

## Spotlight on ILA Institutional Members

ILA Members are doing amazing leadership work around the world, from starting new degree programs to nurturing young people who make a difference, from running innovative workshops and seminars to fostering organizational change. We are pleased to shine an ILA spotlight on the programs of our members. If you would like to nominate yourself or another ILA institutional member to be featured on these pages, please contact ILA at [ila@ila-net.org](mailto:ila@ila-net.org).

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### Spotlight on University of Wollongong's Centre for Student Development Australia

## Adventure Education: A Catalyst for Positive Holistic Development



“Education” is a word that usually brings to mind images of chalkboards and desks, notebooks and textbooks. Rarely does it immediately conjure images of rock-climbing, white-water rafting, or treks through rural villages. But it is precisely adventures of this type that inspire personal development in students in the University of Wollongong’s Centre for Student Development (CSD) in Australia.

Most recently, at the end of 2006, participants engaged in a five week **Project Challenge** expedition to **Egypt & Jordan**. A partnership was made with an experienced Australian Company—Geckos Grassroots Adventures—to co-facilitate this adventure. The focus of this trip was cultural immersion, with students visiting many historical sites throughout Cairo, Luxor, Aswan, Alexandria and Sinai. Students traveled on an amazing array of transport

including planes, trains, cars, busses, boats, feluccas, hot air balloons, camels, donkeys, and horse & carriages. Some of the highlights included a five day trip through the White Desert with local Bedouins, sailing the Nile, working in an orphanage in Cairo, climbing Mt Sinai, relaxing on the Red Sea, and exploring the lost city of Petra.

Last year’s trip to Egypt and Jordan epitomized CSD’s vision: to be a catalyst for positive holistic development in the lives of students. To fulfil this, we design and run a wide range of opportunities in which students can get involved, including activities, the Black Opal Leadership Program, clubs & societies, employment experience, entertainment, Project Challenge, service learning, and training workshops. Individuals in our small team of graduate students, including Rian Satterwhite from the University of Arizona, have backgrounds in leadership, science, marketing, law and education, and they work hard to make a real difference in the lives of students, the UOW campus and the wider community.

### **A History of Project Challenge**

The premise of experiential adventure education is that change may take place within individuals and groups by way of direct, purposeful exposure to challenges, high adven-

### Join University of Wollongong on Study Abroad

This year we have a group coming out from the University of Colorado just to participate in our 2007 Project Challenge ‘Rock to Reef.’ If any of your students are coming to the University of Wollongong on Study Abroad or Exchange and would like to be a part of this exciting initiative, or you would like to bring a group out, please visit our website for more information @ [www.unicentre.uow.edu.au/csd](http://www.unicentre.uow.edu.au/csd) or email Tony on [telshof@uow.edu.au](mailto:telshof@uow.edu.au)

--Tony Elshof  
Unicentre Student  
Development Director



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tures, and new growth experiences. Project Challenge encourages students to step out of their comfort zones and engage in travel, service learning, outdoor activities, cultural exchanges, and social interactions.

The initial Challenge began in **2003** with a group of ten intrepid students heading to the remote region of the

## 12. Northern Territory.

After a short period of acclimation, the group undertook a 100 mile white-water canoeing expedition down

the crocodile-filled Katherine River. Environmental projects such as mapping and destroying an introduced plant—the Noogoora Burr weed—and tracking the spread of the toxic South American Cane Toad were priorities. The group also practiced Aboriginal bush skills and implemented hunting and gathering techniques on the river. This was followed by a four-wheel-drive trip through the International Heritage listed Kakadu National Park.

In **2004** Project Challenge headed to **South America**, with pre-trip activi-



ties focusing on team building, fund raising and learning Spanish. In Rio, Brazil, we completed a six day trek in the Serra dos Orgaos National Park, as well as a full day of rock-climbing up Sugar Loaf Mountain. Highlights included exploring the magnificent Iguazu Falls on the border of Argentina and Brazil and our time teaching

children in an impoverished public school on the outskirts of Buenos Aires. A real change of climate was experienced with six days of cross country skiing in the mountains of Southern Patagonia before flying to Peru to complete the high altitude Inca Trail trek which ended at the magnificent Machu Picchu.



**2005** saw the Domestic Challenge in the **Northern Territory** extended to include five days teaching in a remote Aboriginal School, which gave our students an incredible insight into a world that few have experienced. Living and working with the children in this indigenous community was truly amazing. This Challenge also saw the addition of a five day trek through the Stone Country of Katherine Gorge, as well as a tour from Alice Springs to Uluru – the Red Center of Australia.

To some these trips seem like little more than glorified holidays, and it is true a number of students have their hearts set on sun, sightseeing, and shopping. But after four or five weeks of living, traveling, working, playing, and adventuring together in these amazing locations, the students definitely come back changed! The value of these experiential adventures should not be underestimated as a vehicle for student development.



### Student Voices...

“Camping out under the stars, smelling the fish we caught cooking on the fire, and listening to the sounds of the wild dingoes in the distance...does it get any better than this?” Nathan (Australia)

“I have never seen such gifted kids in all my life; they are beautiful, intelligent, caring,... and unbelievably athletic. I have learned so much from them.” Amir – international student from Iran (Australia)

“This trip has been physically and mentally tough; hiking, rock climbing, cross country skiing, and now the Inca Trail. I didn’t think that I could do this type of stuff, but now that I have, I know that I can take on bigger challenges in my life.” Andrew (South America)

“I wasn’t really sure why we had to do a few days teaching in Buenos Aires, but now that I have, it was one of the best things I have ever done and I will never forget it.” Gabrielle (South America)

“Seeing Egypt and Jordan has really opened up my eyes to another way of life. The history, the people, the culture, the food, the whole experience...it has totally changed my life forever!” Amy (Egypt & Jordan)

“Words cannot fully express how amazing this trip has been, how much I have learned, and how grateful I feel to have experienced it. I have been challenged on many fronts, not all of them pleasant, but in the end everything has worked together for good, so thanks.” Melissa (Egypt & Jordan)