



# Session

## SETTING THE SCENE: LEARNING IN AUSTRALIA

At the end of this session, international students will:

- Have developed an initial familiarity with the Australian university context and the academic expectations associated with their course
- Be able to identify aspects of cultural difference
- Feel valued for the cultural contribution that they can make
- Have begun the process of building resources that can be applied to their media / communication course

### How and when to use this material

This session is the first in a five-day pre-semester program where each session builds on earlier sessions. It is designed for use by Student Learning Centres, rather than within seminars on media and communication courses. This first session, and the following three sessions, introduce students to the Australian learning culture, to communicating cross-culturally in order to participate actively in learning, and to university life and protocols. These four sessions are designed to be used in student orientations and pre-sessional programs facilitated by student learning centres and support lecturers.

Lecturers may find it useful to use the following three Briefing Notes as background reading:

- **Why Chinese postgraduate students struggle with listening, reading, writing and speaking in English**
- **Understanding the concept of face and how this impacts the interactions of Chinese students within the Australian university context**

- **Knowing about your Chinese students: A quick reference guide for Australian academics**

### **Lecturer input: Welcome and overview**

#### **Welcome and introduction**

- Welcome all students and introduce yourself and your role.
- Provide an overview of the week's sessions and the learning objectives for this first session.
- Explain briefly how these sessions tie in with their course.
- Articulate key elements of the course that they are enrolled in.
- Explain how the learning that takes place on a postgraduate course relates not only to discipline content but also to skills that apply beyond the course of study.

#### **Session content**

- Show job advertisements for positions in their field of study e.g. journalists, public relations practitioners, screen producers, media policy analysts, etc. (See attached **Handout 1: Examples of job advertisements.**)
- Identify examples of knowledge, skills and values in the advertisements. (You may want to ask students if they can identify additional information – this will depend on the cohort.)
- Align some of these to the units and unit learning outcomes on their course.
- Explain that some aspects of their course may be challenging and indicate how these support sessions and other university support services can assist with developing these skills.

## Student activity 1: April's journey

- Show first clip only of April's Journey:  
<http://tls.vu.edu.au/altc/studentresources.cfm>
- Students to view a second time, individually writing down on a piece of paper their responses to the following focus questions (see **Handout 2: April's questions**):

April says 'We have to do everything by ourselves ... totally different in my country'.

1. *What cultural differences does April identify with respect to:*
  - a. *Learning and teaching*
  - b. *Life in general*
2. *What challenges does she face?*
3. *What does April say about English?*
4. *April mentions 'face' several times. What does she say and why?*

- Allow students a 3<sup>rd</sup> viewing if required.
- Students to share / compare their responses with another person.
- Two pairs should then join and use their responses to prepare a brief verbal report to the whole group.
- A volunteer from each group should then report back to the whole class, followed by a lecturer led discussion of the questions.
- Now ask students these questions:
  1. *What would you like to say about the English language and using English?*
  2. *What is 'face' and is this likely to be important for you in Australia?*
- Sharing and discussion to be done in the same way as above but with different pair / group configurations.
- Lecturer-led roundup of experiences / differences / expectations (theirs and April's).

### Note to lecturer

This activity is structured in this way because our research has identified that:

- Differences between learning and teaching in Australia are significant.
- Students from Mainland China, in particular, are unused to spontaneous discussion, in English, where they have to express their own opinions and therefore it is important to build up to this. (See the Briefing Note on **Why Chinese postgraduate students struggle with listening, reading, writing and speaking in English.**)
- Face is a concept that impacts learning and teaching so it is important for this to be identified early. (See the Briefing Note on **Understanding the concept of face.**)

### Lecturer input: Introduction to university life

- Provide a brief overview of key academic and professional structures related to the program / course of study. Note that these may be covered in more detail in the university's Student Orientation Week.
- Draw attention to the different types of student support available and how students are expected to make use of these (not to struggle in isolation): student learning centres, counselling, advice centres, student guilds, events (including professional associations), social opportunities and clubs.
- Ask students to write questions they may have on A4 pieces of paper – one question per piece of paper (e.g. 'Where do I go if I lose my student card?')
- Overview of university / course structure is now elaborated through the activity on page 5.

## Student activity 2: University life: who, what, where?

- Have A4 sheets with various roles and/or personnel (actual names if appropriate) from your university written one per card.
- Taking the organisational structure of your university or faculty or course, place the key personnel onto the floor of who students can expect to need to communicate with.
- Using streamers and blu-tac, ask students to join up people according to what students think these people are responsible for and any chain of authority. (Get them to colour code with highlighters in proportion to the amount of contact students think they will be likely to have, i.e. pink = most contact/ weekly, green = support if needed/ monthly or for intensive spurts, blue = major issue/ rare if at all.)
- Move from A4 sheet to A4 sheet discussing with students their expectations associated with personnel or areas. (This will vary from university to university.)
- Comment on the student relationship to lecturers being different in Australia to that in China. (See last paragraph in the Briefing Note on **Knowing about your Chinese students: A quick reference guide for Australian academics** on the expectations that Chinese students have of their lecturers.)

### Note to lecturer

Most Chinese students expect their lecturers to provide all the information they need as the Chinese education system does not encourage self-directed learning and little independent study.

This contrasts with the expectations of Australian lecturers.

Here are two contrasting views:

- Chinese student newly arrived in Australia: *'I was expecting the lecturer would **tell me what to do**, which book to read, which paragraph you should remember to pass the exam, and that's the failure. After I come to Australia, the lecturer tells you: 'You have to read this, this, this, and this – and maybe one of them will be in the exam, maybe not', so sometimes I feel very **confused**.'*
- Australian lecturer: *'We assume that when they come onto these programs they already have these skills, we assume that they can write and speak and communicate well in English. We assume that they know how to structure an essay or a report. We assume that they know how to read an academic text and know how to take notes and summarise that text. And what you find when you get into the classroom is that some of them don't have these skills so you're having to backtrack with them to bring them up to speed....In my view they're not here to be taught the skills. They're actually here to learn about content because that's what a masters course is really about.'*

## Lecturer input: Cultural learning

### Life beyond the University

- As an introduction to life beyond the university and also as a way of introducing real media texts, show the attached PowerPoint slides of media stories about youth culture in Australia (See attached Slides: **Youth culture in Australia**).
- Identify some general lifestyle issues, such as:
  - how students need to learn to cook and shop for themselves in Australia
  - young people's involvement in sport
  - alcohol
  - dealing with Aussie culture of 'promiscuity', etc
- Signpost these as topics that students may wish to return to and discuss later in this pre-semester course.
- Emphasise the importance of interacting with the broader Australian community to expand their experience, knowledge and language competence.
- Also emphasise the importance of sharing their cultural knowledge with others.

Again, recap / note differences in students' experiences and cultures, drawing attention to international students as culture travellers or sojourners who are in the process of encountering a new or different culture. This is a learning process and the skills they develop as they transition into the Australian academic culture are ones that will be useful to their successful study in Australia and also afterwards in their (global) careers.

### Lecturer input: Creating and maintaining a personal glossary

- Introduce the idea of students keeping a personal glossary with sections e.g. idioms, phrases, subject specific vocabulary, etc.
- Get them to identify words and terms from today's session and add these as headings.
- Point out that a personal glossary should be maintained throughout their whole course of study.
- Note that personal glossaries encourage students to accept responsibility for their own progress in language and concept development.



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Additional materials and resources are available from  
<http://chinapostgraduates.murdoch.edu.au>

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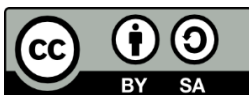
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