similar to ours. While this is generally true, I did find some differences that I had to cope with. For one, I constantly had to stop and ask what a word meant; there were many that I had never heard before in my life. Australians, however, know most English slang and everyday jargon as a result of watching American t.v. shows and movies. This also led to another surprising and astonishing thing about the Australian's view of Americans. Because they view American society through Hollywood's portrayal, they have a generalized and stereotypical view of our society, race relations, and our culture in general. For example, I was constantly asked if I own a gun.

Returning to America, I was not prepared for the culture shock/reaction from others that I experienced. I constantly compared America to Australia (some negative, some positive), and my friends and family had a variety of reactions to this. Some friends didn't want to hear about my trip at all, possibly from jealousy. I understand this but it was really hard to deal with because it had such a big impact on my life. Another challenge, however, was answering the question: "So how was Australia?" This was an amazing experience that can't be described in a one or two word sentences that is expected in general conversation. With the amount of technology available now, it is very easy to keep in touch with the many good friends that I made there, but it is difficult to see them get on with their lives without me. This trip had a big impact on my life, and there is a little bit of a fear that they will forget all about me as other Americans move into the residences and may be more "fun" or "interesting." It is difficult because I was only a small part of their lives, while they made up a big part of mine.

This was a wonderful experience that I would recommend to anyone. It made me more willing to meet new people and more able to deal with new situations. I definitely want to return to Australia and do more traveling (I ran out of money and wasn't able to see everything I wanted to). Whether it is Australia or another country, I think that everyone should have the opportunity to step out of their comfort zones and have their beliefs and values challenged by a different culture. It makes you a stronger person and more aware of others and the larger issues in the world today.

**La Trobe Reflection Paper 7**  
**Spring 2008**  
**Bundoora Campus**

If you are considering studying in Australia, especially at La Trobe University it is a must do experience. Although you may be dreading the long plane ride (20 hours) across the world, I honestly would turn around and repeat the journey in the blink of an eye. In the beginning, I was

extremely worried about leaving home, my friends, and family, but I fit right in with the other Australian students living within the dorms on the campus. I quickly learned that greetings like 'Hey whats up' and 'Yo dude' are not typical slogans in Australia. I began to speak Australian language if you would like to call it that and fell into the popular greetings 'How ya goin' and 'Morning Mate.' I remember one of my first thoughts in Australia was I could spend all day listening to these Australians talk because their accent is cute and much nicer to listen too than some Americans. Little did I know that my Australian suitemates thought the same about Americans and were thrilled to have an American roommate with the 'cool' accent. These individuals became my very close friends and companions during my stay in Australia. We pretty much did everything together-ate breakfast/dinner, went out in the city, shopped at the grocery store, and went to the beach.

The campus itself was very friendly, and if anyone is a stressful individual like myself it allows you to transition into the relaxing 'worry free' lifestyle that the Aussie's lead. I chose to reside in Glenn College one of three dorms on the college campus. Chisholm College and Menzies College are the other two options for students wishing to live on campus. The decision of where to live was a stressful process because I felt that the website does not really help new students decide where to live. Of course living off campus is an option if you can find a family or apartment to rent, but I took the safer option and chose a dorm setting that offered two meals a day and an opportunity to be immersed in the Australian culture. Menzies College has the option of a meal plan if desired, but many students from that dorm formed floor groups and designated nights to cook meals. Chisholm College is known as the international dorm, but not every student within the dorm is required to be international and meals are prepared on their own.

I found the campus very easy to get around and I was so excited to learn that I could see a kangaroo ten minutes from the school eating grass in a near by park. I remember on one of my daily runs, I wished I had a camera to capture the kangaroos. Later I found out that kangaroos are like our deer and are everywhere in Australia, so I had plenty other opportunities to take pictures of kangaroos. Also I was very happy choosing to live outside of Melbourne because I fell in love with city with its various shops and beautiful, artistic and unique buildings. One thing that I did find very difficult was adjusting to the different style of teaching. It was nice having less hours of class, but the downfall is the large amount of work students are responsible for on their own. Also the courses I chose tended to not give exams, but rather assigned term papers. As a Health Science major I am not used to writing papers, but I got used to spending many hours organizing, writing, and rereading many papers.

It was difficult to limit my experience to two pages, because those four months of my life were filled with non-stop traveling and adventurous trips into Melbourne. I look forward to reminiscing the funny jokes and good times with the other JMU girls who also studied at La Trobe. To anyone interested in studying at La Trobe it was a great school and place to begin your own experience. Feel free to contact me because it is always nice to bring back great memories!

**La Trobe Reflection Paper 8**  
**Fall 2008**  
**Bundoora Campus**

My exchange was to Melbourne, Australia. This study abroad was something I had wanted to do since I was in high school and had been anticipating all sophomore year. It was set up so I arrived two weeks earlier than the Australian students, but had an introductory week with the other internationals. I went into this experience with high expectations but those first few days were some of the hardest of my life. I have never wanted to go home so badly. The dorms were empty since students were on break, you couldn't use internet (to contact home or friends) until the semester started. I was stuck in a dorm with two other American students and my thoughts. All I could think about was "what have I gotten myself into". I thought this was an awful way to start off as an exchange student. Nobody knew what was going on and it was terribly unorganized, I was lonely and worst of all, I wanted to go home. I had looked forward to this for so long, and it was just not what I had expected.

The second week arrived and I started to make friends, from that week on it was the experience I had hoped for. I began to get to know people from all over the world, my closest friend was from Norway but I also became close with students from Sweden, Beijing, Holland, Ohio, Hong Kong and of course Australia. The entire semester was amazing, I learned more about myself and about the United States than I had ever expected. My favorite part was getting to travel; I went up the east coast to Sydney, Brisbane, Surfers Paradise and my favorite town Byron Bay. Byron Bay was perfect, a quaint hippie town right on the ocean. I also had a chance to travel to Sydney, Darwin and the little island below Australia, Tasmania. The amount of people I met and interacted with along my travels was amazing. I never realized how similar people could be regardless of where they are from. Back in Melbourne I never really felt like a tourist, and nobody really noticed that I was unless I spoke and they heard the accent. During the election days is when people really asked questions about the U.S. but other than that Aussies were very accepting of Americans.

One of my favorite memories of my trip was a weekend I went home with one of the Australian students Emily, she was one of my closest friends. Her family was so warm and welcoming and it felt great to be around a mom and home cooked food again. All the food her mother made that weekend was traditional Australian food; I even got to try some Kangaroo (I loved it). Then she took me around the coast line to her beach house and we watched some well known Australian movies. It was a relaxing weekend away from dorm and college life.

If I could give a few recommendations to students planning on studying abroad to Australia they would be quite simple. Give time and energy into making the situation work. If I had given up and went home that first week, I would have missed the experience of a life time. Also, get to know the locals they really know what's going on and are willing to help you with everything. Finally, a simple one, download Skype it was the perfect/CHEAP way to keep in touch with everyone from home. I had a webcam and my mom and I tried to talk once a week, it was a great comfort to know I had a way of contacting home if I needed too.

Overall, my experience in Australia was one I will never forget. I made so many friends who I will remember always. I got to try and see countless new things which words cannot explain. Hopefully I will be able to travel back to Melbourne someday to meet up with some familiar faces, but there are so many places around the world I would still like to explore.

## **LaTrobe Reflection Paper 9 Spring 2009**

My experience abroad last year was an unforgettable event and I would urge all students to do what they can to experience a new culture, and do it no holds. I do have some advice or tips that I picked up along the way that I would be more than happy to share. However, my greatest piece of advice is when abroad do all that you can to immerse yourself in it. Don't be a tourist, be a traveler.

The very basic traveling tips are things everyone says but can always be said again, even to an experienced traveler like myself. Less is more, pack what you HAVE to have and then remove 10-20 things. Also be sure you know the laws. Just as in our own country we are prone to bend laws here and there your new friends in the country you visit will be doing the same thing in there's. However, what's a little slap on the hand for them could be a deportation for you. Lastly have an idea of what you want to do in the country and how you're vaguely going to fit it in. Don't have an itinerary set in stone, winging it is part of the fun; but just be sure you don't leave with any regrets because you wish you had seen this or visited that.

When it comes to the James Madison bureaucracy, work on getting your credits pre-approved early and spread it out. It will be a VERY frustrating effort. Also, try and get them approved before you leave - the culture shock and making sure textbooks and classes are in order are enough without worrying about your standing and being sure you're on track. And last and seemingly least, get a copy of your JMU transcript to take with you before you leave. You never know when you could use it but getting it while in a foreign country with a different time zone is more stress than you need when you can just waltz over and pick it up today. I guess when it comes to paperwork just follow Ben Franklin's rule of thumb, "Why do tomorrow what can be done today".

For traveling to Australia I have these three pieces of advice. One, while they do speak English down-under it is a bit different. One I'd really wish I'd known at the beginning was that faculty there is not the professor but the department. Two, keep a tight grasp on any paperwork you get and print out your visa, they come in handy at random moments. And three, get a concession card; you can save hundreds that way. Gosh, what to say about Australia, Australia is an amazing place and Melbourne is incredible. I would recommend it to students as a great place to go. There is little to no language barrier, incredible multiculturalism, both a bustling metropolitan and a rural suburban area. The variety of experiences that can be found in Melbourne is part of its charm.

I stayed at a multicultural housing complex on campus that also had a lot of Australian students. I personally made friends mostly with Australians and while that meant I made a lot of trips alone because they weren't as interested or had been there I did get to more fully experience day-to-day activities as an Australian would, and for me that was perfect. I think the day to day is the root of a culture and the fullest way to experience it. I think the Australian culture and my experiences with it are going to have long lasting effects and benefits on my art, my life, and how I feel towards myself. Going abroad took independence and helped my confidence grow. I

feel more mature as a person and more comfortable in any situation having left home and travelled on my own. I guess that would be my final piece of advice is that a person shouldn't be afraid to travel alone, to go without friends or classmates and to really have an individual experience. It's the most rewarding that way.

**LaTrobe Reflection Paper 10**  
**Spring 10**  
**Bundoora Campus**

My exchange program in Australia was unique and very important to me. Ever since I started thinking about college I knew that at some point I would do an exchange or study abroad program in Melbourne Australia. It was so important to me because I was born in Melbourne in 1988 and did not remember living there because I left when I was 2 ½. Aside from a family vacation in 2007 to Australia an exchange program would be the next easiest way to get back and really find out about the place where I was born over an extended period of time.

When I arrived in Australia I already knew what to expect because of my trip in 2007 as well as the advice from my parents. Therefore culture shock wasn't really an issue for me. The only thing that slightly stood in my way was getting accustomed to Australian slang and words that differ from "American English" words. Two examples: a comforter for a bed is known as a "doona" in Australia, and the typical greeting is "How are you going?" instead of "How are you doing" or "What's up." It was very easy to make adjustments in order to understand the different terms because, for the most part, Australians are more than willing to help. All you have to do is ask.

When I was first planning my exchange I was against the idea of living in a dorm again, but the dorms at La Trobe surprised me. I lived in Chisholm College, which is the most International of the dorms. Each floor had only twelve people and the rooms were not too small. What I realized most from living in the dorm was that if I had lived off campus I never would have met anyone else and would not have experienced the rich mix of cultures that I did. On my floor of twelve I had friends from Australia, Canada, the US, Afghanistan, Mauritius and India. I would have to say that the experience of living with all of these different people was the best part of my exchange. It was really great to experience the different foods, interests and opinions of all these cultures. The one thing that surprised me the most though was that my best friend in Australia turned out to be my RA. Since the drinking age in Australia is 18, I was less worried about getting in trouble with my RA and more focused on getting to know him. It was a great experience simply in the fact that I could relax and just become friends with all of those people.

I think that the biggest thing I brought back with me from my experience in Australia was that I just need to relax and be myself. Australians look at American reality TV shows such as "Jersey Shore" and get the idea that most Americans are superficial, fake, and unruly. On the other side, Australians are mostly relaxed, down to earth, and not afraid to be who they are. Seeing this when I first met my Aussie friends really hit me hard and made me take a good look at myself in the mirror and I feel that I am a better person because of it. Australians also take the time and even go out of their way to help you. Just by staying around that attitude for five months has left me more compassionate, selfless and aware of helping other more. The entire

experience in Australia really helped me with not only my academic growth but also my personal and spiritual growth.

Since I was little I have had a dream to move back to Australia once I have finished school, and I think that my experiences have only reinforced that dream and made it seem more realistic than I had ever thought. Australia is a place that you can easily fall in love with and I know that I certainly did.