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# If you build it, they may not come: Why Australian university students do not take part in outbound mobility experiences.

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# If you build it, they may not come: Why Australian university students do not take part in outbound mobility experiences.

## **Abstract**

Universities around the world seek to internationalise students to prepare them for an increasingly globalised world. Outbound mobility experiences (OMEs) are recognised as one of the most effective ways to foster independent thinking, cultural sensitivity, and a sense of 'worldmindedness'. This article takes a case study from an Australian university and explores efforts to increase student participation rates in OMEs. Through a mixed-method study of three student cohorts (n=223), important data was gathered relating to how OMEs are perceived by undergraduate and post-graduate students. The results are filtered through thematic discourse analysis and suggest that the university needs to do more to build awareness, explain the professional and employability benefits, and create a travel culture where students are encouraged to grow their international skills and communication competencies. This research has important implications for universities seeking to increase international student mobility and prioritise a global outlook.

## **Keywords**

Outbound Mobility, Study Abroad, Short Term Study Trips, Student Experience

## **Cover Page Footnote**

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## Introduction

Responding to the ever-increasing rate of globalisation, universities around the world have made internationalisation a chief strategic goal. Universities Australia (2013), the peak national body for the sector, made global engagement one of four key themes for the future. The process of internationalisation generally involves three planks: prioritising a global outlook in the curriculum, attracting international students and encouraging domestic students to take part in an outbound mobility experience (OME). An OME is a broad term encompassing the whole experience of studying abroad. OMEs include time spent overseas to gain academic credit and the parallel socio-emotional and cognitive processes, which can include personal growth and transformation. An OME can be defined as “the total international study experience including the academic program and cultural interaction through an overseas institution/organisation” (Central Queensland University 2015, p.10). The relatively low participation rate of Australian undergraduate students, just 13.1% in 2012, suggests that OMEs are often thought of as extracurricular, optional activities rather than a vital tool for transformation, personal growth and pre-professional training (Olsen 2013, p.14).

Participation in OMEs at Western Sydney University (WSU) is currently below the sector average, and the university has set the ambitious goal of increasing participation to 25% by 2020 (WSU 2015). WSU’s *Global Futures* report states that “increasing participation in outbound mobility experiences is vital to...internationalisation” (WSU 2015, p.7). This paper offers insights gathered from surveys and a discussion forum asking WSU students why they do not take part in OMEs. Through thematic discourse analysis, key ideas were identified from the data and three recommendations emerge: the need to build awareness, the need to communicate the professional benefits of OMEs, and the importance of a travel culture in which students learn international skills and communication competencies. This article highlights relevant literature on OMEs, explains the methodology of this study, explores the quantitative and qualitative data findings and discusses three key themes that emerge. The findings are relevant to all universities seeking to increase their global reach and reinforce the internationalisation process.

## Literature review

One of the difficulties when exploring why so few Australian university students take part in an OME is the lack of reliable and comprehensive data. Daly and Barker have noted that “[i]nternational student migration is rarely a focus for research interest” (Daly & Barker 2010, p.335). Nevertheless, they conclude that the success of OMEs largely rests on organisational factors and the university’s culture. Taking a case study from Canada, which, like Australia, has a low OME participation rate, Trilokekar and Rasmi (2011) have pointed to a student “intention gap”. In other words, students see value in OMEs, and they would like to take part, but they often do not turn intention into reality. The “costs, curriculum restrictions, and real or perceived inadequate supports are other frequently cited barriers to study abroad” (Trilokekar & Rasmi 2011, p. 507).

In an important, cautionary article, Wendy Green and colleagues note that social justice should be a key concern for proponents of internationalisation in the Australian tertiary-education sector. Currently, OME participants are often the most privileged university students. The authors conclude that access to international programs is “far from equitable” (Green et al. 2015, p.514). This is supported by research from the US finding that “for African American students and ethnic minorities, other obstacles, principally financial, stand in the way of a study abroad experience”

(Dessoiff 2006, p.23). A 2009 Australian study suggested that cost was the single largest barrier to OME participation (Buisson & Jensen 2009). In this environment, the federal government's signature initiative of New Colombo Plan funding (from 2015) provides a counterbalance to assure that economically privileged students do not have exclusive access to OME benefits.

Universities frequently highlight the positive outcomes for students from studying abroad (Hall et al., 2016). WSU's Go Global website suggests that students who spend part of their degree in another country are likely to develop cross-cultural skills while gaining a greater sense of independence (WSU 2016). A recent study (European Region Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students) has also indicated that employers find students who have studied abroad more attractive for their international outlook and transferable skills (Erasmus 2014). This research is supported by a survey from the Institute for the International Education of Students, known as IES Abroad, which indicated that OME participants had a high rate of success in securing well-paid, career-relevant jobs (Preston 2012). The personal and professional benefits are also noted in much of the academic literature (Downey & Gray 2012; Gothard, Downey & Gray 2012; Kowarski 2010; Xiaoxuan 2004; Lewis & Niesenbaum 2005; Slotkin, Durie & Eisenberg 2012; Paige et al. 2009).

Some academics, however, have suggested that the value of OMEs is exaggerated. Messer and Wolter (2007), for example, have challenged the assumption that OMEs are linked to higher starting salaries. A comparison of Czech and Australian academics found that, while the former had universally positive attitudes towards OMEs, the latter held "widely disparate opinions" (Green & Mertova 2014, p. 681). Regardless, internationalisation remains a high priority for most Australian universities, with increased OME participation seen as a strategic priority for both students and the home institution.

In addition to providing personal benefits for students and corporate benefits for universities, support for Australian students' OMEs also responds to a national imperative. Since the late 1980s, the Australian government has actively tried to "relocate" itself within the Asian region (Capling 2008, p.602). The influential Garnaut Report, *Australia and the Northeast Asian Ascendancy*, highlighted the tremendous economic opportunities of a rising Asia but also the importance of understanding and connecting with Australia's regional neighbours (1989). The Australian government's 2012 *Australia in the Asian Century White Paper* reinforced this long-held agenda, arguing, "As a nation we also need to broaden and deepen our understanding of Asian cultures and languages, to become more Asia literate" (Commonwealth of Australia 2012, p. 2). Canberra academic Scharoun (2015) has noted that short-term OMEs to locations in the Asia-Pacific are part of a government agenda to foster cultural competency. Australian institutions have been slow to recognise the full potential of OMEs as a vehicle of engagement with Asia. Much more can be done, especially in terms of preparing students before departure and helping them learn from the experience afterward. With the New Colombo Plan and the AsiaBound Grants program, opportunities for Australian students to study in Asia have increased, but these experiences need to be guided to maximise their influence at both an individual and national level. Funded by the Australian government's Office for Learning and Teaching, the EPITOME Abroad project is a new initiative designed to equip Australian universities with research and resources to maximise the benefits of their study-abroad programs (2016).

## Methodology

The research team employed a mixed-methods approach to generate both quantitative and qualitative data. Two cohorts of students, one undergraduate and one postgraduate, were asked to complete surveys designed to elicit attitudes towards OMEs. A third cohort took part in a group discussion forum. This semi-structured discussion was designed to be casual and conversational, with students encouraged to steer the topic to areas of concern. Ethical approval was granted for all aspects of data collection and reporting. Participants were provided with an information sheet on the project, given time to ask questions and asked to sign a consent forms. Only those participants who freely gave consent had their responses to the research interview protocols recorded.

Thematic discourse analysis (Potter & Wetherell 1987; Burman & Parker 1993; Singer & Hunter 1999; Taylor & Ussher 2001) was selected to provide a detailed and nuanced account of emergent themes where broader assumptions and meanings were seen to underpin what the research participants articulated. Any thematic analysis involves “identifying, analysing and reporting patterns within data” (Braun & Clarke 2006, p. 79). The thematic discourse analysis in this study paid particular attention to the language of students when describing barriers to OME participation. Singer and Hunter contend that, “[I]anguage structures the perceived meaning of things” (1999, p. 66). Examining student language in this case study led to the identification of three core themes that characterise some of the most significant roadblocks to OME participation. The recommendations of this article are drawn from these themes.

The first cohort (n=109) in this study was a group of first- and second-year undergraduates. In a survey, they were asked six yes/no questions to gauge their awareness of OMEs on offer and their previous travel experience (Table 1). Then they were given a chance to express in their own words why they “probably” would or would not take part in an OME. The reasons offered for not taking part (Table 2) offer some valuable insights into student concerns, and can guide the organisation and packaging of future OMEs. The second cohort (n=66) consisted of postgraduate Master of Teaching (Secondary) pre-service teachers. Their program offers two accompanied large-group tours – one to Malaysia and one to China. The program also offers small-group tours to Thailand and to Taiwan. Pre-service teachers who chose not to take part in these two-week OMEs, where they would gain practical teaching experience, were asked to articulate some of their concerns (Table 3). They were also asked if they would be reluctant or unwilling to travel to any particular regions or countries as part of their teaching experience (Table 4).

The group discussion forum was conducted with students (n=48) in their final year of a hospitality degree within the School of Business. As part of an on-campus unit, these students had the option to travel with a staff member to Vietnam for two weeks. In addition to other loans and scholarships, a A\$2000 subsidy was also available to alleviate costs. Despite this trip having direct industry relevance, only a handful of students chose to take part. In an informal and voluntary setting, where the unit coordinator was not present, the students were asked to comment on why they chose not to participate and what the university could do to encourage greater participation in OMEs.

The three cohorts (n=223) were selected as they covered diverse stages of the student experience: the beginning and end of an undergraduate degree and postgraduate study. All students were enrolled in units where industry-relevant, financially subsidised, short-term OMEs were actively

marketed. The questions were designed to offer as full a picture as possible of students' concerns and priorities. Surveys were also designed to provide Western Sydney University and other universities with feedback that could guide design and promotion of future programs. The raw data and authentic student voices complement each other and indicate several key ways that participation rates can be increased. Student reasons for declining to take part can be categorised as concrete and pliable. While concrete reasons are non-malleable, a large proportion of students offered pliable reasons, legitimate concerns that a university can take active steps to address.

### Quantitative data: student awareness and experience

The term "outbound mobility experience" is now industry favoured, as it encompasses a broader range of activities than study abroad. Nevertheless, as illustrated in Table 1, the term is esoteric: 82% of students were unable to define "outbound mobility". One student added, that "OME sounds like dish washing powder". When asked if they are aware of specific OME opportunities at university, and if so to name them, the positive response increased to just over 30% (28 yes and 81 no). Of the 28 who claimed they were aware of an OME, 14 did not name a specific country. Responses were unclear and vague, including "Asia", "Africa", "Colombo plan", "studying abroad" and "somewhere in Europe". Unsurprisingly, given the low awareness level, less than 10% (10 yes, 99 no) reported that they would take part in an OME in 2016.

<b>Question</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Can you define "outbound mobility"?	20	89
Are you aware of OME opportunities at University?	28	81
Do you think you will probably go on an OME this year?	10	99
Have you previously travelled?	75	34
Have you travelled independently?	58	51
Do you have a current passport?	79	30

Awareness is one key area where Western Sydney University – and indeed most universities – can improve. At present, the university promotes OMEs through the internal "Students Go Global" website, information sessions, short in-lecture testimonials and campus advertising. While these channels can all be effective ways of increasing awareness, the presentation of OME opportunities needs to be helpful and informative. Tour organisers are naturally enthusiastic about their programs, but a fragile line must be negotiated where the benefits are clearly outlined without students feeling as though they are missing out if they are not willing or able to participate. Further, it is incumbent on universities who prioritise a global outlook to develop alternative OME options, such as volunteering or other high-impact learning activities, to provide, as far as possible, an equivalent experience.

The low take-up rate of OMEs at university is in stark contrast with the students' willingness to travel. In the surveyed and interviewed cohorts, many students (69%) had previously travelled overseas, 53% had travelled independently before and 72% had a current passport. Respondents

had great diversity in terms of travel experience. Some students had visited over a dozen countries, while others had only been overseas once with their families. Nevertheless, most had a passport and had travelled, or were prepared to travel, internationally. A key issue to be reconciled, therefore, is why 79% are ready to travel overseas, but only 10% are prepared to travel on a university OME.

### “Concrete” and “pliable” reasons for non-participation

The undergraduate survey revealed 12 different reasons that students reported for not participating in OMEs (Table 2). Students could list multiple reasons, giving a combined total of 157 answers. In some cases an OME is simply not appropriate for a student; some have “concrete” reasons for choosing not to participate that are difficult to address. Family or partner commitments affected 27 of 109 students who indicated they would not take part in an OME. In many cases these students were parents or full-time carers, and spending even a short period of time away from home was simply not an option. A further 10 of 109 reported that their work commitments did not allow them to participate; one of the respondents cited a severe fear of flying. Concrete reasons are legitimate, and result in cases where the university would not want to pressure the student into taking part. Thus in 38 cases, the reason a student chose not to take part was an issue that the university, most likely, could do little to address. The remaining 119 cases, those with “pliable” reasons for not participating, offer insights into potential strategies to increase participation.

<b>Reason</b>	<b>Number</b>
Money	36
Family/partner/children	27
Worried about living in a foreign country	19
The process seems to complicated/not enough information	19
Simply not interested	11
Don’t have time	10
Other plans to travel overseas	10
Work commitments	10
Interfere with study	8
Existing OME locations do not appeal	3
Religious reasons	3
Fear of planes	1

The concern most commonly voiced by students was money, cited by 36 of 109 students. As one student said, they were simply “too busy working and surviving”. An OME may well seem an

unobtainable luxury to a struggling student. This perception raises issues both of communication and social justice. With the strategic goals of the Australian government, new finance options are open to university students to take part in an OME. Most Australian students are eligible for a government OS-Help loan (available to eligible students who want to take some of their study overseas). The loans range up to AUD\$6,362, repayment only commencing when the graduate's taxable income is over AUD\$53,345. A range of government scholarships also exists, especially for OMEs to Asia. Nonetheless, money is a major concern for students, and more could be done to promote the affordability of OMEs and also the value for money that OMEs represent.

Interestingly, the third and fourth most cited reasons correlate. Worries about living in a foreign country and a lack of information were expressed 19 times each. Especially for students who have not travelled independently before, the prospect of spending two weeks away from home may be daunting. For students with little or no travel experience, acts like negotiating an airport and finding their way around in a new city may be intimidating. Beyond that, students worried about potential travel-related problems. What if I get sick? Will I be safe? These concerns can be summarised as, "How much support will my home university give me while I am away?"

Eight students specifically highlighted a concern that an OME would interfere with their study. However, some of the 19 who listed "too complicated" as a barrier to participation were also apprehensive about how experience in a foreign country would fit into their degree program, and how overseas travel would affect their education more generally. Undergraduates in a three-year degree generally take part in an OME in their second year, most commonly in semester-long programs. To truly internationalise the tertiary landscape and encourage OME participation, the curriculum needs to be sufficiently flexible to make participation easy and accreditation more accessible. OMEs should not be seen as a distraction from study, but a valuable part of it that receives strong institutional support.

Although the reason was only cited by three students in the survey cohort, it is worth acknowledging that some students felt precluded from travel for religious reasons. One student simply noted "religious issues", while two others elaborated, mentioning that travel is "frowned upon for females (unmarried) in traditional cases". Religious obstacles are a sensitive issue, and universities must respect deeply held religious beliefs. Depending on the cultural makeup of the university, single-gender OMEs may be a viable alternative that could potentially increase the participation rate of students where particular religious beliefs or values must be taken into consideration. More generally, the level of supervision provided by staff members, especially on short-term OMEs, could allay fears.

## **The postgraduate experience**

The results of the postgraduate surveys (n=66) reflect that these students had concerns similar to those of the undergraduates. Again, money emerged as the primary concern (Tables 3 and 4). One noticeable change was that work commitment was the second most cited reason for postgraduates' reluctance to engage in OME (as opposed to equal sixth for undergraduates). At WSU, students often work concurrently with their degree to support themselves and, in many instances, their family. Postgraduates are less likely to be living with their parents, and may feel financial pressure more acutely. Being close to the end of their university trajectory, they often have internships or part-time positions in their desired careers. Consequently, a higher percentage of postgraduates are unwilling to jeopardise their employment situation by taking time off work for an OME. What does seem clear is that the top three reasons for not taking part link to form a powerful barrier.



This correlates with research undertaken by Bretag and van der Veen, who identified “cost, commitments (e.g. family, work, sports) and space within the curriculum” as the three chief reasons for non-participation.

<b>Table 3. Postgraduate experience and reasons for not participating</b>	
<b>Reason</b>	<b>Number</b>
Money	30
Work commitments	17
Family/partner/children	13
Don't have time	8
No barrier to going	5
Worried about living in a foreign country	2
Health	2
Language	2
Safety	2
Sporting commitments	1

Postgraduates often possess a greater awareness of world events than their undergraduate counterparts. To a large extent (slightly over 50% of the cohort surveyed), the pre-service teachers were not troubled about where they might go on an OME; however, they were clearly concerned about some areas of the world where conflict or civil unrest is ongoing. Postgraduate students were also concerned about language and cultural barriers. Asia was listed (5 of 66), behind the Middle East (9 of 66), as regions that students would not wish to visit, with two nations specifically named as “no go” areas. Given Australia’s deep national interest in expanding its relationships within Asia and the burgeoning opportunities for graduates to live and work overseas, addressing any perceived bias against OMEs in Asia is a high priority.

<b>Table 4. Postgraduate travel concerns</b>	
<b>Places students are reluctant to go</b>	<b>Number</b>
Nowhere	35
Middle East	9
Asia	5
Africa	4
Third World countries	3
Anywhere dangerous	2
Anywhere non-English speaking	2
North Korea	2

Indonesia	1
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## Qualitative data: group discussion forum

The group discussion forum was conducted with final year hospitality students who had the opportunity to take part in a short-term OME in Vietnam with direct industry relevance that included financial support of at least A\$2,000. Nevertheless, the majority chose not to participate. The comments support much of what the quantitative data suggests. Again, money was the most frequently cited issue, and was the first objection raised in the discussion. A pattern in student reception is that initial excitement turns to apathy when the costs are examined. As one student phrased it, “At first you’re excited, then you look into it, and it’s thousands of dollars, and we’re students who don’t have lots of money.” She added, “The subsidy that is offered for this trip is good, but then we still have over A\$2,000 to pay, and if you have family you have to support, it’s just not feasible.” Another student suggested, “If you really want to increase [the numbers], have fully funded options.”

When queried what they would do to increase the participation in OMEs, the students offered a variety of responses. One important theme was awareness and following up with students who show interest. One student suggested, “send more emails or advertise it more...[because]I forgot”. Another agreed, stating, “I think students forget about it. I think people who really want to go, they will obviously remember, and they’ll follow it up; however...other people will forget about it.” Another said there should be more opportunities to “talk to people who have been on [a] trip”. Greater use of social media was suggested, as well as more financial support. Students also responded to the importance of OMEs as career preparation rather than as a holiday. One student, who was from Vietnam, said he had no interest in returning as a holiday activity. He may have been persuaded to go, however, if the career benefits had been better explained. He suggested that “specific types of training” should be highlighted so that “instead of thinking [the OME] is a holiday, [it is seen] more as work experience”.

Many students perceived OMEs as fun and exciting rather than as important learning journeys valued by employers. This perception may well speak to the way OMEs are advertised. As one student put it, “I didn’t really know that it was educational.” Another suggested that “listing the benefits so that students know what they will get out of the trip” would increase participation. The discussion suggested that far more needed to be done to explain both educational and professional benefits of taking part in an OME.

## Key themes

### 1. Build awareness

The student cohorts offered a fascinating insight into how OMEs are perceived and the barriers that limit participation. Three major themes emerged from this research that can be applied both at WSU and at other universities. The first and crucial one is to build awareness. Both the quantitative data in the surveys and the themes raised in the discussion forum suggest a that students perceive a vagueness or ambiguity about OME options. Academics may feel that mentioning an OME once or twice combined with an email is ample communication; however, this pattern does not seem to be adequate. Students indicated that they looked for social media and related forms of marketing. Such marketing needs to emphasise the educational and life skills to be

gained from participating in the OME programs. The first cohort (first- and second-year undergraduates) had specific OMEs advertised in lectures, in tutorials, through email and on posters and fliers, yet nearly 70% stated they were unaware of any specific opportunities. Emails seem particularly ineffective, with one student noting, “If I see an email that’s not from a lecturer, I’ll skip it”. The discussion forum suggested that face-to-face information sessions during class time were the most likely to get a response. One student commented that a 10-minute discussion forum had made her think more deeply about OMEs than any of the other strategies.

Class time is a precious commodity at university, and lecturers are often under intense pressure to convey a large amount of important content in a short period of time. At WSU, OME ambassadors are occasionally given two or three minutes to speak before an undergraduate lecture. Apart from being a short time to make a convincing case, they are often speaking while students are still finding their seats, and thus are competing against the noise and lack of attention before a lecture begins. The opportunity to speak is also at the discretion of the lecturer. Collectively, these factors send an unspoken message that OMEs are not important, but an extracurricular activity that may appeal to a small minority of students. A longer presentation in a tutorial setting where students are able to ask questions would have a greater impact. This, of course, is only possible if the university takes a holistic approach to internationalising the curriculum and student experience. Support would need to come from the Vice Chancellor, through to faculty heads, lecturers, and tutors. If all parties are united in the mission of increasing participation in OMEs, this priority will be reflected in the time and resources allocated to promote them.

For the postgraduate group, the first mention of OMEs (called Overseas Professional Experience or OPEP) is in the unit called Compulsory Course Commencement. A dedicated website explains to pre-service teachers that this opportunity is one of the ways to gain course credit. The tour options are offered between the main semesters as well as at the end of the year. Communicating information about opportunities is done by visits to lectures by academics whose dedicated role is to run OPEP and who have built long associations with the partner countries.

The discussion forum indicated that following up the initial surge of interest is vital. The data collected in the surveys indicate that a number of concrete and pliable reasons influence students who do not take part in OMEs. It takes time to address these issues, and a growing awareness will involve information sessions targeted at these concerns. Students need to be made aware not only that OMEs are available, but also what financial support is offered, what practical and emotional support the university provides once students are overseas, how safety concerns are addressed and how an OME benefits a student beyond being fun and exciting. Recruiting strategies need to include information about safety and accommodation as well as cultural highlights and natural scenic beauty. Effective dissemination strategies take dedication. Lecturers and tutors may be reluctant to give up class time for two or three short information and question sessions. For undergraduates, OME information may be offered on days and times when students are at university. In-class time is the most valuable, and students recognise that if this time is given to promote OMEs, they must be important.

## **2. Highlight professional benefits**

The second major theme from this research concerns the professional relevance of OMEs in the Asian Century. The quantitative data indicated a strong willingness to travel overseas, which contrasted with the low OME participation rate. The specific benefits of taking part in a university trip, as opposed to traditional tourism, are often absent from the marketing narrative. While there

is transformative potential in both academic and independent travel, there is substantial research to indicate that the former can provide a distinct career advantage (Harder et al. 2015; Di Pietro 2013; Matherly & Nolting 2007; Molony, Sowter & Potts 2011; Daly & Barker 2005; Erasmus 2014). Despite being a key selling point, this was not highlighted in student feedback in either the surveys or the discussion forum. The promotion of OMEs could be more effective in the context of a substantial discussion of the professional and even national benefits. In the United States, Congress established the Lincoln Commission in 2004 with the goal of seeing one million American students study abroad. The commission's 2005 report highlighted that increased participation in OMEs was a matter of national interest. The report stated:

To develop the leaders required for the future and the broad international understanding of the general citizenry, the United States must begin now to send many more students abroad for study.... Greater engagement of American undergraduates with the world around them is vital to the nation's wellbeing. (Lincoln Commission 2005, p. 4)

In Australia, consecutive governments since the late 1980s have endorsed the finding of the Garnaut Report (1989) and have attempted to increase familiarity with the cultures and languages of Asia.

Regional infrastructure, such as the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), which first met in Canberra in 1989, has had some influence on resituating Australia. Free-trade agreements are now in place with Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore and the ASEAN bloc. What is often lacking, however, is people-to-people diplomacy. The Gillard government's White Paper on *Australia in the Asian Century* listed 25 goals for 2025. These included that "Australia will have deeper and broader people-to-people links with Asian nations", and that "Australia will have stronger, deeper and broader cultural links with Asian nations" (2012, pp.25-26). In 2013, the Abbott government reasserted an aim to have 40% of Australian students learn a foreign language, with an emphasis on Asian languages so "a more Asia literate country [would be] more able to play our part in the Asian Century" (2015).

The Asian Century presents both challenges and great opportunities. What is often missing from the OME conversation is that many Australian students may end up living and working in Asia after they graduate. The pre-service teachers who teach in Asia become aware of future employment opportunities for them there. This Asian literacy needs to be the case for all university students who undertake an OME in their degree. While OMEs have traditionally been marketed as an opportunity for fun or personal growth, research from the United States has suggested these marketing messages are ineffective, especially with men (who tend to take part in lower numbers). Drawing on the Open Doors 2014 report, journalist Ellie Bothwell (2015) suggested that "universities need to highlight the academic and career benefits of studying abroad rather than focus on 'life-changing experience' rhetoric if they want to increase take-up from male students" (para. 1). Cultural awareness and an ability to network and communicate effectively with people from diverse backgrounds are prized skills in a globalising marketplace. For Australian students, the professional as well as the personal benefits of taking part in an OME in an Asian country must be conveyed. One of the ways this might be done is through the creation of a video or photo collages, especially featuring students who can describe how their travel affected their skills or employability.

### **3. Internationalisation through a travel culture**

Finally, to truly internationalise the tertiary teaching and learning landscape, a travel culture must be fostered in which OMEs are the norm rather than the exception. When first-year undergraduates attend their orientation lectures, they are asked to consider their major, unit selection and career aspirations, but are rarely asked, “What kind of OME will you take part in?” OMEs may be mentioned briefly, but they are often presented as optional extras to the university experience (as reflected in the current participation rates). This impression was reinforced in the discussion forum, where students indicated that OMEs are not something they talk about with their friends. However, in a context of diminishing employment opportunities for the “monolingual, monocultural graduate” (Green & Mertova 2009, p. 24) such informed discussion needs to occur. International skills and communication competencies are vital to what Douglas and Jones-Ridders call “worldmindedness” (2001). “Worldmindedness” involves faculty heads working together with unit coordinators to design OMEs that fit easily into the academic calendar and maximise student involvement. Ideally, the question should be not *if* but *when* a student will spend time overseas as part of her or his degree.

Money was the most frequently cited concern for all cohorts, and clearly needs to be addressed. This correlates with research undertaken by Bretag and van der Veen, who identified “cost, commitments...and space within the curriculum” as the three chief reasons for non-participation (2015, p.2). Similarly, Forsey, Broomhall and Davis (2012) found that cost, along with leaving family and friends, were the main inhibitors. To this end, both the School of Business and the School of Education were successful in receiving New Colombo funding for 2016. A vital element in creating an OME travel culture is explaining how these trips are financially viable. Minimising the financial burden, and in some cases eliminating it altogether, can contribute to democratising OME participation and adhering to social-justice principles. WSU could also aim to provide both full and partial OME scholarships through corporate partnerships, alumni support and increased internal funding. These strategies can potentially offset the financial concerns voiced by many students.

Although finances are a legitimate concern, it should be remembered that the majority of students surveyed did hold a passport and have travel experience. In many cases, students expressed a reluctance to go on an OME precisely because they were saving to travel overseas independently. Financial objections are often raised, but must be understood in context. While in some cases overseas travel is financially out of reach, in many others it is a matter of preferring travel with friends or family to a university OME. The onus is on universities not only to limit costs but to highlight the unique benefits of an OME program and its considerable value for money. Together with financial support, OMEs must be seen as a central plank of professional learning. As the *Shifting Perceptions* report states, “the more tightly woven study abroad options are into the curriculum, the more likely students are to participate” (2014, p. 2). Students and parents are reluctant to invest time and money on activities that are not directly relevant to graduating. Integrating financially viable and industry-relevant OMEs into standard coursework will help to create an international travel culture.

## Conclusion

The data collected in the surveys and discussion forum indicate several barriers to student participation in OMEs. These include finances, family and work commitments, safety concerns and a failure to see the career value of the OME. Some objections to OME participation are concrete; however, the majority are pliable, and a large percentage of the student body could take

part if their concerns were better addressed in promoting these international opportunities. To increase student participation, tertiary education needs targeted marketing campaigns to combat misconceptions and generate broad interest. The data also highlights a need to emphasise the professional and educational benefits of the trips, as well as the personal. This is an area where further research is required. The underrepresentation of males on OME trips may be better understood through further research into the marketing focus of mobility programs. Australian universities particularly need to explain the specific benefits of Asian OMEs and the career benefits of Asian literacy in the 21st century. Finally, an international travel culture must be fostered where OMEs are woven into the curriculum and overseas travel is students' expectation rather than the exception.

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