

PORTAL Journal of Multidisciplinary International Studies

Vol. 20, No. 1/2 December 2024



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Citation: Allatson, P. 2024. The Global Classroom in Action: Thirty Years of International Studies at the University of Technology Sydney. PORTAL Journal of Multidisciplinary International Studies, 20:1/2, 1–10. https://doi.org/10.5130/pjmis.v20i1-2.9482

ISSN 1449-2490 | Published by UTS ePRESS | http://epress. lib.uts.edu.au/ojs/index.php/ portal **ESSAYS**

The Global Classroom in Action: Thirty Years of International Studies at the University of Technology Sydney

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.5130/pjmis.v20i1-2.9482

Article History: Received 06/12/2024; Accepted 06/12/2024; Published 26/12/2024

Abstract

2024 marks a significant milestone for the Bachelor of Arts in International Studies (BAIS) and its successor, the Bachelor of International Studies (BIS), at the University of Technology Sydney (UTS): 30 years of pioneering global education and the fostering of international and transcultural understanding. To commemorate this anniversary in this issue of *Portal: Journal of Multidisciplinary International Studies*, a selection of academic staff, past and present, who have contributed to the program, share their memories and insights through short essays and reflective pieces. This initiative seeks to honour the diverse experiences and pedagogical innovations that have shaped the program's success over the decades. It also aims to explain the inevitable evolution of international studies at UTS in the wake of the global pandemic whose associated travel restrictions forced a rethink of how UTS might better deliver international studies with an array of new 'internationalised/ising' experiences some of which start right here, where we are now.

Keywords

BAIS; BIS; UTS; International Studies; Study Abroad; Intercultural Education; Transculturation; Internationalisation



Glossary

BAIS Bachelor of Arts in International Studies, UTS, 1994–2021. A degree program

> that only existed in combination with any number of professional degrees offered by faculties across UTS. The degrees were taught parallel, over a period of five to six years depending on the degree combination, with year four reserved for In-Country Study (ICS). Students in the BAIS specialised in a language and a

country (Major) where that language is spoken.

BIS Bachelor of International Studies, UTS, 2022+ As a response to the travel

> restrictions that accompanied the COVID-19 pandemic, this degree replaced the BAIS with a more diverse array of study abroad options on offer, including short term sojourns and a single semester abroad, as well as two semesters of ICS for Honours students. The BAIS combined degree pattern continues with the BIS, which is not a stand alone option for students but rather must be undertaken in

conjunction with a professional degree.

Contemporary Society This was the name for the compulsory subjects that all BAIS students were

> required to undertake in the semester before their year of ICS. The subjects provided introductory insights into the geography, history, politics, and culture of the ICS host societies so that students would not be confronted on arrival by reducible difference. In the BIS students take the subject at the beginning of their

second year.

FASS Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, formed in 2008 out of one of the university's

> change management restructurings impelled by budgetary constraints that saw the Faculties of Education and Humanities and Social Sciences, and the IIS,

merged into one administrative entity.

FIS Foundations in International Studies was a compulsory subject for all students

> enrolled in the BAIS. FIS introduced students to key concepts and terms in international studies that would be of benefit to them as they progressed through the BAIS degree. The subject was offered at the beginning of year two. It replaced the earlier compulsory subject Social and Political Change, taught through the

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences until 2006.

Heritage Major For students with personal or familial backgrounds not covered by the country

> Major specialisations in the BAIS, the Heritage Major enabled them to study at an institution from a relevant country for a 12-month period. Pre-ICS language classes were arranged with other universities in the Sydney basin when possible.

ICS In-Country Study, a semester of study abroad attached to a partner exchange

> university. Students undertake classes in the target language and, commensurate with their levels, subjects from outside language programs. Students also complete a set of scaffolded research and reflective assessments that are overseen and marked by academics at the home institution, UTS. In the BAIS two semesters of ICS were part of the compulsory curriculum; in the BIS, students have the choice of a short study abroad experience, a semester of global exchange,

or the two semester ICS option as Honours students.

Institute for International Studies, 1994-2008. The IIS, which was not attached

to a faculty, was an independent unit responsible for teaching and delivering the BAIS. The IIS was also an active research enterprise, its academic staff working

across disciplines on the parts of the world that the BAIS covered.



Language and Culture This was the name for, and rationale behind, the teaching of languages at the

IIS, which as the name implies, combined language acquisition with cultural knowledge acquisition about the host societies that students would encounter in their ICS year. The aim was to prepare students as much as possible within a two-

year learning profile for that ICS experience.

Major is the name for a country or region that students specialise in during

the course of the BAIS (1994–2021) and its successor the BIS (2022+). Under the BAIS the following countries, regions and geocultural conceptualisations were offered to students: China, Japan, Southeast Asia (Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand), Quebec, Latino USA, Mexico, Costa Rica, Colombia, Chile, Argentina, Spain, France, Italy, Germany and Switzerland. In addition, between 1996 and 2004 a Heritage Major was also offered. Majors in the BIS are: China, Japan, Spain, France, Italy and Germany. The six Language and Culture specialisations—Spanish, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Chinese—were also

designated Majors or Programs.

School of International From 2017 to 2024 this was the administrative unit that oversaw the

Studies and Education teaching and delivery of the BAIS and BIS within UTS's Faculty of Arts and

Social Sciences (FASS), which came into being in 2008. Between 2008 and 2016 International Studies was one of three teaching Programs in FASS,

alongside Education and Communication.

UTS University of Technology Sydney, Australia.

The IIS

In 1994 the Institute for International Studies (IIS) was established at the University of Technology Sydney (UTS) under the leadership of Professor David S. G. Goodman to oversee and deliver the new Bachelor of Arts in International Studies (BAIS) (for an overview of how the program was established see Goodman in this issue). This degree was unusual for its time in that it could not be taken as a stand alone degree. Rather it was offered in combination with a range of professional degrees drawn from all UTS Faculties: Education; Humanities and Social Sciences; Science; Law; Engineering and IT; Health, which encompassed nursing; and Design, Architecture and Building. The side-by-side delivery of the combined degree and the professional degree meant that undergraduate students were studying for a total of five or six years, depending on the requirements of their professional degree. The BAIS itself began in year two, with classes in Language and Culture (depending on the student's country or Major specialisation), which until 2006 amounted to six contact hours a week (before budgetary constraints forced a reduction of hours to four hours per week). Students also undertook an introduction to international studies subject, alongside professional degree subjects. The pattern continued into year three, with the subject Contemporary Society focused on each of the Majors (China, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Japan, Switzerland, Quebec, Southeast Asia, Latino USA, Latin America) offered in the semester immediately before the centrepiece of the BAIS was taken in year four. This was a year of In-country Study attached to a partner university, with classes taught in the requisite local language in order to further the students' language abilities and local knowledge, in conjunction with a scaffolded set of assessment tasks (Giovanangeli & Allatson 2022). Those tasks involved self-reflection and the research skills required to develop an in-depth fieldwork research project about an aspect of the host culture and society. The tasks were assessed by academic staff back at the IIS, and then in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, which was formed in 2008.

The IIS was of note for its unorthodox approach to teaching and research. Academic staff charged with overseeing Majors (country specialisations) were required to have or develop experience of host



country university systems as well as knowledge of host country student visa requirements. Student travel and insurance costs were generously organised at the IIS by a dedicated travel team, and paid for by the university, the logic being that under Federal legislation the university was obliged to cover such costs because the year of In-Country Study was a compulsory part of the students' International Studies degree. To facilitate the administration of a complex degree involving study abroad options with dozens of partner universities in some 17 countries, the IIS was divided into two departments: Europe (France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Switzerland); and the Asia-Pacific (which grouped China, Japan, Southeast Asia, Latin America). These groupings determined the Majors that were taught and that students opted to specialise in when in their first year. Each year major coordinators and other academic and professional staff would visit partner universities and meet with students to discuss their progress and provide feedback on their research projects and reflective cultural reports.

At the same time, the IIS was a vigorous hub of research with international reach. Themed research activities each year involved an annual workshop and symposium involving all academic staff and invited external interlocutors, many from other countries, who commented on draft papers and lead discussion. Annual themes included, among many: Death of the Concerned Intellectual, Women and Social Change, Exile and Social Transformation, Queer Agencies and Social Change, and Contesting Eurovisions. International collaborations were encouraged, and particularly robust and productive collaborations typified the IIS's signal commitment to China Studies (understood always in an international framework) and to partnering with overseas research units. One of the most successful international collaborations took place over a number of years in the mid-2000s between the IIS and the Departamento de Estudios del Pacífico at the Centro Universitario de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades, based at the Universidad de Guadalajara, México, which resulted in four edited volumes (Falck & Santa-Cruz 2004; Barclay & Peake 2005; Goodman 2006; Lawson & Peake 2007) and numerous trans-Pacific symposia and journal articles. Another productive area of research involved academic staff with education backgrounds, whereby staff published important work on the pedagogical features of the experimental international studies program itself or of intercultural learning, and on the teaching of language and culture in an Australian academic context (Sheldon 2006; De Vincenti, Giovanangeli & Ward 2007; Giovanangeli & Oguro 2016; Giovanangeli, Oguro & Harbon 2018; Giovanangeli & Allatson 2022).²

The Majors

As noted above, the Majors into which students enrolled and that determined their international studies journey belonged to two departments at the IIS. Western European countries, in which some 70+ percent of the UTS students opted to specialise, were overseen in the European Department, while the Asian and Latin American country Majors were managed through the Asia-Pacific Department. Attached, for the most part, to specific countries, the Majors were in effect convenient administrative units into which student choices of where they would like to spend one year of their degree in another country could be located and managed. The Majors inevitably raised all sorts of questions about nationalism and national identities, as well as about a host of national stereotypes to which the students would be confronted. Such questions became crucial to compulsory preparatory subjects in the BAIS, notably Contemporary Society. At the same time, there were always Majors that challenged the nation-centric approach. From the BAIS's outset, students had two experimental options: South-east Asia (so important to Australia given geographical

¹ There were some idiosyncracies; both Quebec and Latino USA were overseen through the European Department where staff with interests and expertise in those areas were located. See Robert (Quebec) and Allatson (Latino Studies at UTS) in this issue.

² Another outcome was the cookbook published to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the international studies program (Allatson, Giovanangeli & Otsuji 2019).



proximity) and the Heritage program, open to students with cultural and linguistic backgrounds that facilitated a year away in a non-English speaking country. Later in the BAIS's evolution, three other experimental Majors were added to the mix: Quebec (and not Canada) (see Robert in this issue), Latino USA (ergo Spanish-speaking USA) (see Allatson in this issue), and Switzerland (which entailed offering students bilingual and multilingual options before and during their year of ICS).

Foundations in International Studies and Contemporary Society

International Studies as it was/is taught in the BAIS and the BIS constitutes a practice of ethical, selfreflective and critical approaches to different societies and peoples. The subject Foundations in International Studies (FIS) was an introductory, compulsory subject for all students enrolled in the BAIS until 2022. In its earliest iterations the subject aimed to enthuse students with insights into the international research being conducted by academic staff involved in teaching the subject. Thus, for example, students were exposed to the transnational contours and complexities of the tuna fishing industry and its sociopolitical, economic, and environmental impacts on local peoples in the Pacific, as well as its global supply chains and impacts (Barclay 2010). In its final iterations, the subject springboarded from the premise that the international begins here, where we are now. This was a vital conceptualisation, given that the teaching and learning about the international occurs on Indigenous Country, and it is a conceptualisation that we wanted students to take with them during their period of In-Country Study abroad. Also discussed were the ethical implications of talking about and studying ourselves and 'our' cultures and 'other' cultures. Students thus established competencies in the basic concepts needed to understand and question their place in the world, and to consolidate the methodological skills needed for reading and thinking critically, building an argument, and using academic and non-academic materials in research. This subject aimed to increase and desimplify students' understanding of the international, and what it means to be a global citizen in the contemporary world. The aim was framed and managed pedagogically through the conceptual lens of transculturation.

The concept of transculturation has been applied and reconfigured across numerous disciplines and sociocultural and geographical settings, and has given rise to, or influenced, important attendant concepts such as contact zones (Pratt 1992) and cultural misplacement (Spitta 2009). Expanding out from transculturation were the subject's other key terms: 1) the first half of the semester introduced students to key concepts and historical developments (world views and identities, transculturation, empires and colonisation, nation-states, borders and borderlands); 2) the semester's second half presented a set of engaging case study discussions that converted the subject's theoretical transcultural approach to the international into accessible, real world and student-relevant/engaged topics: languages, religions, food, music, sports, the environment. Through these entry-point topics, students learned the deceptively simple lessons that, first, in the contrapuntal processes of transcultural contact no side of the equation remains unchanged (Ortiz 1995). Second, that contact zones are spaces of unequal power conflicts and often fraught and forced adaptations (Pratt 1992). Third, that when things move (for instance the corn, tomatoes. and potatoes brought from the Americas by European invaders, colonisers, and explorers) things change (Spitta 2009). And finally, that we encounter all manner of borderlands in our daily movements (Anzaldúa 1997). Students learned, for example, that even the humble meal of battered fish and chips—which is often associated with Great Britain and its colonial offshoots—as well as Peruvian ceviche and Japanese tempura, have distant origins in Sikbāj, a Persian stew of meat, vegetables and spices cooked in vinegar. Sikbāj was first noted in sixth-century Persia as a favoured meal of the Shahs who ruled the Sassanid Empire, and most likely has earlier antecedents. But as the dish moved, it evolved across trade and migratory routes and at the whim of imperial wanings and flourishings into numerous other dishes. It is thought that Jewish migrants and refugees were responsible for introducing fried fish doused in vinegar to England (Jurafsky 2014); the



potatoes came from the so-called New World as part of the equally so-called Columbian exchange, which operated in multiple directions, and which also involved the trafficking across oceans of African slaves.

The first assessment task in the subject Foundations in International Studies, 'Mapping our world,' asked students to research the suburb in which they live or reside now as a local space of international importance, connection and diversity. Students had to create a digital map of their suburb and then to reflect on the mix of cultures and nationalities found there and their relation to them, and then they were required to write a 400-word reflection on the map that justified the choice of places as international sites and that located the student in that setting. Again, since all students were learning and living on First Nations Country, they were expected to acknowledge that location as an already inscribed 'international' space or as home, if that space coincided with the student's particular Country. Sites commonly chosen were churches and other places of worship, war memorials, restaurants, streets named after British royalty, and sometimes, for the more creative students, such places as gardens that contained plants from all over the world, notably migrant families' gardens replete with vegetables and fruit trees with diverse origins (Vanni 2020; Vanni Accarigi & Crosby 2019).

Given the students' specialisation in country Majors, the idea behind the Contemporary Society subjects was to present students with basic knowledge of the historical, cultural, political, and economic aspects of the places in which they would spend a year of ICS. For instance, we did not want students going to Spain to be surprised to learn that the country is still dealing with the legacies of civil war and dictatorship, or that there are strong drives for independence emanating from the historical regions. At the same time, the subjects were intended to provide insights into the country of specialisation that could then feed into the research assessment tasks of the ICS year. Accordingly, during the BAIS the Contemporary Society subjects were delivered in the semester immediately preceding the ICS year. Now along with Language and Culture the Contemporary Society subjects signal the start of the BIS journey in the first semester of year two of the combined degree.

Language and Culture

The conceptualisation of teaching Language and Culture to the students enrolled in the BAIS and later the BIS was led by a simple question: how best to prepare students for a year or a semester of study abroad in the host country's language. The addition of culture to the term language was crucial: it reflected a recognition that language acquisition is not simply about grammatical learning but is also intimately connected to broader cultural and historical knowledge of the future host society/ies. Six languages are taught: Chinese, Japanese, French, German, Italian, and Spanish (see Sheldon's paper in this issue for an overview of the evolution of Spanish Language and culture at UTS). In the BAIS, students in the Southeast Asia and Heritage Majors were able to undertake relevant language studies at other tertiary institutions by reciprocal arrangement. During the period of the IIS, annual research topics fed into Language and Culture teaching, an example being a paper entitled 'The Queer Stopover: How Queer Travels in the Language Classroom' which was co-authored by teachings staff in the Italian, French, and Japanese programs (De Vincenti, Giovanangeli & Ward 2007).

The In-Country Study Year

In the BAIS the centrepiece of the program was the year of In-Country Study which involved two semesters attached to a partner university where students would continue their language and culture studies. At the same time, students were required to complete a range of scaffolded assessment tasks, including reflective pieces (cultural reports) on the host society (for an example, see Scott 2006), and a set of research-focused assessments that led to a substantial research project about an aspect of the host society. These scaffolded tasks (Giovanangeli & Allatson 2022) were assessed by academic supervisors back at UTS, and



students also benefited from in-site visits by those academic staff during their ICS year. The aim was to provide face-to-face feedback to students while also allowing students the opportunity to raise any concerns about their ICS experiences with their academic teachers and mentors (see Vanni, and Harbon, in this issue). As the students were informed in the relevant subject outline for ICS 1:

This subject builds on skills and knowledge gained in Language & Culture classes, Foundations in International Studies and Contemporary Society subjects. Students complete one reflective and two research assignments under the guidance of a UTS academic supervisor in addition to an agreed-upon course of study at a UTS partner university. All aspects of the subject promote the development of international knowledges, understandings of cultural difference, interpersonal skills and ethical practices. The reflective assessment, completed early in the session at the host university, draws upon real exposure to and experience with students' host and home cultures. Students will reflect on preconceived ideas about the host society, as well as the unchallenged assumptions they might have about their home culture(s). Feedback on this assessment should inform the second reflective assessment in ICS & FP 2 and guide students in the development of their intercultural understanding. The research assessments in this subject are scaffolded and build toward a major project in ICS & FP 2 on a topic of the student's choosing.

ICS 2 was pitched as follows:

In-Country Study and Fieldwork Project (ICS & FP) 2 is the second part of the capstone in the X major in the Bachelor of Arts in International Studies, which involves two sessions of In-Country Study (ICS) at a UTS partner institution and reflective and research assessment about the host society. This subject is designed to enable students to live and study in another country and is guided by the principles of cultural immersion and reflection, inquiry-based learning and self-reliance. It fosters in students a capacity for critical reflection – in particular the ability to identify and question one's cultural assumptions, values and beliefs, and thus to acknowledge and empathise with the perspectives of people from other cultures.

Experiential learning in a partner university and the assessments allow students to develop their intercultural capabilities via critical reflection on host and home culture(s). Students build upon the work in ICS & FP 1 and their continued exposure to and interaction with the host society to recognise the processual nature of intercultural learning. Students also continue their work with an academic supervisor to design and research a major mixed-methods project investigating an aspect of contemporary relevance for the host society.

This subject builds on skills and knowledge gained in Language & Culture classes, Foundations in International Studies, Contemporary Society subjects and ICS & FP 1. Students complete one reflective and two research assignments for a UTS academic supervisor in addition to an agreed-upon course of study at a UTS partner university. All aspects of the subject promote the development of international knowledges, understandings of cultural difference, interpersonal skills and ethical practices. The research assessments in ICS & FP 2 build upon the work in ICS & FP 1 and culminate in a major mixed-methods project on a topic of the student's choosing. The reflective assessment draws upon continued exposure to and experience with students' host culture(s) to extend their learning about the host society and, through distance from their home culture(s), allow for new perspectives on home culture(s).

As can be deduced from these briefs, an implicit hope for the program was to contribute to the students' intercultural learning and understanding (Giovanangeli & Oguro 2016; Giovanangeli, Oguro & Harbon



<u>2018</u>). Surveys of returned students on this score were highly illuminating about the lasting world view changes experienced by students while In-Country (see Groeneveld in this issue).

At times, the resilience of students and academic staff were tested by unforeseen events, from political unrest to natural disasters and pandemics. Some key events of this nature that come to mind were: the global financial crisis that began in Thailand in 1998 (see Leigh in this issue); the fall of the Suharto regime in Indonesia in 1998; the swine flu outbreak in China in 2009; the tsunami and nuclear disaster in Japan in 2011 (see Otsuji and Sharp in this issue); the unrest associated with the Catalan referendum vote for independence in 2017; El Estallido Social in Chile 2019 (see Wyndham in this issue), to name a few. And then there was COVID-19.

COVID-19 and the new BIS: Towards an International Studies Future

The lock downs associated with COVID-19 in 2000 had dramatic implications for international studies at UTS, given that all international travel was suspended and no UTS students could undertake their year of In-Country Study. Already earmarked for cancellation for budgetary reasons were the smaller Majors, Switzerland and those across the Americas. A rapid response was needed to somehow ensure the continuation of the program and its aims by providing options for an 'internationalised' and 'internationalising' experience to start from the Australian base, while also providing more flexible study abroad options for when the pandemic's associated flight restrictions were eased. These changes informed the development of the Bachelor of International Studies, which is detailed in the contribution by Giovanangeli, Harbon, and Loda in this issue. As the authors put it:

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the International Studies degree was severely impacted. Students simply could not travel and study or live overseas for a mandatory 12-month exchange at a partner university as similar cohorts had done for more than 25 years prior. Prolonged closure of the Australian borders created an unprecedent situation that required a prompt response from the university community to rethink the future of the undergraduate International Studies combined degree so that students could enrol in a degree with international and intercultural learning outcomes yet with the capacity to complete the degree whether on study abroad or not through a set of embedded virtual and in-person international experiences that provided students with diverse mobility options in mind. This redesign was also an opportunity to incorporate UTS's new Indigenous Graduate Attribute (IGA), an attribute that is a key strategic priority across many Australian universities including UTS but often overlooked in international and study abroad programs yet it has the ability to enhance intercultural skills.

In this new iteration of international studies, students enrolled in the combined degree with International Studies could nominate one of the following options: a short-term period of study abroad of some weeks; a semester of global exchange attached to a partner university; a two semester ICS experience for students in the new Honours stream. Alternatively, students could complete their BIS entirely within Australia, taking advantage of a range of virtual study abroad options. As Hurley says in his contribution to this issue: 'There was also the insight that an international experience is not something that has to happen overseas: The international starts right here.' In the new BIS, FIS was replaced by a subject focused on intercultural communication, while Language and Culture subjects and Contemporary Society continued to form the backbone of the BIS. The evolution of international studies is ongoing, with the proposed introduction of a 'Community Leadership' Major intended for non-Indigenous students from diverse low-SES communities with heritage language skills, and an 'Indigenous' Major (see Hurley in this issue).

In 1994 the BAIS was established under the imprimatur of the Global Classroom (see Goodman in this issue). The program has touched thousands of students over the years and has also transformed the ways that



academics in the program perceived the role and importance of the internationalisation of the curriculum and their own 'internationalised' place in that drive (see <u>Allatson et al. 2002</u>; and, Pratt, Mikula, Manganas, Vanni, and Robert in this issue).

I wish the UTS experiment with international studies well, in whatever directions it evolves.

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