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**Teaching Europe in Australia: intersections and
discontinuities.**

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Abstract

Learning about Europe in Australia at the higher education level requires lecturers and tutors to ground their teaching in students' pre-existing understanding of Australia's links with Europe. Fortunately, these links are many and such discontinuities as there are can provide a useful point of comparison and analysis. In this paper, I will offer a personal view of the ways in which teaching and learning about Europe in Australia can be enhanced and knowledge, insight and analysis most effectively communicated. I will also argue that whilst students display a keen interest in contemporary Europe, European Studies itself is best seen as a sub-discipline, particularly of politics, history and international relations and it is here that "Europe" has much to teach Australian students.

The following views are impressionistic, but I have gathered them in the past four or more years that I have been involved teaching Europe in Australia.

The overall point in this presentation is that, in my opinion, we have to begin our teaching about Europe in Australia in what we think the students know already. This means that we do not leave them behind on the platform as the locomotive of European Studies gathers momentum and puffs out of the station.

Destination Vladivostok

- Tell story about very first European studies tutorial...
- Add in Nangel's comment about Africa
- Accept that the base level of knowledge about Europe is very low, particularly at first year level.
- Bit even teaching about the European Union will require starting not only from a low base-level of knowledge, but also introducing difficult concepts.

Back to Australia

- ...so is Australia part of Europe?
- But the interest in European Studies is certainly present.
- My own experience and that of ANU administrators is that European Studies (along with Development Studies) is a growing field.
- In this sense, knowledge of Australia has much to bring to the table of European studies, but it also suggests areas in which European Studies might most profitably be located: and these areas are mainly (in no particular order) history, politics and international relations.

History (or the past) is one area in which students seem to identify a European distinctiveness.

- This probably has much to do with tourism and tourist promotion (Konitki brochures and photos of castles).
- Europe is seen as being “rich in history” (which is not necessarily a blessing), but understandings of the European past can help illuminate much of Australia’s past and present cultural landscape.

Politics is another area where European Studies can be profitably located

- and Australian understandings of federalism can help illuminate concepts such as MLG (but without appreciating the controversy about the “F Word”.)
- Maybe looking at Australia’s own past one hundred years ago would help bring this home?

International Relations has been a huge growth area and my own teaching of European Studies has tapped into students with an interest in IR.

- Here again teaching about the EU and Europe’s recent past is of interest to students of IR, with the EU generating particular interest as an innovation in IR practice and hence theory.
- The EU is seen as new and “exciting”, maybe post-national or post-modern (or even an anti-US antidote).

European Studies begins at home?

Europe is also identified with a diversity of people and cultures. Wars have even been casually explained away in tutorials as “too many people living in too little space”, as if the quarter acre block could have prevented all the major conflagrations of the twentieth century.

- Nevertheless, there does seem to be a lot of interest in European Studies generated by or through multicultural understandings of Australia’s population. Many, but not all, students come to European Studies with a family background in one European culture or another.
- This can mean that “folk knowledge” or claims to epistemic privilege can get in the way of the communication of new ideas, but on the whole it is a positive step and one that can be worked with.

All this means that teaching about Europe in Australia should make sense to young Australians and reflect something of their own understandings of the sub-continent, if only as a starting point.

- Like students all over the world, Australian students have the capacity to absorb new knowledge and ideas, but I am still learning myself about the most appropriate stages in their educational development to introduce particular concepts: first years may need more guidance; later year students may feel more confidence to develop their own ideas.
- Teaching unfamiliar material such as EU studies or European history can therefore be tricky.

This is not to say that *everything* we do should somehow relate explicitly back to Australia, although I suspect that this perspective is something valuable that we have to offer European Studies.

- Who else will make these comparisons if not us?

- But perhaps the comparisons should be made more strongly in the first year of teaching and decreasing, or following individual student's interests thereafter.

The preceding discussion will have given you some idea about what I take "European Studies" to mean in the Australian context.

- The ANU's BA in European Studies includes literature, philosophy, cultural studies of France, Italy, Germany and Spain, as well as History, politics and international relations.
- But it is in these latter areas that the growth in European Studies has been marked at the ANU.

Why is this?

- I think it is because Australian students come to university with stereotypes of what makes Europe unique ("it has history"; "it is full of different nations") that appeal to students in those particular disciplines.
- There are negative stereotypes ("it is full of effete sophisticates playing soccer").
- For good or ill, we teach with and against such stereotypes in the first instance.
- However, the continuities between Australia's past and that of Europe, and the similarities between Australia's political system and its history of international affairs, make teaching Europe in Australia challenging, exhilarating, sometimes frustrating, but for me almost always fun.