

2019 UNCP Grant for Excellence in Teaching & Learning Award
Final Report
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Background.

The teaching activity for which this grant was requested supported travel and participation for UNCP students who enrolled in the International Indigenous Exchange Consortium (IIEC) study abroad trip to Swinburne Technical University in Melbourne, Australia during Summer Session II 2019. Travel took place from July 1-16. Seven students participated, the maximum allowed for this program because three universities had students participating. As clearly demonstrated by the success of the inaugural IIEC study abroad trip to the University of Saskatchewan in July 2018 (outlined in the original grant proposal), offering international travel opportunities to AIS and to all UNCP students to learn directly about global Indigenous peoples' histories and cultures is a powerful teaching enhancement that adds an indelible experiential element to students' understanding of global Indigeneity. This experiential learning enhancement highlights cultural distinctions and shared Indigenous worldviews and experiences prior to, during, and as a result of colonization on two continents. Ongoing Indigenous agency, resistance, and resilience are the consistent emphases of this program.

Grant implementation.

This grant helped significantly to offset the substantial costs required for student airfare and on-site expenses traveling to, and staying in, Melbourne, Australia. Funds were given directly to the Office of Global Engagement, who booked all flights and lodging reservations.

Assessment of grant impact.

UNCP student experiences in Melbourne studying Aboriginal peoples' histories, cultures, and contemporary experiences was nothing short of transformational. Being in a different country, time zone, culture, climate, and ecosystem all impacted our students' understandings of diverse global environments and societies, and the assigned curriculum on Aboriginal peoples in the state of Victoria was entirely new to them, as it largely was to me and to Dr. Mary Ann Jacobs, the lead instructor for this course. However, it was the relationships developed with international students from Canada and Australia that most affected our students, who learned through personal stories and collaborative course assignments about striking similarities and stark differences in the experiences of Indigenous peoples in their three nation-states. Following are Facebook posts and other reflections by UNCP students who participated in the Indigenous Australia study abroad trip. While this course is open to all UNCP students, the five students quoted below are all Lumbee and are either American Indian Studies or Biology majors. I have the students' permission to use these comments.

Caylee Holden:

“It’s Sunday evening here in Australia and I can’t believe that we leave tomorrow. Y’all my heart is so overwhelmed. This trip has truly been life changing for me in so many ways. I’ve created friendships that I know will last a lifetime, seen SO many beautiful things, and have had

the opportunity to speak with remarkable elders in the Aboriginal community. A special thank you to everyone who made getting me to Australia possible. Thank you to my parents, my sister, my church family, my work family, teachers, and friends. You all will never know how truly grateful I am for each of you. Australia, you were magical!”

Chandra Jacobs:

“These past two weeks have been eye-opening, sad yet amazing, and downright an honorable experience. At first I thought I wasn’t going to be financially able to attend this study abroad trip, however, things made a turn for the better. Being able to hear and know that the stories and lives of Aboriginal Australians are just like ours here in North Carolina was calming for me. Not being home and out of my comfort zone I thought I would be nervous the whole time. Turns out being in Australia with its peoples, Canada’s people, and those from home it was like I never left. All of the events planned and all of the amazing Aboriginal people that we met is the most amazing experience ever. If I could do it all over again, I definitely would.”

Brent Locklear:

“I am so grateful that I was given the opportunity to participate in such an amazing trip. Most people can only dream of visiting Australia, so I am truly blessed to have been a part of this. A couple weeks prior to leaving for Australia, I began rethinking my decision. I was concerned about flying for the first time, if my debit card would work correctly, how I would react to being thousands of miles from home, etc. But I went ahead and pushed all of that out of my mind and took the plunge. And I'm so happy that I did! We were welcomed with open arms, free of judgement. I met so many amazing people, each fit with their own unique story about what their Indigenous heritage meant to them. Sitting there, listening to everyone describe their connection with their heritage was so enlightening and overwhelming. I was barely able to contain myself. I was able to visit some of Australia's most beautiful and sacred sites, and I also got to meet some of the wildlife. I learned so much from the elders and other speakers. I would fill a whole book with the knowledge I obtained. What I enjoyed most about visiting Australia was the bonds we formed. In less than two weeks, I had established friendships with people from two different countries that, I feel, will last a lifetime. I will never forget my trip to Australia, it really was the trip in a lifetime.

Cindy Paul:

“Definitely life changing...the opportunity to meet other Indigenous peoples whose lives were forever changed, so much like ours were. To share their history, walk where their people had walked is an awesome feeling, you can feel it in the land. You can have amazing sense of those long gone by walking in one of the old cemeteries. Oh, the old friends from last year and the new ones gained is just unreal! Wondering what next year holds for us?”

Taylor Strickland:

“I’m finally able to sit down and reflect on the great experience I had while in Australia this summer. This trip was life changing and I am so grateful to have been part of it. I learned so much from those that were around me....These pictures are just some of the amazing moments I was able to capture. Some things are just too hard to put into words!”

Reflecting on My Growth as a Teacher-Scholar.

My ongoing participation in the IIEC program with Dr. Mary Ann Jacobs, UNCP students, and students, faculty, and staff at Swinburne Technical University and the University of Saskatchewan has been one of the most intellectually and emotionally expansive activities of my career at UNCP. I have led or co-led several study abroad or travel study courses during my thirteen years at UNCP, and I consistently see the value to my students of place-based, experiential learning, especially in the discipline of American Indian Studies, whose core values are rooted in establishing relationships with human and other-than-human beings in the ecological, spiritual, and cultural landscapes that have been home to those beings for millennia.

Deepening my own knowledge of Indigenous experiences in Saskatchewan and Melbourne has expanded my Indigenous Studies understandings of the global intersectionality of colonization and Indigenous peoples' resistance and resilience in relation to American Indian peoples in the United States, and in the Southeast specifically. I plan to use my new knowledge and understandings in future research and publications; some of this scholarship will be in collaboration with IIEC faculty. Establishing and developing long-term relationships with Indigenous Studies faculty at universities in two other countries has created a powerful international network of professional allies in my field that helps affirm my goals in doing my work in AIS at UNCP. These faculty have also become my friends. I look forward to continuing to develop these intellectual and social trade routes for myself and for my students into the future through the International Indigenous Exchange Consortium, and I appreciate the Teaching and Learning Center's support of this work.