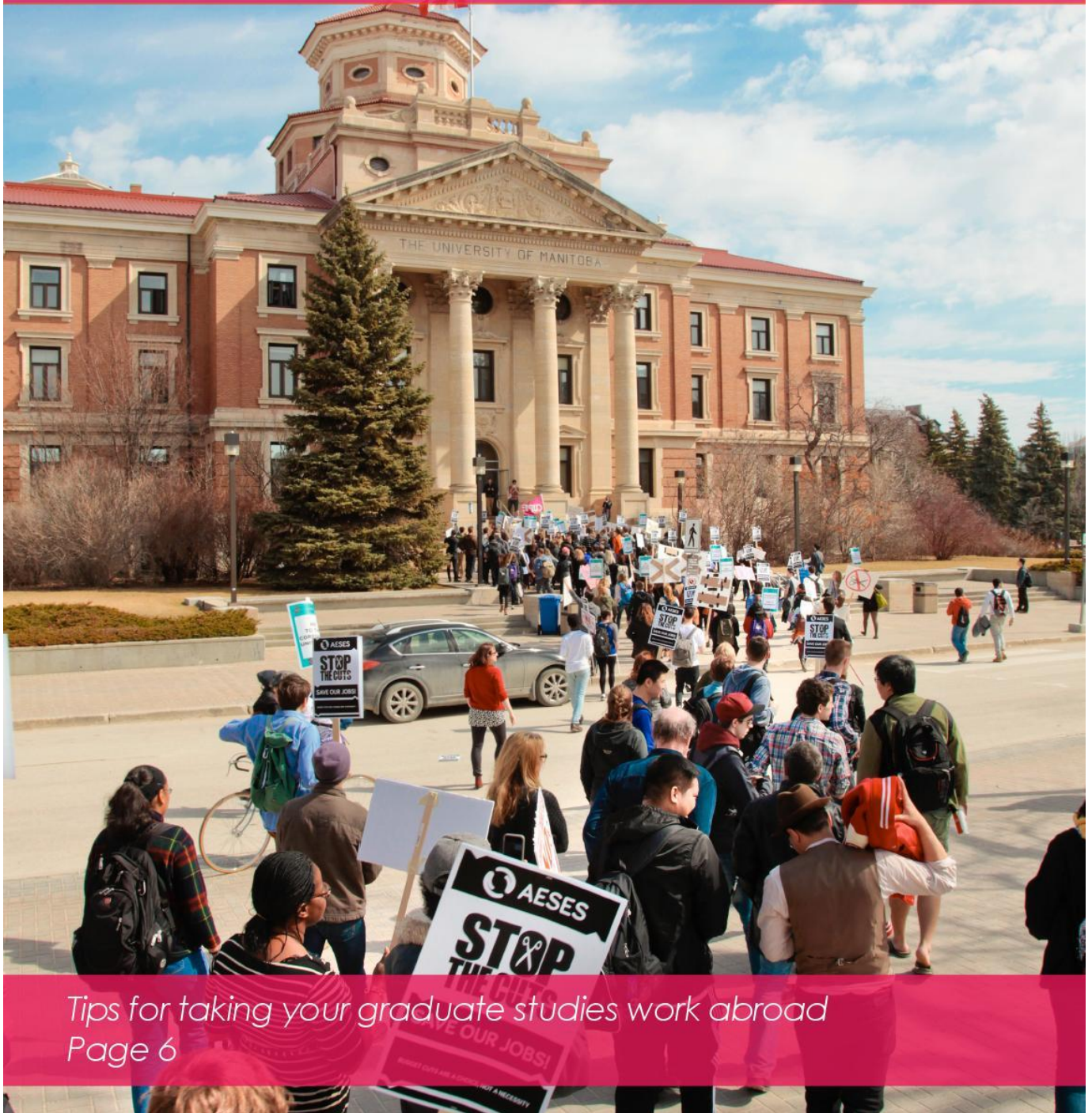


# GRADZETTE

THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA'S GRADUATE STUDENT MAGAZINE  
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*Tips for taking your graduate studies work abroad*  
Page 6





*Bailey Rankine gets some help taking measurements during fieldwork in Australia.*

# The world as your classroom

## *Make your education an adventure*

Bailey Rankine

In today's society, it's impossible to deny the importance and necessity of an education. And for those of us who are currently studying at a post-secondary level, this was probably instilled in us by our parents and mentors before we could even write our names in crayon.

What is often overlooked by the studios is that you don't have to get all of your credits in the classroom. Everything you learn doesn't have to come from a book. You can make your education an adventure.

Unfortunately, not enough students realize the opportunities available to them or why they should take advantage of them. In disciplines like ecology, fieldwork and travel is the norm, but for student in other fields, they may not get opportunities to travel or perform hands-on applications of theory.

### **Study abroad through U of M**

Luckily, the University of Manitoba offers a number of programs to "experience education." The majority of these programs focus on education, human rights, cultural studies or health in underdeveloped countries.

These programs are offered through the International Centre for Students (ICS), World W.I.S.E., Student Life and Extended Education. The ICS Exchange Programs and some Extended Education summer session courses are ideal for individuals that are eager to maintain focus on their studies; credits towards a desired degree can be obtained while exploring a foreign country.

Graduate students may be able to negotiate within their department and faculty that travel/study courses offered through Extended Education during the summer session be modified to meet the criteria requirements of graduate level credits.

It's natural for the first time you leave the nest to be a little unnerved. Even if you no longer live at home, likely you have family or friends nearby. At the very least you have the comfort of urban conveniences close at hand.

Whatever "home" is to you, it provides a sense of safety and leaving it can be scary — especially with all of the distressing stories in news these days. I'm thinking about the Sydney Siege, for example, where unsuspecting coffee shop patrons were held

hostage and two were killed; or the American aid worker taken hostage by ISIS militants and killed in a Jordanian airstrike — a retaliation for the brutal burning of a Jordanian pilot.

### **Safety assurances**

The confidence to fly into an unknown world may be difficult to muster, but luckily, there are measures taken to ensure your safety when you utilize a study/travel-abroad university program. Each program has their own set of safety guidelines and risk management policies.

For example, Students Without Borders utilizes a three-step selection process. First, students interested are pre-screened by Student Life. Those that are determined to have all of the qualifications are encouraged to apply.

Second, students are interviewed by the International Centre for Students. The successful U of M candidates are nominated to the World University Service of Canada.

Lastly, they interview the candidates again before the local organizers in Peru/Malawi/Vietnam interview and select them. Furthermore, the World University Service of Canada will conduct their own session regarding risk management.

Similar strategies are implemented in other programs. Travel/study programs are first and foremost committed to the safety and well-being of every participant.

### **The thrill**

In the second year of my undergraduate degree I enrolled in a five-week field school in Belize. I was

so excited for the adventure ahead of me, but as the departure date neared, I was crippled with fear.

To save money, I had booked my flight to Cancun, Mexico with the intention of completing the rest of the trek to Monkey Bay Sanctuary, Belize by coach and brightly coloured local “chicken” buses. Originally, there were six others who planned to do the same and I was at ease knowing that I would not be venturing into the unknown alone.

With a harsh twist of fate, Swine Flu erupted in Mexico. All of the students with the financial capacity to change flights direct to Belize, did.

Only me and one other classmate (later my roommate and now still one of my very best friends), who was already vacationing in Cancun, trudged on. In truth, it was never Swine flu that concerned me; it was the possible dangers in an underdeveloped country awaiting two foreign females, blonde and slight in build, and with very little travel experience.

We crossed the border into Belize without a hitch, but the next part of our journey was on the local chicken bus. We bravely boarded, and within minutes an argument broke out on the bus in a language I couldn't understand (Belize is primarily an English-speaking country).

Actually it was two languages — Kriol, a Caribbean slang dialect of English and Spanish. I only caught broken phrases here and there, “our country,” “taking jobs,” and an overwhelming range and number of profanities. Of course I was not trying to steal jobs there, but I was from another country and how did he know that that



*Working abroad and enjoy amazing life experiences as you learn. Photos courtesy of Baily Rankine.*



was not my intention?

I was out of my mind terrified; I just wanted to curl up in the fetal position. My eyes wildly darted around the bus from passenger to passenger trying to gauge their reactions. Nobody was looking at us, and overall, everyone seemed relatively unfazed. The woman across the aisle from me must have sensed my distress; she shrugged, smiled and said, "Guatemala." Later I discovered that there has been a long-standing border dispute between Belize and Guatemala. I was never actually in any danger, but my mind ran wild with CNN headlines and my reaction and behaviour was a product of media.

### **Push yourself**

Of course everyone should be cautious while travelling as well as in day-to-day life. Sometimes you need to push yourself out of your comfort zone or you will no doubt have regrets later in life.

After the Belize trip, I was hooked. Now a graduate student in final thralls of thesis writing, I still seek out every opportunity to advance my skills and see the world.

Currently, I'm participating in an international internship with the Gnaraloo Turtle Conservation Program. Our research team is on tour, travelling from school-to-school, all over Western Australia.

All of my work abroad has been science and research focused, but community engagement is new for me. To my surprise, working with the community on conservation efforts provides an

entirely different sense of reward.

Observing children's faces when I talk, I can see their candid concern when we cover threats, or their genuine enjoyment when we coach them on what to do if they see a sea turtle on the beach.

In Australia, indigenous populations are awarded a subsistence take of sea turtles. Whether this is an offense to conservation efforts to sea turtle populations or a cultural right is hotly debated.

When we talk to aboriginal kids about sea turtles, they often comment on how good they taste. Although some adults will be set in their ways, through education of the younger generation, we can encourage responsible practices and with luck, spark a passion so they will want to protect the future of the species.

I believe that at least some of the kids we present to will go home and talk to their parents about how important it is to not drive on beaches when turtles are nesting or that if they do come across a turtle on the beach they will keep their distance and try not to frighten it.

You'll notice that profound sounding phrases like "life changing" and "experience of a lifetime" come up again and again within conversations about study or work abroad programs, and rightly so. If you can, muster up the courage and adventure on outside of your comfort zone, learning all the while. You won't regret it.

## Get your research featured in the **GRADZETTE**

Are you a graduate student eager to promote your research and provide exposure for your work in the master's or doctoral program? The Gradzette is looking for individuals interested in participating in our ongoing "Researcher Profile" column, which seeks to showcase important and exciting U of M research for a larger audience.

If you would like to be featured in an upcoming "Researcher Profile," please contact [editor@gradzette.com](mailto:editor@gradzette.com) with details regarding your field of study, a short blurb about your current research, and any pertinent contact information for interview purposes.