

Press Release: NC STATE STUDENT LEARNS ABOUT AGRICULTURE ABROAD

Title: Experiencing the Australian Life through a Country Girl's Eyes

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My study abroad trip and experience took place in Queensland, Australia, during the months of June and July. There were fourteen students (nine females and five males) and our study abroad instructor Dr. Morgan Morrow. Our Australian experience began on June 10<sup>th</sup>, 2007, when we boarded our first flight at the Raleigh-Durham Airport in-route to Dallas Forth Worth. We then connected to a flight to the Tom Brady Airport in Los Angeles before leaving for Brisbane, Australia. This flight lasted thirteen hours and 40 minutes. Before leaving for this trip, I had only been on one other flight and I was the very first person from my family to go overseas. I met and talked with several interesting people during all of my flights to and from Australia. While studying abroad, I experienced several situations that I am sure will change my outlook on life forever. I think that studying abroad is a life changing experience that if given the opportunity, everyone should take it upon themselves to do. In this paper, I will describe the benefits of the international experiences for students of the millennial generation while focusing on agricultural studies. I had the opportunity to visit and see many Australian agricultural and animal production sites first-hand. Additionally, I will share information about the agriculture production and the practices I experienced, the activities that broadened my outlook on agricultural opportunities, barriers that students face with studying abroad, and steps to promote students to take part in study abroad opportunities.

While in Australia, we visited several unique and exotic places. The first place we visited was Gatton. Gatton is a small town about an hour from Brisbane. This place really reminded me of home, because of the small-town folks and their warming

personalities. The University of Queensland at Gatton Campus was much like the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences at N.C. State that I attend. Here you would find all sorts of agricultural majors such as Ag Business, Environmental, and Veterinary Science. During our stay, the students were taking their final exams before winter break so we were able to converse with students of our own age who shared the same common interest. One interesting thing we found out while in Australia was that Vet Students only have to attend school for five years in order to obtain a degree, where as in the United States it is a total of eight years (including undergraduate). While at Gatton Campus, we visited such places as Helidon Hills, where we set traps for wildlife. We learned about the Wildlife Restoration Program there and saw many animals including the wallaby, kangaroo, emu, and echidna. We even bottle fed a wallaby that was rescued from a road accident. At the location called the Crow's Nest, we did some night spotting for nocturnal wildlife like the opossum. In the United States we spotlight animals at night by riding around in a truck, but in Australia we walked down dirt paths with flashlights. While on the way to the Bunya Mountains, we stopped by the Jondaryan Woolshed and Kerwee Feedlot. Here we learned about early methods of the wool industry. Additionally, we were taught and shown the methods and preparations that are taken before cattle are carried to the butchery. The Bunya Mountains is a common vacation spot for many Queensland residents. Here we stayed at a luxurious log cabin, where we had the privilege of learning how to chop our own firewood, which would be used to heat our cabin. We were also able to see the exotic birds which landed on our heads multiple times during our attempts to feed them. One common problem in Australia is the feeding of the wildlife. The feeding of wildlife is resulting in many

wildlife creatures almost becoming tame which leaves them wide open to becoming another animal's prey. Another agricultural business and production that we visited was the Toowoomba Hills Estate Winery. This was a small wine operation where the grapes were grown on the side of the mountain and transformed into great-tasting wine.

Actually, this was my first real-life winery visit. I learned many different things about the wine industry and the production process. We were given the opportunity to taste and sample the different varieties of wine produced at this location. Our next stop was the Gold Coast, a very big tourist attraction that many Australians visit while on vacation. This was my first time seeing topography that included the mountains and the beach intertwined. While walking on the beach, you have the crystal clear water on one side, large city buildings on the opposite side and the beautiful Australian mountains in front of you.

After two weeks of living at the Gatton Campus, we relocated to the St Lucia campus in Brisbane. Brisbane was a much more rural area than our previously visited areas. In fact, I considered it to be a very large city. While here, I experienced and tried several new adventures, including public transportation. They had several different types of this adventurous form of transportation including: buses, taxis, and ferries. The City Cat was our most frequently used mode of transportation, which included a walk to the ferry that would lead to different locations throughout the city, at a small cost of \$5 per trip. One important thing that I learned very quickly in Australia was that student's receive discounts; however, some means of transportation would only accept international student cards. Possibly one of the most interesting places that I visited while on the study abroad trip was the Musgrave Park Cultural Centre. This was an

Indigenous Australian operation in which they provided information to tourists about their aboriginal ancestors. We learned how to draw Indigenous Australian artwork, throw the popular Boomerang, and watch the Indigenous Australians perform several ritual dances. The Indigenous Australians are very grateful to the tourists who are interested in their artwork, this has provided a much needed source of income. Next, we visited Stradbroke Island which was located off the coast of Brisbane via a 45 minute ferry ride. This place reminded me of our little island on the east coast of North Carolina called "Ocracoke". It reminded me of Ocracoke, because of the ferry transportation and the local restaurants that are still in existence. Some other places that we visited while in Brisbane were the University of Queensland's Animal Clinic, Mt Coot-tha Botanic Gardens, the Australia Zoo, the Queensland Art Gallery and Museum.

There were places that our group decided to explore that were not included in the schedule. In Brisbane, we visited the Eagle Farm Queensland Turf Club. The horse racing industry is very popular in Australia as it is in America. Everyone dresses in stylish attire including the women wearing some sort of feather fashion accessory in their hair. The men dress up in suits. Our group had such a good time at the Eagle Farm Queensland Turf Club, that when we visited Sydney, we visited their Turf Club as well. After the study abroad program concluded, several members of the group decided to extend our time in Australia and discover some other sites and cities. We flew to Cairnes, Australia, the location of the famous Great Barrier Reef. The Great Barrier Reef was a blissful spot that I am so very glad I decided to go and experience. I was given the opportunity to go scuba diving for the first time in my life, even though I did not have my scuba diving certification. It was just so amazing to swim with the magnificent marine

life in the waters surrounding the Great Barrier Reef. There are no words that will ever be able to describe how magnificent and unforgettable this experience was. Pictures will never be able to give the Great Barrier Reef justice in my opinion. After the Cairnes experience, the remaining four of us flew to Sydney to continue our adventure. While in Sydney, which seemed much more Americanized, we visited several different famous sites including the Sidney Opera, the Aquarium, the Sky Walk, the ANZAC Bridge, the Hunter Valley, the Jendan Caves, and the Blue Mountains. I definitely did a lot of growing up while I was in Australia. I developed new ideas and a brand new outlook on life. I had experienced boarding a plane by myself, being self-reliant and confident in a huge city setting with just a few friends, and developed the ability to feel confident about major travel decisions that we made on our own. We became more self-reliant and self-assured as individuals by having experienced these travel experiences.

While at the Gatton Campus, we visited several different agricultural production sites and learned about the processing procedures and policies. We visited the University of Queens Gatton equine unit, the dairy unit, the pig unit, the poultry unit, and the goat and sheep industry. In many ways, the Australian agricultural industries produce, process, and deliver their agricultural products very similar to the United States, but there are some differences. I think my favorite site was the Piggery Unit at Gatton's campus. Here we got dressed in sterile white outfits, while wearing black boots. Upon entering the unit, we had to sanitize our boots before entering this 37 year old hog building. Australia's main exports for the Pig Industry are Singapore and Japan. The Australian hog carcass when compared to the United States hog carcass is smaller (73 kg compared to US 90 or greater kg). Australia has a booming pig production that has only been

increasing since 1975 with a total of 1,999 pig farms and around 318,596 sows estimated in 2004. With these statistics, Queensland is second in the states just after New South Wales. One thing that I found very interesting is that very few male pigs are castrated in Australia, where as, in the United States we castrate the majority of our pigs. Pigs are mostly sold in Australia by direct consignment (the straight to the processor method). In Australia, most pigs are sold on the domestic market (90%), Coles and Woolworth are the biggest buyers. As I stated previously, Singapore and Japan are the main buyers but will only take females and castrated males.

We also visited the Dairy Unit to learn about this aspect of the Australia agricultural industry. As an international production for the dairy industry we learned that India, European Union, United States, and Eastern Europe are the main producers, where as European Union, New Zealand, and Australia are the main exporters (in the form of milk powder). Australia and New Zealand use exports to generate income when compared to others who use exports as a means of handling surpluses (like the US and EU). Australia is currently at a production level of 10 and the United States is at 70. Australia was at 11<sup>th</sup> in production level but due to the drought there has been a drop in production. The average rainfall in Australia is 30 inches of rain and in the last five years they have gotten less than 20 inches of rain (2/3 or less each year). There is an estimated 2,000,000 dairy cows in Australia with Victoria and New South Wales being the top two leaders of production. Australian farmers do not receive as high of price for their milk as those in the United States. Currently the American farmer receives 40 cents per liter; Australian farmers receive 30 cents per liter, while the Japan farmer receives \$1.20 per liter for their milk. The price per liter in Australia had increased recently due to the

drought in order to compensate the local farmer. Another difference in Australia's dairy industry when compared to the US is that Australia has more of a pasture-based industry where as the US uses the conservation of forages such as hay and silage.

The Sheep and Goat Industries are also some of Australia's vital agricultural industries. It has been widely accepted that Australia produces the world's highest quality woolen fiber; Australian Merino wool. Australia is known for its exquisite wool due to farmers being able to select superior animals for breeding purposes and by using the harsh Australian climate to produce clean, fine wool of high strength. Sheep have been a part of Australia almost since the first fleet arrived at Botany Bay in 1788. The main products derived from sheep and goats include leather, wool, cashmere, meat, milk, and cheese. In the sheep industry, a shearer gets around \$3.70 per sheep sheared. Goats becoming feral are very common in Australia. In fact, the only domestic species which will return to its original wild state as rapidly as a goat is the domestic cat. It is currently estimated that there must be more than five million feral goats in Australia. Australia has 100-110 million sheep and lambs and produces over 50% of the world's Merino wool (4.5 kg fleece per sheep per year). Total wool production in 2000-01 was valued at \$2.5 billion or around 7% of total agricultural output. This wool was also used for soldiers' uniforms in the war so during the Korean War there was a huge increase in price of wool due to the American demand. China currently purchases about 55% of Australia's wool production.

Before coming on this trip to Australia, I was aware of the agricultural aspects of livestock and crops grown in North Carolina but was unaware of the global perception of those same crops and livestock. It was interesting to learn that they use zero-tillage

practices (our no-till) especially since just in the last ten years, no-till has become popular in North Carolina. Australia's crops and products are different from those in North Carolina in so many ways, but yet they still grow barley and wheat (their main winter crops) just as the average farmer in North Carolina. Some of the crops they also grow are cotton, cabbage, celery, silage, and pineapples. I experienced and learned many facts about the production and industries of Australia's agricultural products by going on this study abroad trip, and by visiting and seeing the pig, equine, dairy, and poultry unit. Being an Ag Business major and coming from a rural community I did know things about crops and such but never did I know as much about the livestock. One thing we did while in Australia at the equine unit was label the anatomy of a horse in which I had never done before (and was actually better at it than I thought). I even learned how to tell how old a horse was and how to distinguish the colors of horses. I am sure I probably could have learned these simple things in the United States but I had never been exposed to that agricultural opportunity before. Even though it seems silly, I also learned that pineapples are grown on plants and not on trees like I thought. I think also I learned to appreciate all aspects of the crop growing process while I visited Australia. We have droughts in North Carolina but not as severe as Australia has experienced in the last ten years. I saw a dead cow that had died due to the lack of rainfall and stayed in a dorm where they asked you to take a shower in 3 or 4 minutes. I met some students in the Agricultural field who were very concerned about what they were going to do once out of college, due to the drought issue. One in particular was a student majoring in Horticulture who said that his degree would probably not benefit him due to the lack of rainfall and uses of water. Additionally, I appreciated learning about the many Australian



animals and interacting with such animals as the kangaroo, the wallaby, a crocodile, and an emu. Some of my other Australian experiences included feeding a baby kangaroo, throwing a boomerang, feeding an elephant, riding public transportation, scuba diving, and last but certainly not least, going through an airport alone. I was very impressed with my accomplishments and myself.

Studying abroad in my opinion is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Every student, if allowed this chance, should take the opportunity and do it. Almost all of the students that went on this study abroad trip were in the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences at NC State (11 out of 14). We also were from all kinds of backgrounds. Most of the students were pursuing a degree in Animal Sciences with hopes of going to Vet School. When talking to most students about why they chose to come on this study abroad trip, most of them had never traveled outside of the US and were planning on attending graduate school. In my opinion, most students who study abroad do so for added experience in their fields of study and for a more global knowledge base. Most students studying abroad have plans of pursuing a higher level of education or an advanced career. By completing the studying abroad program you can become more of a well-rounded student and one that stands out from other applicants. I also think there are also some barriers that exist that some students face that could prevent them from making this lifetime experience. I think the greatest barrier that students face would be finances. In order to study abroad it takes a lot of finances and financial planning especially when you are talking about visiting such a place as Australia. Even though the study abroad office does offer small scholarships and financial aid, I knew several students who were on my trip who had to take loans out in order to be able to go. I was fortunate to receive

assistance in the form of a scholarship from AgCareers.com, as they support and encourage international experiences for college students. Their support helped significantly in offsetting some of the added expenses of the trip. An opportunity such as providing scholarships for study abroad is a great way for companies to help students gain valuable experiences. I think another obstacle for students would be the language barrier. From my own experience, I chose Australia because I knew it had a language I could understand. Even though I took a foreign language in high school, I would still not feel comfortable about going away for several months with my limited foreign language abilities. Another barrier that I faced when finalizing my plans for the study abroad program was getting my passport. I applied early and it only took me around four weeks before I received my passport. The cost of getting your passport is around \$100 so that is another extra expense added into the whole trip. Time is another barrier that students face. Graduating on time and moving on with the next level or plateau in life is on every student's mind. Studying abroad takes time and money to plan and prepare for in advance. Students striving to be on the fast track (which tends to be more highly valued by employers) would possibly skip the opportunity due to it getting in the way of meeting their career goals.

I think a way to promote participation by students and employers in the study abroad program would be to increase the visibility of the idea and the opportunities that exist. Advertisement from companies that could provide research methods and possible job opportunities while studying abroad would be a wonderful remedy and resource for a study abroad student. This would provide the student with the opportunity to build and add to their resume' while allowing them to make and experience global contacts.

Perhaps this could be accomplished by setting up a joint conference at a Career Fair event or some sort of college and business meeting. This would provide the student with the opportunity to get this lifetime and unforgettable experience. The student would get a wonderful idea of how global jobs are performed, and with the world becoming much more globally dependent, this would allow the company great research assistance while benefiting the student as well. I think students would be more acceptable and interested in studying abroad if perhaps companies could provide job opportunities, which would help with the financial assistance needed for the student to be able to complete this interesting and unforgettable global experience.

My experience to Australia is one that I will never forget and will cherish forever. I feel by having stayed for the month and a half I got a very good imprint of the Australian lifestyle. My only recommendation is that other students could be given the same opportunity to travel abroad. All the different places and things I learned have influenced my life already in just the short time I have been home. The most important lessons I learned overseas were more about myself and how I react when put in a completely different environment and the adjusting period. Hopefully, this will not be my only overseas trip that I will take in my lifetime. Living life in an Australian's eyes taught me about the agricultural production in another country in comparison to the United States and North Carolina, showed me multiple wonderful places and experiences, and exposed me to several different activities that influenced my outlook on agricultural opportunities beyond what I could ever imagine.