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Face to Face in Australia

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Field Notes from Abroad: Face to Face in Australia

One of the main differences, regarding higher-level education, between Australia and the United States, is that many universities in Australia will accept high school students straight into graduate level programs, such as medical, dental, and nursing school. These students do not have to complete undergraduate or prerequisite courses prior to entering programs that are equivalent to graduate programs in U.S. I have been very interested in this difference, one of the reasons being I am currently enrolled in a first year class for nursing students. The majority of students are 17-years old and immature, such as constantly talking while the professor is lecturing. As I explained to my friend I interviewed, I don't feel confident that in 3 years these students will be prepared to work in a hospital and be able to give their full attention to their patients. Chris, being a second year dental student, told me that he prefers starting graduate level programs early for several reasons, one being you get to start your career in your twenties and not in your thirties like most Americans. He also said that professors help the students mature during their time at a university and develop them so they are prepared for their specific career choice. Going straight into medical or dental school after high school also prompts students to work harder in high school. From my experience in Australia so far, it seems as if professors in the U.S. go more in depth in their subjects, and Chris, as well as other Australians, agreed with me from what he has heard from other American international students.

I also asked Chris what he thought about when he heard of the United States, and if I applied to any stereotypes he might have of Americans. He said he off hand thinks of celebrities, power, and President Obama. I thought it was pretty funny he asked me if I knew any celebrities when I first told him I was from Los Angeles. We then discussed how his views of America represented what he saw on television, as did mine of Australia. I admitted that before I arrived, all I thought about were kangaroos and gorgeous beaches. Chris also said something that I thought was not such a good impression of the U.S., and that was he thought the U.S. was not safe. He hears a lot about the right to own a gun, shootings, and dangerous places, but knows

that overall, it just depends on where you go in the country. In Australia, it is not legal to own a gun without a permit, and it is extremely difficult to obtain a permit. Cairns is a safe city, and I think going from this area to the U.S. would be somewhat intimidating. Even though Chris had some other stereotypes, such as Americans eat a lot of fast food, are enrolled in prestigious schools, and participate in a lot of sports and clubs, he couldn't place me, or other international students, with these stereotypes. He said his first impression of the Linfield students was that we were friendly, polite, and generally awesome.

The interview did not change my view of Australia drastically. My opinions were shaped in the weeks following my arrival to Cairns, and I'm sure they will adjust as I continue to travel to other parts of the country. I was mostly interested in the difference in higher-level education and was interested to hear Chris' opinion, especially since he entered dental school at 18 years old. I also learned how others view the United States. Although I wasn't shocked to hear Chris say he thought of celebrities and power when I asked his impression of the U.S., I was surprised to hear he thought of the U.S. as an unsafe country.

Interview Date: March 26, 2011

Interview With: Chris M. – a second year dental student I met at the student lodge