The URA Forum 2010 was held by ICET on the 29th June at Davidson High School. The main purpose of the URA Forum is to provide adolescents from a variety of cultural backgrounds with an opportunity to get together to share their thoughts and opinions about several issues regarding the youth. This year, 58 students from three high schools in Sydney, Davidson High School, Blacktown Girls High School and Model Farms High School assembled in the Jan Jones Room at DHS.

The main theme of the forum this year was ‘An Ideal Society: How do social changes brought by globalisation influence our lives?’ and ‘What can we do to adapt our lives to these changes to lead a better life?’ There were five topics presented by the five groups: ‘Mass Media’ by DHS Yr.11 students, ‘Multicultural Populations’ by BGHS, ‘Careers’ by MFHS, ‘The role of education in the global society’ by the Yr.11 ICET students and ‘Family’ by the Yr.10 ICET students. Each presentation was well-prepared and of high quality, and as a result, each of the participants gained a good understanding of the issue. After each presentation, we had approximately thirty minutes to discuss the issues raised. As for the discussions, through the processes of sharing our own understandings, perceptions and values, we learned much about each other, and came to understand, respect and accept each individual’s voice.

This booklet contains the speech of the president of the forum this year, and some information about ICET and its program. In the following pages (pg. 2 - 4) are the summaries of each of the discussion topics. On page 5 is the editor’s note, and on page 6 is feedback from the participants of the forum.

The President’s Speech: Riho Mikamo (ICET/ Davidson Yr.12)

The URA forum has been held since 2006 for the purpose of discussing current issues, sharing ideas and accepting different opinions of people who have diverse cultural backgrounds. The theme of this year’s forum is ‘an ideal society’. The core questions for this year’s theme are ‘How do social changes brought by globalisation influence our life? What can we do to adapt our life to these changes to lead a better life?’

As society has been changing rapidly by globalisation, many positive and negative effects on our life are occurring. Today, we are going to look at and discuss them in 5 different areas: Multicultural populations, career, mass media, education and family with a presentation to be given by each group. I hope that you will have a wonderful time and enjoy different views of our ideal society.

About ICET

URC Forum is organized and sponsored by ICET for giving the opportunities for the ESL learners not only to mix, work and learn together with local Australian students but also to take up leadership roles in an English speaking environment.

ICET is a language school accredited by NEAS and its unique joint curriculum with Davidson High School, MacKillop College (VIC) and MLC School is highly regarded. The students getting benefit from its strong educational philosophy and well-thought personal development program. The graduates enjoy using their all round high quality skills in their further study and careers in a global environment.
Mass Media

Mass media is any of the means of communication which reach very large numbers of people. Despite the great benefits of mass media to our world, we, teenagers, are facing an enormous number of negative effects of mass media in various ways. These issues include:

- An excessive number of advertisements trying to make us buy unnecessary products and junk food.
- Inaccurate and unhealthy information concerning sexuality, health (diet and drug), celebrities, etc.
- Displays of violence, sex, etc. as 'appropriate' images for teenagers
- Enforcement of unhealthy or inappropriate stereotypes, values, etc. portrayed in the mass media: manipulative information and images
- Excessive access to the mass media

To deal with these problems properly, it is important to

- Limit your access to the mass media
- Learn to avoid negative influences and inaccurate information
- Be able to evaluate the information objectively
- Establish a stable sense of self and identity

Interesting facts:

- There are 1,626,333,488 internet users in the world.
- 2 billion Google searches are made each day.
- 55% of iPhones are owned by those under 35.
- 45% of relationships are ended through txt.
- 3 billion minutes are spent on facebook each day.
- 1 in 11 minutes are spent on social sites.
- 18 million users update their facebook page a day.
- A child is exposed to about 40,000 ads a year.

Multicultural Populations

What does it mean to be an Australian? How would you answer this question? Are the Aboriginal people the only Australians, or only the British descendants? What about all the immigrants from all over the world? The answer to these questions is: Not one of them, but all of them are Australians!

The Blacktown girls gave us all a better understanding of what it is to be an Australian. Australia is one of the world's multicultural countries, where 22 million people from diverse cultural backgrounds live together. There are so many different cultures in this country and it is almost impossible to claim ‘this is the Australian culture’.

What if there was only one culture in this country? How boring would it be! Australia is a country of cultural diversity where we have an access to all sorts of cultures in the world. We can enjoy this diversity and also benefit from it in many ways.
Careers are changing in many ways as globalisation causes the worldwide movements of people, products, currencies and Information. In the current world, there are innumerable careers available for people from any part of the world. There are a number of international companies that provide us with career opportunities to work overseas. In fact, more than 800,000 Australians work overseas. In their presentation, MFHS students presented a case study regarding entertainment industry careers, as an example of worldwide occupation. They provided examples of four successful Australian actors who became world-famous. We learnt how several types of career have spread their stages to the global society.

The Role of Education in the Global Society

As the world continues to change dramatically with globalisation, education has to adapt to the changes accordingly. Shown below is the role of education in the global society in the following six different areas.

- The quality of individuals required in the global society
  An effective global citizen has to have:
  - Communication skills
  - Language skills: English, Spanish, French and Chinese
  - Worldwide experience & knowledge (experience of home stay, studying abroad, world history, political & religious understandings, etc.)
  - A stable sense of identity

- Role of home stay & studying abroad as education
  Home stay and studying abroad enable a person to have:
  - The qualities of an effective global citizen as listed above

- Cultural interaction
  An effective global citizen has:
  - An accurate and objective knowledge of other cultures and his/her own culture
  - A firm sense of identity and of self
  These characteristics of an effective global citizen will be valued and helpful in any cultural interactions.

- Education and mass media
  The mass media in our education assist us in learning more efficiently and having access in a broader range of information sources
  Education has to improve a number of problems concerning the mass media such as:
  - Cyber bullying
  - Lack of media literacy

- Acceptable manners in a global society
  As global citizens, we have to:
  - Acknowledge that there is no universal manner
  - Know that some attitudes and behaviours can cause misunderstandings and conflicts in other cultures.
  - Appreciate differences.

- Voluntary contribution to a global society
  As global citizens, we must:
  - Identify global issues
  - Work voluntarily to help solve a lot of the issues facing the world.
Family

The presentation focused on these three elements of family in the global society: intercultural marriage, changes of women’s role in society and the increasing number of students who choose to study abroad. Intercultural marriage has both advantages and disadvantages. The advantages include: children raised in a multicultural environment and becoming multilingual. The disadvantages include: confusion as to which nationality the child belongs to; the issues raised when parents divorce and each goes back to his/her original country. Due to the changes of women’s role in society, there are the tendencies of late marriage and a decline in birth-rates. Despite the laws to enforce the equal treatment for both men and women in the workplace, there is discrimination against women, for instance, less career opportunities, less income and a lower status in the workforce. With globalisation, an increasing number of students choose to study abroad. Studying abroad encourages students to become mentally mature; to gain beneficial cultural experiences; and to acquire the quality of effective global citizens. In the discussion, we talked about how intercultural marriage affects family and children, and how the absence of a mother in a family affects children. We came to the agreement that a positive family environment is an important foundation for an individual's life.
We all must acknowledge that all the participants in the URA Forum were tremendously lucky and fortunate to be given such a beneficial opportunity and experience to learn so much about the world, other people and ourselves. Not everyone at our age can have this great experience. However, it might take a little while for the participants to become aware of the many benefits of this event.

Overall, the URA Forum provided us with a great learning experience and an opportunity to share our own knowledge and understanding with other teenagers. In our everyday lives, we are not exposed to diverse ideas, perceptions and people from as many cultural backgrounds as we were in the forum. I suppose that we all realised how only sixty or so students have different opinions and attitudes towards particular issues, and that is attributed to the diversity of human beings in terms of cultures, beliefs and ways to approach the world. Most importantly, this diversity is the very arena in which we all will live and work in the near future. Unfortunately, in reality, the number of worldwide issues, like we discussed in the forum, are countless and still rapidly multiplying. The forum was one of the opportunities for us, the future leaders of the world, to face the problems seriously and to share our own knowledge and insight in order to work out possible solutions to those problems.

Assuming that the Australian students sometimes found the forum challenging in some respects, for the ICET students, the forum was a great challenge in many ways.

The URA Forum had been organised by all the ICET students, and all the phases of this huge process had required so much effort, dedication and sacrifice of our own time. It all began from nothing. To create something from nothing is much harder than you could possibly think. We brainstormed and had many discussions, time and again, until we came up with the main theme of this forum and the discussion topics. We planned everything important very thoroughly, two months prior to the forum, and every Tuesday after school, we had a committee meeting, which sometimes took hours. Despite our shyness, Hikaru and I made announcements a few times in the Thursday year meetings to encourage the year 11 students to participate in the forum. We often stayed at school until 9pm, desperately trying to complete the work which we should have done weeks ago.

It was the second time I participated in the URA Forum and last year I had been a committee member too. Though intending to learn from my own mistakes that I had made last year, the preparation process of the ICET Yr.11 presentation was disastrous. I was the leader of my presentation group, but I must admit that it was an uneasy job for me. The URA Forum, being one of the very few opportunities for ICET students to take a leadership role in a foreign country, helped me so much in identifying the weaknesses in my leadership. Because of my poor leadership and inefficiency of all the preparation, the whole process was delayed and our presentation was not even finished when we presented it on the 29th of June.

According to some ICET students, the URA Forum is the hardest and the most stressful event in the ICET program because everything has to be done in English in this forum. It is an excellent opportunity for us to use and improve our English, but we tend to wish we could elude this kind of valuable but challenging learning experience, probably because we are simply not confident enough to accept and confront the challenge. Making a presentation in a foreign language in front of native speakers and having to discuss complex topics in a foreign language with them is extremely hard and nerve-wrecking as you might be able to imagine.

Studying abroad involves a series of challenges but we cannot choose to avoid them. Having conquered this one enormous challenge, more than the other participants of the forum, we, the ICET students, in particular, have benefited from this fantastic event, whether we realise it or not.

Editor’s Note: Komei Henmi (ICET/Davidson Yr.11)
Feedback from the Participants

The URA forum was a great experience for me. It was a great opportunity to discuss interesting topics, share our own ideas and present our topic in front of the other students. It made me feel more confident to talk in front of people. Our presentation was very hard to complete, but we tried so hard. I think we made a great presentation. I also think this URA forum was better than last year, because I could share many ideas with other students and I could understand many more things. I had a good time with the other students.

(Saki Okazaki/ICET Yr.11 Vice President)

I have learnt so many things, such as the different perspectives and/or opinions of different people through the forum, as well as being given the opportunity to think about my identity as a Japanese citizen. I especially felt like I was Japanese when I got to speak to the members in our discussion group about our laws, and even people's behaviours based on our culture and customs.

This forum has made me think that Australia and Japan are very different and we all should be proud of our backgrounds, and be able to understand, respect, and accept each other. I hope that everyone in the world, in particular, our generation will know this one day and the world will be more peaceful and comfortable for us to live in the future.

(Yuki Takao/ICET Yr.12 Liaison Officer)

This was my second time at the URA Forum. It was a fantastic day where I was able to work with students so different from myself. It gave me the opportunity to share my experiences and learn from those of others. The presentations from each school were well done and informative. The day was very enjoyable and I would love to be included again next time.

(Rachel Ferrett/Blacktown Girls High School Yr. 11)

I thought that the URA Forum was an excellent experience for me. It was great to meet people that have been part of the student exchange program and to see how good their English had become. The topics discussed were very interesting and it was interesting that the other students' perspectives were quite similar to ours.

(Naillah Rahmatullah/Blacktown Girls High School Yr. 9)

The excursion was a great opportunity to discuss the problems surrounding globalisation, and the benefits. It was good to interact and meet with the other schools and find out interesting things about each school. It was also good to see the Japanese exchange students. Each presentation was well rehearsed and contained good information and helped with the discussion. I thoroughly enjoyed the day, and would go back there next year as well.

(Jessica Small/Model Farms High School Yr.11)

The URA Forum was so exciting and such a good opportunity to discuss current and interesting topics with other people. Putting us on tables with other people was cool, hearing their views, but maybe even a mixer / ice breaker game at the start would be good. It was so encouraging to see the Japanese ICET students do a presentation. I would recommend the URA Forum to my friends. HOORAY!

(Veneta Bailey/Model Farms High School Yr.11)

I had never experienced an event like the URA forum before, even in Japan, so today's discussions were very difficult because we had to discuss in English. I wasn't able to speak what I thought and I also couldn't think of any good ideas to share at all. I just listened to the discussions, but the last discussion was about our topic, so I was able to express my opinions. I realised that I need to study English more and that I don't have enough thinking skills. I think our presentation succeeded. It was very hard to prepare for the forum, but we were able to do that because everyone helped each other.

(Moeka Endo/ICET Yr.10)

I took part in the URA forum. It was a good opportunity for me, but I couldn't express my opinions. My discussion members were very kind, so I was able to say just at least ‘yes’ or ‘no’. I had a really good time and good experience. I have to study more.

(Mayu Takiguchi/ICET Yr.10)

Today's URA forum was very exciting for me. We could discuss and share our ideas with students from Blacktown Girls High School and Model Farms High School. We could understand each other through the presentations and discussions. I thought ICET year 11 and 12 students were great because their English was good and clear, and they were able to discuss with Australian students. I couldn't do that like them. So, I have to work harder for the forum next year.

(Taiki Nakaya/ICET Yr.10)

Today I took part in the URA forum. We had been preparing for it for a long time and it had been very hard but I had a good time in the forum. My presentation was about family in globalisation. It was difficult because I had never thought about the topic before. I felt nervous to present in front of the audience, but it was a good opportunity for me. If there is another opportunity like the forum, I would like to participate in it.

(Mako Yamada/ICET Yr.10)

The URA forum was very nice and successful. We researched and practised very hard for this forum. I assisted in translating Japanese sources into English and making a script of the presentation. A lot of words were unfamiliar and difficult to translate, so it took a long time. When we finished making presentation, we felt very tired. If we had not helped each other, it would not have been a success. I think our presentation gave everyone a lot of important information and also we learnt a lot from the other presentations. Understanding their presentations was difficult for me because of the English, but I tried to join the discussion. I didn't understand everything but I thought I could express my opinions. When I expressed my opinions to my discussion group, they agreed with my opinions, so now I have confidence to express my opinions in English. It was a very nice opportunity to learn about some problems regarding globalisation. I was glad to attend the URA forum. I want to have another event like this forum.

(Hiromasa Ishimoto/ICET Yr.10 Leader)

I am glad that the URA forum went pretty well because we had been preparing for it for a while. I enjoyed the forum as we had a lot of laughs and nice conversations. Each of the presentations was interesting as each group made a different style of presentation. During the break time, I enjoyed talking with the students from other schools. I had a really nice day.

(Hikaru Kawall/ICET Yr.11)