# JOURNAL OF THE AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND STUDENT SERVICES ASSOCIATION

*Number 38      October 2011*

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# EDITORIAL

Within this edition of JANZSSA are thought-provoking articles on issues as diverse as social media, meditation and factors affecting student completion of research higher degrees, to name but a few. Interest in student mental health continues to be represented as well, with the publication of a set of guidelines for tertiary education institutions to facilitate improved educational outcomes in students with a mental illness. These guidelines, by Reavley, Ross, Jorm, and Killackey, are certain to arouse debate, and JANZSSA invites comment, as explained in the Editors' comments at the start of the article.

Within these pages readers will also find a 'sneak preview' of the upcoming ANZSSA Bi-ennial Conference, to be held in December in Sydney, with the publication of articles that foreshadow the pre-conference workshops. Three articles are reprinted with permission from the e-journal, *The Journal of Technology in Student Affairs* published by StudentAffairs.com.

It is unusual for JANZSSA to publish reprints of articles. A decision was taken to seek permission for this as a way of highlighting the theme of the pre-conference workshop being offered on 'social media and student support' and to draw JANZSSA readers' attention to international networking and student services around the globe via the above-named e-journal in which they were originally published. Rhonda Leece while not offering the pre-conference workshop on social media and student support was invited to write a review of three articles on social media included in this JANZSSA issue. Her review is also included in this invited section of this issue.

As in the April edition, this edition of JANZSSA also contains papers on examples of good practice within the Student Services sector. We hope that this will continue to be a regular section of JANZSSA and invite practitioners to continue to submit practice papers.

We hope you will enjoy the articles within this edition of JANZSSA, and we warmly invite all readers to attend the 2011 ANZSSA Bi-ennial Conference in Sydney, 4-7 December. More details can be found on the Conference Web Site at:

http://www.epicconferences.com.au/anzssa2011/program.htm

**Cathy Stone**

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# "Getting to the End":
# Psychological Factors Influencing
# Research Higher Degree Completion

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## Abstract

*There is increasing interest concerning progress and completion rates of postgraduate research students. This paper examines factors relating to completion and non-completion identified in Australian and international research, and takes a critical stance towards hidden or simplistic assumptions in research and policy. A review of psychological dimensions of the RHD is provided, and argument is made for recognising the complexity of factors associated with RHD non-completion and delayed completion. Accordingly, a multimodal approach and range of responses to the issue is endorsed. Finally, a research framework for investigating interventions addressing psychological factors influencing completion is proposed.*

*"After 6 years I still can't finish my PhD. I worked very well for the first 3 years and was writing up when I had to stop for nearly a year (I had cancer but it is all clear now). After getting back to writing early last year I wrote more than 80 percent of it in 6 months and my supervisor and I both thought I would be finished by November or December at the latest. I am dismayed that it is now 8 months later and I have yet to finish. Help!*

- *Submitted by a student to the University of Melbourne's "Ask Counselling" website.*

## Introduction

Interest in the issue of research higher degree (RHD) completion has gathered considerable momentum in higher education circles over the last few decades. Attrition rates, and time to completion, of PhD candidates have internationally become a concern of governments, universities, postgraduate student associations, and the candidates themselves (Bourke, Holbrook, Lovat & Farley, 2004). In Australia, these issues have in recent times been the subject of focused Government policy initiatives; policymakers have an immediate interest in reducing the economic costs of RHD attrition (Rapaport, 1998).

A concentrated body of research has investigated these topics. In some international studies, drop out from certain doctoral programs has been estimated as high as 50% (Johnson, Green & Kleuver, 2000). It has been argued that such a rate is financially and professionally untenable. "Failure at this point is expensive and painful for the student, discouraging for the faculty involved, and injurious to the institution's reputation," (Green, 1997, p. 57). In contrast, RHD completions provide a measurable outcome that rewards the investment of time, resources and commitment by the student, the supervising staff, and the University as a whole.

This paper examines the issues of RHD non-completion and delay. It focuses on the PhD, but includes reference to research on other doctoral or masters level research dissertations. It begins by examining factors relating to completion and non-completion identified in local and international research. It then takes a critical stance towards hidden or simplistic assumptions in research and policy on these areas of increasing interest. A review of psychological dimensions of the RHD experience is then presented, with particular focus made on the nature and effects of procrastination, which is conceived of as having cognitive and affective components that constitute it as being beyond a matter of study skills. The paper concludes with suggestions for actions, and proposes a research framework for investigation of focused interventions to address RHD completion.

### Factors Associated with Completion, Non-Completion, and Delay

Whilst there has been considerable research on factors contributing to student retention in higher education (for example McInnis & James, 2004; Marks, 2007; Yorke, 2000) measures of retention have not always included full course or degree completion. Fewer studies have specifically addressed RHD students. Fewer still have actually analysed the effectiveness of responses aimed at increasing RHD completion or improving their timely completion.

There are two issues under examination here, in the context of the PhD:

- Candidate attrition during candidature, resulting in non-completion of the degree.
- A longer than normal period of candidature, even though the extended candidature results in successful completion of the degree.

Whilst distinct, these are related, and are closely linked in the literature.

Studies which have examined these issues have investigated a wide range of potential factors thought to contribute to non-completion or delayed completion, or in turn to be factors associated with successful completion. The methodology has often been in the form of post hoc surveys of those enrolled in RHD programs.

Boroda (2007) has paid close attention to how departmental and program characteristics influence completion, and Ober (2005) covered an extensive literature on describing individual student variables that lead to completion. In a wide scale research review, Latona and Browne (2001) summarised the following as factors associated with improved completion rates:

- Disciplinary differences: there were better completion rates for RHD students studying within science based disciplines than in the social sciences, arts and humanities. The most successful PhD students were young, male, and in a science field, who undertook structured research, often as part of a team. In contrast, students who dropped out were more likely to be enrolled in disciplines with traditionally higher expectations of autonomy of individual researchers.
- Student admission and enrolment characteristics: entry qualifications made a difference. Whilst overseas studies also suggest that students working full time on their degree fare better, Australian evidence was that part time students complete in an equivalent timeframe when adjusted for actual time enrolled.
- Quality of supervision: critical issues here include timely feedback from the supervisor, meeting regularly, explicit protocols of supervision, the quality of the relationship between student and supervisor, having a sense of belonging in an academic setting, and keeping the same topic and supervisor.
- Student characteristics: completers had reduced tendencies to procrastination and perfectionist behaviours.

These authors concluded that "these factors could be used to identify students at risk and develop interventions focused on dissertation completion," (p.6).

In the USA, the Council of Graduate Schools (2009) reported on 1406 surveys returned by those who completed a doctoral program between May 2006 and August 2008. Of these, 80% indicated that financial support was a main factor in their ability to complete their doctoral program; 65% reported that mentoring/advising was key; and 57% said that family (non-financial) support was also important.

In a survey of 1797 candidates, Bourke et al. (2004) found that 51% of 698 who were able to be enrolled for four consecutive years completed, and after six years 71% had completed. The median elapsed time was 4.4 years. They found the following factors influenced completion rates and time:

- Discipline area, with again arts/humanities completion rates being less than for sciences.
- Within an institution, and notwithstanding discipline, different departmental arrangements were important, with student departure linked to lack of integration in the intellectual and social community, and issues in the organisational culture of the school.
- Quality of relationship with a principal supervisor.

Consistent with the above examples, three broad categories have been identified (McCormack, 2005) with improved completion rates and time of completion:

- Institutional and environment factors (discipline differences, sense of belonging, and clear guidelines for candidates).
- Supervision arrangements (frequency, relationships, and uninterrupted arrangements).

- Student characteristics (entry skills and qualifications, demographics – gender, age, holding a scholarship or other form of financial support – and psychological factors).

From this sort of summary framework, guidelines have been developed to assist institutions in addressing RHD attrition. For example, the Council of Graduate Schools (2008) have produced laundry lists of "promising practices" for reducing RHD attrition, including in areas of student selection and admission, mentoring and advising, financial support, program environment, research experience, and administrative processes and procedures.

However there has been little research that has investigated the effects of such practices on completion rates and timeliness. Nonetheless, the issue of RHD supervision has come into special focus in policy terms. For Colebatch (2002), Governments have been seduced into the idea that while there may be a number of factors contributing to RHD attrition, a major cause is poor supervision and support on the part of the universities. Indeed this has become a hot topic in institutional reviews, with the assertion made that the single most important factor in student decisions to continue or withdraw is the relationship with a supervisor (Lovitts & Nelson, 2000). "Success in achieving a PhD depends upon a close and effective working relationship with one's advisor and mentor," (Council of Graduate Schools, 2008). Again however, little actual evidence has been adduced to support such contentions.

### An Example of Local Initiatives

A recent edition of the University of Melbourne's PhD Handbook (University of Melbourne, 2009) provides an example of the importance now given to the issue of RHD completion. It states:

> *"In many countries, universities have recognised that progress and completion rates of their research students are less than desirable and that the issues need to be addressed in the interests of the institutions, their academic staff and the research students themselves. A similar pattern is evident in Australian universities, and research conducted by the Centre for the Study of Higher Education has shown that the University of Melbourne is no exception. This research has demonstrated on the one hand that many of the factors affecting lengthy completions and attrition from higher degrees are beyond the institution's control. On the other hand, problems have been identified that the institution can clearly address."*

The PhD Handbook goes onto to enumerate the following problems which may impede progress of research students:

- lack of understanding by the student of what is expected in a research degree and from the supervisor;

- inappropriate choice of a research topic;

- inappropriate matching of supervisor and the student's research project;

- insufficient contact with, and feedback from, the supervisor, particularly in the critical early stages of the project;

- absence of clear guidelines within departments regarding access to research facilities and authorship of publications;

- a sense of intellectual and social isolation from the academic life of the department;

- differential treatment of men and women research students within the department.

In addition, a recent internal discussion paper (Slocombe & O'Brien, 2009) has addressed the topic from the perspective of the development of "student at risk" management strategies for the RHD cohort. These authors note that this cohort is diverse, often with significant external responsibilities. Further, enrolments are scattered across the year, there is generally no means to assess progress reliably over a period, and progress can be fickle due to the nature of research. They provide a comprehensive list of factors that place an RHD student at risk, broken down into salient time periods: from enrolment to confirmation, and confirmation to completion. Examples of their recommendations include:

- Mandating pre selection interviews.

- Requiring all RHD students to attend an orientation.

- Ensuring all RHD students have two supervisors.

- Introducing formal systems where regular milestones must be endorsed and documented.
- Aspiring as much as possible to continuous supervision without extended breaks.
- Introducing a process of second year confirmation (and its part time equivalent).

Whilst these vary in the degree to which they are achievable and realistic, they do provoke institutional thought and reflection.

### Policy Confusion and Conceptual Complexity

But things are not as clear as they may seem. Despite all this activity, and the proliferation of advice, recommendations, guidelines, and "promising practices". there has been controversy and mixed results in the literature about actual attrition rates internationally. There has also been wide variation in completion rates reported between institutions and, as noted, across disciplines. Most importantly, there is little consensus about factors associated with non-completion or delayed completion.

Stock, Finnegan and Siegfied (2009) sought to identify factors associated with PhD program completion, and measured a wide variety of variables covering program characteristics, demographic student characteristics, and financial aid factors. The results did not provide much illumination. In fact these authors concluded that "It appears that many considerations unique to individual students and faculty that we cannot measure – such as ambition, motivation, persistence, organizational skills, the creativity of students, and interest in students' success as well as mentoring – matter more than the myriad characteristics we were able to measure," (p. 629).

Further, some attrition should be considered inevitable, and therefore is not necessarily undesirable (Rapaport, 1998). Some candidates leave to accept lucrative work opportunities, or to pursue a degree in another field, and lead productive lives elsewhere. McInnis, Hartley, Polesel & Teese (2000) have also argued that non-completion is not necessarily negative. Further they suggest that students' relationships to structures of education and work are "increasingly diverse, changeable and non-linear," (p.7) so that "Identifying single factors influencing withdrawal is risky since the research consistently demonstrates that it is rarely the case that any one factor is the cause for a given student deciding to leave," (p.1).

Similarly, Wright and Cochrane (2000) identified the difficulties of isolating single variables as reasons for poor completion rates. They stressed the interconnectedness of personal and structural considerations when viewing the problems experienced by research students. The qualities of the student, personal and individual issues other than study matters, difficulties with research, and supervision all can interconnect and contribute to such problems, with successful completion also often the product of a grouping of several qualities or characteristics.

In a forthright exposition, Colebatch (2002) outlines the paucity of evidence for simplistic accounts of RHD completion or non-completion. He cites examples where those taking longer to complete attributed the extra time more to the impact of personal commitments than anything else. Supporting the inevitability of some level of attrition and delayed completion, he presented cases where numerous candidates had been enrolled part time at some point, or suspended their studies for a period, but the average adjusted length of enrolment taking all this into account was around the standard time period. For Colebatch, "What is missing… is the students themselves… They are adults with volition and intelligence; and they make their own choices…Whether students continue with their PhD, and also the rate at which they progress, is a reflection of their own situation and orientation," (2002, p.31).

An investigation by McCormack (2005) has proposed that "the focus on broad categories of factors has tended to obscure the complex interplay of the constellation of factors that comprise a category and the meaning these factors have for individual students in their lives," (p.234). McCormack argues that today's performance driven model of higher degree research has constructed student withdrawal, non-completion or slow completion as failure, and a problem with economic and professional consequences for an institution. "The failure is often attributed to the student and internalized by the student as failure,' (p.234). But in the McCormack (2005) study, PhD students who had dropped out or delayed completion were able to "re-story" non-completion and slow completion as a positive beginning rather than a negative ending. Whilst non completers did indeed have isolation, lack of support, poor supervision, and personal and professional crises, nevertheless each negotiated contingencies, contradictions, and turning points, and found something positive in the result so had not experienced it as a failure at all. The author

explained this outcome on the basis that these students had been doing a lot of "identity work" during the course of the candidature, constructing and reconstructing a sense of self as they experienced the highs and lows of the postgraduate journey.

In short, research students take their time, or discontinue their enrolments, for all sorts of reasons, many of which have little to do with the quality of the university experience. The fact that PhD students get promoted, have babies, become consultants, or go overseas, and that they suspend or discontinue their enrolment to allow them to do this, does not mean that they, or a university, have failed. Notwithstanding this however, universities do retain a responsibility to create environments conducive to success and able to accommodate individual circumstances to a reasonable extent.

### Psychological Factors in Higher Degree Research

It is not uncommon for many broad analyses of factors contributing to RHD completion or non-completion to make reference to, but not elaborate on, relevant psychological factors. For example, Latona & Browne (2001) note that "Psychological factors are to some extent outside the control of the institution, but supervisors may be able to move students through to completion if they can identify personality traits such as a tendency to procrastination," (p.7).

In an elaborate reflection, Wright and Cochrane (2000) ponder reasons behind differences in discipline completion rates: "In some fields of study in the arts… study can be perceived as being considerably more subjective and requiring exposure to judgment of elements of the student's internal world, such as their values and belief system and even ability to demonstrate and convey emotion. Such as element of personal risk and investment perhaps makes the work more intrinsically challenging to an individual's psychological equilibrium, thus bestowing the potential to affect their ability to function effectively. This may make such study more difficult for individuals who have negotiated few developmental stages in life and who may therefore tend to be less psychologically robust. Support at times of particular challenge may be helpful to such students and it might therefore be advantageous in terms of successful submission for institutions to take account of psychological processes attached to different types and levels of study in training of supervisors and in support service provision," (p.193).

Numerous writers have examined the emotional dimensions of graduate research. Vilkinas (2005) conducted in-depth interviews with those who had completed doctoral studies and found that building a support system is a key survival strategy. Other literature has underscored the emotional challenges of the RHD undertaking – especially frustrations, doubts and anxiety – and noted that courage, resilience and passion are vital for successful completion (University of Melbourne Counselling Service, 2008). It is self-evident that RHD students may experience issues that are common to all – grief stemming from bereavement or loss, relationship issues with families or partners, and the myriad of challenges that affect people in general as they move through life.

However there are special elements of the RHD experience that can trigger, or exacerbate, a range of psychological or emotional problems. Repak (20005) has described the difficult impact of factors such as lack of time, financial pressure, lack of faculty contact, excessive workload, lack of balance, and sense of incapacity to shape the local academic environment. These nevertheless coincide with motivations to pursue ideas for their own sake, and wanting to influence others or "make a difference". Writing a thesis is, simply, an isolating, time consuming process. It is not uncommon to feel it is an insurmountable task that will never be completed (Kuther, 1999).

The independence encouraged of the research process can also be a two edged sword. Self-reliance, otherwise so valuable and necessary, may undermine some students because it makes it hard for them to seek support, or to show vulnerability. This can lead to withdrawal and isolation, and result in a skewed sense of perspective. "Students appear to accept, and indeed pride themselves on being able to cope with, the exigencies of life," (Clegg, Bradley & Smith, p112). As Repak (2005) argues, "Even if support were available, most probably would not accept it. An overwhelming majority of graduate students surveyed (86%) said their primary source of strength during times of need or crisis was their inner self. As self-reliant individuals, they feel they must face their external environment and any accompanying sense of hopelessness and helplessness or feelings of isolation and frustration alone. The internal qualities which keep them pushing, pursuing, seeking, and reaching out of their realm of skill and familiarity, also make them hesitant to seek external help."

In a major research review, Green (1997) posed directly the question of the role that psychosocial factors should play in our thinking about helping students through their doctoral programs, noting that there has been little systematic research with personality variables to explain failure or lack of progress in thesis completion. Examining relevant research, she reported that the following variables predicted failure to complete, or delayed completion of, a thesis: history of separation or loss in childhood, high dependency needs, inability to plan ahead, rebellion, perfectionism, and procrastination. Of these, procrastination is the topic that has attracted the most research attention. Accordingly, it is to a review of the literature on academic procrastination than I now turn.

### Procrastination

Procrastination is defined in multiple ways in the higher education literature. Yaakub (2000) defines it as letting low priority tasks get in the way of high priority ones, with a procrastinator being someone who knows what they want to do, is equipped to perform the task, is trying and planning to perform the task, but does not complete the task, or excessively delays performing the task. Johnson et al. (2000) described procrastination as the tendency to put off doing something until a future date, and suggest that one fourth of all college students experience some degree of problem arising from procrastination with direct negative academic consequences. They identified correlations between procrastination and irrational cognitions, low self-esteem, depression, anxiety and lack of organisation. Ahern & Manathunga (2004) have also suggested that procrastination is often associated with problematic anxiety.

In a major review study, Green (1997) summarised studies of procrastinators in academic contexts and reported that research has found them to be more test-anxious, depressed, pessimistic and perfectionistic, as well as having less self-efficacy, less frustration tolerance, and lower self-esteem. However she found low correlations in research between procrastination and impulsiveness, locus of control, and achievement motivation.

These results suggest procrastination includes affective (emotional) and cognitive components, rather than simply representing a deficit in study skills. Procrastination can also become a strategy to maintain self-worth – by reducing effort, procrastinators can attribute failure to lack of trying rather than incompetence. According to Green, the effects of procrastination are more marked in tasks perceived as being more competitive, ability focused, and difficult (which seems to describe accurately a doctoral dissertation). Recommendations arising from this review included group sessions for those who delay, on the basis of early identification: "If students who are likely to procrastinate could be identified early in their doctoral studies, they could be directed to such a program at the outset of their academic career or could at least be advised of the potential problems facing someone with their profile," (Green, 1997, p.63). This is a notion echoed by Yaakub (2000).

Muszynski & Akamatsu (1991) investigated factors leading clinical psychology students to delay completion of their doctoral dissertation. They found that cognitive and affective factors related to procrastination were predictive of delays in completion. In addition, demographic and situational factors were also predictive of delay, including having a supportive advisor, finding a topic of interest, and living close to a university. They also argued for identifying those "at risk" for delays, and that the Procrastination Inventory (developed for their study) appeared to have some utility in predicting delay. They concluded that "Group sessions using cognitive restructuring, stress management, or supportive techniques may be useful in ameliorating cognitive and affective factors that cause procrastination behaviour," (p.122).

In addition, Steel (2007) has offered a repertoire of potential interventions to overcome procrastination in four separated areas: degrees of expectancy, value attached to delayed activities, levels of sensitivity-to-delay, and delay management. The Johnson et al. (2000) study also examined the psychometric properties of the (revised) Procrastination Inventory in use with doctoral education students, and found that procrastination was negatively related to emotional but not financial support. Thus emotional support in the form of encouragement may be more effective than other incentives for the minimization of procrastination and thesis delay. They again argued for the use of the inventory in admissions and student monitoring because it has been shown to predict dissertation completion.

In one of the few studies that directly assess the impact of interventions with research students, Franek (1982) found that subjects attending four group sessions (involving psychoeducational information and

discussion of time management, negative emotions, motivational strategies, the supervisor-student relationship, and writer's block) made significantly more progress on their thesis over the eight week period of the study as compared with control. Group support was rated by participants as the most helpful component of the treatment program. Again this emphasises that delay cannot be attributed to a single trait variable; rather, students reach impasses which require individual solutions derived from a broad range of considerations, thus necessitating multimodal intervention strategies.

**Suggested Ways Forward**

From this broad survey of literature on RHD non-completion and delay, it is concluded that this is a complex area and individual outcomes are the result of an interplay of many and varied issues, including institutional and environmental factors, the nature of supervision, and matters related to student characteristics including the nature of individual support systems and tendencies towards procrastination. Accordingly, the following conclusions are offered:

*Multifocal Approach*

A range of strategies are required to address non-completion and delayed completion. The "issues" of delay and non-completion of RHD study are not amenable to simple or single solutions, and there is no consensus on what those would be anyway.

*Institutional and Supervisory Arrangements*

It would seem that there are structural, and supervisory initiatives that are both sensible and achievable, and which if implemented are likely to have a positive impact on the experience of RHD students (although they cannot be guaranteed to eliminate non-completion and delay, given the complexity and exigency of people's lives). The sort of actions proposed by Slocombe and O'Brien (2009) make for useful adoption or adaption according to local circumstances.

*Psychologically Oriented Interventions*

Procrastination and associated traits such as perfectionism are commonly associated with academic endeavour in general, and more commonly with non- completion. There is a case, as part of a range of responses, for providing screening and broad interventions to address procrastination in those individuals for whom this is likely to emerge as an issue and result in delay in completion, or non-completion.

**A Research Avenue**

A sketch of a proposal to undertake research to investigate the effectiveness of actions in relation to psychological factors and procrastination in particular is now provided. Interventions would include:

- Use of a screening tool such as the Procrastination Inventory as a means to allow individuals to identify their needs for assistance, in the first six months of candidature.

- Providing a series of group based workshops covering topics such time management, managing negative emotions, motivational strategies, nurturing the supervisor-student relationship, maintaining momentum, and writer's block. These would aim to create an ongoing group cohort experience, and be spaced over time to incorporate a supportive and facilitative function.

It is noted that there are complexities in research design that would need to be considered here. As noted, much of the existing research on completion, non-completion and delay has involved retrospective surveying techniques. To properly evaluate the proposed interventions, it would be desirable to establish some form of control group, but this is not easy in this domain (it would, for example, have to include procrastinators with comparable disciplinary and demographic profiles who do not receive interventions). Most particularly, the actual time needed to complete PhDs, especially for part time students, is inimical to timely reporting of results of interventions.

These factors would need to be carefully thought through, and it is beyond the scope of this paper to describe solutions to these complexities in detail. However it is envisaged that such research could focus on a relatively small cohort of subjects from up to two broad discipline fields. Indicators of effectiveness would include a variety of qualitative and quantitative measures available through interviewing, survey and self report. In order for timely results, progress would be tracked over its first eighteen months of

candidature. If found to be successful, the program of interventions could be expanded, and longitudinal research conducted to track PhD candidates through to completion over a period of years.

## Conclusion

This paper argues for a recognition of the complexity of factors associated with RHD non-completion and delayed completion. Accordingly, it endorses thinking in terms of a multimodal approach and a range of responses, but also building an actual evidence base on the topic. The effectiveness of actual, focused interventions in the area of RHD completion is little researched, and it is timely for an examination of such interventions. A beginning point would include investigation of a set of interventions linked to broad psychological factors such as procrastination which have been identified in literature as relevant. The findings of such research can then inform what supports may be put in place for students' unique situations.

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# Engaging Students through Social Media

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*This article was first published in the DE Quarterly Spring 2011.*

## Abstract

*The ways in which support staffs, engage with students in Higher Education continues to be a robust topic of discussion and the evolution of social media now contributes a new element to this discussion. Much of the current debate about the use of social media in higher education is redundant. The question of 'should we use social media' is irrelevant, given the vast number of individuals who are currently utilizing all manner of media. The real question is how do we continue to capitalize on the advantages delivered by social media? Distributed learners do not have a geographic neighbourhood of peers, but through the use of social media, support staff in higher education can satisfy this expectation of students. Tinto (2006) suggested that we... we already have sufficient research on student success. What is missing ... is the ability to transform the knowledge that we have into practical knowledge. Using this as a recommendation, this article describes the practice of deploying social media to engage and support students at the University of New England.*

> *With all due respect ... one might argue that we already have sufficient research on student success. What is missing ... is the ability to transform the knowledge that we have into practical knowledge (Tinto, 2006).*

The discourse around 'student engagement' in higher education significantly relates to the characteristics or practices that contribute to student success. The term engagement is frequently used without necessarily defining the concept, except for the context in which it is used. There is general agreement (Coates, 2010; Kuh, 2003; Webber, 2004; Bryson, Hardy & Hand, 2009; Tinto, 2006), that the characteristics of engagement are multifaceted and that engagement in higher education is a valuable contributor to student retention. The terms 'engagement' and 'retention' are often used in tandem to illustrate the perceived interdependence of these two concepts.

General definitions of 'engagement' include aspects of:

> ***Commitment*** *– as in engaged to be married or engaged in the process of education.*
>
> ***Action*** *– as in an active or operational state or an act or condition of being activated or becoming operational.*
>
> ***Connectedness*** *– A mechanical definition of engagement, for example, may include the action of parts when they connect, or the action of parts of a machine when they connect with each other.*
>
> ***Personal*** *– 'Engagement' (like beauty) is in the eye of the beholder.*
>
> ***Interaction*** *– In an interpersonal sense, engagement is described as the feeling of being involved in an activity or activities.*
>
> *"Engagement has been described as a dynamic and constantly reconstructed relationship" (Bryson, 2009, p.2.).* ***Engagement is a dynamic state*** *that is influenced by interaction or lack thereof.*

Social media are considered to be singular or collective mediums that facilitate and maintain dynamic and interactive dialogue. Like engagement, the term social media is generally defined, based on the context in which it is used. Also, like the term engagement, social media and social networking deliver action, connectedness to a community of peers, personal relevance and interaction which, when combined, links the user to others involved in similar activities or who have similar interests.

At UNE, social media tools are deployed as an integral and dynamic component of the Early Alert engagement and retention program. Facebook and Twitter are used to encourage peer-to-peer networking and to disseminate information and engage with the student population. Engagement is enhanced through the use of these tools, and can be measured by student feedback. As one student commented:

*The lack of being informed is a problem for externals – so using technologies such as FB & twitter to find out really useful things is invaluable. Being informed of 'informal' things is enjoyable as it is being part of the UNE community and increases my feelings of being connected. (External Student, June 2011).*

Another commented:

*When I first started my course through UNE I felt disconnected from everything. External students do not get the same university experience that on campus students get. Having … the support team on facebook has restored that connection. I can read posts from other students on your wall and get the latest information on IT outages and the like. It's like having a friend on campus all the time :-) I now get to feel a little of what University is like and appreciate it more than you or the student support team could imagine. It is a very invaluable resource for all external students. (External Student, June 2011).*

Flickr is used as a gallery through which students share their study experiences. A recent competition titled 'Where I Study', for example, delivered an exhibition of photographs provided by students of their own study spaces. Early Alert uses these tools to expand the peer network and to counteract the feeling of isolation often experienced by distributed learners. The mix of media and the engaging approach elicits strong support from students.

In 2008, a set of emoticons were created as a way for students to self report their satisfaction with their study experience. Emoticons have long been used in on-line environments and have become predominant in social networking sites as a method of communicating feelings. The emoticon system was embedded within the online UNE student portal. This provided an opportunity for students to directly report an emotional reaction associated with an individual unit or their overall experience of study. The take-up rate by students was considerable (approximately 17% of the student population) with over 3,000 e-Motions being logged in the first seven days of the soft launch. This demonstrated strongly that students are willing to communicate their self-assessed levels of happiness to the University, and this tool has fulfilled its potential to capture a wealth of student reported data.
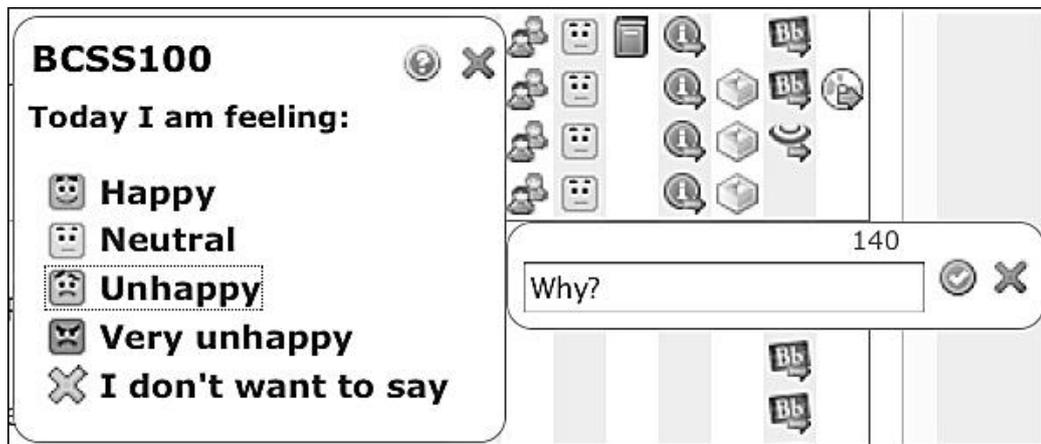


Figure 1: Emoticons

The data from this system is reported to staff via daily automated reports and provides the opportunity for direct intervention with students. Every student who reports an 'unhappy' or 'very unhappy' experience is contacted personally within 24 hours. Feedback from students has been overwhelmingly positive and is reflected in comments, such as: "Thank you for your concern and feedback. I now understand that if I am struggling that there will be someone looking out for me during the coming semesters" (External Student, 2009).

Figure 2: The Vibe

Distributed education involves around half of the students in Australasian higher education, yet many institutional practices do not reflect the characteristics or needs of contemporary learners. Without understanding the needs of distributed learners, it is difficult to design effective support programs to facilitate their success (ACER, 2008). Early Alert is based on the fundamental premise that the voice of the student is critical to understanding their characteristics and needs. Listening to the voice of the student is amplified by the development of the Vibe, a word-cloud positioned in the Student Portal (asking students what they are thinking about). The Vibe provides space for 140 text characters and students use this to express their feelings. This tool closes the feedback loop by allowing students to see what other students are feeling and allowing the Early Alert Team to respond appropriately where issues are identified.

One student commented:

> *I love watching the vibe on myUNE (the little ball of words). ... The biggest word today is 'finished' the second biggest are exam, essay, tired, behind, stresses ... seems I'm not the only one swept up in catching up with all the forgotten assignments. (Student, 2010)*

The technological aspects of Computer Mediated Communication allows the team to enhance the messages they construct, and to better manage impressions and positive relationships with students (Walther, 2007), thereby creating a positive learning neighbourhood. Communication is two-way (through the use of blogs, Twitter and FaceBook) and automated in many elements (therefore less time intensive). The language used is purposefully engaging whilst accurate and informative. Social media allows large numbers of students to be individually and collectively supported through the use of a suite of online tools that provide targeted information to complement the traditional communications from the institution to student. The information is designed to both inform and engage UNE's predominately off-campus student cohort. The philosophy is to take the program into the student spaces and to create the support network within the students' own neighbourhood. To do this, the program utilises a blog (The Insider's Guide), YouTube, FaceBook, Twitter and Flickr.

As demonstrated below, feedback confirms that this approach resonates with students.

> *I have been meaning to let you know how effective I think [Early Alert] is being at UNE at the moment. [Facebook] is excellent and the updates (especially with regards to IT) and the information that is been provided is great! I really think students (especially externals) are benefiting from the team's dedication and willingness to answer questions after hours and generally just be accessible. It is very refreshing to see...*

> *I have especially noticed during residential schools that students seems to be interacting more with each other during lunch breaks (in the Central Courtyard and near DeliMarche) and I think this can be directly*

*attributed to the discussion generated on Facebook which is creating a community for external students, which as we know is so important. Anyway just wanted to pass on my congratulations to the team and let them know that their effort is valued! (Student, 2011)*

The Insiders' Guide blog is designed to provide a timely and credible launch point for students to access information they need to know at key points of their academic calendar and to act as a navigation aid for students who often feel lost in UNE's 50,000+ page website (une.edu.au). Students value this form of interaction. As one commented:

*I'm usually on here [Facebook] and the Insider's Guide several times a day. It's wonderful to feel connected to what's going on at UNE and to have someone pointing out useful information just when it's needed.*

Another demonstrated the value of building informational capital through the use of social media:

*Just wanted to drop by and say thanks for the blog! It's an absolute lifesaver. I was feeling very overwhelmed until I read through the page yesterday, and clicked on a few of the links. Now I am super confident and wonder what I was worried about in the first place. I especially liked your video of the different people at UNE, giving first timers advice. (New External Student 2011)*

Visitor statistics are used to ensure information release is timely and appropriate and to drive feedback to the wider university on issues related to the student learning experience. YouTube delivers short sharp guerrilla-style videos and tutorials featuring key UNE support providers, and these are designed to both inform as well as to personalise the online learning experience:

*I have really appreciated the support that you offer through your emails and also keeping the blog updated. Following your last email I went and had a read through the postings and found a lot of information there that was really helpful. It is pretty daunting starting this level of study at my age – the technology alone takes some keeping up with – so the support that you offer is fantastic. Keep up the great work. I really enjoyed the few videos I watched – very entertaining as well as being informative. (Student 2010)*

Much of the current debate about the use of social media in higher education is redundant. The question of 'should we use social media' is irrelevant, given the vast number of individuals who are currently utilizing all manner of media. The real question is how do we continue to capitalise on the advantages delivered by social media? Distributed learners do not have a geographic neighbourhood of peers but, through the use of social media, support staff in higher education can satisfy this expectation of students. Using Tinto's (2006) recommendation, we can transform our knowledge of social media into a practical knowledge of the student experience.

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# Teaching Meditation 3:
# Loving-kindness

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'May I be filled with loving-kindness
May I be well
May I be peaceful
May I be happy' [1]

## Abstract

*The Buddhist meditations on loving-kindness have been adapted for use in a secular context. How to teach and do loving-kindness meditations are described. Loving-kindness is used as both a type of meditation and a valuable quality that is cultivated; it can be an antidote to negative thoughts, and a foundation for a kinder relationship to yourself and others.*

*Five meditations are described: (1) concentration on loving-kindness, (2) a visualisation filling the self and space with loving-kindness, (3) directed it to a part of the body, (4) directing loving-kindness to other people, (5) directing loving-kindness equally to all categories of people, and (6) a modern version of one of the original meditations on loving-kindness.*

## Introduction

We are too harsh on ourselves when it would be more useful to be kind. We can become kinder by meditating on loving-kindness. Kindness can become a foundation for our thoughts, emotions, and actions. It can be used as an antidote to negative thinking, anger, and frustration. We can replace unhealthy thoughts and feelings with kind thoughts and feelings. Loving-kindness can be directed towards ourselves and others and even the entire world and all who live in it. It can also be used as the focus for concentration meditations.

Many of our attitudes and beliefs discourage loving-kindness. For example: "no pain no gain"; pushing when pausing would be more wise, fighting when peace would be more wise, opposition when cooperation would be more wise. When people's lives go wrong they tend to respond by harshly criticising themselves, then not only are their lives going wrong they are being harshly criticised — creating a double burden for themselves. Of course, we do this with good intensions not realising that too much criticism can paralyse. Also, people can believe they do not deserve to feel okay until their lives are okay and yet, often the reverse is true; people need to feel okay for their lives to work properly. Loving-kindness is a useful way to do this.

## Loving-kindness 1: Concentration

Loving-kindness can be cultivated in many ways. It can be cultivated by using a poem: "May I be filled with loving-kindness / May I be well / May I be peaceful / May I be happy". The image of a parent caring for their child can be used. The poem can be blended with the image of the sun radiating the reddish glow the sun gets when it is setting on a hot summers day, as an image for loving- kindness. Some people just use the first line of the loving-kindness poem; some people change the words to suit them. The word loving-kindness then becomes the meditation object it becomes a Meditation Word. The main thing is to contact loving-kindness in whatever way you are able, then cultivate it and us it. I first teach the poem then the other methods.

We can use the loving-kindness poem as the meditation object in the Four Stage Meditation Cycle (O'Donoghue, 2009) so that: Stage One is *focusing* attention on the loving-kindness poem; Stage Two is *wandering* attention away from the poem; Stage Three is *realising* that attention has wandered; Stage Four is *returning* attention to the loving-kindness poem.

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[1] *Adapted from Kornfied, 1994, p.20.*

For some people the poem works better as a meditation object than the breath because the poems wordy nature gives their mind more to hold onto making it easier to concentrate on and to block out discursive thoughts. For them, it is easier to replace the chattering mind with the poem rather than replacing it with the breath. For other people loving-kindness works better because they are more attracted to loving-kindness than the breath, therefore it is easier for them to concentrate on loving-kindness. It is best to use a meditation object that is easier to stick to.

The more you practice the better you get; the more you practice loving-kindness the easier it is to contact that quality and the deeper you sink into it. This occurs over time, even a lifetime. Just repeating the poem changes you. It is a psychological process where any resistance to kindness comes up and is slowly dissolved. When doing this meditation I can feel tensions in my body, which I believe, are a subtle resistance to the poem's intent and as I keep repeating the poem those tensions slowly dissolve as I open up to loving-kindness.

When teaching this meditation I say a phrase aloud, and ask people to repeat it in their thoughts. If I see that anyone is struggling or upset I say "If you are feeling uncomfortable just open your eyes and quietly move your body around and that will bring you out of the meditation." If this has the desired effect I keep on with the meditation if not I stop the meditation.

### The Language of Loving-kindness

Loving-kindness is a translation for the Pali word *metta*; Pali is the language that the talks of the Buddha were recorded in. Other translations are: kindness, friendliness, and good will. Loving-kindness was useful for myself but when I started to teach it I was not sure how people would react to meditating on loving-kindness. A few people have reacted negatively to loving-kindness. Resistance to kindness can arise because kindness contradicts some people's beliefs about how best to motivate themselves, for example, by pushing, working hard, or "pulling up your socks". When people believe these are the best responses to difficulties, then loving-kindness may be seen as promoting self-indulgence, laziness, or giving up. However, I believe that kindness is often a more effective and supportive foundation for change.

Some people do not like the word "love" in loving-kindness. Many depictions of "love" in romance novels and movies have cheapened the word. Other people are simply uncomfortable with love. I think it is more important to reclaim the legitimate use of the word love and I believe love is something we should all become comfortable with. Thus I continue to teach loving-kindness.

If you have done affirmations, or some forms of goal setting, then, you might object to the use of the word "may" that prefaces each of the four phrases in the loving-kindness poem. There are times, when as a therapist, I encourage definiteness of purpose. "I *will* try to go to bed on time so that I can get up on time" is a bit weak for a student who habitually stays up late, sleeps in, does not attend lectures, and is failing. I might encourage such a student to "go to bed on time and get up no matter what" and to think, "I *will* go to bed on time". But in other psychological contexts, for example, "I will be happy" can bring a person into conflict with their experience. If they are unhappy a more gentle "may I be happy" is more likely to lead them one step at a time to more happiness rather than the strongly intended "I *will* be happy". The attempt to overpower emotions is not always helpful or productive. Definiteness of purpose has its places but is not necessarily useful in the cultivation of kindness as it contrasts too greatly with the nature of kindness. On the other hand if you still prefer the definite "will" as in "I will be filled with loving kindness" then do so.

Another objection is that it sounds "too religious" as if we are asking God to fill us with loving-kindness, but this is not what is meant. I believe that psychologically to wish for kindness brings about a useful change in attitude and intention. When a person shifts from " I am useless" to "may I be filled with loving-kindness" that is a useful change.

I decided that loving-kindness was a good thing and that I am going to unashamedly talk about it and teach it. It is the lack of kindness in people's lives and our culture that are the source of some of these negative reactions, so in spite of those reactions I will continue to promote loving-kindness.

### Loving-kindness 2: Visualisation

This meditation combines the poem, a visualisation, and the feeling generated by the poem and visualisation. The poem can be accompanied by a visualisation. In our minds we see images, talk to ourselves, and feel things, however, we are usually better at one of these than the other. We should emphasise the aspect of this meditation that is natural to us: the image, the words, or the feeling and allow the other aspects to operate in the background. The meditation is on the CD, Meditation Works (O'Donoghue, 2008)

> *Imagine before you a sun, it is not hot it is pleasantly warm, it has the soft reddish glow the sun gets when it is setting on a summer evening. This is the light of loving-kindness. Imagine the sun shining on you so your whole body is covered with loving-kindness. It is not too hot but pleasantly warm. The sun then shrinks to the size of a tennis ball and rests in your heart. Loving-kindness then fills your whole body.*

> *As it fills your body whatever you experience can begin to dissolve into loving-kindness. You do not have to make this happen it will happen naturally of its own accord. Any thoughts, images, memories, tensions, or sensations - let them slowly dissolve into loving-kindness. Loving-kindness fills your chest, shoulder blades, shoulders, down the arms to the hands - the whole arms. Loving-kindness radiates up the neck, fills the head, soaks into the eyes, jaw sockets, tongue, face - whole head. Move back to the heart. Loving-kindness dissolving any tension in the stomach muscles, the whole pelvic region, buttocks, lower back, middle back, upper back, the spinal column - whole back. Loving-kindness now fills the whole torso. Loving-kindness fills the thighs, knees, lower legs, ankles, feet - whole legs. Your whole body from the top of the head to the soles of the feet is now filled with loving kind-ness. Allow loving-kindness to fill all the organs of the body. Soak your bones and joints with loving-kindness.*

> *Allow loving-kindness to pass thought the skin, so that, you are resting in a sphere of loving-kindness. Your body is filled with loving-kindness, and it is surrounded with loving-kindness.*

The loving-kindness poem can be interspersed within this visualisation wherever it seems appropriate. The meditation does not need to be done in the exact order I use; it can be done in whatever way feels natural.

### Loving–kindness Filling Space

In this meditation we take loving-kindness out from ourselves one step at a time to fill the world. The meditation goes through these stages: self, room, city, state, country, earth. As a preliminary to this meditation it is helps to generate loving-kindness, this can be done with the poem, or the previous visualisation.

> *May I be filled with loving-kindness. May I be...*

> *May this room ...; May this city ...; May this state ...; May this country... May the earth ...;*

If you wish then you can reverse the order or leave it at that point.

This meditation can be extended out to include the solar system, universe, and infinity. I do not do this in a class because if a person has a very vivid imagination it can be disturbing to imagine these domains, therefore, I tell people about this possibility and encourage them to experiment with it themselves if they wish.

### Loving-kindness 3: for a Part of the Body

We can use loving-kindness for tension, pain, injuries, or when we are ill. We start by directing loving-kindness to one part of the body. To lay a foundation for this meditation it is helpful to first generate loving-kindness, which can be done by using any of the earlier meditations. The instructions for this meditation are:

> *We are going to direct loving-kindness to a part of the body. Could you select one part? It could be a part that is tense, or is painful, or where you have an injury, or a part of the body you do not feel good about and it would be better if you felt good about it.*

> *Select a part.*

> *Now have a sense that loving-kindness is being directed more intensely to that part. "May that part be filled with loving-kindness, may it be...". (Do this at least three times in a class but in private it can be done many times.)*

*If you get tense, upset, or frustrated while doing this meditation then shift to doing loving-kindness for yourself until you feel okay.*

*Now to finish we spread loving-kindness more evenly throughout the body and do loving-kindness for ourselves again. This diffuses any tension that may have been caused by directing loving-kindness to one part of the body only. "May I be filled with loving-kindness, may I be …".*

When we are ill or injured and we have to live with discomfort or pain we tend to be frustrated and impatient with ourselves, or the parts of our bodies that are injured. Frustration and impatience are subtle forms of aggression and aggravate sickness and injuries. This aggression is a part of unhealthy attitudes towards being ill. You may have been told to "soldier on", that is, ignore it, don't give in to it, do not care for yourself, act as if you are in a war zone and will be killed if you stop fighting. While these may be useful reactions if you are in a war zone, they are not useful when you are not in a war zone. Loving-kindness provides a healthy antidote to these habitual and damaging responses.

When I feel unwell I want to ignore it. I want it to not happen! I want to do the things I had planned to do based on good health. However, eventually I start to do loving-kindness for myself. Then, I start to be a little more careful of myself and to care for myself. Out of kindness for myself I might have a hot bath, eat some healthy food, do quiet things, cancel previous plans, go to bed early, not go to work if I am still sick in the morning, or visit a Medical Practitioner. I take kindness as an antidote.

We do not like being injured. We do not like the discomfort or pain and we dislike not being able to do what we could do before the injury. We get frustrated and angry. Which only adds to the burden of the injury. It can even cause us to aggravate the injury slowing the recovery, or even re-injure ourselves by not taking proper care.

I have a knee injury from running and I use loving-kindness to manage it. The injury was not bad enough to need surgery but I need to manage it by keeping the muscles strong, the tendons flexible, and not doing things that will injure my knees in other words treating them with care.

Sometimes my knees are painful. Initially I do not pay much attention to the pain. There might be a low level of irritation with my knees or the pain in them. This level of irritation takes the form of ignoring the pain. This ignoring can grow into a frustration with having to be bothered by my knees yet again — a wish that I did not have to spend time and effort looking after my knees.

At some point, if the pain does not go away, I realise that I need to do something about my knees. This is often before I can imagine doing something or before I can bring myself to do what needs to be done, I do loving kindness for my knees: May my knees be filled with loving-kindness / May … I just keep saying the poem. I do not try to change my behaviour. I just give kindness to my knees. I then start to notice that my stepping is a bit hard — the frustration is taking the form of striking the ground more firmly than I need to. After generating kindness I will be a bit gentler in how I contact the ground with the heel of my feet. I walk with a bit more care and gentleness. I might even walk slower.

When I get home I will treat my knees with more care. I might gently rub them, rather than rubbing them with annoyance. Then I might do the exercises that strengthen my knees. Although the proper physical care is important I believe this is more likely to follow when the proper psychological attitude of kindness is initially generated and then sustained.

People with work injuries do not like being injured and wish to return to work as soon as possible. They want to do what they could before the injury. Sometimes they dislike being injured so much that they ignore their injury and unintentionally re-injure themselves. What they need is kindness and I talk about having a kind attitude towards their injury, encouraging acceptance that their body cannot do what it could do before they were injured. I explain why their impatience can lead to a slower recovery and how kindness can help in the recovery they seek. Where appropriate I teach the loving-kindness meditation.

Illness, injury, tension, and pain all feel unpleasant. Our habitual reaction is to pull away from unpleasant feelings. This reaction causes a secondary tension. Then, not only is there the primary pain, our reaction of dislike becomes a secondary pain. This sometimes takes the form of tightening around the primary injury. Loving-kindness can reduce this secondary pain.

Pain can be valuable, for example in giving us the message "I do not want to injure myself again so I will be more careful". Ignoring this message can be a dangerous reaction to pain. If in fact you do need to go

to a medical doctor, then just doing loving-kindness is not enough when going to the doctor will be the kind thing to do. We should all face illness, injury, tension, and pain with kindness.

### Loving-kindness 4: I, We, You, and All

We have learnt to do loving-kindness for ourselves, the whole world, to direct it towards a part of our bodies, and now we will learn to do loving-kindness for other people. We can direct loving-kindness to a specific person by naming then, imagining them, or while they are present. We do this by directing the loving-kindness poem, visualisation, or feeling to other people: *May you be filled with loving-kindness …or May [a person's name] be filled with loving-kindness...* This can be used to mend relationships, for people we are concerned about, to overcome our dislike or anger for a person. I have done loving-kindness for audiences before giving a talk, for clients, for colleagues I have had conflict with, a partner I was arguing with, and while sitting with a sick person in hospital. I do not believe this magically or mysteriously changes anything but it can change our attitude to others and that can change how we relate to them. We can also direct it to categories of people such as 'you', 'all beings', or people who are in a physical location.

I teach people how to generate loving-kindness for four categories of people: (1) yourself, (2) another person, (3) both yourself and another, and (4) all beings; then reverse the order (5) both yourself and another, (6) another person, and (7) yourself. The first time I teach this I get people to say each phrase three times. The words I use are: *(1) May I be filled with loving-kindness; May I be well; May I be peaceful; May I be happy. / (2) May you … / (3) May we … / (4) May all beings … // (5) May we … / (6) May you … / (7) May I …*

There are dangers in using loving-kindness towards other people. If kindness to others is not balanced by kindness to ourselves then our ability to be kind cannot be sustained. A person who is all giving might become so exhausted that they struggle to cope and are no longer able to give. Some people realise they cannot go on like this so they decide they must be "selfish", hardening themselves against their natural tendency to be giving because they can no longer sustain it. They have swung from the extreme of being all giving to the other extreme of no giving — "selfish". It is hard to keep being selfish, particularly if you are a caring person. At some point these people weaken and revert to being all giving, until that is again no longer sustainable.

When this happens I like to have a conversation about how neither is sustainable. I explain how it is good to be caring but that many caring people have a lesson to learn about how to be caring without being destroyed. I point out that they need to include themselves in the caring and how caring for themselves helps them to keep caring for others. It can assist if people do not think of self-care as a selfish act but as a strategy to enable them to go on being kind and helpful. I like to use the example of a tomato plant. Is it selfish because it needs water and nutrition for it to produce fruit? Or is this the kind of caring needed to produce fruit. Kindness is so valuable that we should not allow others to abuse it. For a more detailed discussion about swinging between unsustainable extremes and using a middle way to escape this, see O'Donoghue (2002).

Just as we can give too much, too much can be taken from us. When being used, abused, or bullied it is important to be careful how you use loving-kindness. In an abusive relationship someone can manipulate our natural tendency to be helpful in a way that is damaging to us.

If you are in an abusive relationship using loving-kindness for the abusing person can reinforce an unhealthy dynamic of giving while the other person takes. When this is happening I warn against using loving-kindness for the other person, instead, I suggest using loving-kindness for yourself. As you become kinder to yourself you are more likely to look for ways to escape an abusive relationship.

### Loving-kindness 5: Equally for All

Another version of this meditation teaches us to generate loving-kindness for four classes of people: oneself, a friend, a neutral person, and an enemy or person you dislike (Buddhaghosa, 1975). Once you have done it for each of these classes of people, you generate loving-kindness equally for all four classes of people. I do not teach this in my secular meditation classes. When I first did loving-kindness for someone I disliked it seemed so "against the grain" that I felt exhausted and had to stop and lay down on my bed to recover. However, once this reaction eventually stopped it became a useful meditation. To

generate loving-kindness for someone you do not like is so counter intuitive for many people that even the idea is disturbing. I do not believe it is useful to disturb people with this. I explain this meditation very lightly, even with a joke, by saying that I have used it while watching television for politicians who I "hate". By presenting it this way people become aware of this use of loving-kindness and are free to use it if they want.

I have also found it helpful to do loving-kindness for activities I find difficult:

*may the dishes be filled with loving-kindness;*

*may cleaning be filled with loving-kindness;*

*may writing be filled with loving-kindness;*

*may sleep be filled with loving-kindness ...;*

*may exercise be filled with loving-kindness ...;*

*may work (case notes) be filled with loving-kindness ....*

### Loving-kindness 6: The Buddha's Words on Loving-Kindness

I like to introduce some of, the Buddha's original words on loving-kindness so that people know where this tradition of loving-kindness came from. I read this discourse aloud asking people to place themselves in a mild meditative state while listening to the words. Rather than think about the precise meaning of the words I suggest that people just let them pass through, while they get a general feel for the words, and to get the precise meaning later when they can read the discourse.

*May I be skilled in goodness / And know the path of peace. /May I be able and upright / Straightforward and easy in speech / Gentle and not proud / Contented and easily satisfied / Having few duties and living simply / Peaceful and calm and wise and skilful / Not proud or demanding. / May I not do the slightest thing / That the wise might fault./*

*Wishing: in gladness and in safety / May all beings be at ease. / Whatever living beings there may be — / Whether they are weak or strong, omitting none, / The long or large, medium, short or small, / The seen and the unseen, / Those living near and far away, / Those born and to-be-born — / May all beings be at ease. /*

*May I not deceive another / May I not despise beings in any state. / May I not through anger or ill-will / Wish harm upon another. /*

*Just as a parent protects with their life / Their child, their only child / So with a boundless heart / May I cherish all living beings / Radiating loving-kindness over the entire world / Spreading upwards to the skies / And downwards to the depths / Outwards and unbounded / Freed from hatred and ill-will. /*

*Whether standing or moving, seated or lying down / Free from drowsiness / May I sustain loving-kindness. /*

*This is the sublime abiding. / By not holding to wrong views / The pure-hearted one, having clarity of vision / Being freed from greed / Is awakened[2].*

In one course a participant preferred reading this discourse to all other meditations taught. For them the more wordy nature of the discourse was more engaging than other forms of meditation.

I made a recording of the discourse and put it on my MP3 player. For one month just listening to that was my main meditation practice. I would listen to it on my way to work, at lunchtime, on my way home, and at night if I could not sleep or if I woke up.

I became calmer, found it much easier to "let things go", my relationship with people became gentler, I was happier, and more content. This occurred from just listening to this discourse when I had spare time.

### Loving-kindness: a Realistic Approach

When people start to use loving-kindness as an antidote to negative thinking they can get trapped into feeling they are getting nowhere if they cannot fully replace the negative thinking with kind thinking. They hope to fully remove negative thinking and anything less feels like they have failed their thinking about this has polarised (O'Donoghue, 2002). When this happens we need to provide some ways to step

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[2] *This version of the loving-kindness discourse has been made by comparing a number of translations, by making it consistent with contemporary language, and making it an aspiration rather than a description.*

out of this polarity so that even small improvements are seen as improvements. I often talk about one step at a time. Is it contributing? Is it heading in the right direction? Every minute of loving-kindness is one less minute of negativity; every minute of gentleness is one less minute of harshness.

For example, Jill had an injury that caused physical pain. She found meditation useful and enjoyed it. One week she came to the class and said meditation was not working, that she was still in pain and it would not go away. She sounded disappointed and discouraged. The way she spoke implied that she was giving up on meditation because it was not working. I talked to her about polarised thinking and being trapped into thinking that either it fully works or it is not working at all. I explained that meditation can contribute to managing and reducing pain; that small relief from pain is better than no relief from pain; that contributions are useful; that we can be trapped into believing that meditation is a waste of time if it does not fully remove the problem rather than seeing a reduction as a useful contribution. Jill continued to meditate with a more realistic expectation of its usefulness and contribution to her pain management.

## Conclusion

We can meditate on loving-kindness, we can drip-feed it into our lives, and we can help others to do the same. If our thoughts, feelings, and actions are filled with kindness then we will be better people, have better relationships, and the world will be a better place — it will be kinder. To privilege kindness in this way is an ethical decision — it is to value kindness as a primary quality.

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**Statement from the Editors**

*Those ANZSSA members who attended the National Summit on the Mental health of Tertiary Students (4-5 August, 2011) in Melbourne will be aware of the "Guidelines for Tertiary Education Institutions to facilitate improved educational outcomes for students with a mental illness".*

*Few if any ANZSSA members or professionals employed within the post-secondary sector would have any argument about the intent of improving educational outcomes for students with mental illness. However these guidelines have already generated some debate about the appropriateness of the guidance and application to the post-secondary sector.*

*On the following pages you will find an article by Reavley, Ross, Jorm, and Killackey, describing briefly the Delphi Method used to generate the guidelines. The guidelines themselves are also reproduced with permission from the authors.*

*JANZSSA readers are advised that the publication within JANZSSA of these guidelines does not imply ANZSSA endorsement.*

*In the interest of healthy and constructive discussion ANZSSA members are invited to submit their review, comments and/or constructive critique of the guidelines and/or outline their own institutions response to these guidelines to the ANZSSA President (JElliott@curtin.edu.au) by the end of November 2011. Submissions received will be used to inform the ANZSSA Executive should it consider a formal endorsement of the guidelines at an executive meeting after April in 2012. Such contributions received from ANZSSA members, with the submitter's permission, may be considered for publication in the JANZSSA April issue 2012. However NO response will be published without the submitter's consent.*

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# Introduction to Guidelines for Tertiary Education Institutions to Assist Them in Supporting Students with Mental Health Problems

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## Introduction

Evidence suggests that the prevalence of mental illness in higher education students has increased in recent years, placing pressure on institutions to adequately respond to the needs of their students (Roberts et al. 1999; Kadison 2004). While Australian tertiary education institutions typically offer a number of services to support students with a mental illness, including counselling services and disability liaison units, most young people with mental disorders either do not seek or delay seeking professional help and they may also be reluctant to access formal disability support services in tertiary education institutions (Salzer et al. 2008; Slade et al. 2009).

While depression, anxiety and related disorders are among the leading causes of disability worldwide, the term 'disability' is typically seen as relating to physical problems, with the links between mental disorders and disability often poorly understood (World Health Organisation 2008). Tertiary institution disability services have traditionally been focused on physical disabilities and it is only relatively recently that the need to support students with mental illness-related disabilities has been highlighted. The scientific evidence for how best to do this is relatively limited and there is a need to develop and evaluate policies and practices in the area (Salzer, Wick et al. 2008). This is particularly true in the Australian context, as the majority of research has been carried out in Europe and the US, which have somewhat different education systems.

In the context of the limited evidence base, assessing expert consensus offers a way of bringing together available research evidence and best practice in order to enable recommendations and decisions to be made. Such methods have been widely applied in the development of clinical practice guidelines. The most commonly used consensus method is the Delphi process, which has been used to develop mental health first aid guidelines using the expertise of professionals, consumers and carers (Jorm et al. 2008; Kelly et al. 2008; Langlands et al. 2008). These guidelines have been used to revise the content of a Mental Health First Aid training program (Kitchener and Jorm 2008).

## Development of the Guidelines

A systematic review of the scientific and lay literature was conducted to develop a 172 item survey containing strategies that institutions might use to support students with a mental illness. Two panels of experts (74 professionals and 35 consumers) were recruited and independently rated the items over three rounds, with strategies reaching consensus on importance written into the guidelines. Professionals were largely recruited through ANZSSA and consumers through *beyondblue*'s consumer forum BlueVoices.

## Results

The overall response rate across three rounds was 83% (80% consumers, 85% professionals). 155 strategies were endorsed as essential or important by 80% of panel members. The endorsed strategies provided information on:

- policy
- measures to promote support services
- service provision
- accessibility of support services
- relationships between services
- other types of support

- issues associated with reasonable adjustments

- the procedures the institutions should have for making staff aware of issues associated with mental illness

- mental illness training

- support for staff

- communicating with a student with a mental illness

- student rights and responsibilities

- the procedures the institutions should have for making students aware of issues associated with mental illness

- dealing with mental health crises

- funding

- research and evaluation

## Conclusions

The guidelines (see attached document) provide guidance for tertiary institutions to assist them in supporting students with a mental illness. It is hoped that they may be used to inform policy and practice in tertiary institutions.

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# Guidelines for Tertiary Education Institutions
# to Facilitate Improved Educational Outcomes
# in Students with a Mental Illness

*These guidelines consist of actions tertiary education institutions can take to facilitate improved educational outcomes for students with mental health problems. They were produced using the Delphi method, which is a systematic way of assessing the consensus of a panel of experts. The actions have been rated as important or essential by expert panels of tertiary education mental health professionals and student consumers. The guidelines will be used to improve the advice to tertiary institutions as they support students with mental disorders.*

## Policy

### Policy content

- The institution should have a mental health policy covering mental health promotion, mental illness prevention and services for students with a mental illness.

- Disability policies must address the needs of students with a mental illness as well those with physical disabilities.

- Strategic planning in relation to mental health should include objectives, performance indicators, accountabilities and timeframes, so that all involved are clear about what needs to be achieved, who is responsible for achieving it, and by what date.

- The institution should have a policy to ensure that alternative examination and assessment procedures and arrangements are applied consistently across the institution.

- Institution-wide policies and procedures should include confidentiality and disclosure that protect the privacy of an individual's with a mental illness..

- Mental health training should be provided to all members of the institution's community (students, staff, faculty) to increase awareness about, recognition of, and the impact of mental illness on study, work and life.

- Institutions should have a mental illness prevention and mental health promotion program.

- Senior staff should actively participate in and encourage other staff to do mental health training.

- Staff in student contact roles should be the highest priority for mental health training.

- A contact person should be identified who is available to talk to students who have returned to study after periods of mental illness, in order to discuss achievable standards and goals and arrange the necessary academic support.

- Comprehensive procedures involving security should exist for responding to students who are identified as being in a mental illness crisis to ensure the safety of the individual and of the campus community.

### Policy development and implementation

- The institution's mental health policies should be developed in consultation with outside agencies providing services to students with a mental illness.

- Staff with experience in the field of mental health should play a key role in developing the institution's mental health policy.

- The institution should develop a Disability Action Plan that covers mental illness.

- The mental health policy and its implementation should be driven by senior management in partnership with students with mental illnesses, staff from different areas of the institution, student associations and representatives of outside services.

- There should be a member of the institution's executive who is responsible for mental health policy and its implementation.

- The institution should regularly evaluate the impact of its mental health policy and revise the implementation when necessary.

- The institution's mental health policy should be updated in accordance with legislation, needs of staff, students and stakeholders.

### Communicating the policy

- The institution should have a strategy for communicating its mental health policy to staff and students.

- The institution should inform all students that the institution is committed to supporting students with a mental illness.

- Students with mental illnesses should participate in the development and review of relevant policies, procedures, services and facilities.

- Policies and procedures in relation to student complaints, appeals, harassment and disciplinary procedures should cover issues concerning a student's mental illness, and these should be accessible and communicated effectively to all students.

- Effective communication systems (with appropriate consideration for privacy) need to be in place to allow appropriate staff to receive information about the individual needs of students with a mental illness.

## Support services

### Awareness of support services

- Disability services should make all staff and students aware that they provide support to students with mental as well as physical disabilities.

- Counselling services should promote the availability of their support to all students for any difficulties they may be experiencing, including stress, anxiety, personal problems, depression, and performance anxiety.

- The disability office should make all staff aware of the range of services they provide to assist and educate staff supporting students with a mental illness.

### What support services should provide

- Support services should develop a mental health promotion strategy, which covers prevention, early identification, stigma reduction, availability and access to services.

- Support services should provide all staff and students with education on mental illness.

- Support services should coordinate with on-campus housing services to educate resident advisors on how to identify and deal with mental illnesses, and what to do in a mental health crisis.

- Support services should proactively promote and publicise information about mental health (including available services) making it widely available (e.g. in student diaries and handbooks, orientation sessions, brochures, global emails, posters around campus and on toilet doors, fact sheets, websites, educational campaigns such as seminars and lectures, at the beginning of lectures, university website, desktop of computers in lecture theatres and computer labs, TV monitors around campus, events in mental health week).

- The institution's support services need to have resources to allow students with urgent or severe problems to be quickly attended to (e.g. have some dedicated crisis appointments).

- The institution's support services need to have a way of prioritising appointments for students with more urgent and severe problems.

- Effective support services should exist for students with a mental illness who are studying through various off-campus enrolments.

- Students with a mental illness should be encouraged by the institution and support services staff to register with these services in order to receive support.

- Information held by support services should be coordinated so that students do not have to repeatedly verify their mental illness.

- Support services should be tailored to be culturally appropriate to different ethnic groups, including international and indigenous students.

- Universities should, as far as possible, ensure that existing services are responsive to the needs of students with a mental illness rather than create separate service streams specifically for mental illness.

- Support services should make students aware of the extent and limits of confidentiality of these services.

- If the student wishes, support services staff should provide the student with a mental illness with documentation outlining the impact of their mental illness on their study in order to facilitate discussions regarding reasonable adjustments.

*Accessibility of support services*

- Information about how to access mental health services through 'multiple' entry points, either on campus or in the community, should be highly visible (e.g. first level branch on the institution's website).

- Institution enrolment forms should offer students the opportunity to disclose mental or physical illnesses, while explaining to the student that this information will only be used to link them to suitable support services.

- On-campus support services should be easily accessible to all students wherever they are located geographically.

- The institution's support services should adopt an easy access and 'no wrong door' policy to entry for assessment and treatment of mental health problems.

- Support service offices should be easily identifiable.

*Relationships with other services*

- All staff members in the 'helping network' (including counsellors, disability officers, teaching staff) need to develop good professional relationships to help support the student.

- Where the institution's support services are aware that a student with a mental illness is receiving services from an external mental health agency, they should (with the student's permission) collaborate with that agency to support the student.

- Support services should facilitate communication and coordination with community service providers and be proactive in establishing links with these providers to create networks of support for students with a mental illness.

- If the support services within the institution are not sufficient or appropriate for a student with a mental illness, the institution's services should make arrangements for this student to receive appropriate help at an external service.

**Other types of support**

- A guide should be developed for students with a mental illness on how to get the most out of their studies and time at the institution.

- Student unions and associations should help to reduce the stigma associated with mental illness by being involved with mental health promotion campaigns.

- The institution should offer short courses for students on how to best manage their mental health while fulfilling the student role (i.e. positive coping skills, stress management, study skills).

- Staff involved with vocational and career planning should be trained to have expertise in the area of employment issues of people with mental illnesses.

- Institutions should provide a quiet space where students can go if they feel stressed.

**Reasonable adjustments**

- Staff should be provided with information about making reasonable adjustments for assessments.

- Staff should inform students at the beginning of the course about provisions available for reasonable adjustments.

- Staff should encourage students to approach them as soon as possible about any reasonable adjustments they may require.

- If staff give reasonable adjustments to a student, they should record any agreement with the student in writing.

- Staff should periodically review adjustments with the student to assess their effectiveness and make adaptations to changing needs.

- Wherever possible, course content and information should be made available via electronic sources to aid accessibility to students (i.e. audio and video recordings of lectures and tutorials).

- Rather than providing a guaranteed outcome of passing, adjustments and considerations should provide students with a mental illness with an equal opportunity to learn and to demonstrate their knowledge.

- Disability staff who determine reasonable adjustments should do so in collaboration with teaching staff in the relevant discipline.

- The process for getting reasonable adjustments should be as simple as possible and advice should be available to students if needed.

### Staff

#### *Mental illness awareness*

The institution should have procedures for making staff aware of the following:

1. What mental illness is.
2. How common mental illnesses are in Australian students.
3. The types of mental illness.
4. The warning signs and symptoms of mental illnesses.
5. The causes of mental illnesses.
6. The range of mental illness treatments and their effects
7. The importance of early identification and intervention for young people who may be developing a mental illness.
8. The things they may notice which might indicate that a student has a mental illness, such as effects on attendance, handing in assignments, displaying unusual behaviours.
9. The benefits for students of disclosing their mental illness to the institution (e.g. to allow access to support services).
10. The fears students may have about disclosing their mental illness (e.g. stigma from others and not wanting to identify as 'crazy').
11. The impact of the symptoms of mental illness on the skills necessary for work and study, such as problems with concentration, memory, decision making and motivation.
12. That the level of support needed by students with a mental illness will fluctuate, as the symptoms of most mental illnesses come and go over time.
13. Measures that can be taken to ensure optimum mental health and prevent mental illness (i.e. self help strategies, seeing a health professional).
14. How they can reduce stressors that increase students' risk of mental illness (e.g. at main assessment times).
15. How they can support their students with a mental illness in ways that promote recovery.
16. The mental health and disability support services available on-campus and in the community.
17. How to refer students who show signs of mental illness to on-campus counselling centres or other mental health resources.
18. That the negative attitudes of others can be a major problem for a student with a mental illness.

19. The myths surrounding mental illness which lead to stigma and limit the potential achievements of students affected by mental illness.
20. The relevant laws and institution policies that affect their interaction with students with a mental illness (e.g. Disability Discrimination Act 1992, Disability Standards for Education 2005).

### *Mental illness training*

- Support services staff should receive appropriate and ongoing professional development and training in relation to mental illnesses.
- Appropriately qualified experts should be involved in mental health training for staff.
- The institution should provide staff with training and information about the following:

    1. The use of non-judgemental listening skills when talking with students about their personal problems.

    2. How to respond when a student discloses a mental illness to them, including which things are supportive and which are unhelpful. (3 waiting on)

    3. Techniques for promoting motivation and self-esteem in students with mental illnesses.

    4. Curriculum design, development and delivery strategies that facilitate inclusive and effective learning for students with mental illnesses.

    5. Classroom, examination and assignment adjustments that can be made for a student with a mental illness.

- Staff should be encouraged to attend mental health training.
- Staff should make every effort to attend mental health training.
- Staff of student residences who have a pastoral care role should receive mental health training.
- All staff should receive the training necessary to enable them to meet the requirements of students with a mental illness.
- All staff should attend professional development training that continues to provide them with the knowledge and skills to work effectively with students with a mental illness.

### *Support for staff*

- Faculty coordinators and student support staff should encourage discussion among teaching staff about working effectively with students who have a mental illness.
- All staff should have access to an advisor with a higher level of mental health expertise who they can call upon for advice and support when dealing with students with a mental illness.

### *Communicating with a student with a mental illness*

- If a staff member is concerned that a student may have a mental illness, they should express their concern in private to the student, but should leave diagnoses and treatments to the expertise of mental health professionals.
- Staff should interact with students with a mental illness in a manner that maintains respect, dignity, confidentiality and equity.
- When a student discloses that they have personal issues such as a mental illness, confidentiality should be respected unless there is an immediate danger to the person or to others in withholding that information.
- Staff should only ask students with a mental illness for the information about their illness that is relevant to providing support.
- Staff should ask students what, if any, information would need to be shared with other members of staff, or with other students in the class about their mental illness.
- If the student has a mental illness, staff should not make assumptions, but rather ask the student what support, if any, they might need.

- Staff should help students with a mental illness by asking whether they want information about the supports available.

- Staff should explore any challenges or barriers to successful learning with students with a mental illness.

- Staff should always allow sufficient time for discussions with students with a mental illness.

- Staff should be aware of the risk of becoming over-involved with a student with a mental illness, or feeling that it is their responsibility to sort out all the problems.

### *Support from teaching staff*

- Teaching staff should let their students know that they can be approached if the students have any problems impacting on their study and that they will be supportive.

- If teaching staff are unsure of how to assist a student with a mental illness or whether the required supports are available, they should consult with the relevant support services staff.

- Teaching staff should not discuss their observations about students' potential mental illnesses in front of a lecture or tutorial group.

- Teaching staff should make the adjustments recommended by the support services for students with a mental illness.

- Teaching staff should encourage students in the helping professions and courses to increase awareness of mental illness and encourage the appropriate use of available mental health services (e.g. through setting appropriate class projects).

## Students

### *Student rights & responsibilities*

- The institution should make the students aware of their rights and responsibilities in relation to their mental illness and its effect on their studies.

- In relation to their mental illness, student's rights should include:

  1. Being in an institution that observes the principles of equal opportunity.

  2. Confidentiality of information about their mental illness, within the limits of safety.

  3. Reasonable access to support services.

  4. Being made aware of appropriate appeals procedures.

  5. Access to reasonable adjustments where necessary (e.g. extended time for exams).

- In relation to their mental illness, students' responsibilities should include:

  1. Letting needs be known to appropriate teaching and support services staff.

  2. Participating in discussions and cooperating in the process of determining special considerations.

  3. Fulfilling the academic requirements of the course.

  4. Completing appropriate administrative procedures.

### *Mental illness awareness*

- The institution should have procedures for making students aware of the following:

  1. What mental illness is.

  2. How common mental illnesses are in Australian students.

  3. The types of mental illnesses.

  4. The warning signs and symptoms of mental illnesses.

  5. The mental health and disability support services available on-campus and in the community.

6. The importance of early identification and intervention for young people who may be developing a mental illness.

7. Measures that can be taken to ensure optimum mental health and prevent mental illness (e.g. self help strategies, seeing a health professional).

8. How to help fellow students who show signs of mental illness to access support services or other mental health resources quickly.

9. How they can support fellow students with a mental illness in ways that promote recovery.

10. That the level of support needed by students with a mental illness will fluctuate, as the symptoms of most mental illnesses come and go over time.

11. The impact of the symptoms of mental illness on the skills necessary for work and study, such as problems with concentration, memory, decision making and motivation.

12. The pressures of student life and the stresses involved with study, including the amount of work expected, to allow them to make decisions about realistic study loads, particularly if they have a mental illness.

13. The things they may notice which might indicate that a student has a mental illness, such as effects on attendance, handing in assignments, displaying unusual behaviours.

14. The benefits of disclosing their mental illness to the institution (e.g. to allow access to support services).

15. The myths surrounding mental illness which lead to stigma and limit the potential achievements of students affected by mental illness.

16. That the negative attitudes of others can be a major problem for a student with a mental illness.

- The institution should have procedures for making students aware of the range of mental illness treatments and their effects.

**Dealing with mental health crises**

- Staff should be informed about how to handle mental health crisis situations (e.g. a suicidal person or someone out of contact with reality).

- Staff should be informed about the early signs that someone may be at risk of suicide and what to do if someone is showing these signs.

- Staff should be informed about how to deal with distressed students.

- Staff should be informed about how to deal with students' disruptive or aggressive behaviours.

- Students should be informed about how to handle mental health crisis situations (e.g. a suicidal person or someone out of contact with reality).

- Students should be informed about the early signs that someone may be at risk of suicide and what to do if someone is showing these signs.

- The institution's response to a mental health crisis should include mechanisms for supporting the campus community in the aftermath of suicide attempts or completions, or other traumatic events, within the limits of confidentiality.

**Funding**

- Adequate funds should be allocated to provide support services to students with a mental illness.

- Institutions should seek funding opportunities that can be used to help develop and enhance support services for students with a mental illness.

- Institutions should consider ways in which they can reduce the financial burden on students, including students with a mental illness, through targeted additional financial support (i.e.

scholarships, hardship funds, subsidised accommodation or other support) and by providing assistance to access financial aid or contingency funds.

**Research and evaluation**

- The institution should conduct research into the experiences and support needs of students, including those with mental illnesses.

- The institution should conduct research into the barriers to accessing services faced by students with a mental illness.

- The institution's mental health services should be subject to ongoing research and evaluation of their service provision.

- Mental health promotion and training activities carried out within the institution should be formally evaluated.

- The demand for support by students with a mental illness from on-campus services should be monitored regularly in order to ensure that sufficient support services are available.

- Support services should be regularly assessed through a peer-review system to ensure they are of high quality.

- Institutions should cooperate to support and conduct research on student mental illness.

- The institution should conduct research into new models of service delivery for students with a mental illness.

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Please cite these guidelines as follows:

Guidelines for tertiary education institutions to facilitate improved educational outcomes for students with a mental illness. Orygen Youth Health Research Centre, Centre for Youth Mental Health, University of Melbourne; 2011.

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# Introducing Ask Counselling:
# an Online Question and Answer Service
# for University Students

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## Abstract

*For most counselling services, providing services for the whole university community is an ongoing challenge. Whilst a small percentage of students and staff attend appointments and workshops, the majority do not access traditional counselling services.*

*The Ask Counselling initiative started in April 2009, allows students to submit a question online that is answered by counsellors, and then posted on the web for all to read. The large bank of over 163 questions and answers reflect "hot topics" for students including on Uni life, mental health issues, relationships, friendships and families. Over 45,000 page views demonstrates its success as a place to look for issues affecting students, psycho-educational material and good local resources and online sites. That 59 % of questions submitted have come from students who had no previous contact with the Counselling Service, highlights the increase in access of our services by the student community.*

*This paper will discuss how the Ask Counselling website was set up, its intended aims and how it is being used by students and the university community.*

## Introduction

Ask Counselling is an innovative, accessible and cost-effective means of delivering a quality professional service to students in an online format. The University of Melbourne Counselling Service's aim in developing this website was to engage with the wider student community and reach beyond the normal constituency of those attending "face to face" counselling. The Ask Counselling website has been successful in responding to individual student concerns and in expanding access to resources and information, not only to students and staff of the university but to all interested web users.

Launched in April 2009, Ask Counselling allows students to submit a question on any issue that concerns them, including topics relating to university life, family and relationship issues, and general mental health and wellbeing. The student's question is answered by a team of counsellors, and then both question and answer are posted on the website (all identifying information having been removed). Answers include detailed advice on the topic and links to local resources. Questions and answers can be read by any person visiting the site and are searchable by category, keyword, and chronologically.

By the end of 2010 163 questions and answers had been posted, and there had been 45,000 page views from the many thousands of student and staff visitors who have read material on this site.

This paper outlines the context and impetus behind the project, charts its progress through phases of development, describes the practical elements of the project and examines outcomes.

## Background

Like most other developed countries, Australia has experienced an expansion of interest and uptake of mental health services delivered over the internet. This is evident in both the private and non-government sectors. We have seen the arrival of websites dedicated to psycho-education, automated self-help systems, medication tracking, symptom reporting, and of course internet counselling. This has all been within the context of household access to the internet at home quadrupling from 16% to 72% in the decade of 1990 to 2008, (ABS 2010).

Consideration of this context was one of the drivers for developing our online services. Another was the particular relevance of this domain for our target group. Research suggests that reliance on the internet as a source of health information is more pronounced amongst university students. Jared Dart (2008) investigated the current utilisation, importance, trust and future preference for the internet as a source of health information in three different socioeconomic groups (low socio economic, middle to high socio

economic and university students). The internet proved to be a much more important source of health information for the university sample.

More recent research by Jonathan Kam et al (2010) has supported this finding. Kam surveyed 120 university students regarding their behaviours and attitudes regarding online health information. 61% of the respondents had used the internet as a source of personal health information and 34% reported doing so at least once a month. The internet was the third most common source of health information at 41%, after General Practitioners (73%) and family and friends (60%). Given that a significant number of students do not have ready access to their family networks, one can conclude that the internet takes on even greater importance.

Having established our evidence base, the next step in exploring the utility of this medium was to survey what was currently available in terms of counselling support in the online environment.

### Online services which inspired us

Go Ask Alice is a service hosted by Columbia University. Originally (back in the 1990s), the site was for Columbia students only. Its instant success on campus, combined with new internet capability, quickly landed Go Ask Alice on the World Wide Web for global access. Go Ask Alice receives over 1,100 inquiries weekly on a wide array of health topics.

Closer to home, is Australian National University's interactive program, MoodGYM. Since its launch in 2004, it has received several IT and health awards, and has over 200,000 registered users worldwide. Another leader in internet based interactive support for university students was Swinburne University. At Swinburne, the questions submitted by students were answered privately. They were then published as part of the FAQ bank if they were deemed to be of broader relevance. The primary communication in this design was an individualised response sent directly back to the student who had submitted the question. The student needed to give their permission for the question and answer to be published within the FAQ section of the site. The posting of the question was therefore not a consequence of submitting the question and not the means by which the student could access the answer. At the time we were conducting research, in late 2008, there were approximately 20 student-generated questions, integrated into FAQs on the Swinburne site.

A continuum of internet-based mental health service provision as detailed below best describes the range of options available.



**Range of therapeutic interventions available online 2010**
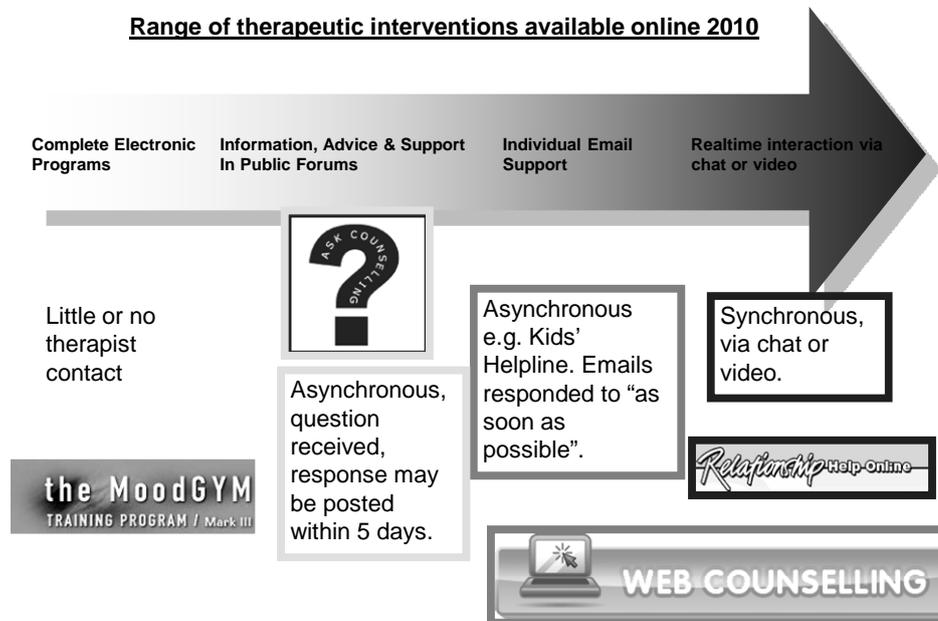
Complete Electronic Programs are at one end of the continuum, moving to Asynchronous Information, Advice and Support in Public Forums, then to Asynchronous Individual Email Support, and at the other end of the continuum Synchronous Realtime Interaction such as chat or video.

Examples include:

Mood Gym (http://www.moodgym.anu.edu.au) which is a complete electronic CBT-based web program for depression.

Go Ask Alice (http://www.goaskalice.columbia.edu/) which offers asynchronous information, advice and support in public forums.

Swin ECounselling (http://www.swinburne.edu.au/stuserv/counselling/swin_ecounselling/) Swinburne University of Technology Counselling Service and

Kid's Helpline (http://www.kidshelp.com.au/teens/get-help/email-counselling/) which offers asynchronous email support where a student or young person who emails the question receives an answer via personal email from the service provider.

At the other end of the continuum counselling is provided via synchronous real-time interaction via chat or video. Examples are Relationships Australia online counselling http://www.relationshiphelponline.com.au/ and Kids Helpline web counselling.

### Deciding on a service

The University of Melbourne Counselling Service positioned Ask Counselling in the "Information, Advice and Support in Public Forums" part of the continuum. In this model students could ask questions and their question and answer would routinely be placed on the Ask Counselling website. This position was negotiated given the time and resources available, logistical and cost constraints. It fulfilled the aim of increasing access for those unable or unwilling to physically attend the Counselling Service during normal business hours. It would provide students and staff with an extensive bank of questions and answers, and embed information in responses to real-life situations. It also facilitated the dissemination of information on local resources and carefully selected and vetted websites.

Importantly, positioning Ask Counselling at this point in the continuum, was consistent with the counselling team's professional values and clinical concerns.

### Team process

In a team of diverse and mature professional counsellors, making this decision generated many high energy discussions. As might be expected with such a significant change in practice delivery, some staff were cautious. There was much debate about how an internet-based service fitted with counsellors' professional values. Team members questioned whether such a service was compatible with our beliefs about the importance of 'face-to-face' interactions that build rapport and enable the assessment of risk.

The issues addressed included cultural change, scepticism, anxiety and philosophical objections. The following is a sample of team members' reactions during this developmental phase:

*"Is it just a fad we just want to be 'in on', is it really part of core business or are we just trying to look trendy?"*

*"...feels as if the students are way ahead of me adapting to this way of interacting with others...and their way of gathering information – but I felt positive and energized...and knew other counselling services were going down this path."*

*"How much extra work?"*

*"I could remember back to when computers were first introduced and there had been uproar over them being on our desks – an intrusion into the counselling process. We got over that."*

*"Are we enabling students to continue avoiding social and meaningful interactions?"*

*"What are the legal implications if something goes wrong and we never actually sighted them?"*

*"Why the f.... always go with the 'sign of the times' and suck up to Gen Y?"*

Some of these issues were resolved during the developmental process. Others remained present and tensions eased only once Ask Counselling was up and running. Some fears could only be alleviated by experiencing how the Ask Counselling operated in practice; seeing its popularity and its complementary

relationship with traditional counselling. Over time this occurred and the feelings of some team members shifted.

The following are examples of recent comments from team members when canvassed for their opinions on how Ask Counselling was operating:

*"The writing/editing/publication process seems to guarantee some 'quality control', as well as being a good example of teamwork"*

*"...seems to serve a useful process for the too shy/apprehensive to communicate any other way"*

*"It's been a challenge to let others view my answer and possibly modify it, no one comes into my office to judge my work. Yet I've also come to value having someone else look at my answer and ensure it's as good as possible before it goes out"*

The current majority opinion is that Ask Counselling compliments our other work, is separate to face-to-face counselling and serves to demystify the counselling process for potential clients and the wider University community.

### Legal and IT considerations

The project team worked with the university Legal Office and Information Technology Service from July 2008 until April 2009. This process involved a complex interaction between three interests:

- What was possible from an IT perspective?
- What was required from a legal perspective?
- What would constitute an inviting and useful service?

We worked on creating the kind of disclaimers deemed necessary and setting up minimal barriers to people accessing the service

Central to these discussions was the definition of a 'health record' as any personal communication from a client. We needed to explore the ramifications of that for privacy and confidentiality issues, and look at how to keep records to minimum standards of security required by current law.

The legal department were also interested in the potential difference between what constituted a minimal acceptable legal standard and what direction the law was heading at the time. They encouraged us to cater to future standards in this evolving field.

Given these constraints it was decided that email did not provide an adequate level of security and that students would therefore need to login in to a secure website to submit their question.

This nine month process involved refining all explanatory text, disclaimers, health record issues, appropriate level of security and duty of care issues. This investment of time ensured a quality service which operated in line with rigorous ethical and legal standards.

### The "How To" of answering questions

In order to ensure quality control, questions are answered by one counsellor, then blind-reviewed by at least one other counsellor, before going to the editor (the project team leader) for final review. In instances of highly complex issues, a senior clinician may be invited to review the outcome. The team endeavours to complete this process and to post responses within five days of receiving the question.

Although the website is in the public domain, only currently enrolled University of Melbourne students can submit a question using their University login. When linked to personal information questions constitute a health record, and therefore must be stored securely. To ensure client confidentiality and health record security, only the question is released to Counselling Service staff. It is delinked from the student's identifying details and therefore ceases to be a health record.

However, in the case where staff consider that there may be a risk to the safety of the student or any other person the personal information is "re linked" to the question. A small number of staff are authorised to action this procedure. Since launching the service, it has been necessary on several occasions to make direct contact with a student in response to concerns about their immediate welfare, based on the content of their question. In these cases, the risk has been managed, and their safety maintained. Thus the service

has enabled the Counselling Service to expand its capacity to address issues of risk beyond those using traditional counselling options.

### Action research issues

Some of the beneficial outcomes of the project have been surprising. The collaborative nature of formulating responses has been a valuable team experience, as has staff attending regular meetings to reflect on themes, hits, categories, styles and emerging issues. There has also been the growing awareness that through Ask Counselling we are engaging in health promotion using an action research methodology (Trondsen, M & Saundaunet, A., 2009; Meyer, D, 2007). The Counselling Service has created a new way for students to communicate their concerns and through our answers, is opened up a new dialogue with the student population.

We have labeled this as "Responsive Health Promotion" The Action Research Spiral.



Cohen & Manion, 1980; sited in Bannister et al., 1994, Trondsen & Sandaunet, 2009.
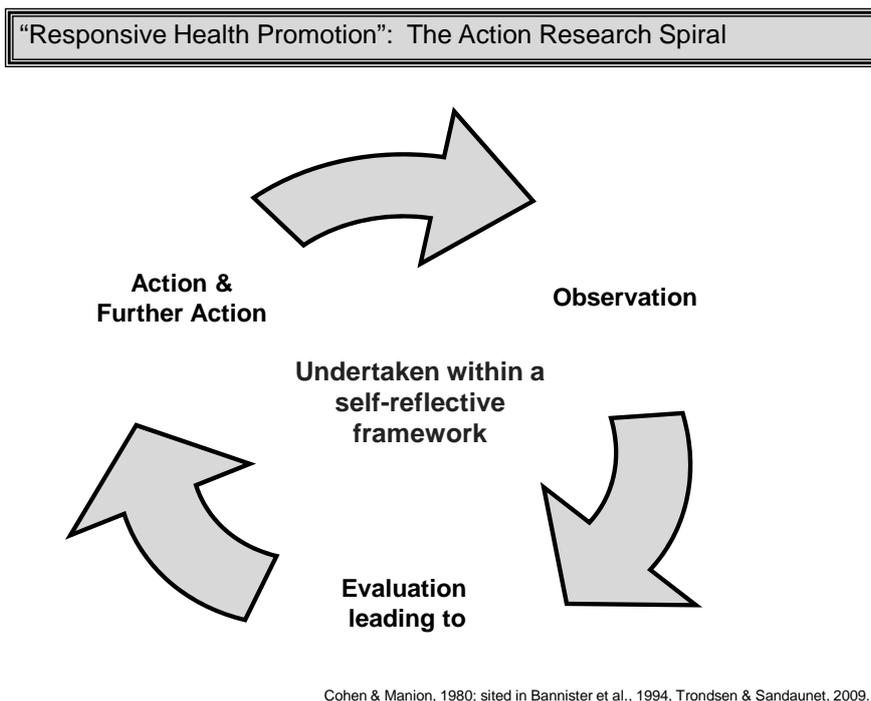
In the diagram above the "action" is where we initially developed Ask Counselling knowing that it would be shaped in the future by the nature of the questions received. Our ongoing action is responding to questions, editing responses and collating questions. Observation and evaluation is the time spent meeting to discuss themes, hits, categories and emerging issues. This then allows for further action in how we both answer questions and develop the website.

For example questions have prompted discussion amongst counsellors and alerted us to trends in the student population. Counsellors have learned of new resources and now refer students to the website. The end result of this Action Research Spiral is a repository of health information that is globally accessible.

### The questions

Questions submitted to Ask Counselling to date have covered a wide array of issues affecting students; academic, relationships and mental health. The questions have been uniformly genuine, relevant and appropriate, and are often moving, reflecting the depth and complexity of the student experience. For Counselling Service staff, responding to questions has promoted specific topical research, which has added to the depth and relevance of resources and knowledge available at the agency.

Of the students who submit questions, it is notable that the majority of them have not had any prior contact with the Counselling Service, and that nearly half have posted their questions after business hours

(in the evenings and overnight). In this sense, through Ask Counselling, the University Counselling Service extends its hours of operation, and builds organisational capability.

### Website usage summary statistics as of November 2010

Since its launch in April 2009, there have been:

- 163 questions and responses posted
- over 45, 000 page views
- 14, 732 unique visitors.

Questions have been submitted in the following numbers for key categories:

a. *"Uni Life"* -                     *61*
b. *"Head Space"* -               *55*
c. *"Love and Sex in the City"*    *33*
d. *"Families"* -                     *28*
e. *"General"* -                      *19*
f. *"Wellbeing"*-                    *13*
g. *(Note that some questions are recorded in more than one category due to their subject matter).*

The number of questions submitted has been consistent and steady, averaging 1-3 per week. This has enabled answers to be made in a timely way and within the target period for response, and also for the initiative to continue to operate satisfactorily from within existing resources.

### Analysis of students submitting questions

The vast majority of questions have been submitted by students during academic semesters. Four questions have been deemed to have sufficiently concerning content that direct contact was made with the students who submitted the question. In those cases risk was assessed, and an appropriate clinical response provided.

The following tables provide further details of the students, their backgrounds, submissions and history with the Counselling Service:

| *Gender* | *%* | *Study Level* | *%* | *Submission: Time of day* | *%* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Male* | *29* | *Undergraduate* | *65* | *9.01am -5.00pm* | *53* |
| *Female* | *71* | *Graduate* | *35* | *5.01pm-12am* | *36* |
| | | | | *12.01am-9.00am* | *11* |

| *Number of questions asked* | *%* | *Counselling Service Usage* | *%* |
|---|---|---|---|
| *One* | *91* | *No prior contact* | *59* |
| *Two* | *6* | *Client prior* | *25* |
| *Three* | *3* | *Attended workshop prior* | *16* |

Of the students who had submitted a question within the first year of operation, 20 percent subsequently made an individual appointment to see a counsellor at the Counselling Service.

**Melbourne Experience Survey 2009 Data**

A question concerning Ask Counselling was included in the 2009 Melbourne Experience Survey. For graduate students it achieved a mean score of 3.97 out of 5, with 76% of respondents rating it as good to excellent. The score for undergraduate students was 3.58 with 59% rating good to excellent. Verbatim Comments by students included the following: "Ask Counselling is a good idea for information without having to see a counsellor. It can be a good first step to seeking help."

**Sample questions for each category**

### Uni Life

I feel isolated and don't fit in

> *I am an international student. Although I have acquaintances I have met through my classes, I feel isolated...*

Too much time on the Internet

> *I have a learning problem with my study. It's hard for me to focus on my research because I always spent lots of time to browsing the Internet and easily feel tired...*

### Head Space

Relapse of depression

> *7 months ago I was diagnosed with depression...but now I have noticed the depression creeping back...*

Can't feel happy anymore

> *I can't seem to feel happy anymore and I'm not sure why. Since I began uni (a year ago) I've never quite enjoyed my day to day life as much as I used to and I spiral into periods of very low mood...*

### Love and Sex in the City

Relationship problems and a history of incest

> *My girlfriend is an incest survivor, and often she gets upset over the smallest thing...*

Unsure about baby

> *My girlfriend has just found out she is pregnant and I am having serious second thoughts about becoming a father...*

### Families

I lost my sister to terminal cancer

> *Last year I lost my sister to terminal cancer. I used to be an excellent student. I just don't see the point anymore. I desperately want to move on and have a normal life again...*

Parent's bankruptcy

> *My mum confided in me that she and dad are bankrupt, because of his gambling and will lose their house. Should I quit uni and work to help them?*

### Wellbeing

I would like to get the best out of myself

> *Everything is going okay but I would like to get the best out of myself and feel happy with my life both now and when I am older...*

Can meditation help me settle down?

> *I am a really fidgety, restless person and I was told that meditation could help me settle down...is this true?*

### General

Bullying and Intimidation at Work

> *I have been bullied at work, this was over a year ago, I went to mediation and the problem was solved however the bullying has started again...*

Going home after 3 years

*I have changed a lot in the last three years...am feeling quite sad because I have to go back home after 3 years here...*

## Ongoing development

The service continues to develop, with the introduction of a facility for people to comment on posted questions and answers. Any member of the public is able to submit a comment which, if deemed relevant, will be published.

## Conclusions

Traditional appointment-based counselling services have inherent limitations in terms of access. Students may have to wait for appointments, must be prepared to physically attend the service, and need to do so during office hours. Ask Counselling is an experiment in the use of online services to complement the tradition model of counselling service provision. In widening access to students the model allows the Service to reach a greater proportion of the student population. In doing so it builds our capacity to both respond clinically, and engage in health promotion.

The process of developing the service has also been a rich one for Counselling Service staff. It has facilitated valuable professional development and team building.

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# The Sleep Smart Project Pilot
# at UNSW 2011

Annie Andrews

UNSW Counselling and Psychological Services [CAPS]

### Abstract

*Knowing how to get a good night's sleep and being well slept is a very influential skill that is essential for living a productive and satisfying life. As a self care skill it provides more than the platform for psychological resilience. This article outlines the first steps of a university based program that aims to 'sell sleep' to students via an awareness campaign designed by students. The program currently offers a very short learning module located in the universities online teaching and learning platform. Social media is being used to spread the word and draw attention to the benefits of getting adequate sleep. The program as envisaged by the students is much broader in scope than a simple learning module and includes plans that will eventually provide opportunity for students to be sleep ambassadors and receive training in sleep awareness. This article outlines the very first steps in the planning process and the initial pilot semester for the online learning module.*

### Why sell sleep to students?

Based on contact with students in post-secondary education, student services anecdotally frequently comment that students have shocking sleep patterns, pull all-nighters and generally stay up past 1am and sleep until 11am.

The research on sleep has a long history. William C. Dement recognised as one of the key founders of sleep research (See: http://www.sleepquest.com/sq_dement.shtml). Dement began researching sleep in 1953 and as a researcher at Stanford University in the early 1960's continued his research on the neurochemistry of sleep and the different sleep states and their functional significance. In 1970 he established the first Sleep Lab and began researching sleep disorders. He has taught classes on sleep, sleep patterns and sleep disorders for decades and established with his students a well resourced website on sleep and everything you could possibly want to know about sleep. (See: http://www.end-your-sleep-deprivation.com/)

Another researcher of sleep that is worth knowing about is Robert Stickgold. In an article in the Harvard Magazine (Lambert, 2005) provides some insight into Stickgold's wisdom about the 'all-nighter' generated from his research into sleep.

> *Students often wonder whether to pull an all-nighter before an exam. Will the extra studying time outweigh the exhaustion? Robert Stickgold, who has studied sleep's role in cognition for the past 10 years, reports that it depends on the exam. "If you are just trying to remember simple facts—listing all the kings of England, say—cramming all night works," he explains. "That's because it's a different memory system, the declarative memory system. But if you expect to be hit with a question like 'Relate the French Revolution to the Industrial Revolution,' where you have to synthesize connections between facts, then missing that night of sleep can be disastrous. Your ability to do critical thinking takes a massive hit—just as with alcohol, you're knocking out the frontal-cortex functions. (Lambert, 2005, p.30)*

Sleep research has identified that sleep deprivation probably plays a role in overall health such as contributing to weight gain and obesity, development of diabetes, and influences the development of many illnesses. Road safety research has shown that sleep deprivation as a factor contributes to car accidents and underperformance on the job and the generation of worker contributed work place errors. Commonsense tells us that sleep is important to performance. No one would feel confident about an operation if their heart surgeon was under slept, nor would we be happy knowing that the pilot of the plane we were on was suffering from fatigue nor would we be delighted to know that the air traffic controllers in their bird's eye tower were feeling daytime or shift related drowsiness.

Sleep research over fifty-eight years builds a more than convincing picture that sleep is essential for a long life, that it is necessary for effective management of stress, anxiety and depression, that it plays a strong role in a well functioning immune system, that sleep is an important facilitator of learning and memory construction and retrieval and even contributes to the conducting of respectful and cordial interpersonal communication. Many people become irritable as their fatigue goes beyond their 'be nice' tolerance level and who hasn't lost the benefit of their sense of humour when they are over tired?

### Don't look the funding gift horse in the mouth?

In late 2010 there was an opportunity for the UNSW Counselling and Psychological Services [CAPS] to apply for UNSW project funds offered by the Pro Vice-Chancellor Students. These project funds were dedicated to offering an inaugural paid internship to students interested in gaining work experience within the university. The students had to apply formally and were selected in a competitive application process.

This is the story of one of the successful projects that received funding to employ student interns. The funding was not guaranteed to be repeated and it was very short term but it was enough to breathe life into the project. This project was led by a student project manager funded by the internship. One other student was also offered funds from the internship and four other students were funded by CAPS funds. All worked four long and furious weeks to establish the Sleep Smart Project ready to run in semester 1 2011.

### The project began with the working title:

Student Wellbeing Project –Getting Adequate Sleep? Sleep: the foundation stone for learning, achieving a productive career and living a healthy life.

### The students worked to a brief project description:

This project will highlight the positive benefits of adequate sleep to UNSW students.

This project aims to raise awareness amongst the UNSW student cohort of the benefits of adequate sleep including:

- enhancement of learning and memory recall necessary for academic achievement;
- safeguarding mental health;
- promoting physical health;
- enhancing general wellbeing,
- enhancing interpersonal communication;
- enhancing creativity;
- improving the capacity to sustain high level career engagement.

UNSW students acknowledge that their sleep habits often leave them sleep deprived (Counselling and Psychological Services [CAPS] client self-report).

Patterns of sleep which result in chronic or even sporadic sleep deprivation can have serious consequences.

Recent research demonstrates the role of sleep in protecting against mental illness, aiding the effectiveness of the immune system and improving brain function including the impact on brain plasticity.

The Student Wellbeing Survey (JANZSSA 37, p. 9-38, 2011) identified that many students live in a condition of chronic stress and psychological distress. Adequate sleep is a major ingredient in managing such chronic conditions.

Students are known for 'doing all-nighters' in order to prepare for a next day exam or complete due assessment. This behaviour is likely to be detrimental in terms of the experience of stress and it's by products and the learning outcome and/or assessment outcome. Doing ' all-nighters' will not deliver peak performance and has the potential to not only be academically detrimental but also potentially long lasting in the formation (or reinforcement) of coping behaviour used when dealing with a longer term goal/project with a defined deadline.

The use of the internet for social networking, online games and chat options are changing the sleep patterns of students with many still engaged in online activities at 2 am or later.

Residential Colleges are noting that students are frequently still awake and using college common space in the early hours of the morning.

Applying current sleep research outcomes to contemporary experience (learning, working, relating, and individual lifestyles) and drawing on understandings from other areas of related research (e.g. brain

development/plasticity, capacity to exert self-discipline/control, the use of digital technology and engagement with the internet, the cause of and impact of procrastination) suggests that an awareness campaign, highlighting the beneficial power of adequate sleep and the experienced positive outcomes derived from adjusting sleep patterns to reduce sleep deprivation, would be extremely beneficial to UNSW students both as graduands and graduates.

For example:

- Adequate sleep is linked to increased capacity to learn and for efficiency of memory recall.

- Adequate sleep on a daily basis in high powered careers is a protective factor against career burnout and improved 'on the job' functioning, problem-solving and risk management.

- Adequate sleep aids emotion regulation especially those emotions that increase with sleep deprivation (such as frustration and irritability). Reducing unnecessary negative emotion has a positive impact on interpersonal interaction and increases tolerance in interpersonal exchange. These emotions contribute positively to working in teams and in workplace communication.

Awareness of the importance of sleep in human functioning has the potential to positively influence the lives of university graduates via the impact on their personal lives (as a life skill) and across their career life time via reduction of career burnout and chronic stress.

Knowledge and behaviour in relation to sleep patterns is an important graduate attribute for all university students.

**The project goals were defined as:**
1. Delivery of a public awareness campaign within the UNSW community focusing on key 'positive' messages about sleep and sleep patterns during 2011.
2. Delivery of appropriate and targeted messages using a variety of delivery methods suited to a higher education student population.

Target messages to include:

- the detrimental impacts of sleep deprivation on individual's health, academic performance and interpersonal communication;

- the positive impact of adequate sleep patterns on numerous aspects of life style, mental and physical health, academic and career performance and quality of interpersonal relationships both in the workplace and more broadly.

3. Positively influence students' behaviour via increased awareness of the impact of sleep deprivation and adequate sleep while learning at UNSW and in their lives post-graduation.
4. Increase students' capacity to better manage chronic stress experienced whist completing a degree at UNSW.

**The project leader generated the following project scope:**

SLEEP WELL: Think better

Learn better

Feel better

1. Literary Review
2. Identify Goals
3. Key concepts for UNSW campaign
4. Identify channels for communication – website, facebook etc
5. Plan promotional campaign
6. Design Promotional campaign
7. Plan Promotional Activities
8. Plan Action Time Line for roll out of campaign
9. Plan evaluation process

10. Construct evaluation tools - Student Sleep patterns – benchmark

**Initial project deadlines established by the student project leader:**

- Review of Literature: TUESDAY 16th NOVEMBER: MORNING 9-10:30AM

    o Problems, Benefits, Causes, Hints etc

    o Food – types and amounts

    o Technologies impact on sleep

    o Rituals – cup of tea etc

- Expand on research

    o Identify Key Concepts – minimum of 14 – 1 per fortnight in 2011

    o Write summary of findings and research to hand out in team meeting

    o Prepare PowerPoint presentation/handout for team meeting

- First Project Team Meeting: FRIDAY 19TH NOVEMBER – 11-4PM

    o Based on Key Concepts – how do we communicate

    o Delegate/assign work and hours

    o Website, Course on BlackBoard and O-Week.

### Selling Sleep to Students

The project team members quickly decided they needed some catchy approaches in order to 'sell sleep' to students. The Getting Adequate Sleep? Project became UNSW SleepingCAPS (brought to you by Counselling and Psychological Services [CAPS]). Below is the description of the project generated by one of the project team:

*The UNSW SleepingCAPS program exists to raise awareness amongst students of the importance of healthy sleeping patterns, and to draw attention to the crucial role sleep plays in determining the quality and productivity of our lives. Unhealthy sleeping patterns dramatically affect our physical health and vitality, our ability to think with clarity and focus, our variability of mood, the quality of our work participation and the vitality of our relationships. SleepingCAPS aims to wake students up to the challenge and problems associated with poor sleeping habits. The SleepingCAPS awareness campaign embraces and highlights the power of sleep, and is designed to affect positive change in students' lives. The SleepingCAPS campaign is the work of a team of UNSW students from various disciplines working in conjunction with CAPS at UNSW (2nd year UNSW student involved with the SleepingCAPS Project).*

**Campaign Taglines used to test the marketing strategy via a student focus group:**

- **Are You Good In Bed?** The "are you good in Bed" quiz will be uploaded onto Blackboard (via survey monkey) and be available as a 'module' to ALL first year students commencing in Semester 1 of 2011. It will Introduce SleepingCAPS in an engaging way, recognise that we want to better understand the students sleeping habits and help them achieve better sleep.

- **Good Sleep Doesn't Happen Overnight!** – Sleep Hygiene explained. Getting good sleep is really important and the best bit is there are some really easy steps everyone can take to ensure they can consistently achieve a GOOD NIGHTS SLEEP.

- **Count Sleep NOT Sheep!** - EVERYONE sleeps differently **-** Keeping track of your sleeping patterns is a great way of understanding your sleep and possible health issues associated with your specific sleep patterns. Woolcock Sleep Centre in GLEBE, NSW offers services to learn about your sleep.

- **Getting A's by Getting Zzz's** - Research has shown that getting a good night sleep is just as important as studying your text book. In fact sleep can enhance your studies. Whilst you're asleep your brain synthesises what you've learnt in the hours before sleep. You need to reach REM sleep for this to happen, so quality and quantity is important – especially leading up to exams.

- **Put a cap on the cappuccino** – have your last hit before 4pm! – Coffee Curfew - Caffeine has been shown to fasten the time from sleep to awake in the morning – making you more alert and feeling awake. This feeling can't go on forever – and too much caffeine will interrupt your ability

to fall asleep. By having your last cup before 4pm your body will become tired as normal in the evening. Caffeine is high in COFFEE, TEA, SOFT DRINK AND ENERGY DRINKS!

- **Drunk with Fatigue? -** Research has shown that fatigued drivers cause the same if not more deaths and serious injuries on the road than drunk drivers. There are steps you can take before you drive home to improving your driving alertness. Naps, walk, food etc.

- **Sleeping Myths Put to Bed!** - Common misconceptions about sleep – sleeping more over the weekend to catch-up is normal and ok, some people can do fine with only 5 hours of sleep, snoring is not a problem etc

- **Wake Up to Sleep!** - Benefits and Problems with sleep quantity and quality. Sleep Hygiene – steps to achieving consistently good sleep – a holiday message from the mascot about sleeping during the break. Basically a summary of most important semester messages and an incentive to sleep well during the holidays to be the best they can for semester 2.

- **Sleep Stakes – Beat the odds of being in Sleep Debt!** - Holiday sleeping patterns can interfere with the circadian rhythm and can affect ability to adjust to different sleeping patterns during semester – learn ways to re-adjust to semester sleep habits. Information about Sleep Deprivation.

- **Sleeping Disorders are an EYE OPENER!** Sleeping disorder information, how to self-assess sleep disorders – EPWORTH scale and where to find out more and get help. Causes and Effects of Sleep Disorders.

- **Sleeping Beauty** - Good sleep has many physical benefits; improved metabolism for weight control, melatonin, hormones, growth etc. Getting in shape for summer – means getting good sleep.

- **In Your Dreams** - There are misconceptions about the functions of dreaming, and most people believe that the brain 'switches off' during sleep. Research has shown that dreams are an important way for memories to be stored and synthesised and a lot of creativity happens during dream sleep.

A promotional time line was established and strategies for systematic promotional releases were identified.
The key concepts and the weeks for message target were identified as:

1. Sleep Hygiene: What is good sleep and how to get it. (WEEK 1+2)
   a. *PDF Information sheet on website*
   b. *A3 Posters for Housing*
   c. *Bookmarks or alike to be handed out weeks 1 & 2 semester 1 2011*
   d. *PowerPoint presentation to be displayed during week 1 classes*

2. "SWAP" Sleep and WAP (Weighted Average Percentage): how good sleep can improve your WAP. (WEEK 4)
   a. *PDF information sheet on website – literature review of research*
   b. *A3 Posters for housing*
   c. *PowerPoint presentation to be displayed during week 1 classes*

3. Motor Vehicle Accidents: Sleepiness WORSE than being DRUNK! (WEEK 7)
   a. *PDF Information sheet on website – review of Australian stats*
   b. *Key-rings - CAPS*
   c. *A3 Poster for car park entries, library, internal and external noticeboards*
   d. *"SleepingCAPS: Do you need a power nap before you drive?"*

4. "Snooze or lose" all-nighters and next day performance (WEEK 6 +13)
   a. *PDF information sheet on website*
   b. *PowerPoint presentation for subjects with mid semester exams*

   *c. CAPS Workshop – EXAM Preparation – reduce anxiety and SLEEP?*

  5. Jet Lag and Time Zone changes: Arriving or Leaving Australia ( WEEK 13)
    *a. PDF information sheet on website*
    *b. A3 Poster for Housing*
    *c. A4 poster for notice boards – Travel Tips*

  6. "Sleeping Beauty": positive attributes of sleep. (WEEK 8)
    *a. PDF information sheet on website*
    *b. Photo Competition – Facebook*

### Sleep Smart learning modules

The SleepingCAPS campaign spread into a Sleep Smart module located in the teaching and learning platform and all first year students were given access.



### Usage data for the Blackboard module

Data has been collected for the Sleep Smart Blackboard participation outcomes from student interaction during the first seven weeks of S2 2011

|  | Hits | Percentage of participants |
|---|---|---|
| SLEEP SMART LEARNING MODULES | 926 | 17.71% |
| SLEEP GAMES FACTS AND FUN | 1057 | 20.21% |
| SLEEP QUIZZES: | 3246 | 62.08% |
| **Total hits** | **5229** | |

Survey Monkey was used to collect the responses posted to the quiz segments of the online learning module. Extract of results from quiz returns are given below.

### *How do students feel in the morning on waking?*

46.7% say they are a little tired

36.9% say they are not functioning in a fully alert state until after lunch

### *What percentage of students are satisfied with the amount of sleep they get Mon-Fri?*

13.8% report waking alert and energetic and ready to start the day

44.6% are only "sort of" satisfied and report starting drowsy and needing a coffee but after that are alert for remainder of the day

27.2% report feeling tired all day

14.4% report forcing themselves out of bed and are so tired they find it hard to concentrate during the day

### *What percentage of students are satisfied with amount of sleep they get on weekends?*

44.2% report waking alert and energetic and ready to start the day

34.2% are only "sort of" satisfied and report starting drowsy and needing a coffee but after that are alert for remainder of the day

18.5% report feeling tired all day

3% report forcing themselves out of bed and are so tired they find it hard to concentrate during the day

### *What reasons do students give for feeling tired during the week (during semester)?*

37.1% kept awake by worries and stressors

8.7% kept awake by consumption of caffeine

4.4% kept awake by use of alcohol and/or nicotine

1.6% kept awake by use of prescription drugs or non-prescription drugs

26.5% kept awake by job/work commitments

55.1% kept awake by university study loads (excluding assignments and exam prep)

56.7% kept awake because of university assignments and exam preparation

17.1% kept awake by family commitments

32.4% kept awake by socialising with friends

42.7% kept awake because they are watching TV, playing video games

38.3% kept awake using social networking sites - Facebook, Utube, Twitter etc

### *What reasons do students give for feeling tired during weekends and holidays?*

25.2% kept awake by worries and stressors

5.5% kept awake by consumption of caffeine

11% kept awake by use of alcohol and/or nicotine

2.3% kept awake by use of prescription drugs or non-prescription drugs

20.4% kept awake by job/work commitments

27.2% kept awake by university study loads (excluding assignments and exam prep)

27.2% kept awake because of university assignments and exam preparation

17.2% kept awake by family commitments

39.2% kept awake by socialising with friends

38.2% kept awake because they are watching TV, playing video games

29.4% kept awake using social networking sites - Facebook, Utube, Twitter etc

### *What is the preferred time of day for doing an assignment?*

39.6% have no preferred study time – whenever fits their schedule works best

42.7% report that they work best late at night

### *At 1am if a friend called what percent of students would say they would be…?*

..feeling sleepy and are just about ready for bed          50.7%

..in bed since 10pm with phone switched off          26.7%

..still browsing the internet and not sleepy yet          22.7%

### *In 9am lectures what percent of students say they would be…?*

..half asleep and half listening          71.6%

..trying to nap and most aware of comfort of chairs          5.8%

..focusing on remembering the content of the lecture          22.7%

### *On the night before an exam what percentage of students report….?*

..that their usual routine is to go to bed later than usual but try to get a little sleep          56.7%

..that they get a good night's sleep and wake early to do final study          33%

..that they cram and do an all-nighter          10.3%

### Social media experimentation

The SleepingCaps campaign went to Facebook and found itself a mascot "Basil Bear".



Figure 1.
Concept drawing of Basil Bear
(Final Year Masters level Design student
Stephen Chikazaza).



Basil went from cartoon concept to life sized.

Basil became a Sleep Smart Ambassador and got his own Facebook account and went to O week 2011. Sleep Smart ambassador volunteer positions were created and established as part of the UNSW Advantage Program and eligible for listing on the UNSW AHEGS statement.

### What has CAPS learnt from this project?

- Students do have problematic sleep patterns that will not support optimum learning, healthy lifestyles or resilience associated with mental health.

- Students are interested in information about healthy sleep patterns and general information about sleep and sleep disorders.

- Students engaged in projects can get a lot done in  few weeks. In the Sleep Smart project they were amazingly productive, enthused by the project, ,appreciated being paid and loved the work place experience.

- When students move on the project momentum can be quick to fade unless skilled and enthusiastic volunteers are willing to carry the project forward.

- The project has to be marketed skilfully to attract volunteers as well as using marketing strategies to take the program to the students in the broader cohort.

- A student lead project needs a university champion, some budget, and clear guidance and boundaries set for the use of resources, awareness of university expectations concerning use of resources and OHS.

- Social media usage takes a lot of time and understanding in how it can be used to deliver services and information to students.

- Facebook takes a lot of managing so that your intended message doesn't get cluttered and lost.

- Not everyone who wants to join the Facebook site established for your message and to attract students from your institution will be a student at your institution, or a student that you are hoping to target, they might not even be a student!

- Facebook privacy settings /rules are both limiting and too broad.

**Next steps**

- Allocate the SleepingCAPS Project to a CAPS staff member to provide a more consistent anchor for the student lead initiatives and to keep the student volunteers engaged with the project throughout the year.

- Establish key strategies to keep students engaged with the project on a volunteer basis.

- Build more information to include in the Blackboard Module.

- Allocate resources to add to the CAPS website the proposed section to hold the SleepingCAPS tip sheets.

- Make the marketing campaign rolling out the various tip sheets and awareness building activities more consistent in 2012.

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*Review of current articles*

# The Use of Social Media by
# Student Affairs Practitioners

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## Abstract

Many student affairs professionals in the higher education sector consider the internet, social media, and other emerging technologies as peripheral to the real business of supporting students. There are however, many early adopters of this form of media driven engagement within the higher education sector. The 2011 Summer Edition of The Journal of Technology in Student Affairs (http://studentaffairs.com/ejournal/Summer_2011/) presents three articles which each offer an insight into the use of social media as a tool through which to engage, support and connect students and institutions. These articles represent the formative nature of online engagement and provide both encouragement and caution to the student affairs practitioners in higher education.

## Introduction

Many student affairs professionals in the higher education sector consider the internet, social media, and other emerging technologies as peripheral to the real business of supporting students. Current conversations revolve around the use or otherwise of social media tools, including well utilized favourites such as Facebook and Twitter. Issues related to confidentiality, privacy, socially appropriate content within the context of learning communities is all bound up with opinions about whether the use of these emerging technologies is a legitimate means of engaging with and supporting students. For many practitioners, the focus is on the appropriateness of using the new tools and this can inhibit the adoption of new ways of working with students.

The 2011 Summer Edition of The Journal of Technology in Student Affairs (http://studentaffairs.com /ejournal/Summer_2011/) presents three articles which offer an insight into the current debate.

Sarah Jenness discusses how Facebook is currently used to engage students, and she offers some recommendations to student affairs practitioners regarding how Facebook can be used to positively impact student learning and development in her article Rethinking Facebook: A Tool to Promote Student Engagement. Amy Ratliff discusses how social media tools are currently used by students, administrators and staff members, in her article Are They Listening? Social Media on Campuses of Higher Education, and William Mallett shows how using an online social network has been successfully deployed as a means of assisting and welcoming international students prior to their arrival on campus in The Use of an Online Social Network to Introduce and Connect Newly Admitted International Students.

### *Rethinking Facebook: A Tool to Promote Student Engagement by Sarah Jenness*

In this article, Sarah Jenness discusses the features of social media sites such as Facebook and she identifies a number of features which students find appealing. These include the range of tools and services available to users (such as online chat, and the ability to create interest groups); the ability of users to alter privacy settings; the capacity of users to control various aspects of their interactions with friends; and the potential of Facebook to create smaller and more intimate communities within the larger context of an institution. For educational institutions, she cites the value of 'maximising a resource that students are already tapped in to' as a real benefit.

This article looks at the use of Facebook to provide the traditional types of information to students which student affairs practitioners would normally disseminate through more traditional means. She demonstrates the use of Facebook to promote Orientation, to introduce students both to each other and to support staff. The provision of essential information prior to students arriving on campus is used as an example of how Facebook can be deployed to keep newly admitted students connected and involved throughout their first year. The State University of New York for example has used Facebook as a pre-orientation device for new students, creating engagement with them through the use of the wall and event

notifications. Advertising 'events such as 'stress busters' for finals week... and providing links to online campus publications detailing other news and events' are suggested as ways of engaging with continuing students.

She suggests that the current practices of using Facebook to connect like-minded students, to advertise student activities and campus events such as clubs, societies and sporting groups as well as promoting general entertainment offerings on campus assist in the transition to college life. It is interesting that she explores the role of Facebook in encouraging civic and political engagement within the student population but the link between Facebook pages addressing these issues and the volume of students who do engage in civic and political activities is unclear. The use of Facebook in this way is still exploratory.

This article introduces the potential to use Facebook into the future, as a tool through which to provide academic advising and to further engage students beyond the classroom is also discussed. Jessen outlines the opportunities to holistically engage with students across the multi-faceted student experience but she does offer a word of caution about the number of unknowns in using this media. She identifies that 'educators and student affairs practitioners have expressed a variety of concerns about the use of Facebook, which center around students' success and well-being as it relates to time spent online, privacy and online behaviour'. She further suggests that it is timely for student affairs practitioners to collaborate through research, informal sharing and more formal conversations about the use of social media in education. She quite rightly identifies that these media are here to stay!

This article provides an extensive reference list for interested practitioners to start to explore what is happening within this field.

### *Are They Listening? Social Media on Campuses of Higher Education, by Amy Ratliff*

This article presents a strong picture of the immediacy of communication afforded through the use of social media. Responses to social media vary between the 'technologically savvy student' and administrators and faculty who may be intimidated by the emerging technologies but Ratliff suggests that as a result of new technologies, students now 'communicate differently, research differently and socialize differently'. The challenge for student affairs professionals is to understand and utilise the range of technologies to support their work with students.

Ratliff defines social media and then explores the range of social media sites currently being used. Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, MySpace and others are described for those not familiar with these media

As identified in similar articles in recent times, the challenges of using these forms of social media include loss of control (by users and staff alike), time commitment to successfully utilise mixed media, information overload for users, 'the openness of these programs to allow creation of an 'official' account without formal channels' and the potential to create confusion through the use of multiple sites.

Ratliff suggests that higher education providers need to understand the different forms of social media, embrace the new technologies and explore ways of engaging with students who are active in these sites.

This article continues the discussion of similar articles but provides little in the way of evidence of the efficacy of these tools.

### *The Use of an Online Social Network to Introduce and Connect Newly Admitted International by William Mallett .*

William Mallett presents a review of practices from East Carolina University's Office of International Affairs. He outlines the way in which social networking assists in the orientation and transition of new international students, prior to their commencement at ECU. Two months before commencement, ECU introduces a private social networking site to familiarise new international and exchange students with staff, information about arrivals at college, invitations to orientation and transition activities such as orientation schedules, peer mentoring opportunities and administrative information such as fees and tuition information. Essentially, ECU International encourages social networking between students and staff from a very early online first encounter. The article identifies that there is 'no single method to achieve a sense of belonging to the institution' but the author believes that this social networking approach is a step in the right direction. The article does not include evaluative data or participation statistics to illustrate the points being made.

## Conclusion

Each of the reviewed articles provides an insight into the use of social media as a tool through which to engage, support and connect students and institutions. These articles represent the formative nature of online engagement and provide both encouragement and caution to the student affairs practitioners. The issues and concerns raised within these articles have been widely discussed but there is a lack of research-based data on which to base decisions about our future practices. For me, these articles provided an opportunity to reflect on current practices locally and to make comparisons about where we sit on the social media evolutionary chart.

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# Rethinking Facebook:
# A Tool to Promote Student Engagement

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## Introduction

Though the nature of technology's impact on college campuses is widely debated (Bargh & McKenna, 2004; Katz, Rice, & Aspden, 2001; Milliron & Miles, 2000; Treuer & Belote, 1997), the fact that it has dramatically altered student and campus life is undeniable. Since the early decades of the twentieth century, the advent of new communication technologies such as the telephone, radio, and television have necessitated changes in the way student affairs professionals design programming and interact with students (Guidry, 2008). Unlike these earlier forms of technology, however, the wide-spread integration of the Internet happened in just four years (Milliron & Miles, 2000), causing more rapid changes than in the past (Kleinglass, 2005). According to the Student Monitor (as cited in Kleinglass, 2005), full-time undergraduate students in 2004 spent approximately fifteen hours online each week, up 42 percent from reported usage in 2001. A more recent study (Jones, Johnson-Yale, Millermaier, & Perez, 2009) reports that students are devoting increasing amounts of time to online activity; specifically, over half of the students surveyed reported spending 21 hours or more online per week. Jones et al. (2009) also document the increase in use of mobile devices by undergraduates to access the Internet. Certainly, this trend is not stagnant; use of the Internet and related technologies by undergraduates is constantly becoming more deeply integrated with the college experience (Elling & Brown, 2001; Kleinglass, 2005; Kruger, 2009; Malaney, 2004-2005; Treuer & Belote, 1997).

Today's college students are "plugged in" everywhere – and student affairs practitioners must use this to their advantage if they aim to engage students in the campus culture (Heiberger & Harper, 2008; Shier, 2005). In fact, Elling & Brown (2001) instruct that "connectivity [is the] key word for student affairs in the 21st century," (p. 82) a notion they suggest is vital to building effective relationships with students. Traditionally aged undergraduates today report high comfort levels with technology (Shier, 2005) and are overall much more technologically savvy than older generations (Milliron & Miles, 2000), due in part to the fact that they began using computers at a very young age (Gemmill & Peterson, 2006; Jones, 2002). As a result, this generation is "the most wired in history" (Juncol & Cole-Avent, 2008, p. 3), expecting those in higher education to be knowledgeable about technological advances and invested in maximizing new technologies to increase efficiency and ensure immediacy of services (Heiberger & Harper, 2008; Juncol & Cole-Avent, 2008; Lowery, 2004; Shier, 2005).

While a host of technologies are available to students, Facebook seems to be among the most popular, reporting over 500 million active users worldwide in 2010 ("Statistics," 2010). This figure refers to users of all ages, but student participation in the Facebook community has grown exponentially (Cain, 2008; Heiberger & Harper, 2008), resulting in widespread student use. Specifically, Facebook engages an estimated 80 to 90 percent of college students (EDUCAUSE, 2007).

The current version of Facebook allows users to see when friends are online and chat in real time via an instant messaging tool, send email messages, advertise and reply to event invitations, upload and share photos, post and reply to status updates and notes, find friends, "like" particular products and services, and create and join virtual groups. For many students, Facebook is an appealing and easy way to keep in touch with friends from high school, as well as a low-risk way to connect with fellow students who share similar interests (Shier, 2005). Little formal research exists to explain the popularity behind Facebook (Pempek, Yermolayeva, & Calvert, 2009), but the availability of this wide variety of tools and features (EDUCAUSE, 2007), and the ability of users to alter privacy settings and control other aspects of interaction with friends (Heiberger & Harper, 2008), may be some reasons for growing membership of the site.

According to Read (2004), another appealing aspect of Facebook is its potential to foster the creation of smaller, more intimate communities within the larger context of an institution, engendering a greater sense of belonging among students. Feeling a sense of belonging is widely documented (Astin, 1999; Barefoot, 2000; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates, 2010; Tinto, 2007; Upcraft, Gardner, & Associates, 1989) as an important factor influencing student involvement and student retention. For this reason, and due to evidence suggesting that increasing numbers of undergraduates are spending considerable time using Facebook (Cain, 2008; Pempek et al., 2009), student affairs professionals must seriously consider how Facebook can be used on their campuses to facilitate social connections among students and between students and faculty and staff (Cain, 2008; Heiberger & Harper, 2008; Kolek & Saunders, 2008; Lowery, 2004; Treuer & Belote, 1997). The value in maximizing a resource that students are already tapped in to and excited about cannot be underestimated. The purpose of this paper is to provide an overview of some of the ways Facebook is already being used in higher education to engage a wide variety of students, and to offer student affairs practitioners additional recommendations for using Facebook to positively impact student learning and development.

### Engaging Newly Admitted Students

Some institutions are attempting to involve newly admitted students in campus culture as early as possible (Heiberger & Harper, 2008) – and many institutions have taken advantage of the heightened publicity available through Facebook, as evidenced by the new student orientation initiatives that follow. Though these online initiatives vary depending on the institution, the innumerable group listings and pages returned in Facebook searches (e.g., "new student orientation") suggest that this early method of contact is becoming more prevalent. Much more research is needed, however, to explain whether and how new students' participation in Facebook groups impacts their overall transition to college.

Unlike past first-year students who arrived on campus knowing virtually no one, today's freshmen are connecting with fellow students online through Facebook groups and pages prior to setting foot on campus. The State University of New York (SUNY) at Purchase, for example, created a 2010 orientation page through Facebook that provides general information and connects newly admitted students in a common virtual space. In addition to offering details about orientation programming and the university itself, the SUNY Facebook orientation page also offers photos of orientation staff and students, relevant videos, and makes use of the "event" function of Facebook, which allows users to see other students who are attending the same orientation session (SUNY Purchase Orientation, 2010). The "wall" section of this group's page features an assortment of links to events and useful information from the orientation staff along with questions and comments posted by new students themselves. Many of these wall posts aim to connect with other students attending orientation, while other posts pose general questions about the transition to college.

Another variation of Facebook use to promote orientation events and new student connections is the page managed by the orientation staff at Hofstra. Hofstra's 2010 new student orientation page includes many of the features already mentioned (general and contact information, photos, videos, events), but this page also includes details about common reading and numerous links to information about events well beyond the orientation (Hofstra New Student Orientation, n.d.). Apart from simply engaging students in the early days of the college experience, this page seems to be a tool for keeping the newly admitted students connected and involved throughout their first year, advertising such events as "stress busters" for finals week at the end of the fall semester, alternative spring break trips, guest speakers on campus, local debates, intramural sports, talent show auditions, and providing links to online campus publications detailing other news and events.

In addition to these kinds of groups, Inigral, Inc. recently launched a "Schools" application on Facebook that is a paid service attempting to connect new students with common social and academic interests through a variety of features (Inigral, Inc., 2010). Essentially, this application creates a private community within Facebook that allows new students at a particular institution to interact with each other and make connections prior to arriving on campus (Ellison, 2010; Inigral, Inc., 2010). Since this aspect of Facebook is still quite new, little information apart from client testimonials is available regarding its impact. Certainly, research will be needed to determine how "Schools" affects students differently, if at all, from the traditional Facebook groups already described.

Not only can Facebook pages connect newly admitted students before they arrive on campus, but they can continue to facilitate engagement with other new students and involvement in campus events long after orientation activities have ended. The potential benefits for students include a greater sense of connection and community (Eberhardt, 2007), factors Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman (1995) identify as crucial in helping students transition successfully to college.

### Engaging Current Students

Once students have negotiated the initial transition to college, social networking sites like Facebook can continue to be useful in connecting students with new opportunities, people, and ideas (Eberhardt, 2007). According to EDUCAUSE (2006), one of the most useful features of Facebook may be the ability to efficiently disseminate information to targeted groups (created based on shared interests or affiliations) through the message feature. In addition to the simple message feature, Facebook also offers a "Facebook Flyers" tool that creates advertisements (for a fee) designed to appeal to specific networks or groups of students based on shared characteristics (EDUCAUSE, 2007). These ads may promote campus job openings, elections, local activities, or other events (EDUCAUSE, 2007).

While Facebook is widely thought of as a venue for engaging students in social activities, research (EDUCAUSE, 2007) suggests that users are connecting over more diverse interests, including those political and professional in nature, among others. A search on Facebook for groups and pages related to a variety of student activities returned overwhelming results; colleges and universities of all types are using Facebook to engage students in events that range from social to civic to academic in nature. Like the pages and groups designed to engage newly admitted students, more research is needed to understand how students use Facebook and the impact of initiatives aimed at engaging current students.

### Student Activities & Campus Events

Eberhardt (2007) and Olson & Martin (2010) document the increasing use of Facebook by campus activities staff and those associated with athletic teams and intramural sports clubs to promote attendance and participation at sporting and other events. Scholars (Lowery, 2004; Olson & Martin, 2010) also suggest that effective use of social networking holds great potential for increasing participation in these activities – and contributing to more positive college experiences for students.

*Athletics.* One example of the use of Facebook to engender support for and participation in college athletics is the Michigan State Spartans page. As a Big Ten School, Michigan State University (MSU) certainly places more emphasis on athletics than many other institutions, however, the features of Facebook the institution uses to involve students and general fans alike could be tailored to meet the needs of any college or university. This page, representing all athletic teams at MSU, has nearly 160,000 followers and provides regular announcements about sporting events, links to news features, photos and video clips from games, trivia, game day updates, fan polls, discussion blogs covering a variety of sports-related topics, and it also includes links to support teams through donations, to buy game tickets, and to purchase team apparel (Michigan State Spartans, n.d.).

While it is unclear how many of the followers are students, alumni/ae, or simply fans, it is clear that the institution has maximized the features of Facebook to appeal to as many different types of followers as possible. One downside to the design of this page, however, is that fans can only see a limited number of other fans; a group page or traditional profile would allow members to see other members and establish connections within the group.

*Student clubs & intramural sports.* On a much smaller scale than Michigan State, small institutions like Saint Joseph's College of Maine have a modest but informative intramural sports page, covering all intramural opportunities available, including sign up information, times of events, results of contests, and photos of teams in competition (Saint Joe's Intramurals, n.d.). Still, other institutions like Mount Holyoke College (MHC) promote engagement with specific teams, clubs, or other organizations through individual Facebook pages or groups. Among these are MHC Glee Club, MHC Center for the Environment, MHC Japan Group, MHC Jewish Student Union, MHC Fencing Team, and MHC V8s (an a cappella group). Each organization's page differs slightly, but all include linked members, general information about membership, events, and in some cases, relevant videos or photos.

***Other entertainment.*** The University of Minnesota promotes a wide variety of non-athletic events and campus activities using its "Student Unions & Activities" Facebook page (Student Unions & Activities, n.d.). In addition to advertising a link to follow "Student Unions" on Twitter, this page also provides a variety of information regarding event programming such as community events, guest lectures, trivia contests with giveaways, movie screenings, and opportunities to get involved with the Student Union planning board (Student Unions & Activities, n.d.). Like other pages, "Student Unions & Activities" also includes general information, photos and videos from events, and opportunities to respond to event invitations and learn of other event attendees.

## Civic & Political Engagement

Though Millennial students are often characterized as politically apathetic and uninterested in community involvement unless course credit is involved, some scholars (DeBard, 2004; Levine, 2008) suggest that this generation of students is more politically and civically engaged than it may initially appear, if we are willing to reconsider what is meant by engagement (Heiberger & Harper, 2008). A review of the way students use Facebook to show their support for particular candidates or platforms, learn about candidates, promote their own campaigns, and attempt to encourage active engagement with both campus and community government suggests that students are indeed more involved that it may seem – and that Facebook holds potential for boosting student participation in civic and political activities (Shier, 2005).

***Civic Engagement.*** A search of Facebook for civic engagement or service-learning pages for colleges and universities returned innumerable results, though many of the pages viewed did not appear quite as robust as those for other student activities. Overall, these pages included basic information, a contact person(s), a listing of past and upcoming events in which students were encouraged to participate, some press and photos related to service, and sometimes discussion posts surveying students for service project ideas. Northwestern University's civic engagement page offers some more depth to the civic engagement process, promoting lectures, film screenings, and readings that inform students about the larger systemic issues creating a need for service (Northwestern University Center for Civic Engagement, n.d.), but this kind of depth seemed to be an exception.

Many of these pages may be effective at increasing student awareness of particular events, yet they do not seem to maximize the features of the site. For example, these pages could be used as a tool to interact with community partners who would like to solicit short-term volunteers, or who would like to pose ideas for long-term sustainable projects. Facebook could also help to facilitate communication between the institution and service sites via private messages or instant messenger whenever face-to-face communication is not possible. As well, more could be done to provide students with a context for service like Northwestern has done, though it is unclear whether students take advantage of these resources.

***Political Engagement***. Whether undergraduates are interested in campus issues, local issues beyond campus, or are more focused on national concerns, the number of Facebook pages illustrating student involvement in government suggest that apathy may not be an appropriate descriptor of this generation. Innumerable pages for specific institutions' Republicans, Democrats, and Green Party members exist, as well as pages for larger regional and national groups such as "Maine College Democrats," or "College Republicans of America."

At the college level, student government associations' Facebook pages may include information about student government officers and contact information, pressing issues, ways to get involved, meeting times, sponsored events, and discussion forums. Georgia Tech's Student Government Association page, for example, attempts to engage students in conversation about important issues, such as those concerning equality on campus, through the discussion feature of the site, but only two or three students posted responses to each question (Georgia Tech, n.d.). Like this page, other student government pages also include information about political rallies or other similar events, but little can be gleaned from the Facebook forum about how many students actually attended. This unknown link between online behavior and real-world behavior points to an important issue that deserves further investigation: How are students using Facebook to learn about issues that matter to them? Though the presence of these kinds of pages and groups on Facebook are promising, unfortunately, they are no guarantee for student involvement.

### Overall Engagement

Interestingly, as an alternative to some of the examples above, other schools like University of Maine Orono (UMO) maintain a general student affairs page, which covers a wide variety of events and services, rather than charging each office with creating and maintaining its own Facebook presence. UMO's page includes information ranging from events and services related to multicultural and LBGT affairs, Greek life, transfer and commuter services, and counseling services, among others (University of Maine Student Affairs, n.d.).

The benefits of such a model for students include having all campus activities and services information in one place, and learning about a wide variety of events and services that they may not have known to seek out otherwise. On the other side, however, the depth of information featured on this page may not be as great as that featured on groups and pages specific to one service or organization. For student affairs professionals, this collaborative model can streamline efforts spent updating page content and can help raise practitioners' awareness of events and services outside their own divisions. The challenge of using this model for student affairs, however, is that it requires continued collaboration among departments which may not always be feasible or well-supported.

### Academic Engagement

Though Facebook is a social networking medium, research studies (Caruso & Salaway, 2008; Ellison, 2010; Selwyn, 2009) suggest that large numbers of students are using the site to communicate about academic coursework and goals. In a study done by Ellison et al. (as cited in Ellison, 2010), undergraduates reported using Facebook to coordinate face-to-face study group meetings, to manage group projects, and to seek help from classmates to aid their understanding of specific concepts or assignments (Selwyn, 2009). In fact, some participants in Ellison's study suggested that undergraduates would benefit from the availability of more academically-oriented tools on Facebook. Using Facebook as a means for helping support academic goals or supplement classroom time may not be readily accepted, but evidence (Ellison, 2010; Fontana, 2008-2009; Pempek et al., 2009) suggests that it can be an invaluable tool.

A tool for academic support. Ellison (2010) and Fontana (2010) suggest that students' level of comfort and familiarity with Facebook is one reason it holds such great potential as an academic support tool. Unlike other online tools such as Blackboard, Facebook appeals widely to students, and is a website they are already using – and visiting quite frequently (Fontana, 2010). Facebook also allows students to learn more about their classmates through their profiles, and possibly make connections with other students, something that other online academic tools do not offer (Ellison, 2010). Other research (Selwyn, 2009) suggests that groups could be created to connect students in particular course sections outside of the classroom for extra support from each other and the instructor. By helping students in a course connect on Facebook, faculty can broaden students' resources for academic assistance, and improve students' chances of feeling more comfortable at the institution as well. Some scholars (Eberhardt, 2007; Gemmill & Peterson, 2006) propose that increased levels of comfort and well-developed support systems may help reduce anxiety and facilitate better academic performance.

Another way colleges are using Facebook to support students academically is in the advising process. At Holyoke Community College (HCC), the First-Year Student Success program surveys students about preferred methods of contact for the advising process; this year, many students chose Facebook as the best way to communicate (M. Snizek, personal communication, October 18, 2010). This initiative is still in its early stages, but program coordinators noted the flurry of communication with advisors through messages and wall posts on Facebook early in the semester (M. Snizek, personal communication, October 18, 2010).

In addition to connecting with advisors and building relationships among classmates to support academic goals, Facebook can also be used to assist students academically through the creation of student support services pages. Disabilities services, tutoring services, or general student support services offices can use Facebook as a way to promote their services and help make students aware of the supports available to them. Being able to connect with support personnel online – or with other struggling students – may make seeking in-person assistance less intimidating (Eberhardt, 2007).

A tool to engage students beyond the classroom. Apart from using Facebook as a tool to provide students with academic support when they need it, some faculty have incorporated Facebook directly into course requirements. Fontana (2010) originally created a Facebook page for one of his art courses in 2008 in an effort to make students more aware of art events on campus and to provide links to art suppliers on the Web. As the semester progressed, students in the class also contributed to the page, using it as a forum for promoting events, posting links, and sharing relevant photos (Fontana, 2010). This development led to the creation of one page in 2010 (called "Fontana's Class") that united all of his art students across courses and required them to post photos of their own in-progress artwork as well as comment on that of others; surprisingly, students began interacting with others in different art courses, even engaging each other in discussion of their artwork when it was not required (Fontana, 2010).

Fontana (2008-2009) does note, however, that this process posed challenges at times. In particular, he reported that student commentary was often lacking in substance when not required as part of a student's course grade. Such challenges will certainly persist as other faculty attempt to incorporate Facebook or other similar tools, though research (Yan, 2008) suggests that this kind of online collaboration beyond the classroom can create an environment that motivates and empowers both students and faculty.

### Engaging Alumni/ae

Finally, use of Facebook can move beyond engaging newly admitted and current students to keeping alumni/ae connected to the institution, to each other, and to current students. In particular, alumni may be valuable resources for current students to learn more about specific career fields or job or internship opportunities (EDUCAUSE, 2007; Pempek et al., 2009). Career services offices would be wise to work closely with alumni relations to maximize such connections, which could be useful in identifying speakers or panelists for career services events. Likewise, companies employing alumni/ae could benefit from such a relationship through free promotion of particular job opportunities.

A common space for alums to connect with each other may also be valuable for networking, reconnecting (EDUCAUSE, 2007), or sharing ideas or resources with colleagues in similar fields (Elling & Brown, 2001). Not only will this common virtual space facilitate relationships among classmates, but it is another vehicle for keeping students connected to the university, which may make them more inclined to be involved in campus activities and to donate to campus causes. Vanderbilt's Alumni Association Facebook page, for example, includes listings of alumni-sponsored or alumni-relevant events such as reunion, holiday gatherings, and lectures given by alumi/ae. The page also features links to current events at the University, photos and updates from alums, and other opportunities to connect with former Vanderbilt students and to get involved with University events (Vanderbilt Alumni, n.d.).

### Challenges and Questions

Alongside the many potential benefits of using Facebook as a tool to engage students, there are, of course, many questions about whether and how Facebook actually promotes engagement and supports student learning (Eberhardt, 2007). Educators and student affairs practitioners have expressed a variety of concerns about the use of Facebook, which center around students' success and well-being as it relates to time spent online, privacy, and online behavior.

### Excessive Time Spent Online

Can students be "addicted" to Facebook? If so, what does this behavior look like, and what can be done about it? (Anderson, 2001; EDUCAUSE, 2006; Heiberger & Harper, 2008). Gemmill & Peterson (2006) suggest that the degree to which technology distracts college students is significant and needs to be further investigated by student affairs practitioners to learn how such an obsession impacts students' offline interactions and other aspects of their lives (Heiberger & Harper, 2008). Scholars suggest that those working in student affairs will need to encourage students to find a balance between being on- and off-line (Gemmill & Peterson, 2006); to explicitly promote face-to-face interaction through maintaining of physical campus gathering spaces and modeling of this offline interaction (Elling & Brown, 2001); and to provide training to student leaders to help recognize patterns of excessive use (Eberhardt, 2007).

Another concern about excessive time spent online is that students participating in online communities are doing so in isolation (Elling & Brown, 2001). Despite research studies (e.g., Kraut et al., 1998) warning that extensive time online may lead to social isolation and loneliness for users, more recent

investigations (e.g., Anderson & Rainie, 2010) suggest that these virtual spaces facilitate connections among users by removing potential barriers. With regard to undergraduates specifically, Heiberger & Harper (2008) report that students who spend more time on social networking sites seem to be more frequently engaged in real-world campus and community organizations. Additionally, in the same study these scholars suggest that students who cultivate relationships online also report more positive feelings about their social life and feel a deeper connection to their respective institutions.

### Student Privacy

Because younger students, especially, are less attuned to privacy concerns (Caruso & Salaway, 2008), many faculty and staff worry that students will share information that may be too personal, too specific, or even incriminating – and they stress the importance of educating students about responsible participation in online communities (Cain, 2008; Eberhardt, 2007; Heiberger & Harper, 2008; Kolek & Saunders, 2008). One specific facet of this concern is the need to make known the very public nature of sites like Facebook, which may feel quite private to many users (Cain, 2008). Unintended audiences of Facebook content that students are not likely to consider also should be part of the discussion about the public nature of Facebook (Kolek & Saunders, 2008).

### Monitoring Online Behavior

Another question surrounding the promotion of Facebook use is whether administrators should monitor Facebook activity to ensure student safety. If so, how can they effectively address online etiquette and establish enforceable guidelines to govern student behavior in this virtual realm (Cain, 2008; Kleinglass, 2005)? And, how might these efforts conflict with rights to free speech and privacy (Cain, 2008)? Eberhardt (2007) suggests that clear rules for online behavior will need to be established and communicated explicitly to students.

### Other Concerns

With the prevalence of newly admitted students using Facebook, concerns are also surfacing that online scrutiny of assigned roommates has led to an unprecedented number of requests to change roommates before students ever meet in person (Eberhardt, 2007; Farrell, 2006). Apart from being an administrative nightmare, certainly this kind of hasty judgment can lead to missed opportunities to connect with others, or opportunities to negotiate challenging relationships, all of which can be important parts of development (Eberhardt, 2007). Finally, what does all of this mean for those students who do not have a Facebook account, or regular, convenient access to the Internet? (Bargh & McKenna, 2004).

### Conclusion

Certainly, Facebook holds great potential for engaging many types of students in a variety of different ways, but many questions will need to be answered, and more innovations attempted, to weigh the advantages and disadvantages of Facebook use in higher education to encourage student engagement. Interestingly, students reported using Facebook regardless of how busy they were on a given day (Pempek et al., 2009), which suggests that it has become an enduring fixture in the higher education landscape. This means that faculty and staff, and particularly those in student affairs, will need to learn how to harness the potential of Facebook to help cultivate community among students (Heiberger & Harper, 2008; Shier, 2005).

In addition, faculty and staff will need to take steps to better understand students' interactions with Facebook, as well as recognize when its use may be prohibitive to academic and social success (Anderson, 2001; Kruger, 2005). Beyond simply observing students' use of Facebook, staff and faculty will need to be active users of Facebook and similar technologies and engage students via these tools in order to understand students' expectations and to design programming that meets their needs (Kleinglass, 2005). It will also be essential to include students in discussions about how to use technology most effectively and in evaluation of technology's current uses on campuses (Juncol & Cole-Avent, 2008). Lastly, those involved with implementing Facebook initiatives for student engagement will need to share their experiences with colleagues (Kleinglass, 2005) through formal and informal conversations and published research in order to clarify the extent of Facebook's impact on student engagement and success.

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# The Use of an Online Social Network to Introduce and Connect Newly Admitted International Students

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## Introduction

This article is a review of what East Carolina University's (ECU) Office of International Affairs (OIA) carries out in regards to assisting new international students transitioning to the institution, prior to their arrival on campus. The use of an online social network has been a successful method for assisting and welcoming international students before each semester begins.

## Rationale

Online social networks are, in large part, an immediate method to disseminate and share information. These special networks are also considered, by many in higher education, to be the most popular sites visited by students. While growth in numerous websites (e.g., Yahoo, America Online, and MSN) has been tapering off, the continuing evolution of websites like Facebook, MySpace, and LinkedIn are increasing (Bausch & Han, 2006). For example, Facebook users post over 55 million updates a day with 70% of those users living outside the United States (Osmond, 2010). A recent survey at ECU found that over 80% of all international students utilize at least one of the numerous online social networks available to the public. Some studies have seen promise for administrators in the connective nature of online social networks, as well. In her article on integrating technology into the university student life setting, Shier (2005) writes that online social networks contribute to the academic community. This is accomplished by helping students link up and communicate, as well as allowing them to become a part of a larger group within the institution.

According to data from the Institute of International Education, the number of international students enrolled in American colleges and universities is breaking previous records and representing the largest increases for this student population in decades. Furthermore, over 670,000 students earning a degree in the United States come from outside its borders (Bhandari & Chow, 2009). The challenge for higher education administrators is to meet the needs of incoming international students who are adapting to a new culture and a different academic environment. Today's institutions must continue to provide consistent, meaningful connections for newly arriving international students and enhance the delivery of pre-orientation services. This being said, utilizing popular student-friendly technology can help bridge the gap and improve delivery of vital information to new international students in a unique fashion. Many administrators in this country believe that the essence of higher education is to extend the boundaries of everyday life. Online social networks can be employed to meet this objective.

## Implementation

In the past at ECU, the only way incoming international students had the opportunity to meet each other, as well as the OIA staff, was during mandatory orientation sessions held prior to the start of each semester. This was satisfactory, at the time, since it was the first opportunity these students had to connect with the university community and each other. The primary objective of orientation is to familiarize new international students with the campus and its services, to make them aware of university and immigration service policies, and to register them for classes. Two years ago, the OIA began to explore electronic strategies to assist incoming international students and give them the ability to interact in a low pressure setting. It is also essential to allow these students online access to detailed information such as how to apply for a student visa, what to expect when moving into their residence hall, and how to complete required student health services paperwork.

In the summer of 2008, the OIA set-up an online social network for newly admitted and matriculating international undergraduate and exchange students on the Ning Network. The purpose of this private social networking website was to create a short-term online community. This was done two months before these new students actually arrived on campus.

The OIA felt it was necessary to set into motion the development of a system for new international students to learn about the campus community and for them to begin to form an attachment to ECU (or at least some part of it). Whether it is with other new incoming international students, the IOA staff, or some combination thereof, building a sense of belonging is a needed first step for a successful collegiate experience. Research has found that almost all positive outcomes associated with student success stem from students' ability to feel socially integrated to the academic community – meaning that they felt strong social connections (Tinto, 1993). There is no single method to achieve a sense of belonging to the institution but it was believed that *ECU International: Supporting and Engaging Future ECU International Students*, as it is called on Ning, is a sound beginning to this process.

*ECU International* initially provides new international students with OIA staff pictures and biographies, airport pick-up information, and what to expect upon arrival to the university and city. It also includes a detailed orientation schedule, an invitation and application to join the First Friends peer mentoring program, how to obtain a university email address, and how to make arrangements for the payment of tuition and fees. *ECU International* has a chat room and a selection of videos that highlight and introduce the university to new students, as well. Students who register on ECU International are encouraged to post a picture, provide a brief biography, ask questions or make comments on the message board, and chat with online *ECU International* community friends.

After the semester begins, announcements and emails are sent to the international students currently on *ECU International* making them aware that that the social network will close down for their particular group – since it is offered for only entering international students. These newly enrolled students are then given information regarding the OIA peer mentoring program, First Friends, as well as information on how to contact the International Student Association on campus. It is hoped the international students who just started at ECU will begin to make other connections at the university, although they may certainly take advantage of all available services the OIA offers.

## Conclusion

*ECU International* is a helpful and informal way to communicate with new international students, as well as a means for them to make contacts with others before they arrive to the United States. The transition to university life can be a stressful time for any student, and can be especially stressful for new international students. *ECU International* helps ease the transition by preparing incoming international students on what to expect when they arrive on campus, and by encouraging students and staff get to know each other through social networking.

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# Are They Listening?
# Social Media on Campuses of Higher Education*

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## Abstract

*Communication with students on campuses of higher education continues to drastically change. The social media phenomenon sweeping across the world creates a picturesque environment for the technologically savvy student, but often an intimidating outlook for administrators and faculty. While some higher education professionals embrace this opportunity to engage students through a new outlet, others struggle to adapt to new demands of the constantly connected, digital college student. Understanding social media and preferences of today's college student are inherent to identifying the best practices to encourage student engagement and foster student development on college campuses.*

***Keywords:*** *Social Media, Higher Education, Engagement, Communication, Technology*

## Introduction

The news of the earthquake and pending tsunami on Japan flooded the status updates of the popular social media site, Facebook on the early morning of March 11, 2011. In the days that followed, YouTube videos posted to this same site shared images of the horrific event and devastation of the landscape. Individuals across the world received instantaneous news at their fingertips as if they were there. Technology and social media create an atmosphere that encourages engagement and connectivity more than ever with college students. Students on campuses of higher education, often called millennials, are accustomed to using technology in almost every facet of their daily life (Underwood, Austin & Giroir, 2010). These students are technologically savvy and require immediate connectivity as well as access to resources and information. Engaging these students in campus programs and activities through social media communication requires a closer look by higher education administrators, staff, and faculty.

The year two thousand eleven seems the same as the year before, but is it? People still travel in cars, watch television, and go to the ballpark. They even still read a novel and play solitaire. The difference in this year, from last, or ten years before is individuals now communicate differently, research differently, and socialize differently. Drastic changes are occurring with how college students learn and communicate. Higher education faculty and administrators have adjusted slowly, adapting as necessary and often without a choice, but now is the time to embrace the opportunity to reach students in a new more effective manner. Student engagement can be accomplished but staff and administrators must no longer plan mediocre attempts to achieve, but excel through incorporation of social media in programs.

Higher education professionals face challenges every day, some forced upon them, others may be the same scenario but with a different generation. Creating a culture of learning and an environment that encourages student development and involvement is one consistent challenge, and today's digital students present a new twist. First, understanding social media and all it offers to the technologically savvy student is crucial to developing a successful strategy to reach these students. Secondly, higher education professionals must identify their strengths and weaknesses as well as their needs and expectations. Finally, to assess the needs of your students and to create an environment that encourages growth requires uncovering how students are communicating differently and what they expect from higher education professionals in return.

## Social Media – What Is It?

The prevalent terms used to describe social media include: information sharing, electronic communication, and social interaction. Visit the World Wide Web, conduct a search on social media and a multitude of definitions are presented. Interactive dialogue within the crossroads of web-based and mobile technologies classify social media's true description. A relatively inexpensive outlet, social media provides a dynamic blend of technology and social interaction as well as accessibility to individuals of all backgrounds, educational status, and socioeconomic background.

Social media, in the beginning, was used as a means for individuals to communicate on personal interest and stay connected with friends, family, and co-horts. Now information is disseminated through these avenues to educate, inform, survey, assemble, and protest everything from classroom curriculum, family updates, to breaking news. It is no longer necessary to watch the 5:30 news broadcast to get up-to-date on community and national headlines. Nor is it necessary to pick up a phone and call to confirm a dinner reservation, a date, or communicate with professors or a fellow student. Social media takes communicating to an entirely new dimension.

### Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter

The most dominant social media sites surfacing in the news include: Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and MySpace, and this is not an exhausted list. Whether a higher education professional has a Facebook account, chances are they have heard the reference. Facebook is used by both individuals and organizations to share information that is both work related and for personal interest (Ewbank, Foulger, & Carter, 2010). Individuals, groups, organizations, businesses, etc. may disseminate information in a text, link, photo, or video, and share with whom they like; all through their personal account. Also, Facebook provides a resource for individuals to carry on instantaneous messaging, and internal email without leaving the site.

In addition, "groups and organizations can establish collective pages," (Ewbank, Foulger, & Carter, 2010, p. 26) which provides two additional avenues to reach others with the same interest. Users can create a group page, or a fan page. The group page allows a platform for those of shared interest, any user, to converse and share information. The fan page is an opportunity to establish a professional presence, mainly by an official representative. Often campus programs and services will host a Facebook page or group; however, administrators struggle to identify how much presence is needed, what type of information to disseminate and how often they need to update their Facebook "status."

Twitter, another leading contender in the social media favorites among college students, is a little more difficult to explain. Jeff Jackson (n.d.), author on the breakdrink.com website, geared to current news in the student affairs profession, best explains Twitter as a microblog, because you let others know what you are thinking, but limits your thoughts to 140 characters. These microburst of information are often referred to as, "tweets." Twitter provides access to share and interact with individuals whom otherwise you would not know, but share the same interest. In addition, users can filter their personal interest, as well as their own tweets, with hash-tags (#). Hash-tags provide one more avenue for users to filter the information they are receiving. For instance, the hash-tag, #SALead, is dedicated to topics relating to leadership theory and practice in the field of student affairs.

A study by Pearson Education (2010), "Social Media in Higher Education," found YouTube as the most common social media service used to communicate with students. Not surprising, this communication tool provides an alternative to traditional methods of sharing information, including lectures, podcasts, and current news. Over 100 million videos currently reside on the servers of YouTube and educators and higher education professional are just a few of the users who take advantage of these free video sharing site. Simply stated, YouTube is a website where videos are uploaded and shared relating to opposing end of spectrum, personal to professional, comical to news worthy. YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter are noted as the most recognizable social media; however, the number of professionals actually using these technologies in higher education is much lower (Bart, 2010).

### Administrator Understanding, Involvement, and Challenges

Visible in many classrooms, social media is present on campuses of higher education; however, the process of incorporation has been slow. Faculty members are utilizing media outlets to communicate with students, while significantly increasing its incorporation in curriculum dissemination. These outlets appear to present excellent avenues for encouraging student engagement and involvement, but administrators are often caught in the struggle of knowledge of usage and opportunity versus time commitment to making social media work.

Campus administrators and faculty as well, struggle to identify with college students and perhaps find themselves resembling a "digital immigrant" as noted by Marc Prensky (2001). Digital immigrants did not grow up in an Internet household, and may look to the Internet as a secondary source of information as opposed to the first and primary source. These individuals have "adopted most aspects of new

technology," but often continue to implement methods and strategies that have always worked (Prensky, 2001. para. 6). Unfortunately, digital immigrants are now under pressure not only to adapt to new learning and communication styles of digital natives but also to restructure their own thought process to maximize student development.

Faced with the challenges to constantly evaluate their programs and their effectiveness when communicating with students, administrators are exploring innovative ways to enhance student engagement with technology, specifically social media. Educators are using interactive technology within the classroom in a variety of methods, such as online discussion boards, wiki pages to encourage creative collaboration, and web-based conferencing options such as Skype. Strengthening student engagement on campus requires an active approach to uncovering the emerging trends and continually adapting practices to meet the needs of students (Olson & Martin, 2010).

An outsider to higher education may think that campuses of higher learning would be a haven for social media use; however, that is not the case. Ewbank, Foulger, and Carter (2010) remarked that teachers used social media primarily for personal communications, not those of an academic nature. In reviewing one campus' Facebook page, the authors determined that a majority of communication referred to accomplishments, press releases, and that the fans were mostly its own faculty and staff.

While faculty and administrators are slowly embracing social media and incorporating uses into daily practices, many concerns and challenges continue to exist. Social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and blogging are very interactive mediums. Rachel Reuben's (2008) Guide for Professionals in Higher Education noted that the four top concerns of administrators were loss of control, time commitment, information overload, and the openness of these programs to allow creation of an "official" account without formal channels. Many sites allow comments that are immediately posted and therefore not screened for content, which can cause distress about potential negative comments. Involvement in any type of social media requires a great deal of time for establishing frequent updates, responses, and release of current information. Social media outlets can create an environment conducive to information overload and can cause users to feel bombarded with responsibilities to keep up. On a campus of higher education, often duplication of presence through social media sites by varieties of campus programs and users can create confusion. Administrators show concern for program identity and the reflection of this resource as official means of communication.

## Students – How They Communicate, What They Expect

Students walking about today's campus of higher education are different from students of twenty, or even ten, years ago. Incredible technological advances have emerged in their lifetimes and have become everyday conveniences. Prensky (2001) refers to these students as "Digital Natives," who grew up with computers in the home, had constant access to the Internet, and had cell phones that were not attached to chargers in bags that had to be left in their personal vehicles and were small enough to carry in their pockets. These students are more digitally connected than previous generations.

S. Craig Watkins, an associate professor at the University of Texas at Austin, when questioned, noted that these students are now "walking in armed with technology, from their mobile phone to laptops" (Beja, 2009, para 3). College students are now expecting communication with their academic and extra-curricular program to mimic the communication in the rest of the lives. They want to be connected constantly, informed instantaneously, and selective of what they find suitable for immediate, if any, response.

Technology offers college students an array of options to socialize, network, stay informed and connected. Students are now using technology to communicate more than face-to-face interaction. Many have lost the art of maintaining eye contact while speaking in person; instead they continually consult their phone for updates, text messages, emails, Facebook posts, and Twitter tweets. While faculty on campuses of higher education struggle to identify how digital students learn differently, higher education professionals struggle to identify their preferred methods for communication. There is limited research on social media usage by campus programs and administrators and the success with students; however, many colleges are reaching students this way. Research on social media usage in the classroom abounds, although this research does not provide accurate information when comparing communication of faculty to higher education professionals and campus programs.

According to Gemmill and Peterson (as cited in Heiberger & Harper, 2008, p. 22), "three-quarters of college student spend between one and three hours per week using the Internet for social communication; the remaining one-quarter spend three or more hours per week communication socially online." According to Facebook, of the active college network users, an average of twenty minutes per day is spent on the site and during this time over fifty pages are viewed (Heiberger & Harper, 2008). The students are engaged through social networks; they are connected. Choosing to utilize social media outlets to reach this population seems inevitable; yet, higher education professionals must develop a strategy that will not pollute their resources.

### How Administrators Communicate with Students

Regardless of the time spent online by students, administrators must be mindful to find "positive ways to use the technologies most popular with students" (Heiberger & Harper, 2008, p. 29). Staying abreast of the current technologies and preferences of students is crucial to ensure the most effective incorporation of social media in communicating with students. The ultimate goal is to increase involvement and knowledge of campus programs. Poor planning and utilization could result in negative participation and response rates from students.

A variety of opportunities exist for higher education administrators to disseminate information and engage students through social media. Facebook can be used to encourage a sense of community with campus programs by creating groups where members can join and communicate with others of the same interest. The group page is an excellent way to share program news, updates, and event information. Before any plan of action is developed, the target audience must be identified, as well as the demographics of the followers. Develop a strategic plan and commit to this method, because students have a "high expectation about the speed and quality of campus connection" (Heiberger & Harper, 2008, p. 31).

Twitter provides a micro-blogging platform which serves as an exceptional resource for marketing campus programs and opportunities for involvement. Utilizing one-hundred forty characters to share current news, campus happenings, and useful tips is one additional method for distributing content in a non-aggressive manner. Informational podcasts and instructional videos shared through YouTube provide one additional outlet for getting the message to students. YouTube also has the option to create sub-channels that are content specific, so this avenue presents another opportunity to make information available to students. In addition, with video sharing, campus programs and administrators can use creativity, music, graphics, and current trends to capture their audience.

### Conclusion

According to Eric Stoller (2011), "a prevalent theme for 2011 is how higher education can capitalize on social media as a way to create relationships, student retention, and engagement" (para. 5). To communicate effectively with students, higher education professionals must embrace new technologies, explore opportunities to implement a social media presence, and most importantly develop a plan that constantly re-evaluates trends and adapts to the changing needs of students. Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube are the preferred social media outlets for socializing and networking. Current research shows students are online, engaged, and desire to be connected to their campus. They are listening, but choosing the appropriate message and outlet depends on the commitment to success.

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# Mental Health Issues and International Students:
## Background to the Workshop to be held at the
## ANZSSA Biennial Conference
## December 2011

Jim Elliott
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Curtin University
President, ANZSSA

In November 2011, Sean Murray (WA ANZSSA Convenor and Head of Counselling and Disability Services at Curtin) and I both attended the ISANA Conference being held at the Crown Casino complex in Melbourne. In the middle of that conference, an ANZSSA Heads of Service meeting was being hosted at the other end of the central business district at RMIT.

As readers will very likely know, ISANA members and participants at their conferences are individuals with a very strong interest in matters to do with International students. This includes International student advisors, staff in International student offices, external providers of a range of services, government agencies, student associations and many others. Conspicuously absent from this list is a critical mass of people professionally qualified in mental health issues. At the ISANA conference, both Sean Murray and I noted that there were serious concerns being expressed about International student mental health issues by this constituency. At the same time, when we attended the ANZSSA Heads of Services meeting, we observed many of the same concerns being expressed. ANZSSA's membership includes a substantial number of professional staff working in counselling services, and thus represents a group which does indeed have significant mental health expertise. Our response at this point was to comment to one another that ANZSSA and ISANA ought to be working together on this issue.

In my role as ANZSSA President, I began discussing this matter with the President of ISANA, Danielle Hartridge. We came to an agreement that the issue was indeed something that we could work together on. In broad terms, the key points of agreement were:

- Whilst there are mental health issues of concern for <u>all</u> students, there are reasonable grounds to believe that International students dealing with mental health issues have particular needs.

- The staff who may be the first point of contact for such students are frequently not highly trained in mental health; and are almost certainly not fully-qualified and/or accredited mental health professionals.

- International students may not necessarily easily approach counselling services, where campus-based mental health services are available to them. International students may not have a clear understanding of the cultural presumptions underpinning many Australian support services. There may be different understandings of the nature of mental health; when and how to use such services; shame associated with seeking support; a different conception of their rights; and so forth.

- There is a need for clear processes and common understandings of mental health issues between "front-line" staff likely to encounter these issues first and professional mental health staff who are likely to be working with such clients at a later point

We were aware that many campuses have been delivering Mental Health First Aid workshops – and this is to be commended. Despite that, we considered there would be value in developing a shorter workshop that might be a beginning point for many staff to begin considering how they recognise and respond to International students who may be experiencing mental health difficulties.

An initial outcome of the discussions between ANZSSA and ISANA led to the development of a template one-day program that regional branches of both associations may use to construct a local conference. This template was produced by Sean Murray and me in consultation with various other ANZSSA members and stakeholders within ISANA. The template was distributed to the various regional groups within ANZSSA

and ISANA early in 2011, with endorsement from the presidents of both associations. The intention was that the model may work in a similar way to the series of annual Duty of Care ANZSSA/ISANA Conferences held in WA over the past decade – that is, fairly large scale events attracting 200 or so participants. This has since been under consideration by some state branches but at the time of writing, no events have actually been delivered. It is not such an easy thing to organise events of that magnitude. Meanwhile, the issue of student mental health has remained on the public agenda. The National Summit on the Mental Health of Tertiary Students held in Melbourne in August 2011 is one example of a very high profile event addressing this matter.

The shortened workshop being presented at the ANZSSA conference in December arose from a request to deliver something on this topic at the International Education Association Conference being held in Adelaide in October 2011. However, in this case, the time available on the program was a half day. As a result, the template program was reviewed with the more critical questions – "what might people need to know to even start thinking about this issue?" That is, we cannot pretend to do other than make a beginning on the issues that need more thought; a short workshop is a taster and a stimulus for participants to do further work.

The resulting workshop will now be delivered in Adelaide in October at the International Education Association Conference, in Hobart in November at the ISANA Conference, and at the Biennial ANZSSA Conference in Sydney in December. Given the profile of the summit in Melbourne, this will mean that there has been at least some level of coverage of the issue in four state capital cities in 2011.

The workshop itself will work quickly through some key topics, in a highly interactive style.

- A broad overview of the Western Model in contrast to what International students may have experienced in their home countries. The gap between student <u>expectations</u> and what is <u>available</u> to them will be explored.

- The issues which have the potential to exacerbate mental health issues for International students – such as being away from home; lack of support network; shame; fear of loss of visa; and more

- An overview of <u>who</u> is most likely to come into contact with students showing signs of mental health difficulties – and what behaviours they may observe that are potential indicators of mental health problems

- A brief summary of what may be viewed as "unhelpful" responses

- An outline of a "Good Practice Model"
    o Early identification
    o Early Intervention
    o Appropriate psycho-education of International Students
    o Strong lines of communication between key people – front-line staff, mental health professionals and external sources of help
    o Well-constructed case management systems – including keeping stakeholders "in the loop" whilst respecting client confidentiality

- A case study – the "worst case – student suicide"

- Next steps – what might participants do next to build on what has been gained from workshop

Those readers who have a professional knowledge of mental health issues will know that the above list of points is ambitious. However, the goal of the workshop is to bring together mental health practitioners with staff who have more limited knowledge and skills in the area. It is the latter group who may find themselves interacting with distressed students in administrative offices, libraries, student housing, advisor service areas and the like. If we can raise knowledge and awareness amongst these staff, and help build good communication between front-line staff and mental health professionals, then this workshop will have achieved its goals.

The workshop facilitators encourage conference attendees to consider attending this workshop. Those who are not mental health professionals will gain some knowledge, and perhaps some confidence to work effectively with counsellors and other mental health professional staff. Professional counsellors who

choose to attend this workshop will perhaps learn something about the work context of other staff, and gain some insights into effective ways of working with staff in other roles.

An outcome of the development of this workshop is that we now have several models to choose from in raising the profile of mental health. We may choose the somewhat more comprehensive model of Mental Health First Aid. Or perhaps the one-day large scale conference format delivered to regional branches earlier in the year. And now, a small-scale and small time-frame model that may be used in future contexts.

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# Assessing the Value and Impact of Student Services

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*Andrew West is Chair of AMOSSHE – The Student Services Organisation which is the professional association for student services managers in the UK higher education sector. Andrew is Director of Student Services at the University of Sheffield in the north of England. This is a research intensive higher education institution with c25 000 students. The University of Sheffield is a member of the 'Russell Group' of leading universities in the UK. Andrew's remit at Sheffield has a wide scope covering the student 'journey' - including student recruitment, admissions, registry, student administration, learning and teaching support, and a broad range of student support services. As well as being current Chair of AMOSSHE – The Student Services Organisation, he was Vice-Chair of AUA (the overarching professional association for HE managers in the UK) during 2010-11. Andrew also serves as a member of the HE Advisory Panel for the Office of the Independent Adjudicator, which is the UK HE ombudsman. Andrew has published a number of professional journal articles on HE management and leadership issues, including a chapter on strategy and service quality within UNESCO's guide to global best practice in student services.*

Over a period of fifteen months during 2010-11 AMOSSHE has led a national project focused on assessing the value and impact of student services.

Beginning with a literature review which informed the development of a draft evaluation 'toolkit', the project worked with four universities to pilot the proposed evaluation tools and techniques in eight different service areas, representing 'core' student services provision, including international student support, counselling, financial capability and study skills.

The project has adopted a holistic approach to evaluating the impact and value of services that support students and the resulting toolkit proposes a range of evaluation approaches. In particular this form of evaluation goes beyond systems of user feedback which concentrate on satisfaction measures, or which measure activity participation and/or service footfall. It is a richer, more comprehensive form of assessment and evaluation.

The literature review (available to download at http://www.amosshe.org.uk/projects/vip/lit_review) demonstrates that there is well developed practice in this holistic form of evaluation particularly in US higher education, but that the concepts are relatively less developed elsewhere. In the US system, there is a particular focus on demonstrating impact of student services in terms of 'learning outcomes' for students – terminology which might not necessarily fit easily in the UK HE context. Within AMOSSHE's work, we have been keen to ensure that our understanding and definitions of 'impact' are sufficiently generic to be applicable to a wide range of student support services. Also that they allow for assessment of impact in respect of matters such as student wellbeing or student progression, as well as what might be described as learning outcomes. We have also developed tools to help service managers assess the value of student support services, both in relation to cost effectiveness, and also using a broader more qualitative definition of 'value'.

Experience gained during the pilot phase of the AMOSSHE project suggests that the theories, models and resources set out in our Value and Impact toolkit form a strong basis for the development of a properly holistic approach to service evaluation. It is important to note that this is a strategic approach which does not constitute a 'quick fix' for service managers and neither can it lead to the generation of superficial indicators supporting a league-table mentality. In fact the experience of this form of assessment may well be uncomfortable; but the results are likely to be invaluable.

From AMOSSHE's perspective, work to assess the value and impact of student support services is related to three key drivers and benefits:

- it underpins the evidence base for the contribution of student support services in higher education - a particularly important theme in the UK when the university student experience is perhaps in sharper focus than ever before as the balance of financial contribution to the costs of HE is moving further away from the public purse and towards the individual student;

- it forms part of the continued development of professionalism in the student services community and the increasingly strategic approach to the management and delivery of student service;

- it leads to demonstrable and practical improvements in the delivery of student services, so contributing to improved student learning, achievement and success.

At the forthcoming ANZSAA conference, Andrew will lead both a pre-conference workshop and a plenary presentation on the theme of value and impact in student support services. He will provide a brief overview of the origins of the Value and Impact Project (VIP), including the use of international exemplars. He will summarise the key findings from the literature review and will set out the service areas covered by the pilot studies and the principal learning points and challenges experienced within this phase of the project. In describing the development of the evaluation toolkit he will also provide an overview of the toolkit contents and the associated website which was launched at the end of the project in June 2011. He will also touch on plans for future dissemination and some of the further development work (eg in the area of implementation support for service managers) which is in preparation at the point of writing and will have begun by the time of the conference. Attendees at the pre-conference workshop will have hands-on opportunity to engage with some of the contents of the toolkit, alongside associated tools developed at the University of Sheffield, so demonstrating the adaptability and flexibility of the VIP approach.

Andrew believes that value and impact evaluation represents a rich, reflective process paying strong dividends in terms of improved user understanding, professional learning and service enhancement. The process is best conceived as a 'journey' and AMOSSHE is delighted to have the opportunity to share some of this journey at the ANZSAA Sydney conference in December 2011.

**References**

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AMOSSHE *Value and Impact Toolkit* http://www.amosshe.org/vip

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# JANZSSA Submission Guidelines 2012

### Word Processing platform

All articles should be submitted electronically using Microsoft Word or in another commonly used word processing format able to be converted to an MS Word document.

### Language and spelling

JANZSSA uses Australian English so please adjust your spell check in word to ensure compliance.

Contributors will be contacted if there are language or spelling difficulties with the articles submitted.

### Journal format

In 2011 JANZSSA moved to an A4 format to simplify the process for the authors and for the editors.

### Article Length:

Articles would normally be less than 6,000 words to be accepted.

Articles longer than 6,000 words may be returned to authors to be shortened.

### Abstract is required:

All articles submitted must include a brief (<250 words) abstract.

### Page layout required:

From January 2011 articles for inclusion in JANZSSA in either the referred or non-refereed suctions will need to be submitted electronically using the following layout instructions.

The following is a normal page layout in MS Word:

Top: 5.5          Bottom: 5.5

Left: 2.54          Right: 2.54

Gutter = 0          Header = 1          Footer = 6

### Font type:

Times New Roman

### Font pitch:

Article Title:     14 point BOLD

Author/s Name, Role, Institution:          12 point

Abstract header:          12 point BOLD

Abstract body:   10 point italics

Body text:        12 point

Header within body of the text:  12 point BOLD

Footnotes:        9 point

### Diagrams tables and drawings:

Any diagrams and tables included in the text must be no larger than 21depth x 17 wide cms.

Any drawings included are inserted with Paste Special function so that the drawing is stable in the body of the text.

Text within a table is preferred as centred or left margin aligned.

### Use of colour:

JANZSSA is published in black and white so use of colour in graphs, diagrams and drawings may mean that the nuanced meaning in the various components of the chart, gra Ph: etc lost. Please ensure that the differences in charts, diagrams and graphs etc are clearly defined using variations of colour within a grey scale.

### Use of References:

Referencing protocol is the APA Referencing System. Examples of the APA Referencing system are easily found using an internet search. Below are two examples from Australian Universities.

http://www.lc.unsw.edu.au/onlib/ref_apa.html

http://www.lib.monash.edu.au/tutorials/citing/apa.html

### Suitable content for articles submitted for publication in JANZSSA:

Articles may include comment and debate on current issues, reports of student services in practice, policy matters, research projects, and reviews of relevant books. The guiding editorial policy is that articles are of interest to student service staff, and are of a high standard.

### JANZSSA publishes both refereed and non-referred articles:

Authors who wish to submit an item to be published as a refereed article must include a written note to that effect at the time of submission. If an author does not specify for inclusion in the refereed section the editors will consider the article for publication in the non-refereed section.

### Refereed Articles:

The Research Programmes and Policy Unit, Higher Education Group, Department of Education, Science and Training (now known as DEEWR) advise that JANZSSA is recognized by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (formerly DEST) for publication of refereed articles. The register of such journals is to be found at

      http://www.dest.gov.au/Search.aspx?query=refereed%20journals.

### Non-Refereed Articles:

Articles submitted for publication without being peer-refereed will be published at the discretion of the editors.

### Best Practice and Strategies to Show Case

JANZSSA is going to look to include in its non-refereed section examples of best practice and innovation emerging in Student Services.

Contributions for this section are invited.

Contributions to this section would normally be descriptive and not evaluative.

Length of submissions can vary but the upper word limit will normally be 1500 words. Contributions of longer length may be returned to the author for editing.

### Deadlines:

Contributors should observe a deadline three months earlier than the date noted below for other articles.

JANZSSA publishes: in April and October each year. Deadline for submission of non-refereed articles is January 31 and July 31 respectively.

### Referee Process:

The editor of JANZSSA will consult with the Editorial Board to identify at least two expert referees (who may not necessarily be members of ANZSSA).

Each referee will be unaware of the identity of the other referee/s.

Each of the referees will be provided with an electronic copy of the article from which the author's name has been removed.

**As author/s you should take care to construct your article so that you are not identifiable as the author/s once the author names have been removed.**

Referees will submit a report back to the editor that contains one of four recommendations. These are:

That the article be published without amendment

That the article be published with minor amendment, to be approved by the Editor of JANZSSA

That the article be published with amendments to be approved by the referees

That the article not be published as a refereed article

Referees will also return the electronic copy of the article, which may contain annotations and suggested amendments to the paper. Referees will be asked to ensure that their identities are not revealed in the track changes or annotations made.

At least two of the referees must be in agreement for an article to be published as a refereed paper.

### Enquiries:

Any queries regarding submission format should be directed to either of the editors. See contact details for the Co-editors below.

### Before submitting your article:

Please refer to the following check list and complete these actions prior to submission of the article.

### Please check:

JANZSSA page layout has been used

JANZSSA font type and font size requirements have been used

JANZSSA referencing system (APA style) has been used throughout and that all references are included.

Spelling, grammar and punctuation reviewed.

All diagram and table contents are position and text correct (i.e. text abbreviations used are consistent throughout diagram or table and that text is centred or left margin aligned.).

Drawings included are inserted with Paste Special function so that the drawing is stable in the text.

Do print and read for final corrections.

De-identified version of paper as reviewer copy completed and attached (if the article is for submission for the referred section of JANZSSA).

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**From 6 December 2010**
This group also functions as the Editorial Board of JANZSSA

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**Convenors of Special Interest Groups:**

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# Information about ANZSSA

The Australia New Zealand Student Services Association Inc (ANZSSA) is the professional association for all people working to support students in post-secondary education in Australia and New Zealand.

As an umbrella organisation for a wide range of professional workers, ANZSSA is uniquely placed to provide professional development activities which will deepen understanding of the principles and philosophies of student support and provide a venue for training in best practice in the profession of student support.

This is done through meetings, seminars, workshops and conferences where experienced practitioners present in their areas of expertise.

These meetings provide the basis for peer support amongst staff across institutions. This occurs informally and more formally through professional interest groups.

More information on ANZSSA can be found on the web site: **www.anzssa.org**

### Aims of ANZSSA

The basic aims of ANZSSA are:

- to foster and promote support amongst students and staff.
- to facilitate the general well-being of the institutional community in universities and other post-secondary institutions
- to sponsor the professional development of members through regular conferences and organise close professional contact between members.
- to promote research
- to support and promote the interests of all those engaged in these activities.

### Professional Development Activities

A **Biennial Conference** is the major ANZSSA meeting. It is a significant and substantial conference which attracts numerous international participants as well as delegates from the Australian States and New Zealand.

**Regional and State meetings** are the main ANZSSA events between biennial conferences. Regional activities range from informal workshops to visiting speakers and, in some cases, regular three day conferences.

**Bulletin Board** located at *www.anzssa.org* provides opportunities for members to share information and seek assistance with programs and issues. Recent issues include use of case notes, critical incident policy and procedures, financial advising of students and peer counselling programs.

### Publications

**JANZSSA**, the Journal of ANZSSA, is published and distributed to members twice per year. Members are encouraged to contribute a variety of material: scholarly articles, information communications, comments, book reviews, and items of interest to the general membership can all be accommodated.

ANZSSA is on the web at: http://www.anzssa.org The ANZZSA web site is a comprehensive resource offering a broad range of support information to professionals working in student support roles.

### Membership

Membership is open to all those who:

- work directly with post-secondary students in various aspects of service provision to students
- have responsibility for ensuring that students receive the services and assistance they need
- who have an interest in the area of student services

Full details of current membership categories and registration costs are available by downloading the membership form available via the JANZSSA website members' page http://www.anzssa.org or

http://www.adcet.edu.au/Anzssa/view.aspx?id=5336