JOURNAL OF THE AUSTRALIAN AND NEW ZEALAND STUDENT SERVICES ASSOCIATION

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Editorial

Welcome to the 'new-look' April 2016 edition of JANZSSA. You will notice that our cover has had an update – thanks to the design talents of Laila Faisal, from Victoria University, Wellington, New Zealand, who is part of the team that produces the monthly ANZSSA newsletter that all members now receive.

We hope you will enjoy this larger-than-usual edition, which contains no less than seven papers from the 2015 ANZSSA Conference, held in Hobart last December; including both refereed conference papers (peer-reviewed as part of the conference submission process) and non-refereed conference papers. These seven papers all provide interesting insights into various aspects of the student experience and the innovative strategies that are being used and developed, at a wide range of institutions, to meet student needs and improve student outcomes.

In addition, this edition contains three refereed papers, peer-reviewed through JANZSSA's usual double-blind process, which encompass the varied topics of: the experiences of international students from India; the experiences of distance students; and student needs and expectations in relation to counselling services. Finally, there is a report which will be of particular interest to those who have an interest in and/or a responsibility for service improvement, as it provides a summary of the results of the benchmarking survey conducted in 2013 by the Heads of Counselling.

We look forward to receiving further quality submissions for the October edition, and encourage all our readers to use JANZSSA as a way of sharing innovative practice and research, thereby letting others know of the work that you are doing that is making a positive difference to the student experience.

Cathy Stone
Annie Andrews
Co-editors, JANZSSA

Expectations and Experiences of
Indian students in Australia:
Findings from a Survey and Focus Group Study

Swati Basu
International Student Services
Queensland University of Technology

Abstract

India currently ranks among the top source countries for the Australian education industry and therefore, a better understanding of the concerns and challenges confronted by Indian students is essential. This study was undertaken among Indian students enrolled at Queensland University of Technology (QUT) to assess the needs and expectations through survey and focus group meetings. Whilst several past studies have emphasised language and acculturation difficulties encountered by international students, we find that Indian students coming to Australia are more concerned about 'value for money' aspects of their education including quality of programs, course fees, availability of scholarships, and career and networking opportunities. The findings also reveal an acute need for more effective dissemination of information prior to the students commencing their programs in Australia. Initiatives like pre-departure briefings and orientation programs should cover both academic and non-academic aspects of university life as well as resources and support services available to international students.

Keywords

Indian students, international student experience, focus group.

Introduction

Australia has gained recognition as one of the world's leading providers of education and training. Students from different parts of the world have made Australia their education destination. This is the result of an innovative and effective education system. Australian qualifications are widely recognized, gaining the attention of many employers worldwide and launching many successful careers. The Australian education experience is seen as different and challenging, each year attracting hundreds of thousands of international students who wish to maximize their potential and secure their future.

In the past decade, more than a million overseas students have studied in Australia. The international student enrolment data for 2009 showed that 631,935 international students drawn from more than 100 different countries around the world were undertaking a qualification in Australia (Australian High Commission, 2010). Over one in five tertiary students in Australia were international students (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011). These students reportedly chose Australian education for several reasons: its reputation for excellence and world-wide recognition; safe and stable environment; Australia's enviable standard of living – one of the highest in the world; and Australia's multicultural society which helps international students feel at home.

In keeping with the international student enrolment trends, the number of Indian students studying in Australia has also grown rapidly over last decade. In fact, the growth rate in Indian student numbers far outstripped the growth rate in students from most other countries. The end of year Indian student enrolment data for 2009 shows that 120,913 Indian students had enrolled to undertake an Australian qualification in that year. In other words, one out of every five international students enrolled in Australian institutions came from India. This made India the second top-source country (after China) for Australia's international education providers. To put it in perspective, India was ranked eighth in the list of top-source countries as recently as in 2003 when Indian students accounted for less than 5% of all international student enrolments. Since then, for Indian

students, Australia became the second most popular international education destination behind the United States.

Indian students find it easy to transfer to the Australian education system due to its similarity with the 10+2+3 education system prevalent in India.[1] Students can choose from a wide variety of Australian universities and education institutions to suit their specific needs and goals. Each higher education institution has its own strengths and areas of specialisation. This provides students with a wide choice of study options and access to the latest research in their chosen field. The most popular courses amongst Indian students coming to Australia are in the areas of business, information technology, engineering, and science. Although vocational education and training (VET) sector attracted by far the greatest share of enrolments among Indian students (62% in 2009), enrolments in the higher education sector also grew three-fold between 2003 and 2009 to reach 24% (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2009).

However, there is a continual need on the part of Australian higher education providers to be attuned to the changing perceptions and needs of international students. Any perception of decline in overall quality of education and related services can result in students becoming reluctant to select Australia as their destination and instead choosing to study elsewhere. Sometimes a single issue like security (on and off campus) can exert substantial influence in choice of destination countries, cities, and education providers. For example, incidents of violence against Indian students in 2009 and the consequent media attention had a damaging effect on Australia's reputation as a safe destination for study among Indian nationals and adversely impacted levels of enrolments of Indian students in the following years.

Understanding the overall Indian student experience in Australia, in relation to life on campus and beyond it, is critical to assess the needs of the students and identify areas of concern. This knowledge can be informative to higher education providers in devising successful strategies to provide superior service to the current and future cohorts of students coming from India. This is the overarching motivation of the current study.

Background

In keeping with the international student trends in Australia, international student enrolments at Queensland University of Technology (QUT) have also seen a steady increase in the last decade. In 2009, out of a student population of 40,000, nearly 6,700 students enrolled at QUT were international students. About 5% of these students were from India. Subsequently the number of Indian students, both in absolute and relative terms, sharply declined. This slump is not unique to QUT but is a trend reflected across all Australian education providers and is consistent with the anecdotal evidence of widespread concern among Indian students about choosing Australia as their study destination in the wake of several violent attacks reported against Indian students mainly in the southern states during 2009.

This strong interest among Indian students in Australia as an education destination in recent years has been underpinned by a perception of quality. Australia has comprehensive quality assurance mechanisms embedded in its education system at the government and institutional level as well as through professional peak bodies. To maintain their reputation as providers of a high quality education experience, Australian universities need to offer robust student support services and conduct regular quality assessment of those services. This is a complex task in itself.

Whilst Western higher education institutions are academically among the best, they are continually challenged by the need to simultaneously address the cognitive, social, and interpersonal development of students (Keeling, 2004). Despite the interwoven nature of learning, programs,

---

[1] In India, students gain secondary qualification after ten years of schooling and post-secondary qualification after another two years. This is followed by three years of undergraduate studies to gain a bachelor's degree. Hence, this system is referred to as 10+2+3.

services, and systems of support may remain fragmented and separate. Such fragmentation had been common among institutions in the past. However, sophisticated student affairs models and infrastructures have been found to dramatically enhance students' experience in Western colleges and universities (Chakrabarti, Bartning, & Sengupta, 2009). Australian universities are no exception to this.

However, student experience is not confined to what is delivered within the university campus. For international students, education involves more than just acquiring an overseas qualification. By studying abroad, students gain valuable experience through living and working in a foreign country. These opportunities, however, come with an additional set of challenges of adjusting to unfamiliar social and cultural settings. The change in surroundings can result in feelings of disorientation and helplessness (Furnham & Bochner, 1986; Olivas & Lee, 2006). These feelings can be accentuated at times of crises, real or perceived, like the reports of violent attacks on Indian students flashed regularly in the media. Feelings of isolation and loneliness have also been reported by Deumart, Marginson, Nyland, Ramia, & Erlenawati (2004) as issues affecting a large proportion of international students. The present study, therefore, attempts to capture the different facets of Indian students' experiences, both within and outside the university campus.

The study contributes to a growing body of work that looks into international student experiences from a social and developmental perspective (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2008). Undoubtedly, the overall international student experience is significantly influenced by the ease or difficulty in adjusting to the host environment. Araujo (2011) organises these adjustment issues around several convergent findings. For example, many studies find proficiency in English language to be a significant factor in relation to both academic and social adjustment. Poyrazli & Kavanaugh (2006) reveal that English proficiency significantly affects the level of academic adjustment. On the other hand, Yeh and Inose (2003) find that self-reported English language fluency is a significant predictor of acculturative distress. In a study conducted among Taiwanese students in United States, it is found that that apprehension about speaking English affected the adjustment of these students (Swagler & Ellis, 2003). Alarmingly, Sümer, Poyrazli, & Grahame (2008) report that students with lower levels of English skills show higher levels of depression and anxiety. Finally, Kwon (2009) suggests that international students undertaking 'English as second language' programs are more likely to feel intimidated or isolated in classes where the medium of instruction is English.

Social support is identified as an important factor in facilitating adjustment of international students. Poyrazli, Kavanaugh, Baker & Al-Timini (2004) report that students with higher levels of social support demonstrate lower levels of acculturative stress. Ye (2006) examined the linkage between cross-cultural adaptation of Chinese international students in the United States and the perceived support from traditional support networks and online ethnic social groups. The paper's findings suggest that there is a negative correlation between perceived support (from interpersonal networks in the host country and from online ethnic social groups) and difficulties in social adjustment.

Perceived discrimination and prejudice has also been shown to affect the acculturation and adjustment process of international students. Constantine, Anderson, Berkel, Cadwell, and Utsey (2005) qualitatively investigate the adjustment experiences of Kenyan, Nigerian, and Ghanaian international students in the United States. In their study, all subjects reported experiencing discriminatory treatment. Interestingly, Poyrazli & Grahame (2007) find that the different types of discrimination experienced by international students occur mainly outside the campus.

There has been very little research to date on homesickness of international students. Among the two prominent studies in this field, Poyrazli & Lopez (2007) find that not only international students in United States experience higher levels of homesickness than American students, but their level of perceived discrimination is an important predictor of the level of homesickness. The

second study (Tochkov, Levine, & Sanaka, 2010) compares the level of homesickness experienced by a sample of Indian students in United States to that of a sample of American (domestic) students. The authors find that international students from India experienced significantly higher levels of homesickness than American freshmen, although the level declined among students who had accumulated more credit hours.

Gunawardena & Wilson (2012) investigate the experience of students from the Indian subcontinent in Australian universities. In addition to many other studies dealing with the socio-cultural factors shaping international student experience, they also look into the reasons behind the choice of Australia as destination for higher education. One of the key issues that emerge from their research is the influence of the agents who market Australian universities in this region. Since the agents earn commissions on student recruitment, they have an incentive to promote an overly attractive image of student life in Australia and not adequately highlight potential difficulties the students may encounter with high cost of living, scarcity of accommodation, and limited employment opportunities. When student expectations are not met on arrival to Australia, it leads to disappointment. The authors point out that a majority of these students come from the lower end of the rising middle class population of the region and therefore, are financially constrained with significant debt burden.[2] Consequently, they are driven to make poor choices to cut living costs (such as residing in cramped accommodations far away from campus) and generate income (such as working excessive hours in menial jobs unrelated to their study or past experience). Although a vast number of students arrive with the expectation that they will be able to obtain permanent residence in Australia on completion of their studies, in reality many of their degrees are not of sufficient duration to make them eligible to apply for permanent residence.

Many academic institutions (and researchers) often treat international students as one cultural group. Gunawardena & Wilson (2012) warn against this notion as it can result in the overlooking of important variations between and within cultural groups. For example, they note that whilst past studies have highlighted English language issues among international students, students from the Indian subcontinent have superior English language skills because it was taught to them at a very young age alongside their native language. However, while they are proficient in the grammatical aspects of English language usage, they may still have difficulty with certain aspects of communication like jargon and accent, which are more culturally specific. This study makes an important contribution in this context. It provides a more nuanced understanding of the issues relevant to students of a particular nationality (India), who have a distinct socio-cultural identity within the international student population. Although the sample in the study is drawn from students enrolled in one university only and as such their experience is likely to be partly influenced by institution-specific factors, the insights are sufficiently general to be useful and informative to other universities and various entities operating within the tertiary education sector.

Table 1 presents QUT's annual new enrolment numbers for Indian students over a four-year period between 2008 and 2011. The aggregate number for all international student enrolments is given in the parentheses for comparison. The data indicates dramatic drop in number of Indian students in 2010 from the new enrolments in previous years. The overall international student numbers, however, were steady over this period. This forms the backdrop for this study conducted among Indian students currently enrolled at QUT.

Table 1. Indian student enrolments at QUT

Year	2008	2009	2010	2011
Enrolments	187 (3,212)	186 (3,641)	86 (3,674)	91 (3,210)

---

[2] 95% of the students in their study had student loans and 88% were in part-time employment.

QUT aims to deliver very high standard of service as well as meet the demand of continuous improvement in overall experience of all international students enrolled in its programs. The International Student Services (ISS) plays a central role in achievement of these goals. The ISS, through its activities, provides dedicated support services to international students, to assist them in adjusting to life and study in Australia, including helping them to resolve any problem that may arise during their course of stay in Australia.[3]

The goal of ISS is not only to provide a service that meets the needs and expectations of the international students but also to enhance existing services through constant monitoring, evaluation and assessment. It is in this context that the current study was undertaken to gain a better understanding of how ISS can provide or facilitate in providing better services to Indian students enrolled in QUT. The aims of the study were as follows.

- Understand and assess needs and expectations of Indian students

- Explore their experiences

- Discuss problems, issues, and coping mechanisms

- Elicit feedback on existing services provided by QUT

- Seek suggestions on how to improve the services

Methodology

This study involved two data collection techniques – e-mail survey and focus group meetings. Survey method is commonly used to gather information about attitudes and orientation of a population of interest that the researcher cannot observe directly. Focus groups help the researcher to further explore and clarify the views of the participants in ways that is not possible through surveys. They explicitly use group interaction as a method of gathering information where participants are encouraged to talk to one another, ask questions, exchange anecdotes and comment on one another's experiences and perspectives (Kitzinger, 1994). As this research was meant to be an exploratory study to understand the expectations and experiences of Indian students at QUT, a combination of survey and focus group research methods were considered appropriate for the purpose.

The survey and focus group meetings were conducted sequentially. The survey was launched first and remained open for four weeks. After a month following the closure of the survey, two focus group meetings were organised. The survey responses served as the basis for framing discussion questions for the focus group meeting. More details on the data collection and sample are provided below.

Survey

For the survey, responses were sought from all Indian students enrolled in QUT. Key Survey, an online survey creation tool used at QUT, was used to develop and distribute the survey questionnaire online. The survey consisted of thirteen questions seeking information on different aspects of student life and experiences. The survey questions are presented in Appendix A. Although individual information was requested, it was not compulsory for students to identify themselves on the survey form. A total of 280 Indian students enrolled in various courses at QUT were found in the university's student database. E-mails were sent out individually to these students where the weblink to the survey was provided. In addition, the survey (including the weblink) was also advertised in 'ISS News' newsletter consecutively for a few weeks. Responses from 41 students who completed the survey were downloaded from Key Survey after the closing date.

---

[3] Details of the services offered by the ISS to international students can be viewed on the ISS website
https://www.student.qut.edu.au/international

Focus group

Invitations were sent out to all 280 Indian students enrolled at QUT as found in the student database. Out of these, eighteen students registered for participation in the focus group. These students were split into two groups and meetings were held on separate days to suit their convenience. The meetings were held in an informal setting. Data collection approach was inductive in nature to gather as much evidence as possible with nothing ruled out. As Dalglish and Chan (2005) points out, through the inductive process it is possible to identify issues that have not been previously identified in the existing literature. Nevertheless a clear set of questions was used as a guide for framing the discussion. However, students were able to move outside this framework when and where they wished to discuss something on their own. The questions taken up for discussion in the focus group meeting are provided in Appendix B.

Focus group discussion was centered on experiences of Indian students studying at QUT, their perceived needs and concerns, and perception of the services provided by QUT and ISS. At the beginning of the focus group session, the purpose of the session - to collect information that might enable ISS to improve its services - was explained to the participants. Complete confidentiality of individual comments was guaranteed. At no time during the session, the identity of any individual speaker was recorded. The sessions lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. Where students had individual issues that they wanted to have addressed, they met with the facilitator after the session. Students contributed openly on different issues although only the most pressing issues were probed further due to time constraints. The relaxed and conversational nature of the group sessions enabled students to explore the issues and spontaneously contribute to the discussions. Tea and snacks were provided to the participants during the meetings.

Sample data

As stated before, there were 41 individual responses to the survey. As shown in Table 2, the number of survey respondents was almost evenly split between undergraduate and postgraduate students. A majority of respondents (75%) were enrolled in coursework programs. However, research students were well represented with about 25% of the respondents belonging to that category.

All eighteen participants who registered for the focus group meetings attended. There were eight participants (seven male, one female) in the first meeting. The second meeting had ten participants (six male, four female). Unlike the survey, most participants in the focus group meetings were postgraduate students.

Table 2. Student categories

Enrolment	Survey Number (Percentage)	Focus Group Number (Percentage)
Undergraduate	21 (51.2%)	5 (27.8%)
Postgraduate (coursework)	10 (24.4%)	10 (55.6%)
Postgraduate (research)	10 (24.4%)	3 (16.6%)

Figure 1 presents the age distribution of survey respondents.[4] The 18-25 age group was by far the largest age category in the survey sample data. More than half of all survey respondents belonged to this age group. On the other hand, there were only two respondents above 40 years, which is about 5% of the total number of respondents.

---

[4] The same data for focus group participants could not be procured as it was optional for them to provide personal information beyond a bare minimum in order to retain anonymity.
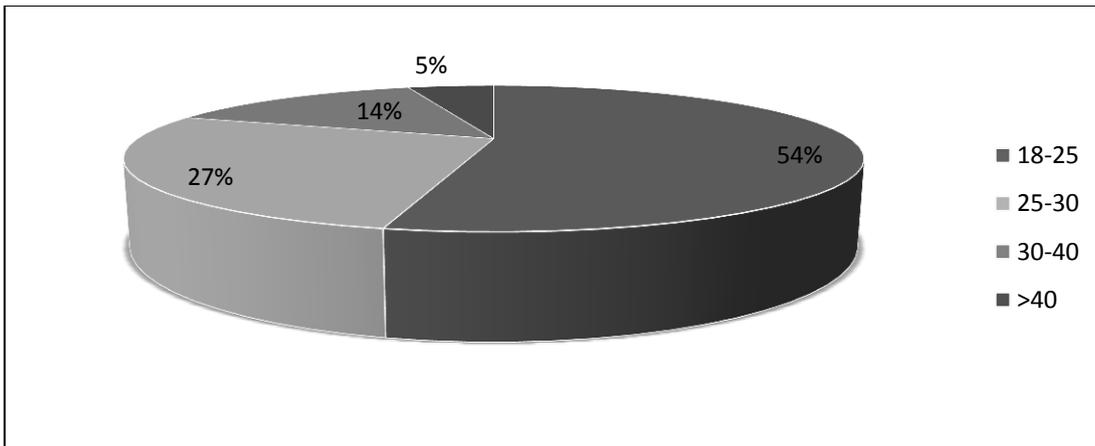
Figure 1. Respondents' age

Within every age group, barring above 40, both undergraduate and post graduate students were well represented as shown in Figure 2. Expectedly, undergraduate students vastly outnumbered postgraduate students in the youngest cohort (18-25) in the sample. For other age groups, there were a higher proportion of post graduate students.
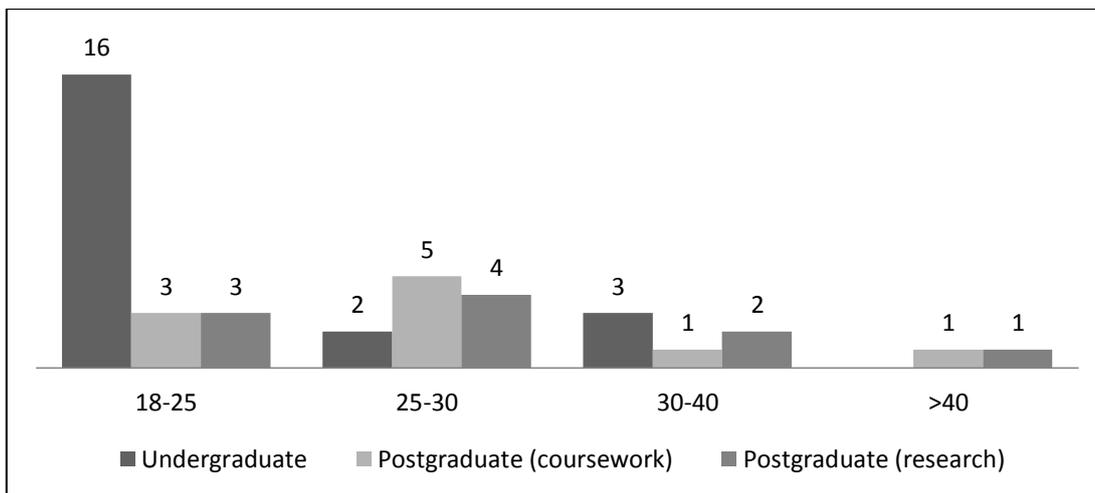
Figure 2. Age distribution by categories

Results and Discussion

The results of the survey and focus group meetings are presented and discussed below.

Survey

Students were asked to specify the reason(s) behind their decision to study at QUT. The responses are tabulated in Table 3. Since students were allowed to pick more than one factor that influenced their selection, the number of reasons is higher than the total number of respondents.

From the responses, it appeared that reputation of the institution was the most important factor behind the decision to study at QUT. This was closely followed by reputation of the course and desire to study in Australia. This is consistent with the findings of Dalglish and Chan (2005). Personal and family reasons played a less important role. The responses also suggested that financial reasons such as tuition fees, living costs and so on, appeared to have negligible influence on choosing QUT as the institution of study.

Table 3. Reasons for studying at QUT

Reasons	No. (percentage) of Responses
To study in Australia	15 (36.6%)
QUT's reputation	19 (46.3%)
Reputation of the course	16 (39%)
Tuition fee	1 (2.4%)
To live in Brisbane city	2 (4.9%)
Cost of living	0 (0%)
Recommended by a QUT graduate	4 (9.8%)
Personal reasons (eg. Family lives here)	6 (14.6%
Other	12 (29.3%)

Next the survey explored the issue of perception about cost of living, specifically the student's expectation before arriving in Brisbane vis-à-vis what they actually confronted while living here. The responses summarised in Table 4 indicates that more than half of the respondents found living expenses to be higher than they had expected. However, a sizeable proportion of respondents (39%) found that cost of living in Brisbane was in line with their expectations.

Table 4. Cost of living

Cost of living in Brisbane	No. (percentage) of Responses
Same as I expected	16 (39%)
More than I expected	21 (51.2%)
Less than I expected	0
Uncertain	4 (9.8%)

Social life forms an important part of the international student experience and the survey focussed on this aspect. Participants were asked to identify if their friends in Australia were mainly students from their home country (India), domestic students, or international students from other countries. The results, shown in Figure 3, did not suggest any clear preference. More than half of the respondents indicated that their friends were a mix of domestic and international students. From the responses, it seemed that it was equally likely that Indian students would socialise with students from their home country or those from other countries.

Figure 3. Friends of respondents
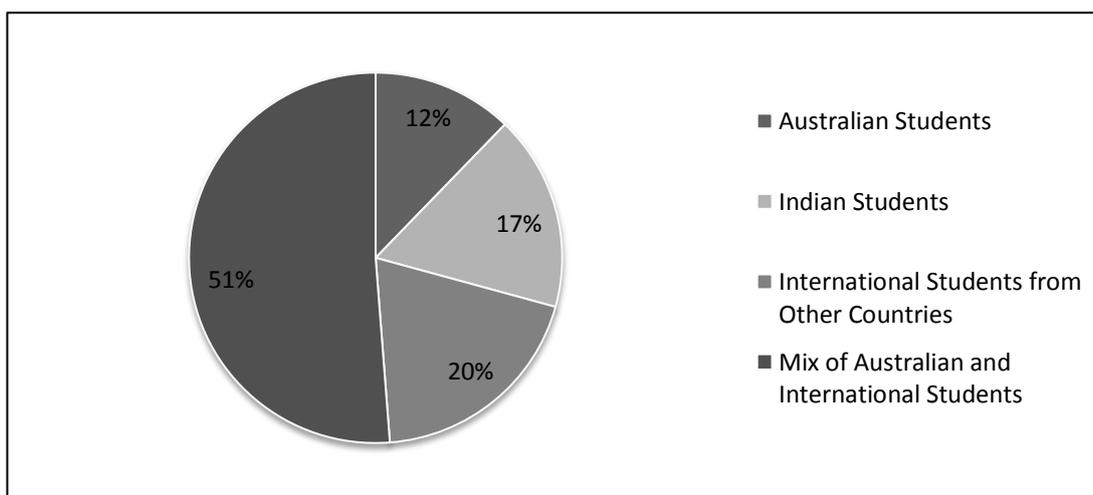
Next, the students were asked to respond to the concerns and challenges they faced during the time they spent in Brisbane and at QUT. The responses are presented in Table 5. Financial and migration issues appear to be the dominant concerns among the respondents. Almost half of the respondents faced challenges with cost of living issues and more than a third of the respondents cited financial

concerns. Nearly two in five respondents indicated changing migration conditions as a concern. Next were issues related to accommodation and food with 30% of the respondents citing accommodation as a challenging issue and 25% citing food. Adapting to a new academic environment and different study methods were a source of concern to a quarter of the respondents. Social needs such as friendship needs and homesickness were also of concern to nearly 20% of the respondents. Very few survey respondents (less than 10%) indicated English language to be a challenge, which is consistent with the findings of previous research on Indian students such as that by Deumart et al. (2004), Dalglish & Chan (2005), and Gunawardena & Wilson (2012).

Table 5. Concerns and challenges

Issues	No. (percentage) of Responses
English language (social use)	3 (7.3%)
English language (academic use)	2 (4.9%)
Adapting to new place	6 (14.6%)
Adapting to new/different study methods	11 (26.8%)
Financial concerns	15 (36.6%)
Food	10 (24.4%)
Accommodation	12 (29.3%)
Cost of living	19 (46.3%)
Changing migration conditions	16 (39%)
Meeting religious needs	4 (9.8%)
Feeling homesick	7 (17.1%)
Keeping in touch with family and friends	4 (9.8%)
Making new friends	9 (22%)
Relationship with QUT staff	4 (9.8%)
Other	4 (9.8%)

The survey also asked the participants about sources of support they would seek in relation to issues of concern. Responses are tabulated in Table 6. The overwhelming response to this question was that help would be sought from friends within QUT and family members. More than 35% of respondents mentioned speaking to lecturers and tutors. Only 28% of the respondents stated that they would speak to an ISS advisor about their concerns. This was identical to the number of respondents who said they would speak to friends outside QUT regarding these matters. The results also indicated that Indian students are unlikely to talk about their concerns to a community person such as a religious adviser.

Table 6. Support providers

If you had a concern, who would you speak to?	No. (percentage) of Responses
Family	22 (56.4%)
Friends outside QUT	11 (28.2%)
Friends within QUT	24 (61.5%)
Community person (eg. religious adviser)	1 (2.6%)
Lecturer, Tutor	14 (35.9%)
ISS Advisor (International Student Services)	11 (28.2%)

Finally the survey asked whether they would like attend a focus group meeting to discuss the above issues further. Nearly 60% of the respondents answered in the affirmative.

Focus group

The focus group meetings were organised to gain a deeper understanding of the issues related to the Indian students' experience of studying at QUT and living in Brisbane. The objective was to understand needs, concerns, and challenges faced by these students within and outside of university, to assess the current level of support provided by QUT and ISS in relation to these issues, and to identify specific steps that could be taken to close the gap between student needs and services offered by the university.

The focus group meeting revealed the following concerns (in no particular order of significance). Academic challenges, financial difficulties and uncertain employment prospects emerged as key concerns followed by issues related to personal adjustments in a foreign environment.

- English language for academic usage such as completing assignments was difficult. Level of language skills demanded was higher than students had originally expected. In response to questions about their main concerns with studying at QUT, two students mentioned *'Language barrier in group meeting'* and *'Language barrier, especially when it comes to academic writing.'*

- Lecturers have specific expectations and requirements of assignments but offer very general and broad feedback. The following comment from a student illustrates this point: *..all they can teach us is what to do, not how to do. We have come here to learn 'how things are done' and nobody tell us that.*

- Difficulty in finding jobs. A number of students expressed concern about finding employment after finishing studies, through comments such as: *How good is QUT's reputation internationally? Will I get job security in QUT after graduating?;* and *...employment is still a concern.* One remarked, *QUT should have more employment opportunities on campus, arrange for job placement and provide some kind of internships as students would be more employable with some work experience.*

- Resume writing service needed to be improved.

- Proof reading service in the library (only fifteen minutes) was not adequate.

- University fee increases. Comments included *...the awful INCREASE in FEES! In return we're not receiving anything extra...* and *...the fees structure is so uncertain, it keeps increasing every year which makes it tough for us as International students.*

- Temporary accommodation costs were very high.

- Transport was generally considered safe but expensive and inconvenient.

- Safety was an issue. While no participant reported any incident where their personal safety was directly under threat, many were aware of such incidents through acquaintances and media reports. Some students opined that Indians get attacked more often because they are reluctant to report such incidents to the police. (No racist attack was experienced by any of the participants.)

- Hard to make friends.

- Lack of proactive support by the university.

While concerns were highlighted during the meeting, a major part of the discussions revolved around what could be done to alleviate students' concerns and provide them with more support in coping with academic and living issues. The emphasis of the focus groups was to learn what the participants thought would be helpful. Following is a list of specific steps/actions that were suggested during the meeting.

- Comprehensive and authentic pre-departure briefings including information about coursework and level of required English language proficiency.

- More information needs to be made available to parents back in India (to address their concerns and, at times, their reluctance to send their children to Australia after media coverage about racial attacks and natural disasters)

- Supplying complimentary phone cards on arrival.

- Providing arriving students with a list of cheap food and lodging options.

- Providing a list of vegetarian food outlets.

- Providing more information about assignments, with examples provided.

- Mentoring/tutoring facilities in their respective subjects, with senior students mentoring new students in their own disciplinary fields.

- More information on the level of English language skills required should be covered in the orientation.

- More detailed information should be provided at the Faculty level orientation.

- More English language support would be helpful.

- Free printing services for international students.

- More networking facilities by conducting meetings (such as the current focus group), workshops, social and cultural events. (The role of ISS was valued by most participants. One commented, *If a student ever walks in through it's (sic) doors, we know he'll be fine... He'll be looked after, nurtured and supported*

- More information needs to be provided on services offered by ISS. A number of participants in the survey and focus group meetings were not aware of the services provided by the ISS. One student commented *I didn't know about ISS until I got this email but I would love to know more about this.*

- Discussion groups, forums and focus groups needed to be held more often, with one at the start of each semester.

- Meetings with police could be organised as these were very helpful in addressing safety concerns and raising awareness.

- Students needed to feel 'homely' away from home. Suggestions were made by students about providing support from people who can speak their language and understand their cultural and socio-economic backgrounds (someone who could 'relate' to them).

The focus group also deliberated on what students themselves could do to address some of the issues they faced while studying at QUT and living in Australia. The participants showed recognition of the areas where more effort needs to be made. Some important action points that emerged from the discussions are provided below:

- Acculturate effectively by opening up to people from other cultures and background. "Move around" and mix more with students from different backgrounds.

- "Get their priorities right". Show a more serious attitude towards achieving their goals and aspirations.

- Get more involved in sports and other co-curricular activities.

- "Speak up for themselves" and not suffer from lack of confidence due to living in a foreign environment.

- Be more aware of the facilities and resources available to them.

Implications

Findings from the survey responses and focus group discussions have important implications for student support services. Some suggestions and recommendations are provided below.

a)   Pre-departure briefing seminars need to provide more emphasis on academic issues. Expected level of English language proficiency required to undertake degree programs (and to communicate socially) should be made clear. Samples of academic writing in English could be provided. More information regarding assignments typically undertaken by students (with some samples) could also be provided. Time allocated for these briefings should be increased providing representatives more opportunities for one-on-one consultation with the students. Follow-up on these issues could be provided at the orientation sessions that students attend after arriving in Australia.

b)   Both pre-departure briefings and orientation sessions upon arrival should highlight the services provided by international support services in supporting the needs of international students.

c)   Providing a dedicated editing and proof-reading service should be explored. Career related services need to be improved by organising more resume writing workshops, arranging for internship and placement with local employers.

d)   Since accommodation appears to be one of the most important issues for many arriving students, an information pack on bonds, lease, tenancy rules and regulations (RTO) should be made readily available. This could be provided at pre-departure seminars.

e)   To overcome feelings of loneliness away from home, more social networking opportunities should be provided. Group discussion meetings, workshops, seminars are very helpful if such meetings are held at the start of the semester. Mutual discussion among members helps clarify issues as well as providing opportunities for the sharing of knowledge and information. Helpful practical tips could be passed on by senior students to newly arrived students at such meetings and seminars.

f)   Periodic sessions could be organised with members of the police to apprise students about safety and security issues and to help them deal with any potential law and order situations with confidence.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to monitor, evaluate, and assess the needs of Indian students studying at QUT. Although the study was undertaken on a small scale, it provides some understanding of the factors that attracted students to study at QUT; how well they coped after arriving in Australia; and whether the overall experience met their expectations. This information may be useful to other higher education providers in communicating with prospective students and also providing a more effective learning experience.

The survey responses and focus group discussions indicate that Indian students feel the need for more support from the university in various areas, although there was appreciation for the assistance currently offered by QUT. In terms of identifying which issues are of most concern to Indian students, the survey and focus group findings were not consistent. For example, usage of English language in an academic setting emerged as a major issue in the focus group meetings but this was not reflected in the survey results at all. On the other hand, migration related issues were cited as a concern by many survey respondents but was not raised by any of the focus group participants.

Overall, the findings suggest there is an acute need for more detailed information dissemination prior to students commencing their studies in Australia. In relation to Indian students at QUT, Dalglish and Chan (2005) emphasised the importance of orientation. In the current study, it was apparent that the students wanted more information prior to their enrolment or before their arrival in Australia. Improvements in services once they arrived were mainly needed in areas such as academic support, career issues, low cost accommodation and provision of more networking opportunities. A greater emphasis on pre-departure briefings may be beneficial in providing a better

understanding of the level of support they can expect on arrival.

One finding of particular concern was that Indian students who confronted difficulties in coping with their studies or personal life were not very likely to contact university services such as ISS for advice or guidance. This is possibly a result of lack of awareness about QUT's existing support services. Interestingly, Indian students who made use of support services such as ISS generally had positive experiences to share. This finding makes a strong case for utilising existing resources of the university more effectively through more efficient dissemination of information amongst the student community. Orientation programs can play a key role in developing greater awareness of university support services as well as opportunities for cultural intermingling and networking (such as national day celebrations, student excursions) thereby facilitating acculturation within an unfamiliar academic and living environment.

In terms of the specific student concerns highlighted in this study and their significance, caution needs to be exercised in drawing general conclusions because of two important limitations. Firstly, survey studies can potentially suffer from response bias as participants essentially self-select. Whilst there is no reason to believe that the views of the participants are widely different from those who did not participate in the survey and focus group, the possibility of some variation cannot be completely discounted. Further studies with a larger sample of Indian students in Australia need to be undertaken to validate these findings. Secondly, since the participants in this study belonged to a single university, their experience is likely to be influenced at least to some extent by local factors. For example, students in larger Australian capital cities such Sydney or Melbourne may demonstrate a greater level of concern with cost of living, relative to their counterparts in Brisbane (where QUT is located) whereas students in regional universities may view it as a lower order issue. On the other hand, larger Indian communities in Sydney and Melbourne may provide students with greater possibilities for engagement with their own culture, helping students to feel more 'at home' than in Brisbane and other smaller centres. Similarly, there is likely to be a great deal of variation between these locations in terms of work placement and training opportunities which can impact upon the students' level of concern with career and employment prospects.

However, despite these limitations, this study offers some important insights that may apply more generally to other tertiary institutions with international student enrolments, particularly from India. The findings suggest that issues with language and culture, often highlighted in the literature as being a key factor affecting the international student experience, are not necessarily the foremost concern for these students. The results suggest that there is a need for universities to avoid a narrow focus on providing English language support but instead to offer a more holistic approach that addresses deeper challenges in academic engagement confronted by international students who are coming from a completely different teaching and learning environment. Increasingly, Indian students in Australian universities are from an aspirational middle class background and are looking for 'value for money' from their education providers. As a result, support in the areas of financial aid (such as loans and scholarships) and career opportunities (job placements, internships) needs to be accorded strategic priority in future student recruitment and retention in this highly competitive environment.

References

Araujo, A. A. (2011). Adjustment issues of international students enrolled in American colleges and universities: A review of the literature. *Higher Education Studies*, *1*(1), 2-8.

Australian Bureau of Statistics (2009). *Expanding link with China and India*: *Australian social trends*, Bulletin No. 4102.0, Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics.

Australian High Commission (2010). *Study in Australia*. New Delhi, India: Australian High Commission.

Chakraborti, R., Bartning, A., & Sengupta, S. (2010). Developing globally compatible institutional infrastructure for Indian higher education. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, *14,* 183-200.

Constantine, M. G., Anderson, G. M., Berkel, L. A., Cadwell, L. D., & Utsey, S. O. (2005). Examining the cultural adjustment experiences of African international college students: A qualitative analysis. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, *52*(1), 57-66.

Dalglish, C. & Chan, A. (2005). *Expectations and reality – International student reflections on studying in Australia*. Paper presented at the Australian International Education Conference, Gold Coast, 11-14 October, 2005.

Deumert, A., Marginson, S., Nyland, C., Ramia, G., & Erlenawati, S. (2004). *Factors affecting the social and economic security of international students in Australia: A study of 200 student cases*. Paper presented at the ISANA conference, Melbourne, 1-3 December 2004.

Furnham, A. & Bochner, S. (1986). *Culture shock: Psychological reactions to unfamiliar environments*. London, UK: Methuen.

Gunawardena, H., & Wilson, R. (2012). *International students at university: Understanding the student experience*. Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang Publishing.

Keeling, R. (2004). *Learning reconsidered: A campus-wide focus on the student experience.* Washington DC, USA: National Association of Student Personnel Administrators.

Kitzinger J. (1994). The methodology of focus groups: the importance of interactions between research participants. *Sociology of Health and Illness, 16,* 103-21.

Kwon, Y. (2009). Factors affecting international students' transition to higher education institutions in the United States: From the perspective of the office of international students. *College Student Journal*, *43*(4), 1020-1037.

Olivas, M., & Lee, C. (2006). Understanding stressors of international students in higher education: What college counselors and personnel need to know. *Journal of Instructional Psychology*, *33*(3), 217-222.

Poyrazli, S., & Grahame, K. M. (2007). Barriers to adjustment: Needs of international students within a semi-urban campus community. *Journal of Instructional Psychology*, *34*(1), 28-36.

Poyrazli, S., & Kavanaugh, P. R. (2006). Marital status, ethnicity, academic achievement, and adjustment strains: The case of graduate international students. *College Student Journal*, *40*(4), 767-781.

Poyrazli, S., Kavanaugh, P. R., Baker, A., & Al-Timini, N. (2004). Social support and demographic correlates of acculturative stress in international students. *Journal of College Counseling*, *7*(1), 73-83.

Poyrazli, S., & Lopez, M. D. (2007). An exploratory study of perceived discrimination and homesickness: A comparison of international students and American students. *The Journal of Psychology*, *141*(3), 263-279.

Sümer, S., Poyrazli, S., & Grahame, K. (2008). Predictors of depression and anxiety among international students. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, *86*(4), 429-437.

Swagler, M. A., & Ellis, M. V. (2003). Crossing the distance: Adjustment of Taiwanese graduate students in the United States. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, *50*(4), 420-437.

Tochkov, K., Levine, L., & Sanaka, A. (2010). Variation in the prediction of cross-cultural adjustment by Asia-Indian students in the United States. *College Student Journal*, *44*(3), 677-689.

Ward, C., Bochner, S., & Furnham, A. (2008). *The psychology of culture shock*. London, UK: Routledge.

Ye, J. (2006). Traditional and online support networks in the cross-cultural adaptation of Chinese international students in the United States. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, *11*(3), 863-876.

Yeh, C. J., & Inose, M. (2003). International students' reported English fluency, social support satisfaction, and social connectedness as predictors of acculturative stress. *Counseling Psychology Quarterly*, *16*(1), 15-28.

The author may be contacted
Swati Basu
S1.basu@qut.edu.au

Appendix A: Survey questions

1. What student category are you?

   Undergraduate ☐ Post-graduate (coursework) ☐

   Postgraduate (research) ☐

2. What age group?

   18-25 ☐   25-30 ☐   30 -40 ☐   > 40 ☐

3. Reasons for studying at QUT (please tick all that apply to you)

   To study in Australia ☐

   QUT reputation ☐

   Reputation of the course ☐

   Tuition fee ☐

   To live in Brisbane city ☐

   Cost of living ☐

   Recommended by a QUT graduate ☐

   Personal reasons (eg. Family lives here) ☐

   Other (Please specify)..

4. The cost of living in Brisbane is (please tick all that apply to you)

   As I expected ☐

   More than I expected ☐

   Less than I expected ☐

   Uncertain ☐

5. Most of my friends are

   Australian students ☐

   Students from India ☐

   International students from other countries ☐

   Mix of Australian and international students ☐

   Cannot say ☐

6. Which of the following are concerns or challenges during your time at QUT?

   English language (social use) ☐

   English language (academic use) ☐

   Adapting to new place ☐

   Adapting to new/different study methods ☐

   Financial concerns ☐

   Food ☐

   Accommodation ☐

   Cost of living ☐

Changing Migration Conditions ☐

Meeting religious needs ☐

Feeling homesick ☐

Keeping in touch with family and friends☐

Making new friends ☐

Relationship with QUT staff ☐

Other (Please specify)_____

7. What are your main concerns before coming to QUT?

8. What are your main concerns as a student studying at QUT?

   If you had a concern, who would you speak to?

   Family ☐

   Friends outside QUT ☐

   Friends within QUT ☐

   Community Person (e.g., religious adviser) ☐

   Lecturer, Tutor ☐

   ISS Advisor (International Student Services) ☐

9. Do you think Indian students perceived needs are met by the current service?

10. What gap do you see in service provision?

11. What resources would be needed to fill this gap?

12. What have you gained from living here and studying at QUT (from what you have learnt here, what will you take back to your home country)

Appendix B: Focus group questions

Experiences of Indian students living in Brisbane and studying at QUT

1. Take a few moments to tell us about yourself. Tell us about your life in Brisbane, your struggles and achievements. What was it like living in a new environment?

2. Could you tell us about your experiences and coping strategies with respect to cross-cultural differences? How well adjusted do you think you are (on a scale of 1-5)?

3. Why did you choose to study at QUT?

4. What have you learnt from living here?

Perceived Needs /concerns of Indian students

5. What are your needs as a student studying at QUT?

   Probe: What do you think your needs are in terms of:
   - *Financial (monthly expenditure/income)*
   - *Emotional*
   - *Academic*
   - *Social*

6. What are your main concerns as a student living in Brisbane?

7. What are some of the key issues for Indian students studying at QUT?

   Probe: What are the main challenges/concerns for you as a student at QUT? Are there different issues 1) for Indian males 2) for Indian females?

Support services

8. Are Indian students perceived needs met by current services provided at QUT?

9. What gaps are there generally within QUT of the services provided to Indian students?

10. What support do you seek when you have issues or problems?

    Probe: Who do you go to with regard to these concerns? Again – who and where you go to for support is different for 1) males 2) for females – what are these differences? Have you been satisfied with this support?

International Student Services

11. Did you ever seek help from ISS or attend support and information programs/sessions such as 'New to Brisbane', 'Orientation', 'Accommodation Services', 'PR Seminars', 'Pre-departure briefings', etc held by ISS? Have you been satisfied with this support?

12. What other resources do you think would be useful to Indian students studying at QUT?

13. Do you feel that QUT values and supports International students? In what ways do you think this support could be beneficial to Indian students?

Australian Distance Students' Perceptions of Individual and Institutional Responsibility for Health and Wellbeing

Lisa Beccaria, Cath Rogers and Lorelle Burton
Faculty of Health, Engineering and Sciences
University of Southern Queensland

Abstract

Distance students continue to be a growing cohort in higher education. They may not be able to access university supports, activities and services as easily or readily as students studying on campus, and their demographic and social characteristics may mean that issues that affect their health and wellbeing may be different. No previous research has examined Australian distance students' perceptions of their responsibilities for their health, nor how they perceive the role of the university in supporting health.

As part of a broader study about distance students' health, semi-structured telephone interviews were conducted with seven (n = 7) university distance students enrolled at a regional Australian university. This comprised 4 females and 3 males. Two major themes emerged including the individual student role and responsibilities and the roles and responsibilities of the university. Students perceived that they had an individual responsibility for their health and wellbeing, as well perceiving the university playing key roles to support their health. They believed that the university should provide health information that is framed and targeted to distance students, increase awareness of support services, provide transition to study and academic support, and develop community partnerships to meet health and wellbeing needs. Knowing what distance students think about their university's obligations to support students studying at a distance, can help university leaders, student services, and health promotion practitioners, to develop or enable greater access to the right supports and services.

Introduction

It is widely acknowledged that the university student experience extends beyond teaching and learning (Jackson, 2015; Temple, Callender, Grove & Kersch, 2014; Yue, Le & Terry, 2014). Ensuring student health and wellbeing is also important. It potentially extends students' capacity to not only remain at university but also to perform better academically, to adjust and cope with study and to form meaningful and positive relationships with others (Marshall & Morris, 2011; Murphy & Baines, 2015; Russell & Topham, 2012; Stallman, 2012; Wrench, Garrett, & King, 2013).

Supporting students with diverse cultural, social, economic and demographic characteristics is certainly a challenge yet is the reality for universities in Australia. Additionally, the growing number of students who study by distance also means that universities must consider how best these students can be supported (Norton & Cherastidtham, 2014). In the Australian domestic market alone, the enrolment numbers of external mode students between 2005 (111,078) and 2014 (192,485), have increased by approximately 57% (Department of Education and Training, 2015).

The term distance education is often used interchangeably with distance learning, e-learning and online learning, therefore within this paper 'distance students' refers to students who are studying off-campus by any of the above-mentioned modes. Typically, distance students are older than their on-campus counterparts being mostly over the age of 25 years (Gershuny & Rainey, 2006; Johnson, 2015; Lowe & Gayle, 2007; Mancuso-Murphy, 2007; Palmer & Rodger, 2009). They are also more likely to be female, studying part-time and to have family and work commitments which may potentially impact on their study experience (Fuller, Kuhne, & Frey, 2011; Stone, 2012). Distance students are described as spending little time, if any, on campus and predominantly using online technologies to access learning materials, (Australian Council for Educational Research, 2012; Palmer, 2012). One of the key challenges facing distance students is that of combining their study with other commitments. They need to manage their time, be self-directed, motivated and able to remain focussed on achieving their objectives, whilst trying to engage, interact and navigate their

way around an e-learning environment (Brown, Hughes, Keppell, Hard, & Smith, 2013; Dabbagh, 2007; Wang, Peng, Huang, Hou, & Wang, 2008).

Much of the research in distance education to date has been heavily focused on micro educational issues such as instructional design, learner characteristics, and interactions and communication with learning communities and technology. A review of published articles on distance education between 2000 and 2008 found that only 3.3% of papers were specifically related to learner support and that none related to the health of distance students (Zawacki-Richter, Backer, & Vogt, 2009).

Universities supporting students' health and wellbeing

The concept of health is certainly challenging to define, due to its complexity and multifaceted nature. The World Health Organisation in 1948 defined health as "a state of complete physical, mental, and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity" (Keleher & MacDougall, 2009). Health can also be viewed from lay understandings where having "good health" or "being healthy" can mean different things to different people and can be greatly influenced by one's own social and cultural understandings and previous illness experiences (Blaxter, 2010).

The concept of *wellbeing* itself appears to be closely linked with the concept of health. Wellbeing is often categorised within domains such as psychological wellbeing, social wellbeing or emotional wellbeing. Each of these domains may also contain sub-themes or constructs. For example, social wellbeing may involve aspects such as one's quality of their relationships and their appraisal of their acceptance within society (Negovan, 2010).

The role of universities in supporting and promoting health and wellbeing is considered by many to be just as important as it is in schools, other workplaces and cities (Baum, 2008; Doherty & Dooris, 2006; Dooris, 2001, 2002; Tsouros, Dowding, Thompson, & Dooris, 1998; Whitehead, 2004). In Australian universities, there is usually a student services section that provides students with access to a range of supports and services. This may include medical and health services, health education/health promotion, legal help, counselling and career support, international student support, accommodation assistance, careers and employment support, scholarship and financial assistance, disability support, employment options and advocacy services (Perozzi & O'Brien, 2010; Russell, Thomson, & Rosenthal, 2008; Stallman, 2012). Particularly in the case of student counselling, this is typically provided free of charge, being bulk-billed through the Medicare system. There may however be limits placed on the number of sessions an individual can attend (Stallman, 2012). Further to this, many universities, as part of their campus facilities, have sporting facilities including gymnasiums, tennis courts, pools and bikeways. Additionally, universities are often the setting for numerous sporting and recreational groups that may be established by student bodies to support health and quality of life.

The intention of this paper is to describe a small, qualitative study, which aimed to explore distance students' perceptions of an Australian university's roles and responsibilities in supporting their health and wellbeing. Participants were also asked to identify ways that universities may enhance student health and wellbeing.

Methods

Study background

This study was conducted at an Australian regional university, which is considered to be a major leader of distance education in Australia (Australian University Quality Agency, 2009). It also provides distance education to international students in approximately 100 countries. The participants in this study were domestic students, enrolled in distance mode and located in Western Australia, Queensland, and the Australian Capital Territory.

Research design

This study used a qualitative approach, conducting semi-structured interviews with distance students. Given that this study aimed to involve students who were likely to be busy and living at a distance from the university, it was decided that telephone interviewing would be the most appropriate (Taylor & Francis, 2013). This exploratory approach recognised that the social construction of the student experience is likely to be influenced by factors such as their relationship with the university, their fellow peers, the learning and teaching environment and their own social circumstances (Coates, Nesteroff, & Edwards, 2008; Hagel & Shaw, 2006; Moore & Anderson, 2003).

Sampling

This study was nested within a larger university-wide online health and wellbeing survey that involved both online and distance students. A link at the end of the survey invited those who studied by distance to indicate their interest in participating in an interview on completion of the survey. From an original subset of 135 distance students who responded via the survey link, twelve were randomly selected (as this was assessed as a manageable starting point). Of these twelve, seven agreed to participate in the study. In qualitative research, decisions about sample size should be driven by quality and the appropriateness of the data, rather than simply by the number of participants (O'Reilly & Parker, 2013).

Interviews

In-depth semi-structured telephone interviews lasting approximately 60 minutes were held with each participant and audio-recorded (see interview schedule Appendix A). The interviews included the opportunity for the student to ask any additional questions or add further information. This paper focuses on the key question asked:

> *As a distance student, what do you think are the roles and responsibilities of the university in supporting your health and wellbeing?*

Sample

The sample consisted of four females and three males with the average age of the females (38.25) being lower than that of the male students (47.67). When compared with the general distance student population in the overall university cohort, the age of the female students was more representative of the population, compared with the male participants who were slightly older than the average male distance student. At the university where this study was conducted, typically males are between 30 and 40 years.

The following table provides an overview of the demographics of the participants.

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of the study participants

Participant	Age	Gender	Marital status	Number of dependants	Faculty	Level of program
1	35	Female	Married	2	Sciences	Bachelor
2	42	Female	Separated	5	Arts	Bachelor
3	42	Male	Married	2	Sciences	Postgraduate
4	41	Female	Married	3	Arts	Bachelor
5	35	Female	Married	2	Education	Bachelor
6	51	Male	Single	0	N/A	Non-award
7	47	Male	Married	3	Business and Law	Bachelor

Data analysis

All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The interview data were analysed manually using thematic analysis, undergoing a process of reading, re-reading and identification of

common key themes and sub-themes (Attride-Stirling, 2001; Carrera-Fernandez, OGuardia-Olmos, & Pero-Cebollero, 2014).

Results

Thematic analysis resulted in identification of two major themes: 1) the student's perception of their role and responsibilities with regard to health and wellbeing; and 2) the student's perception of the university's role and responsibilities with regard to health and wellbeing. In addition a number of sub-themes were identified under the second theme.

Themes:

1. Student's perception of their role and responsibilities

In terms of student perceptions of who should be responsible for their health, there was an overwhelming sense that the university was not responsible. The term "responsibility" appeared to evoke a strong response from students, which was communicated at times with strong language.

> *I don't think they have to mollycoddle anybody, because ultimately undertaking any form of study, is an individual's responsibility. As adult students and distance education, the responsibility is up to the student, but you feel that the university can give us as much help as they are able to (Participant 6).*

Another student talked about the issue of physical strain of studying and the university's responsibility. However, ultimately he believed that the major responsibility was his own:

> *My only hesitation with responsibility is that I can't blame the University for telling me not to slouch. If I get a sore lower back, it's purely my fault not theirs…… perhaps they [the university] do have a role in saying we're forcing you to sit at a computer for so many hours a week, so it's perhaps our role as well to give you some health hints that will keep you in shape while you're doing that (Participant 3).*

2. The role and responsibilities of the University

Commonly, students believed that the main responsibility of the university was to provide quality academic support. Nevertheless, students did believe that the university should play a role in supporting students to cope with their studies, as well as in offering some support in maintaining their health.

Within this theme, a number of sub-themes emerged which reflected the main ways in which students felt that the university played a role and/or had a responsibility. These sub-themes included: i) provision of information; ii) framing and communicating health messages; iii) awareness of support services; iv) community partnerships; and v) transition to study.

i) Provision of information

Students felt that health messages needed to reflect and acknowledge the demands often faced by distance students, taking into account their stage of life as well as the sedentary effects of study. These excerpts were indicative of students' comments about the type of health advice and information that should be provided to distance students:

> *Maybe meditation skills… with eyesight [related to physical strain with using the computer], and nutritional information (Participant 6).*

> *Offer simple advice to students… don't say you need to weigh this… give them some simple strategies…going okay you might be putting on weight, but how can you manage that? (Participant 3).*

> *Try like drinking more water, or try taking time off for exercise (Participant 5).*

> *I think putting the information out there is good, because you can get caught up in the uni thing and lose balance (Participant 2).*

ii) Framing and communicating health messages

One student suggested that when the university presented health advice for distance students, these should be framed as "productivity hints" (Participant 3). He felt that the usual methods of convincing students to look after their health may not always be successful, unless they were tailored as tips to enable them to study better:

> *It would probably be a helpful thing at the beginning of semester to say, 'here are some ideas of how to improve your study'. Get up every half hour. Walk around for five minutes. Get some water. Sit with your back upright. It sounds kind of stupid but I know it actually makes a difference (Participant 3).*

Another student discussed the idea that having information sheets on the impact of study on relationships could help. This could include information about warning signs to look for, or advice on how to support positive relationships whilst studying:

> *Maybe from a preventative point of view, this is how it [study] could affect relationships. These are some of the things you could try and that could help (Participant 1).*

Some suggestions were offered by the participants about how best this information could be delivered in ways which would result in their accessing or utilising the advice. Providing regular prompts via emails, or embedding messages into courses, were the two main ideas:

> *If they [uni] gave prompts – we all live our life through the UMail [university email system] pretty much…most people are checking their UMail a few times a week if not a few times a day…if there were prompts every couple of weeks going, have you done any exercise since our last prompt? It might be enough to make you go 'oh yeah, maybe I should take my dog around the block or my dog for a walk, run with the kids' (Participant 3).*

Another student felt that information was mainly directed at on-campus students and that the university needed to communicate more with distance students on the importance of maintaining good health:

> *I know that the university offers a lot of different things that students can attend on campus, but off campus obviously can't. Maybe for online students they need to make some kind of point about the importance of a distance student undertaking some of these activities… (Participant 6).*

The following participant quote reflects the dichotomy between being responsible for one's own health and others playing a role. Beyond individual responsibility, he felt that the university could play a greater role in embedding health messages and strategies to help reduce stress within courses of study:

> *I think maybe, like within your study materials there could be a little bit more messages and maybe even some guided meditations…so we're going to sit down and do a tutorial on our assisted guided mediation about relaxation…so it's not something you go looking for outside of where you're looking, where you're mainly focusing (Participant 6).*

iii) Awareness of support services

There was variation in the degree of student awareness and knowledge of university support services. Some were aware of the fact that the university offered counselling services, despite none of the participants having accessed this service. Their perception of counselling services was that it was only for personal problems, rather than offering a wide array of services such as careers counselling. Some were uncertain about the range of services, or how to access them, for example:

> *I know there's counselling and stuff, but that's all I know of. I haven't really looked. If I needed something I would be proactive in looking…it's okay for them to offer it, but how do we access it? Like for me to get counselling, which campus do I go to? (Participant 2).*

> *As far as the student support services, like outside of the subjects, I guess I'm not really aware of what's on offer. But that's probably not the uni's fault. It's probably on their website and I just haven't looked it up. I tend to find I'm doing okay with subject to subject help….I guess there's counselling help and all that sort of thing offered (Participant 3).*

Most students discussed the fact that they had their own support networks and that these would be their "first port of call". There was some reluctance amongst participants about accessing counselling. There were mixed comments about how effective counselling might be at a distance from the university. Students felt that it was important to build a good relationship with a counsellor, and as such, they felt it would be best facilitated face-to-face. Most students saw the role of Student Services as being to provide preventative, rather than crisis management support:

> *I mean if you need someone on the end of the phone there's Lifeline. Why reinvent the wheel? I don't know. I guess if the university wanted to get involved, I think it would be more in preventative measures, rather than crisis management………unless you get someone who's really good, it can do more harm than good (Participant 1).*

The above student's comment reflected ambivalence around the university's role in providing counselling services, but also highlighted the perceived role in preventative approaches. This student felt that the lack of closeness with the university experienced by distance students may be counter intuitive to the counselling process:

> *It sort of needs to be much more personal from a distance point of view. The university can't get personal – because they're not in a position to. It really needs to be someone on the ground (Participant 1).*

Student support also extended to students at risk of "dropping out" of university, with some students commenting on the need for the university to provide a personal approach, rather than an automated response:

> *They should definitely make more than email contact, but an actual phone call (Participant 3).*

iv) Transition to study

The transition to academic study was identified by some students as being important for reducing stress when it came to adjusting to study. Whilst some students had previously been part of on-campus orientation which they felt to be valuable and positive, they commented on the lack of strategies for distance students. For example:

> *When I first started uni they offered those courses [on campus] that you can go to. You know, they do like how to plan your day and how to read textbooks and different things. One of the things that the guy said, 'With your day, you've got to plan your day. Put in what you eat, when you have dinner, your favourite TV shows, block that time out. If you usually do exercise put that in there. Then you fit your study around that.' So that was really good (Participant 5).*

One female student believed that the university could develop a welcome pack for distance students at the commencement of their study. This would acknowledge the unique transition for non-traditional students to distance study:

> *….maybe even send out an initial university welcome pack… acknowledging that you're not just an 18 year old fresh out of school, and you have a life. You actually have these other pressures and we're acknowledging that (Participant 1).*

As part of her transition to tertiary study, one student recalled how she had previously

completed an online test to determine her preferred learning style. She felt that by knowing how she learnt, she was more effectively able to recognise the best study approaches that suited her:

> *It was a psych test to find out what type of student you were. Whether you were visual …I think that we should do that or that it should be on study desk as an aid to students. I know it would be a lot of technical stuff, but if you knew what sort of learner you were, then you would work more effectively if you could identify how you learnt (Participant 2).*

The same student discussed the need for the university to provide more academic support. This meant that for issues such as developing a PowerPoint presentation, technology staff could develop

a visual tool to help students develop these skills. Furthermore, she felt that academic staff could provide more specific assessment feedback, rather than providing just a mark:

> *Whether they uploaded it [academic tips] on YouTube. They could get some of the tech guys to go on camera and start from scratch……. even if they attached a file that was like a voice recording that you could play, because they can talk into the recording while they are marking it [assignment] (Participant 2).*

> *v) Community partnerships*

Some participants discussed the fact that, as distance students, they could not access on-campus services, particularly recreational activities. They felt that there was potential benefit in the university developing partnerships with services in the local community, which could support their health and wellbeing. Some discussed the use of local community counselling services, or even discounted prices for local recreational or health related services. Others discussed the idea of having reciprocal relationships with other universities or services, so that distance students could access these more readily and at reduced costs:

> *It's not like you can drop into the uni health centre and speak to someone or see a doctor or something. You don't have those resources available. Maybe if the university had some reciprocal arrangements or something, to allow subsidised doctors (Participant 1).*

> *I'm sure that there's people out there… we call it being 'povo', even if you had like 50% of a dental visit or massage therapy, you know you would take advantage of some of those things (Participant 2).*

These comments reflect the fact that while services are not currently accessible by distance students, the role of the university may need to centre on facilitating distance students to more readily access services which support their health. Participant 2 also went further to discuss other possibilities, such as receiving vouchers to healthy fast food outlets and even fundraising to raise awareness of health.

Discussion

This study aimed to explore the perceptions of a small group of Australian university students studying via distance about both individual and institutional responsibilities for their health and wellbeing.

A key finding was that these distance students perceived that their health was primarily their own responsibility rather than that of the university. Certainly individual responsibility is a common lay perspective of health, however more contemporary discourses in health literature incorporate the interrelationships between the individual and their social and physical environment, and health responsibility is increasingly viewed as a social and/or public responsibility (Lundell, Niederdeppe, & Clarke, 2013; Snelling, 2012; Sun, 2014). It is possible that these students' comments reflect a lack of articulation by the university about its responsibilities for distance students' health and wellbeing. University responsibilities and roles can be articulated within the university's vision and mission statements and operationalised via policies, practices, decision making and clear communication to students (Baum, 2008; Byrd & McKinney, 2012; Doherty & Dooris, 2006; Dooris, 2001; Dooris & Doherty, 2010).

Amongst this group of students interviewed, the type of health information that they considered would be helpful related mainly to their physical and mental health. This is consistent with other studies of students seeking out health information (Baxter, Egbert, & Ho, 2008; Hanauer, Dibble, Fortin, & Col, 2004). One difference from other studies appears to be that this group of students believed that information on social relationships and wellbeing could also be provided by the university.

In relation to health information, these students mentioned the importance of framing and communicating the information in ways that would attract the attention of students. Interestingly,

the notion of framing health messages as "productivity hints" was suggested by one male participant (Participant 3). Literature on workplace health promotion also draws a link between health and productivity (Mills, Kessler, Cooper, & Sullivan, 2007; Pescud et al., 2015). The findings from this small study perhaps reflect to some extent the multiple demands on distance students and the need for them to maximise their productivity in order to achieve success, as they balance the needs of family, work and other commitments (Vermeulen & Schmidt, 2008).

The receptiveness of the students to health messages and the ways in which these messages are communicated emerged as important factors in this study. Other evidence suggests that, on the one hand, students may resist health information messages (Crossley, 2002), and may also become immune to messages about the need to be healthy, if these messages are overused. On the other hand, health information and advice which does not appear to be related to their life circumstances may in fact "miss the mark" in terms of being relevant to this cohort of students. Students may in fact either take no notice of poorly targeted messages or tune out to what is being communicated (Crossley, 2002). Framing health communication as personalised messages in online formats such as wikis, discussion forums, social media, web-conferencing, and blogs (Mairs, McNeil, McLeod, Prorok, & Stolee, 2013) can be one key strategy in bringing about behaviour change (Pilling & Brannon, 2007). This study indicated that there was a tension between using student emails as the main source of communication, as often these students were faced with already a large array of messages. The idea of targeted follow-up prompts may be one strategy to attract students more effectively to such key messages.

The ways in which these messages are transferred to students is also worthy of consideration. Given that the students interviewed for this research were studying in an online environment and often subjected to a large number of student emails, it is important to consider the best methods of health communication (Dunne & Somerset, 2004). This remains a challenging issue, however the suggestion that appropriate health and wellbeing messages could be built into course related materials and assessment may be of merit (Mitchell, Darrow, Haggerty, Neill, Carvalho, & Uschold, 2012; Stallman, 2012; Yearwood & Riley, 2010). Having distance students assist in the construction of health and support messages may be an important step, given that most previous student research has been conducted with younger on-campus students (Bryden, Schneider, Dawson, & Vandermeer, 2007; Dunne & Somerset, 2004; Goodhart et al., 2006).

As found in this study, distance students are often not aware of services available to them, nor necessarily know how to access them (Cain, Marrara, Pitre, & Armour, 2003; La Padula, 2003; Nichols, 2010; Pratt, 2015). For example, Huwiler (2015) found that distance students may experience greater challenges in getting access to printed loan material, may receive limited instruction on how to access online services and receive inconsistent in-time support (Huwiler, 2015). Distance students may also experience limitations to co-curricular activities commonly provided to on-campus students, such as student workshops, camps, and professional student associations (Dare, Zapata, & Thomas, 2005; Fontaine & Cook, 2014).

To ensure better access by distance students to the range of services and supports offered, there is a need to consider what is offered within the organisation, the outcomes and what gaps exist. This can be illustrated by orientation programs that support students' transition to study. Commonly, universities provide an intensive "o-week" orientation for students on campus, often providing a range of academic, recreational, and social activities. Helping distance students transition to study requires a different approach. Other research suggests that orientation programs for distance students should be aimed at helping them to contextualise the range of supports, assisting them to acquire the skills to be a successful autonomous learner, as well providing guidance on how to establish and maintain social and professional interactions in an online environment (Bozarth, Chapman, & LaMonica, 2004; Kelly, 2013; Northam, 2005).

Despite articulating the need for distance students to have access to counselling, the participants in this study were in fact reluctant to access counselling services. This is perhaps not surprising given the continued stigma around mental health issues which can lead to a fear of discrimination in relation to their studies (Mackenzie, Erickson, Deane, & Wright, 2014; Martin, 2010). This finding may indicate that messages to distance students about counselling may firstly need to demystify counselling, and secondly communicate the various other supports such as career counselling and academic advising.

Overall, it should be acknowledged that this was a very small study with only seven participants, all domestic and, mostly undergraduate students. Also, the three male students interviewed were, on average, older than the general cohort of male distance students at this university. The limitation of sample size and demographics means that the findings from this study cannot be generalised more broadly across the wider cohort of distance students at Australian universities. However, despite these limitations, this study gives an insight into the views of one small sample of distance students and can provide a basis for further studies in the future, including a comparison of the perspectives of on-campus and distance students.

Conclusion

From this study, it is possible to draw some tentative conclusions regarding what may have assisted these students with regard to their health and wellbeing needs at university. Firstly, for the university to support the health and wellbeing of these students, general health and wellbeing information could be better contextualised to suit the demographic context of these distance students. Additionally, framing health information messages in relation to the benefits for academic study and work/life/study balance may have assisted student receptiveness and uptake of the messages.

Services and supports such as access to recreational activities, counselling and health services could be better tailored for students studying by distance education, given that they are likely to have different needs from those of on campus students. Whilst considered integral to students' university experience, the accessibility of these types of services to those studying off campus is certainly an issue. This may involve internal health promotion of university strategies and interventions, but also in extending potential partnerships between universities and communities to support this student cohort.

References

Attride-Stirling, J. (2001). Thematic networks: An analytic tool for qualitative research. *Qualitative Research, 1*(3), 385-405.

Australian Council for Educational Research. (2012). Australasian survey of student engagement (AUSSE). Retrieved from http://www.acer.edu.au/research/ausse/background

Australian Government. (2015). uCube: Department of Education and Training. Retrieved from http://highereducationstatistics.education.gov.au/

Australian University Quality Agency. (2009). Report of an audit of University of Southern Queensland. Retrieved from http://www.teqsa.gov.au/sites/default/files/auditreport_usq_2009.pdf

Baum, F. (2008). *The New Public Health*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press.

Baxter, L., Egbert, N., & Ho, E. (2008). Everyday health communication experiences of college students. *Journal of American College Health, 56*(4), 28-35.

Bozarth, J. Chapman, D., & LaMonica, L. (2004). Preparing for distance learning: An online student orientation course, *Educational Technology and Society, 7*(1), 87-106.

Blaxter, M. (2010). *Health: Key Concepts*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Brown, M., Hughes, H., Keppell, M., Hard, N., & Smith, L. (2013). In their own words: Student stories of seeking learning support. *Open Praxis, 5*(4), 345-354.

Brown, M., Hughes, H., Keppell, M., Hard, N., & Smith, L. (2013). Exploring the disconnections: Student interaction with support services upon commencement of distance education. *The International Journal of the First Year in Higher Education, 4*(2), 63-74.

Bryden, P., Schneider, P., Dawson, M., & Vandermeer, K. (2007). Health issues and service utilization of university students: Experiences, practices & perceptions of students, staff, and faculty. *College Student Journal, 41*(2). 482-493.

Byrd, D., & McKinney, L. (2012). Individual, interpersonal, and institutional factors associated with the mental health of college students. *Journal of American College Health, 60*, 185-193.

Cain, D., Marrara, C., Pitre, P., & Armour, S. (2002). Support services that matter: An exploration of the experiences and needs of graduate students in a distance learning environment. *Journal of Distance Education, 18*(1), 42-56.

Carrera-Fernandez, M., OGuardia-Olmos, J., & Pero-Cebollero, M. (2014). Qualitative methods of data analysis in psychology: An analysis of the literature. *Qualitative Research, 14*(1), 20-36.

Coates, H., Nesteroff, S., & Edwards, D. (2008). *Enhancing the engagement of distributed learners* (AUSSE Research Briefing v.3). Retrieved from the Australian Council for Educational Research http://research.acer.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1008&context=ausse

Crossley, M. (2002). Resistance to health promotion: A preliminary comparative investigation of British and Australian students. *Health Education, 102*, 289-299.

Dabbagh, N. (2007). The online learner: Characteristics and pedagogical implications. *Contemporary Issues in Technology and Teacher Education, 7*(3), 217-226.

Dare, L., Zapata, L., & Thomas, A. (2005). Assessing the needs of distance learners: A student needs perspective. *New Directions for Student Services, 112,* 39-54.

Doherty, S., & Dooris, M. (2006). The healthy settings approach: The growing interest within colleges and universities. *Education and Health, 24*(3), 42-43.

Dooris, M. (2001). The health promoting university: A critical exploration of theory and practice. *Health Education, 101*(2), 51-60.

Dooris, M. (2002). The health promoting university: Opportunities, challenges and future developments. *Promotion and Education, 9*, 20-24. doi:10.1177/10253823020090010112

Dooris, M., & Doherty, S. (2010). Healthy universities - the time for action: A qualitative research study exploring the potential for a national Program. *Health Promotion International, 25*(1), 94-106.

Dunne, C., & Somerset, M. (2004). Health promotion in universities: What do students want? *Health Education, 104*, 360-370.

Fontaine, S. & Cook, S. (2014). Co-curricula engagement for non-traditional online learners. *Online Learning Journal of Distance Administration, 17*(3). Retrieved from https://www.westga.edu/~distance/ojdla/fall173/fontaine_cook173.html

Fuller, R., Kuhne, G., & Frey, B. (2011). *Distinctive distance education design.* Hershey: Information Science Reference.

Gershuny, P., & Rainey, C. (2006). Nontraditional students, accelerated programs, grade expectations, and instructor evaluations. *Journal of Legal Studies Education, 23*, 123-150.

Goodhart, F., Hsu, J., Baek, B., Coleman, A., Maresca, F., & Miller, M. (2006). A view through a different lens: Photovoice as a tool for student advocacy. *Journal of American College Health, 55*, 53-56.

Hagel, P., & Shaw, R. (2006). Students' perceptions of study modes. *Distance Education, 27,* 283-302.

Hanauer, D., Dibble, E., Fortin, J., & Col, N. (2004). Internet use among community college students: Implications in designing healthcare interventions. *Journal of American College Health, 52*(5), 197-202.

Huwiler, A. (2015). Library services for distance students: Opportunities and challenges. *Journal of Library and Information Services in Distance Learning, 9*(4), 275-288. doi: 10.1080/1533290X.2015.1111283

Jackson, D. (2015). Career choice status among undergraduates and the influence of work-integrated learning. *Australian Journal of Career Development, 24*(1), 3-14.

Johnson, G. (2015). On-campus and fully-online university students: Comparing demographics, digital technology use and learning characteristics. *Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice, 12*(1). Retrieved from http://ro.uow.edu.au/jutlp/vol12/iss1/4

Keleher, H., & MacDougall, C. (2009). *Understanding health: A determinants approach.* (2nd ed.). Melbourne: Oxford University Press.

Kelly, O. (2013). *Orientating students to online learning: Going like a dream or still a nightmare?* Paper presented at the 30th Ascilite Conference, 1-4th Dec, Sydney.

La Padula, M. (2003). A comprehensive look at online student support services for distance learners. *American Journal of Distance Education, 17*(119-128).

Lowe, J., & Gayle, V. (2007). Exploring work/life/balance: The experience of higher education students in a Scottish further education college. *Journal of Further and Higher Education, 31*, 225-238.

Lundell, H., Niederdeppe, J., & Clarke, C. (2013). Public views about health causation, attributions of responsibility, and inequality. *Journal of Health Communication, 18*, 1116-1130.

Mackenzie, C., Erickson, J., Deane, F., & Wright, M. (2014). Changes in attitudes in seeking mental health services: A 40-year cross-temporal meta-analysis. *Clinical Psychology Review, 34*(2), 99-106.

Maires, K., McNeil, H., McLeod, J., Prorok, J., & Stolee, P. (2013). Online strategies to facilitate health-related knowledge transfer: A systemative search and review. *Health Information and Libraries Journal, 30*(4), 261-277. doi: 10.1111/hir.12048

Mancuso-Murphy, J. (2007). Distance education in nursing: An integrated review of online nursing students' experiences with technology-delivered instruction. *Journal of Nursing Education, 46*, 252-260.

Marshall, L., & Morris, C. (2011). Taking wellbeing forward for higher education: Reflections on theory and practice. Retrieved from http://eprints.brighton.ac.uk/8192/1/TakingWellbeingForward.pdf

Martin, J. (2010). Stigma and student mental health in higher education. *Higher Education, Research, and Development, 29*(3), 259-274. doi: 10.1080/07294360903470969

Mills, P., Kessler, R., Cooper, J., & Sullivan, S. (2007). Impact of a health promotion program on employee health risks and work productivity. *American Journal of Health Promotion, 22*(1), 45-53. doi.org/10.4278/0890-1171-22.1.45

Mitchell, S., Darrow, S., Haggerty, M., Neill, T., Carvalho, A., & Uschold, C. (2012). Curriculum infusion as college student mental health promotion strategy. *Journal of College Student Psychotherapy, 26*(1). 22-38. doi: 10.1080/87568225.2012.633038

Moore, M., & Anderson, W. (Eds).(2003). *Handbook of distance education.* Retrieved from http://library.usq.edu.au /Record/vtls000511427

Murphy, G., & Baines, J. (2015). Connecting the dots: Facilitating a positive university educational journey with an organisational mental health and wellbeing strategy. *Journal of the Australia and New Zealand Student Services Association, 46,* 20-27.

Nichols, M. (2010). Students perceptions of support services and the influence of targeted interventions on retention in distance education. *Distance Education, 31*(1), 93-113. doi: 10.1080/01587911003725048

Northam, S. (2005). Tips for time management in online learning. *Online Journal of Nursing Informatics, 9*(3), 6.

Norton, A., & Cherastidtham, I. (2014). *Mapping Australian Higher Education 2014-2015.* Retrieved from http://grattan.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/816-mapping-higher-education-20142.pdf

O'Reilly, M., & Parker, N. (2013). 'Unsatisfactory saturation': A critical exploration of the notion of saturated sample sizes in qualitative research. *Qualitative Research, 13*(2), 190-197. doi: 10.1177/1468794112446106

Palmer, A., & Rodger, S. (2009). Mindfulness, stress, and coping among university students. *Canadian Journal of Counselling, 43*, 198-212.

Palmer, S. (2012). Understanding the context of distance students: Differences in on- and off-campus engagement with an online learning environment. *Journal of Open, Flexible and Distance Learning, 16*(1), 70-81.

Perozzi, B., & O'Brien, A. (2010). The global practice of student affairs: A United States and Australian case study. *Journal of Australia and New Zealand Student Services, 36*(1-25).

Pescud, M., Teal, R., Shilton, T., Slevin, T., Ledger, M., Waterworth, P., & Rosenberg, M. (2015). Employers' views on the promotion of workplace health and wellbeing: a qualitative study. *BMC Public Health, 15*(1), 1-10. doi:10.1186/s12889-015-2029-2

Pilling, V., & Brannon, L. (2007). Assessing college students' attitudes towards responsible drinking messages to identify promising binge drinking intervention strategies. *Health Communication, 22*(3), 265-276. doi:10.1080/10410230701708121

Pratt, K. (2015) Supporting distance learners: Making practice more effective. *Journal of Open, Flexible, and Distance Learning, 19*(1), 12-26.

Russell, B., Thomson, G., & Rosenthal, D. (2008). International student use of university health and counselling services. *Higher Education, 56*(1), 59-75.

Russell, G., & Topham, P. (2012). The influence of social anxiety on student learning and well-being in higher education. *Journal of Mental Health, 21*(4), 375-385. doi: 10.3109/09638237.2012.694505

Snelling, P. (2012). Saying something interesting about responsibility for health. *Nursing Philosophy, 13*(3), 161-178.

Stallman, H. (2012). *The mental health of Australian university students: Issues, correlates, and promotion.* (Doctor of Philosophy), University of Queensland Brisbane.

Stone, C. (2012). Engaging students across distance and place. *Journal of the Australian and New Zealand Student Services Association, 39*, 49-55.

Sun, Y. (2014). Rethinking public health: Promoting public engagement through a new discursive environment. *American Journal of Public Health, 104*(1). doi:10.2105/AJPH.2013.301638

Temple, P., Callender, C., Grove, L., & Kersh, N. (2014). Managing the student experience in a shifting higher education landscape. Retrieved from https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/sites/default/files/resources/managing_the_student_experience.pdf

Taylor, B., & Francis, K. (2013). *Qualitative Research in the Health Sciences*. Londong: Routledge.

Tsouros, A., Dowding, G., Thompson, J., & Dooris, M. (1998). *Health promoting universities: Concept, experience and framework for action*. Retrieved from Copenhagen: http://www.euro.who.int/_data/assets/pdf_file/0012/101640/E60163.pdf

Vermeulen, L., & Schmidt, H. (2008). Learning environment, learning process, academic outcomes and career success of university graduates. *Studies in Higher Education, 33*(4), 431-451.

Wang, Y., Peng, H., Huang, R., Hou, Y., & Wang, J. (2008). Charcteristics of distance learners: Research on relationships of learning motivation, learning strategy, self-efficacy, attribution and learning results. *Open Learning, 23*(1), 17-28.

Whitehead, D. (2004). The health promoting university (HPU): The role and function of nursing *Nurse Education Today, 24*, 466-472.

Wrench, A., Garrett, R., King, S. (2013). Guessing where the goal posts are: Managing health and well-being during the transition to university studies. *Journal of Youth Studies, 16*(6), 730-746. doi: org/10.1080/13676261.2012.744814

Yearwood, E., & Riley, J. (2010). Curriculum infusion to promote nursing student well-being. *Journal of Advanced Nursing, 66*(6). 1356-1364. doi: 10.1111/j.1365-2648.2010.05304.x

Yue, Y., Le, Q., & Terry, D. (2014). Transition to an Unfamiliar Environment: International Students' Living Experiences in an Australian Regional Area. *Journal of the Australia and New Zealand Student Services Association, 43,* 10-20.

Zawacki-Richter, O., Backer, E., & Vogt, S. (2009). A review of distance education research (2000 to 2008): Analysis of research areas, methods, and authorship patterns. *The International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning, 10*. Retrieved from http://www.irrodl.org/index.php/irrodl/rt/printerFriendly/741/1433

The authors may be contacted via
Lisa Beccaria
Lisa.Beccaria@usq.edu.au

Appendix A - Interview Schedule

1. What has your experience been like whilst studying by distance?

2. Have you faced any challenges with your study, for example, balancing family with work and study?

3. How have you tried to cope with these challenges?

4. Has it been hard to stay healthy whilst studying, for example, getting enough exercise?

5. Can you think of ways in which you study impacts on your health and wellbeing including your emotional and mental health?

6. How do you feel about the supports that the university offers you to cope with your studies, or to support your health and wellbeing?

7. Could the university do more to support distance students like yourself through your studies?

Students' Perceived Needs and Expectations from University Counselling Services: A Qualitative Review

Clinton Alexander Moore, Philomena Renner,
Alison Ryder and Eileen Seah
Counselling and Psychological Services
University of Sydney

Abstract

This study aimed to identify the personal, social and academic needs of students presenting to a University counselling service. Responses were obtained from 641 students who completed an open response quality assurance survey consisting of four questions. Qualitative results were analysed using thematic and axial coding. Results indicated that students reported needs for connectedness and personal guidance to enable traditional goals of academic success and intrapersonal/interpersonal/personal development. Students also highlighted the need for counselling services to be professionally staffed, accessible and affordable. Overall, the study suggested that students viewed counselling services as an institutional resource providing objective, professional and trustworthy expertise at a time of unique developmental challenges in their lives.

Introduction

In Australia, 857,000 domestic and 335,000 international people are enrolled in tertiary education annually, 61% of whom are aged between 15 and 24 years (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012; Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013). For the majority of these young people, engaging in tertiary studies occurs at a time in their lifespan where demands to adapt personally, socially, academically, and to make key decisions regarding their future are crucial (Byrd & McKinney, 2012; Taylor, Doane, & Eisenberg, 2014). Young people's ability to adapt as successful students is important given the advantages that education provides both to the individual and broader society in terms of economic, social and culture capital (Baum, Ma & Payea, 2013; Feinstein & Hammond, 2004; Hammond, 2002; Nussbaum, 2012). However, students are increasingly faced with a tertiary education system that is both complex and competitive (Shepler & Woosley, 2011). Indeed, within the tertiary student cohort, moderate to severe levels of depression, anxiety, self-harm, eating disorders, drug and alcohol issues, and sexual abuse are reported (Cvetkovski, Reavley & Jorm, 2012; Leahy, Peterson, Wilson, Newbury, Tonkin, & Turnbull, 2010). Such psychological issues are associated with student self-report of greater levels of psychological distress and lower psychological flexibility, in addition to more associated days being unable to carry out normal activities (Renner, O'Dea, Sheehan, & Tebbutt, 2014). From a positive youth development perspective, young people's challenges can be seen in the broader context of their strengths and future potential (Lerner 2000; Lerner, Bowers, Geldof, Gestsdottir, & De Souza, 2012). Consistent with such a developmental perspective, young people report that they want health services to foster their growth and development rather than to be solely focused on the diagnosis of illnesses (Kefford, Trevena & Willcock, 2005).

Given that developmental perspectives suggest that the context of the young person can promote positive or protective assets (Lerner, Agans, Arbeit, Chase, Weiner, Schmid, & Warren, 2013), Universities provide counselling services to support students to overcome personal risks and obstacles in pursing academic success. Consistent with this, counselling services provide brief interventions from bibliotherapy and e-resources to individual services, groups and workshops. They additionally work to strengthen the capacity of the University system to support student success in terms of promoting the development of integrated academic and personal student competencies (Watson & Schwitzer, 2010).

Students' own academic goals and intentions are implicated in success (Tinto, 2012), and involve a combination of internal and external motives (Kennett, Reed & Lam, 2014). Self-authorship theory provides a model to investigate how the development of an internal capacity to define beliefs, identity, and social relationships impacts upon students' academic success (Baxter & Magolda, 2001). This model's emphasis on developing capabilities in cognitive, intrapersonal and interpersonal domains is consistent with the idea of creating positive developmental pathways to enable students to experience self-identity, belonging and purpose. However, in the context of emerging adulthood, achieving such developmental skills can prove difficult (Arnett, 2012). Indeed, during this highly non-normative stage of life, many individuals have not reached full biological or psychosocial maturity, and may require assistance to complete this transition (Arnett & Tanner, 2006).

The developmental processes identified in both self-authorship and emerging adulthood theories suggest a role for Counselling Services in providing the scaffolding and structure to allow students to achieve personal, social and associated academic growth. The psychological scaffolding provided can be seen to parallel many of the processes identified in instructional scaffolding (Wood & Wood, 1996). The first feature of instructional scaffolding refers to collaborative interaction between the learner and expert, which can be seen to reflect the therapeutic concept of the working alliance. The working alliance refers to non-specific factors such as empathy, unconditional positive regard, and therapist attributes, which are used to engage the client in a collaborative approach towards achieving their goals (Ackerman & Hilsenroth, 2003). These non-specific factors have been demonstrated to have a consistent impact on treatment outcomes separate to the specific treatment modalities being implemented (Martin, Garske, & Davis, 2000). The significance of the working alliance has been noted for both long and short-term interventions, highlighting the value of connection in therapeutic engagement (Bhola & Kapur, 2013; Newman, 1998; Shirk & Karver, 2011). The second scaffolding feature refers to an awareness of the learner's current level and an intention to work beyond this level. This feature reflects the therapeutic process of promoting psychosocial development through the dissemination of knowledge intended to motivate change. The third scaffolding feature is guidance and its progressive removal throughout the interactions to promote autonomy. This feature again reflects the core aim of therapeutic interventions to provide support so that new life skills can be developed.

Given the practical stressors facing tertiary education cohorts, and developmental models which suggest a need for facilitating and promoting students' personal development, the current study aimed to conduct a needs analysis of students engaging with a University Counselling Service. It was hypothesised that students would identify needs and expectations related to academic, personal and emotional skills. Overall, this study aims to assist university counselling services in identifying areas of student need that could facilitate better development and deployment of interventions in promoting both young people's development and student success.

Method

Ethical approval was not required for this study as the aim was internal quality assurance.

Protocol

Students attending the Counselling and Psychological Services (CAPS) unit of a major metropolitan Australian University for their first session were given the Quality Assurance Survey. They were informed by Reception that completion of the form was voluntary, anonymous, and for unit quality assurance purposes. Students were asked to complete the survey prior to their first session. Data was collated over a six month period to obtain feedback relevant to an entire semester.

Questionnaire

The Quality Assurance Survey was a structured questionnaire with four open questions and an area

for additional comments. The questions asked were:

1. What aspect of receiving treatment at CAPS is most important to you?
2. What motivated you to attend CAPS?
3. What do you think students want from campus psychological services?
4. Have you any ideas on how CAPS could better reach the student body?

Participants

All new clients attending CAPS during the data collection period were invited to complete the Quality Assurance Survey (n = 2325). Of these students, 641 (28%) completed the Quality Assurance Survey. The four questions were completed as follows: 588 responded to Question 1; 641 responded to Question 2; 552 responded to Question 3; 325 to Question 4; and 31 left additional comments. Demographic data was not collected on participants.

Data analyses

A qualitative approach was used to explore students' expectations of the CAPS unit. Three of the investigators read collated spreadsheets of question responses to uncover themes, and generate broad descriptive categories (open coding). Subsequently axial coding was employed to identify relationships between the categories and subcategories within the narrative framework. The axial coding level involved continuous discussion between authors until consensus was reached regarding emerging (sub)themes and their position within the narrative framework. All transcripts were then reviewed by the authors to extract relevant theme-related data.

Results

Elements in the final coding system are shown in Figures 1, 2 and 3 below. The following are the main themes that emerged in the course of qualitative analysis:

1. **Connectedness**

The most recurrent main theme reported by students was a desire for connection through the Counselling Service and with the wider University.
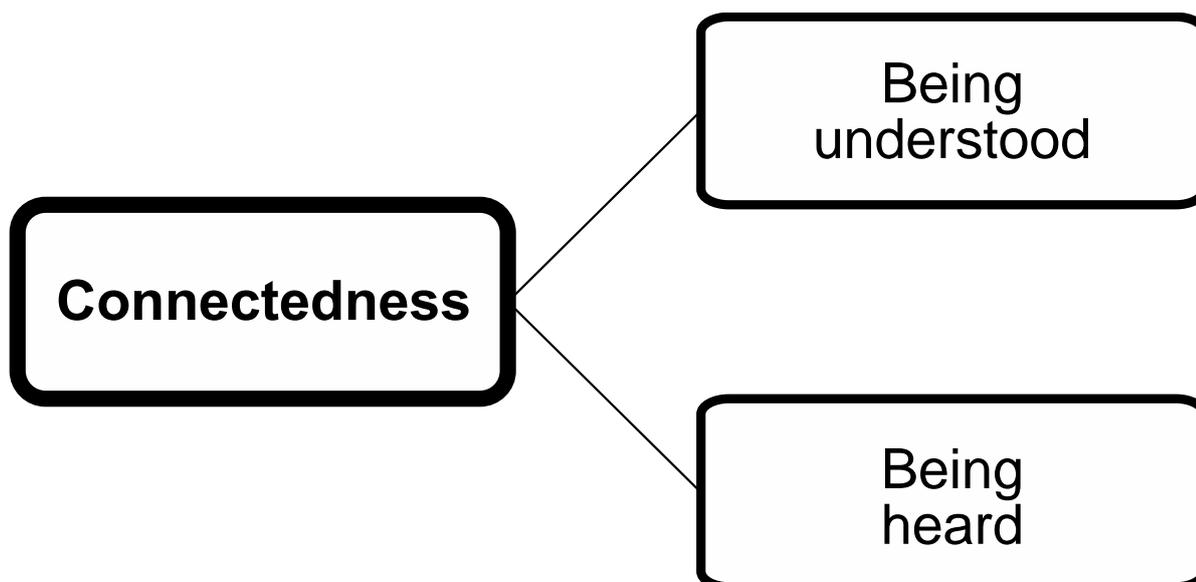

Figure 1. Connectedness theme and subthemes

1.1. Being understood

Students described a sense of not being heard whilst at university. They reported feeling anonymous within the institutional context of the university and had a desire to be recognised as important. Students stated that they believed the Counselling service provided a source of empathy and validation within the University.

Caring, the feeling that someone in this great institutional hulk knows who we are and gives a damn.

Talking to people willing to consider your concerns or/and [sic] the issues that are important for you that can disrupt your everyday activities to a great extent. As opposed to people who tell you the concerns you raise are not meaningful.

1.2. Being heard

Students' indicated that one of the primary reasons they attended the Counselling Service was because of a need to communicate face-to-face with a person when university demands became excessive. They reported that they had limited alternative options for receiving emotional and/or practical support from within the University. Additionally, many stated that they found it difficult to communicate their needs regarding university with family and friends who did not understand the system. As such, students highlighted the importance of having access to university services that could validate their concerns and provide support when it was often the case that no other accessible alternatives existed.

Someone to listen, often out of their circle of friends/family; solutions: a way forward; confirmation: that their issues, perspectives and thoughts are valid.

Having someone who is understanding to help calm any bad feeling in order to return to a balanced, stress free lifestyle in which I can successfully study.

2. Assistance

The second main theme that arose from the data was assistance. This included gaining advice, developmental progress, well-being and university specific aid.

2.1. Advice

Students reported a need to receive advice and mentoring from the Counselling Service.

2.1.1. Guidance/wisdom

Students emphasised the need for guidance in finding perspective when confronting academic and developmental issues that were beyond those with which they were familiar or comfortable. Students indicated that the Counselling Service was seen as a place that supported empowerment by helping students develop through adverse experiences such as stress, depression, anxiety, and identifying a positive pathway forward.

Guidance and advice. I understand that everyone has bad moments in life but I feel that with understanding of how to deal with it life can be made easier.

I wanted to deal with my problem very pro-actively and utilise professional opinion and guidance to undertake this task.

Someone to talk to who understands what you're going through and can give you practical advice.
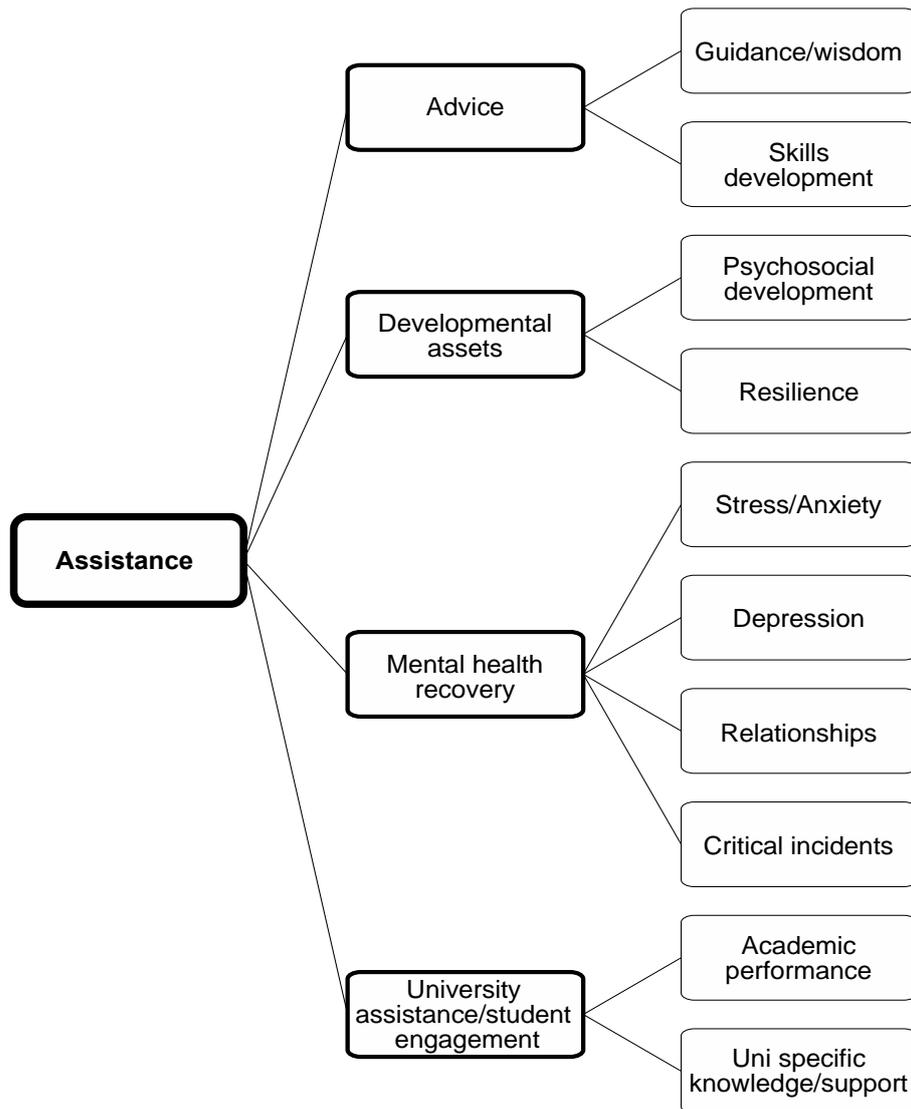
Figure 2. Assistance theme and subthemes

2.1.2. *Skills development*

Students reported that a major reason for attending the Counselling Service was to receive both advice and skills related to problem solving. Students predominantly wanted assistance in identifying areas of their life that were prohibiting them from succeeding both cognitively and personally. Additionally, the value of having a counsellor to assist in the execution of the developed plan was emphasised.

> *Helping me identify the source of my unhappiness and providing some solutions forward.*

> *Gaining a different perspective of my situation and establishing strategies to deal with my worries.*

> *Creating a plan to resolve my issues, and actually seeing it through and monitoring its progress.*

2.2. *Developmental Assets*

2.2.1. *Psychosocial development*

The theme of development was characterised strongly by a desire to overcome emotional difficulties and improve performance. Students reported that they perceived the Counselling Service as a way of sourcing personal skills to help them manage obstacles, thereby allowing them to progress academically.

I need to change my behaviour and get out of bad habits/cycles in times of stress, I can't handle not doing anything to deal with my stress (I don't want it to be an excuse but a motivator).

Earlier experiences have taught me to be more proactive in talking to someone.

Accepting challenges in my life and feeling as though I am actively addressing and engaging with difficulties.

2.2.2. Resilience

Students reported that they attended the Counselling Service to develop resilience skills in relation to the challenges encountered at university and life in general. Additionally, students highlighted that they recognised the short and longer term importance of life skills.

This degree is very important to me. I attended [another University] from 2010-2011 straight after school and struggled due to my depression resulting in failing and leaving. So I want to get help and make it through my degree.

To assist with self-growth and processing, better management with problems that arise.

2.3. Mental Health recovery

In addition to issues relating to development and guidance, students also reported attending the Counselling Service for assistance with mental health issues.

2.3.1. Stress/anxiety

Students emphasised the high level of stress and anxiety experienced in relation to their university career. They stated that this often inhibited their capacity to function both academically and personally. Students reported that they were attending the Counselling Service to help develop the necessary skills to manage stress/anxiety independently.

An anxiety attack - build up that left me unable to do anything and I don't have time for that.

Achieving a state where I am confident in being able to implement strategies to calm my anxiety.

2.3.2. Depression

Students similarly reported depression as a major reason for attending the Counselling Service. They reported frequent difficulties with motivation due to depression and noted the impact this had on their ability to complete assessments.

I'm not motivated to study, this has been happening throughout the semester. Thought of seeking help, but felt I can overcome it myself. I think of the future and become afraid of it.

Hopefully developing coping methods for anxiety and depression - additionally, having a space to safely talk about these issues where I can be taken seriously.

2.3.3. Relationships

Students noted the impact of their personal lives on their university studies. Many mentioned that navigating intimate relationships, often for the first time, caused disruptions to their cognitive and emotional functioning. They indicated that they were uncertain of how to deal with the impact of relationship breakups, critical feedback about their competency/adequacy as a person, and valued the opportunity to discuss and process these situations with a professional.

To sort out my life, stop my personal life affecting my studies at [the university].

To help my [sic] deal with issues concerning relationships and family so I can focus on uni. To help me focus more and be motivated.

2.3.4. Critical incidents

Students stated that the Counselling Service was an important resource during times of crisis. They reported that the Counselling Service enabled them to process issues such as sudden deaths,

suicides, and issues of domestic violence. Additionally, students highlighted the importance of the service as an accessible first point of contact for issues such as psychotic episodes.

My father died last Saturday right before uni started. I am shocked, overwhelmed with responsibility and guilt.

2.4. University assistance/student engagement

2.4.1. Academic performance

Students rated highly the importance of receiving assistance that could improve academic performance. They were aware of the stressors associated with student life and were keen to ensure that this did not impact on academic outcomes. Students also stressed the time pressures associated with being a student and noted that they consequently did not feel they could afford to experience emotional difficulties within the semester.

Both ensuring my wellbeing on a personal level, and ensuring that my recent misfortunes do not detract from my studies significantly.

I needed to seek help when I could not work for the last week due to being constantly nervous, and I do not have the luxury of spending time out, as I have very few months left.

2.4.2. University specific knowledge/support

Students emphasised the importance of attending a Counselling Service that had contextual knowledge of the University. They noted that this enabled the service to provide tailored assistance related to their student needs rather than seeing the problem as an individual's mental health issue. They also regarded the institutional knowledge of the Counselling Service as valuable when trying to resolve issues with the university. Many stated that this enhanced the Counselling Service's capacity to provide guidance, particularly in the case of International students who may not be aware of the University's systems.

An alternative point of view/clarification of my situation and options to that of my usual psychiatrist, friends, family and self, from someone who has knowledge of how university works.

Advice that comes from knowledge about how the uni operates. Outside counselling services don't know how [the university] works, therefore no practical support.

Someone who knows the realistic ins and outs of youth/drug/domestic issues with experience with student struggles.

3. Professionalism

The third major theme identified was professionalism. Students highlighted the need to have quick access to a reliable service staffed by qualified non-judgmental professionals that understood the student experience.

A professional, proficient and friendly experience that is effective in helping me deal with my issues.
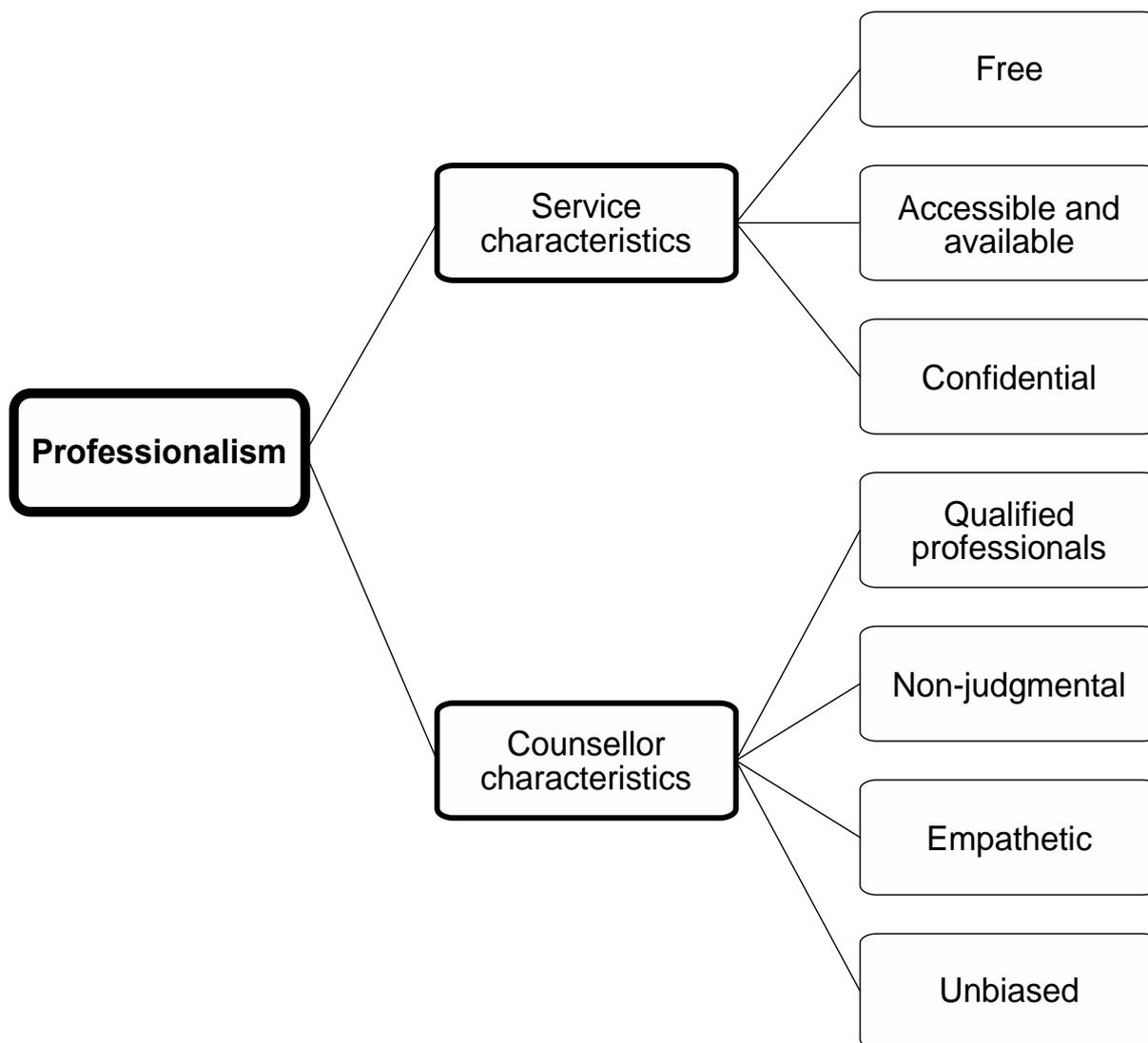
Figure 3. Professionalism theme and subthemes

3.1. Service characteristics

The students reported that they desired the Counselling Service to possess certain logistical characteristics.

3.1.1. Free

Students stressed the need for a free service. Many indicated that in the absence of the Counselling Service they would be unable to access any other form of therapy.

I really needed help but couldn't afford a therapist.

The fact that it is free - I couldn't afford any other type of counselling.

3.1.2. Accessible and available

In addition to being free, students reported the importance of the service being easily accessible and that appointments be quickly available. Students noted the benefit of being able to attend drop-in appointments without being placed on a wait-list. Many students noted that this was different to other medicare-based services that provided subsidised treatment.

Its [sic] ready availability in a central location on campus; the fact that it is free helped, also that there were appointments available on the day I called.

Other psychological services have lengthy waiting times. Urgent help.

3.1.3. Confidential

Students stressed the importance of the Counselling Service being confidential. Many students reported a lack of knowledge about the governance of confidentiality within the service.

I want to beat my anxiety - I don't not [sic] want it to have a hold of my thoughts, actions and goals for the rest of my life. Furthermore, I was given misinformation that attending these sort of services would flag on the student system when applying for degrees such as medicine. Now that I know that this is not true, I have taken the steps to get help.

3.2. Counsellor characteristics

Students reported that they expected certain characteristics from Counsellors employed by the Counselling Service.

3.2.1. Qualified professionals

The majority of students agreed that they wanted access to qualified psychological health professionals. They highlighted the need for such professionals to have university specific knowledge.

Someone with a qualified knowledge of methods that can be employed to overcome psychological issues.

Strategies to take home and apply to everyday life. Mature, experienced professionals, perhaps specific to problem areas - client centred.

3.2.2. Non-judgmental

Students reported that it was important that Counsellors be non-judgmental. They reported that this trait was difficult to access when dealing with family, friends and the University. Moreover, they believed this trait was fundamental to making them feel comfortable within the therapeutic environment.

Having an avenue to deal with my issues and feelings without taking it out on my close family and friends. Getting advice and expressing myself to a non-biased non-judgmental person

Anonymity and no judgement. Very glad this is free or I couldn't afford to get help.

3.2.3. Empathetic

Empathy was listed by students as an equally important trait for Counsellors to possess. Students indicated that this would allow them to comfortably explore issues that were inhibiting their potential. They again indirectly highlighted the value of guidance and wisdom in conjunction with empathy.

Having someone to talk to who is non-judgmental, empathetic and is there to listen to my problems rather than try to solve them.

Understanding from someone who is patient, receptive of our needs and desires and wishes and opinions, knowledgeable enough to give sound advice that will make a change in our lives.

3.2.4. Unbiased

Students reported the importance of speaking with a Counsellor that was unbiased and impartial. They commonly noted that they found this difficult to access outside of a professional service. Moreover they highlighted the value of having someone who had a focus specifically on their needs.

The confidentiality of talking to a person with no vested interest in me other than to help.

Someone to talk to that isn't related or has bias. To be able to reach out and get help for assignments if I can't manage my work well, so extra time to be able to feel safe and knowing someone cares.

Discussion

The aim of the present study was to conduct a qualitative investigation into the needs and expectations of students attending a University Counselling Service. There were three over-arching themes identified: Connectedness, Assistance and Professionalism. Connectedness highlighted a perceived need for greater interpersonal interaction within the context of the University. Students indicated feeling increasingly anonymous, unrecognised and disengaged within the University system. Students emphasised the need for multidimensional assistance across a range of areas including mental health, university performance and developmental support. Students reported that connection and assistance were optimised when services are free, readily available and staffed by qualified professionals with an in-depth understanding of the university system. These areas were all identified as equally fundamental to students' capacity to succeed at university.

Developmental factors such as the search for meaning and connectedness are significant for students who need to acquire the psychosocial competencies to manage personal practical setbacks within an increasingly disconnected culture. Students can benefit from brief mental health or well-being interventions; however the centrality of the need for connectedness (therapeutic working alliance) and psychosocial development (positive development/self-authorship) is highlighted in these results. Students identified that services such as counselling provide opportunities for connectedness, the development of psychological skills, and recovery from negative experiences.

Student interest in personal growth is consistent with evidence that development of an integrated internal identity provides greater outcomes both at university and in later life (Saklofske, Austin, Mastoras, Beaton, & Osborne, 2012). Students indicated that receiving guidance from an easily accessible psychological professional who possessed institutional knowledge was important for this process. As students are generally of an age in which they are still undergoing individuation, it may be possible that the desire to engage with a face-to-face counsellor is both emotional and practical. Students may have difficulties obtaining advice from their parents, either due to individuation or lack of knowledge, and their peers are of a similar life experience stage (Pizzolato & Hickien, 2011). Therefore, a counsellor is able to act as a guide that possesses the required knowledge, but also has the relational distance to act as a mentor rather than an authority figure. Such a dynamic highlights the importance of the therapeutic working alliance in enabling developmental learning (Shirk & Karver, 2003).

Traditionally, psychology looks at alliance in terms of the therapeutic relationship and its role in promoting treatment gains across a variety of disorders (Karver, Handelsman, Fields, & Bickman, 2006; Lambert & Barley, 2001; McLeod, 2011). However, the current findings suggest that within the context of a university counselling service, the alliance role also has a function in promoting the development of positive developmental assets such as resilience, optimism, coping, social support, life satisfaction, self-esteem and effective help seeking behaviour (Bhola & Kapur, 2013).

When considering the range of services provided to students, the results suggest that while students can work with different levels of service engagement, connectedness and professionalism are highly valued in terms of help seeking. Review of this need is increasingly important given the current trend towards service delivery via online means (Barak & Grohol, 2011; Jorm, Morgan, & Malhi, 2013). Whilst online therapeutic service options have the capacity for universal reach, the current findings suggest that such approaches may negate the areas of socialisation and professional mentoring valued at this developmental stage. Reports to date remain unclear about the long-term/developmental benefits of such online interventions, despite their increased application with adolescent and young adult populations (Davies, 2014). As such, the function of the personalised alliance in promoting student development and success needs to be taken into consideration in terms of providing optimal services to students.

Limitations

The current study has several limitations as a consequence of the data being gathered for quality assurance purposes. Firstly, the study surveyed only new students attending the Counselling Service. Additionally, the results represent a quarter of the students attending the Counselling Service during the six-month collection period. As such, caution must be taken in drawing correlations to the counselling service population and broader university population. However, the large amount of data that was gathered across the six-month collection period provided a satisfactory saturation of themes. Secondly, as information on prior therapeutic interventions was not recorded, there is possible ambiguity as to whether students were reporting on their needs or expectations of counselling. Finally, as no demographic data was collected, it is not possible to determine the proportion of respondents that were either male or female; young adult or mature age; international or local students; or had any history of previous treatment. Future studies would benefit from collating such data to enable examination of any interactions between these variables and the perceived benefits of the Counselling Service.

Conclusions

Given the demands of a tertiary education environment, it is unsurprising that increasing levels of distress are reported among the student cohort (Stallman, 2010). However, from the perspective of developmental and connectedness factors, the results of the current study suggest that university counselling services have a complex role; far broader than a focus on preventing or treating mental illness. These findings suggest that students desire professional counselling services that enable the process of personal, social and academic development. This implies that students experience a need for connectedness at both a service unit and institutional level. The results from this survey suggest that counselling services and the broader University culture have roles to play in enabling student development, facilitating connectedness, and optimising integrated student success.

References

Ackerman, S. J., & Hilsenroth, M. J. (2003). A review of therapist characteristics and techniques positively impacting the therapeutic alliance. *Clinical Psychology Review, 23*(1), 1-33.

Arnett, J. (2012). *Adolescence and emerging adulthood: A cultural approach.* (5th ed.). Pearson Education.

Arnett, J., & Tanner, J. (2006). *Emerging adults in America, coming of age in the 21st Century.* American Psychological Association.

Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2012). *Year book Australia, 2012*, cat. no. 1301.0, www.abs.gov.au

Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2013). *Australian social trends, July 2013*, cat. no. 4102.0, www.abs.gov.au

Barak, A., & Grohol, J. M. (2011). Current and future trends in internet-supported mental health interventions. *Journal of Technology in Human Services, 29*(3), 155-196. doi: 10.1080/15228835.2011.616939

Baum, S., Ma, J., & Payea, K. (2013). *Education pays 2013: The benefits of higher education for individuals and society.* Retrieved from https://trends.collegeboard.org/education-pays

Baxter Magolda, M. B. (2001). *Making their own way: Narratives for transforming higher education to promote self-development.* Sterling, VA: Stylus.

Bhola, P., & Kapur, M. (2013). The development and role of the therapeutic alliance in supportive psychotherapy with adolescents. *Psychological Studies, 58*(3), 207-215.

Byrd, D. R., & McKinney, K. J. (2012). Individual, interpersonal, and institutional level factors associated with the mental health of college students. *Journal of American College Health, 60*(3), 185-193.

Cvetkovski, S., Reavley, N. J., & Jorm, A. F. (2012). The prevalence and correlates of psychological distress in Australian tertiary students compared to their community peers. *The Australian & New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry, 46,* 457–467.

Davies, S.C. (2014). *Annual report of the Chief Medical Officer 2013, Public mental health priorities: Investing in the evidence.* London: Department of Health.

Feinstein, L., & Hammond, C. (2004). The contribution of adult learning to health and social capital. *Oxford Review of Education, 30*(2), 199-221.

Hammond, C. (2002). What is it about education that makes us healthy? Exploring the education-health connection. *International Journal of Lifelong Education, 21*, 551–571.

Jorm, A. F., Morgan, A. J., & Malhi, G. S. (2013). The future of e-mental health. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry, 47*(2), 104-106. doi: 10.1177/0004867412474076

Karver, M. S., Handelsman, J. B., Fields, S., & Bickman, L. (2006). Meta-analysis of therapeutic relationship variables in youth and family therapy: The evidence for different relationship variables in the child and adolescent treatment outcome literature. *Clinical Psychology Review, 26*(1), 50-65.

Kefford, H. C., Trevena, L. J., Willcock, M. (2005). Breaking away from the medical model: perceptions of health and health care in suburban Sydney youth. *Medical Journal of Australia, 183*(8), 418-421.

Kennett, D. J., Reed, M. J., & Lam, D. (2011). The importance of directly asking students their reasons for attending higher education. *Issues in Educational Research, 21*, 65-74.

Lambert, M. J., & Barley, D. E. (2001). Research summary on the therapeutic relationship and psychotherapy outcome. *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research, Practice, Training, 38*(4), 357-361.

Leahy, C. M., Peterson, R. F., Wilson, I. G., Newbury, J. W., Tonkin, A. L., & Turnbull, D. (2010). Distress levels and self-reported treatment rates for medicine, law, psychology and mechanical engineering tertiary students: Cross-sectional study. *The Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry, 44*, 608–615.

Lerner R. M. (2000). Developing civil society through the development of positive youth development. *Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics, 21*(1), 48-49

Lerner R. M., Bowers, E. P., Geldof, G. J., Gestsdottir, S., De Souza, L. (2012). Promoting positive youth development in the face of contextual changes and challenges, the roles of individual strengths and ecological assets. *New Directions for Youth Development, 135*, 119-127.

Lerner, R. M., Agans, J. P., Arbeit, M. R., Chase, P. A., Weiner, M. B., Schmid, K. L., & Warren, A. E. A. (2013). Resilience and positive youth development: A relational developmental systems model. In S. Goldstein & R. B. Brooks (Eds.), *Handbook of Resilience in Children* (pp. 293-308): Springer US.

Martin, D. J., Garske, J. P., & Davis, M. (2000). Relation of the therapeutic alliance with outcome and other variables: A meta-analytic review. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 68*(3), 438-450.

McLeod, B. D. (2011). Relation of the alliance with outcomes in youth psychotherapy: A meta-analysis. *Clinical Psychology Review, 31*(4), 603-616.

Newman, C. F. (1998). The therapeutic relationship and alliance in short-term cognitive therapy *The therapeutic alliance in brief psychotherapy* (pp. 95-122). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association; US.

Nussbaum, M. C. (2012). *Not for profit: Why democracy needs the humanities*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Pizzolato, J. E., & Hickien, S. (2011). Parent involvement: Investigating the parent-child relationship in millennial college students. *Journal of College Student Development, 52*(6), 671-686.

Renner, P., O'Dea, B., Sheehan, J., & Tebbutt, J. (2014). Days out of role in university students: The association of demographics, binge drinking, and psychological risk factors. *Australian Journal of Psychology*, n/a-n/a. doi: 10.1111/ajpy.12077

Saklofske, D. H., Austin, E. J., Mastoras, S. M., Beaton, L., & Osborne, S. E. (2012). Relationships of personality, affect, emotional intelligence and coping with student stress and academic success: Different patterns of association for stress and success. *Learning and Individual Differences, 22*(2), 251-257.

Sawyer, R. K. (2006). *The Cambridge handbook of the learning sciences*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Stallman, H. M. (2010). Psychological distress in university students: A comparison with general population data. *Australian Psychologist, 45*, 249–257.

Shepler, D. K., & Woosley, S. A. (2011). Understanding the early integration experiences of first-generation college students. *College Student Journal, 45*, 700+.

Shirk, S. R., & Karver, M. (2003). Prediction of treatment outcome from relationship variables in child and adolescent therapy: A meta-analytic review. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 71*(3), 452-464.

Shirk, S. R., & Karver, M. S. (2011). Alliance in child and adolescent psychotherapy. In J.C. Norcross (Ed.), *Psychotherapy relationships that work: Evidence-based responsiveness* (2nd ed., pp. 70-91). New York, NY: Oxford University Press; US.

Taylor, Z. E., Doane, L. D., & Eisenberg, N. (2014). Transitioning From high school to college: Relations of social support, ego-resiliency, and maladjustment during emerging adulthood. *Emerging Adulthood, 2*(2), 105-115.

Tinto, V. (2012). *Completing college: Rethinking institutional action*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Watson, J. C., & Schwitzer, A. M. (2010). The wide reach of college counseling. *Journal of College Counseling, 13*(2), 98-99.

Wood, D., & Wood, H. (1996). Vygotsky, tutoring and learning. *Oxford Review of Education, 22*(1), 5-16.

The authors may be contacted via
Clinton Moore
clinton.moore@sydney.edu.au

Taking a Communication Perspective on Delivering Student Services: Adding Value and Visibility to Our Work

David Paterno
Centre for Teaching and Learning
Massey University

Abstract

In this paper, I explore the relevance of taking a communication perspective on delivering services to contemporary university students. As is explored in detail below, taking a communication perspective means seeing the actions and outputs of our work as a conjoint product built in relationships not only with our student clients, but also in and across the varied teams representing the diverse operations of staff working in offices of student services. The thrust of the paper is to identify what a communication perspective is and to sketch out how taking it changes the way we approach our work. In short, the paper articulates a few of the advantages to taking a communication approach while also asking others to consider doing the same. The paper also includes a rationale for paying close attention to the variety of media – including face-to-face conversation – invoked in our relationships with students as an essential means of increasing both the visibility and value of our work. In sum, this short essay presents an overview of and rationale for being mindful about the larger role communication can play in meeting students where they are for the purpose of bringing them where they want to be.

Keywords

Communication, student success, advising

Introduction

Communication is more than those times during which we 'send' or 'receive' messages (Sigman, 1995). Rather, communication is the overarching, coordinating system of meaningful behaviours we encounter in our day-to-day lives. Approaching communication in this fashion might initially seem counter intuitive and odd. Doing so, however, illustrates the idea that the 'things' we encounter in our daily lives are not simply found objects but rather made objects – made in communication. Using the words of Barnett Pearce (2007), this alternative formulation captures the idea that we live in communication. Communication therefore is strongly social and requires coordination with others to 'make' a sense of coherence, place, and meaning in our social worlds. Importantly, taking a communication perspective also means being mindful of the forms of media upon which we rely. In a communication perspective, all communication is mediated. Moreover, media matter at least as much as for their form as for their content. This stems from the idea that different media carry with them distinct interactive and social advantages and/or disadvantages. While one might not be enabled to fully reconfigure these features – or as Innis (1951) called them biases – our sense of satisfaction with communication can be elevated when we are mindful of the 'Faustian bargain' encountered in our use of media (Postman, 1985).

The goal of my current remarks is to present a contrasting and fresh perspective on communication and to do so in a way which encourages others to be mindful of their own participation in the patterns of communication engaged in the delivery of student services. Ultimately, the rationale for approaching communication as described below is to improve students' sense of belonging and to assist them in obtaining real success as they navigate our universities.

Contrasting views

Below are two very different approaches to the study of communication. The first of these is widely understood and tends to dominate the way we conceive hof and 'act into' moments of communicating (Pearce, 2007 p. 25). I make use of Pearce's odd phrasing 'act into' as it accurately

captures the idea that communication is less a thing we do than it is a process into which we ingress. The second perspective – which remains very much marginal to the academic study of communication – offers distinct advantages to the dominant paradigm of communication. It is this alternative view which I argue holds promise to improve our interface with students and their needs.

Perspective #1 – Communication as transmission

The predominant view of communication is one of information transmission. In this view, information is seen as a thing which exists independent of and apart from moments of interacting. This is an extraordinarily pervasive view of communication and is found across a wide variety of narratives of what communication is, how it works, and why it matters. In effect, communication is conceived of as a type of transport activity. Accordingly, meaning is understood as 'sent' or 'received' between people, institutions, or other agents. At face value, this approach appears innocuous. Serious problems, however, emerge when we delve beneath the surface of this common rendition of communication.

One key problem with a view of communication as transmission is that it overstates the information value of any of the things allegedly sent or received in communication. In popular culture we hear pundits ask 'what message does politician x's speech, clothing, or hairstyle send?' By extension, then, communication is approached as an action which either happens or does not happen at any moment in time. Consider, for example, those popular programs on television which often provide pointers about 'communicating more' with loved ones. Programs such as these occasionally feature 'experts' who diagnose problems from people 'not communicating.' What is missed in these examples, of course, is recognition that communication is ever present. Using the above 'diagnostic' approach seen on daytime television, a family member who stops speaking during a disagreement and then proceeds to stomp their feet as they leave the room is seen as not communicating. Similarly, remaining silent in the face of a verbal confrontation is also seen as avoiding communication. In sum, a view of communication as information transmission is informed by the following:

- Communication is a linear activity.

- Communication is something that one does – one 'communicates.'[1]

- Communication is a sporadic activity – sometimes it proceeds, sometimes it does not.

- Communication carries meaning to those exposed to it.

- The meaning of 'communication' is found in review or study of the information contained in messages 'sent' or 'received.'

- Things outside of communication (personality traits, demographics, social structure, etc) drive communication and provide an accurate basis to understand the meaning and impact of 'messages.'

- A channel or medium is the conduit through which communication carries messages.

When we conceive of communication as the transmission of information, messages, or meaning we miss the larger overarching function of communication. Contemporary theorists of communication such as Pearce (2007), Cronen (2009), and Penman (2012) maintain that the above view of communication is inadequate.

For Pearce (2007), the prevailing approach neglects the fundamental basis of coordination brokered in moments of communicating. In this view, coordination is required for persons to enter into

---

[1] 'One' may be an individual person, an organisation, or an office. The point here is that communication is often approached as emanating from a particular – and identifiable – source.

moments of communication. To use a very common example stated above, consider once again issues of communication between partners in a romantic relationship. Both partners in a relationship enter into communication in and across a variety of their day-to-day interactions. And this is the case even when they have – or make – an argument.

While such arguments are often unpleasant, partners do have different sets of options for their next moves. A 'communication' analyst might prove useful to remind them that their tacit agreement to engage in an argument actually marks common ground and at least a partial effort to coordinate. Rather than diagnosing the conflict as 'not communicating,' when we study the larger patterns of conjoint interaction we begin to understand that partners can re-coordinate their efforts in whatever communication they are actually practicing. In effect, when couples bicker the problem is not that they are not communicating but in fact are communicating all too well. The meaning shared through such a scenario? "A: I'm angry! B: Oh yeah, so am I!"

For Cronen (2009), the prevailing view of communication underscores dualistic notions of personhood and community. In the examples above, personhood and community are approached as first-order organising entities. In other words, persons – as well as relationships and communities – communicate. Following this view, persons, relationships, and communities are not seen as constituted in communication. For the Australian communication theorist Robyn Penman (2012), the issue is simple: common approaches to communication marginalise communication itself so thoroughly that it [communication] is not actually taken seriously as an independent subject of inquiry or reflection.

> *To place communication at the centre of our focus is to treat it as something far more than a mere vehicle for the conveyance of ideas as portrayed in the classic empirical/administrative transmission model or the semiotic/cultural studies encoding-decoding model. Both of these models and their associated historical traditions share the same foundational presumption that communication can be seen as simply an instrument to bring about an effect. Most notably, both traditions separate people from their activities in the meaning generation process and ignore (or deny) the relational or interactive nature of the process (Penman, 2012, p. 9).*

For university students, the relational nature of communicating is essential to their success as both learners and social beings. For this reason, student services stand to benefit from an alternative definition of communication.

Perspective #2 – The communication perspective

Below, and in contrast to the above approach, is what contemporary theorists simply call 'the communication perspective.' Specifically, a communication perspective maintains:

- Communication is an ongoing, overarching and primary activity.
- Communication is an activity into which one ingresses or participates.
- Meaning is made by persons - but neither randomly nor individually. Meaning is generated through orientation to socially emergent and historically grounded rule-governed behaviours.
- Communication itself is akin to an environment of meaningful behaviours. The "objects and events" of our social worlds are made in communication and these function as patterning surrounds (Pearce, 2007, p. 179).
- Communication is an activity in which we live. There's no 'outside' communication.
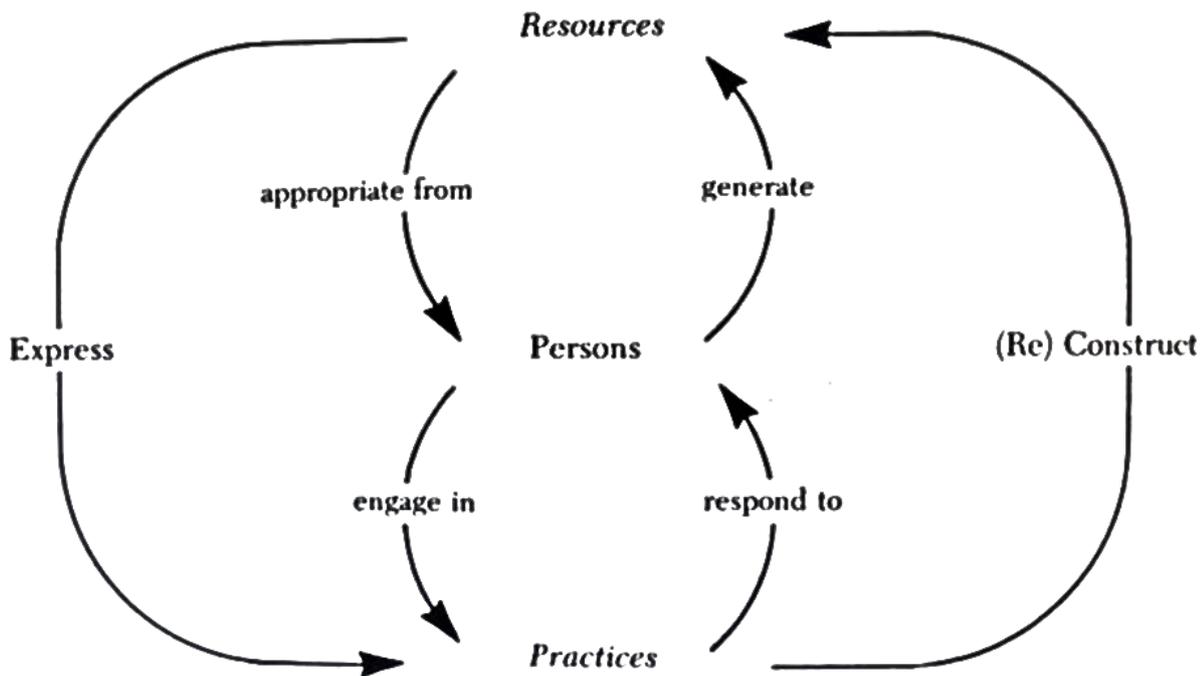- Communication is inherently social and multi-functionally mediated.

Figure 1. The communication perspective (Pearce, 1989, p. 24).

This diagram is a general visualisation of communication in step with the above six points. Again, it is important to be mindful that communication in this sense is not something that persons do but rather an activity in which one participates. In this way, communication is both a practice and a meaningful space in which one is both located and constituted. Thinking about our respective roles of providing student services, we are free to use the model above to envision any number of interactions (practices) with students for which we are required to share and shape a variety of policies or advice (resources).

The figure also contains linked arrows which are designed to capture the ongoing, iterative process of communication. What this means for us in our work with students is that we have both an opportunity and obligation to meet students across the multiple times by which they contact our universities. Importantly, the above sketch is penned at a very general – and abstract – level. Accordingly, the illustration can function as a heuristic to help us reflect upon our roles within our university's communication environment(s). Moreover, conceiving of communication as an ongoing and expansive activity can also permit us to think about both face-to-face and telemediated applications. Ironically, as our interactions come to depend more on digital and other telemediated moments, we need to consider the interpersonal and practical impact of these on students.

Indeed, there is still a strong role for the interpersonal administration of student services and we need to be mindful of this. Turkle (2011) has written about the sense of isolation contemporary university students feel when they rely on Facebook rather than having a chat with people in their classes or living in the next room in university accommodation. These students crave interpersonal interaction and our support services should be ready to deliver it.

Practical steps towards embracing and employing a communication perspective

Approaching communication with the above six alternative tenets in hand calls for changing how we speak and listen to students. This is no theoretical exercise, however. There are practical outgrowths of adjusting how we 'act into' the context of delivering student services. But how do we start? Consider, at minimum, the following action points:

1. Listen actively and paraphrase student responses

If we truly begin to see communication as a conjoint activity, the first step towards planning a communication campaign is not speaking – or assembling 'key messages'– it is listening. Actively listening to students provides a clear sense of where they stand. This is their context. As communication is a means by which to act into context, we're better prepared to work with students when we listen to them both actively and carefully. One very practical means to accomplish this is to paraphrase.

Paraphrasing is one means by which to actively listen. By placing what we hear from students into our own language and repeating it back to students, we're checking its resonance with the students themselves. This is particularly useful when speaking to students expressing challenges with academic projects or assessments. As the institutional representatives on areas of student success, time management, or advising, our first tendency is to offer them what we see as a solution. By taking a step back and paraphrasing we're checking our intent against where the students actually stand. In this way, paraphrasing provides a conversational 'hook' for students to grasp hold. In the end, actively listening helps provide coordination between student and service provider. Doing so enhances the likelihood students will comply with what we offer as solutions to their problems.

2. Practice the platinum rule[2]

The Golden Rule is 'golden' but only works in a fully monocultural setting. It makes sense to do onto others as you would have done to yourself only if there's one way to do things. The rich diversity of learners in our Universities begs for another way. One possibility is the platinum rule. The platinum rule works hand-in-hand with both paraphrasing and listening actively. It states simply "Treat others the way they wish to be treated." There are a number of implications for this. For example, by what name does the student wish to be addressed? Also, by what medium might the student wish to be – or not be – contacted? Holding a position of leadership in our universities with students requires that we uphold those standards which help students succeed both academically and personally. We need to approach this work as a way that mirrors, largely, the orientations taken by the students themselves. Practicing the platinum rule reminds us that there are other ways. Using it to discover what a student practices helps guide us towards coordinating with them.

3. Be open to speak to and learn from others

Considering communication as an iterative, ongoing activity also suggests that students have things to teach us as well. The communication perspective sees all parties to communication as connected to each other. At times these nuggets of discovery come in the form of a complaint about something that's not going particularly well in the university. We can see this, however, as feedback about what we might offer in solution of it. As noted above, our students come from a diversity of social, cultural, and economic frames. They bring with them experiences and knowledge which we might not see as useful to our operations. Real engagement requires investment between both students and the university. Sending more messages will not broker this connection on its own. Building connected, high quality service delivery must be informed by a true openness towards those to whom our services are oriented.

4. Utilise multiple channels to elicit student engagement and investment

University staff working in student services possess a variety of media - or channels - of communication. Many of these are implicit and under-utilised in our reflections about how we reach and interact with students. Consider, for example, the physical location of our offices. Are we located in an area of high foot traffic, for example? Are our offices shared with other service providers? For example at Massey University in Wellington, the Centre for Teaching and Learning

---

[2] The precise origin of this term is difficult to pin down. Various blogs and websites make use of it. I encountered the term in a Ph.D. paper in Intercultural Communication at the University at Albany – State University of New York in the 1990s.

is located within the award-winning newly refreshed Library. When students enquire to meet with me they often ask where we're located and express surprise and relief when I tell them we are in the library. In this way, our centre is already nestled within another more readily known place on campus. This means we should capitalise on this location and use it as a medium to connect with students. In this sense of the word, a medium is any identifiable physical object around which people can organise and coordinate their communication. Universities are built upon a variety of physical places and approaching our physical offices as a medium for engagement encourages interpersonal connection with students.

In addition to the places and spaces physically occupied by student services, we also need to attend to those more traditional 'media' of communication such as email, telephone, facebook, twitter, notice boards, university apps, newsletters, brochures, booklets, as well as university webpages and online learning platforms. I hesitate to make use of the term 'social media' here because the alternative view of communication advanced in this essay sees all communication as inherently social and mediated. Moreover, it is more fruitful to speak of communication as either more or less telemediated. In practice, telemediation occurs on a continuum. Obviously, Apps, Facebook and University websites are more telemediated than a face-to-face chat. All of these moments of communicating, however, are as social as the relationships and shared knowledge which make them possible, are always part of the guiding principles we follow to 'act into' communication across them.

When employing various media it is also helpful to think about our campaigns as invitations. We do not, and in fact cannot, communicate with or to students. What we need to focus on is the idea that we can use media to invite students into communication. This is a very different means by which to approach communicating and requires mindfulness towards to students. Indeed, we wish to meet students where they are in our shared effort to bring them where they need to be.

Conclusion

By listening and speaking broadly, we can study and better act into successful communicational moments with clients. Taking a communication perspective, we can appreciate how the interactions we hold with our student populations help guide students to successful outcomes. An added bonus to taking a communication perspective is enriching both the reach and quality of the services we deliver. Communicating well means thinking about more than messages. It means comprehensively considering media and including the physical spaces in which we work as well as the other people with whom we share our jobs as part of the overall communication environment used to connect with students.

Communication is an ongoing, coordinating practice and requires mindful appreciation. By actively practicing the four points outlined above, student services are better positioned to serve their constituencies. In the end, this leads to more successful outcomes and also an enhanced visible presence for student services across the university sector.

References

Cronen, V.E. (2009). Social construction without dualism: Repairing the ruptures and making connections. In Galanes, G. J., & Leeds-Hurwitz, W. (Eds) (2009). *Socially constructing communication.* Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, Inc.

Innis, H. A. (1951). *The bias of communication.* Toronto, Ontario: University of Toronto Press.

Pearce, W.B. (1989). *Communication and the human condition*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.

Pearce, W.B. (2007). *Making social worlds: A communication perspective.* Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub.

Penman, R. (2012). On taking communication seriously. *Australian Journal of Communication*, *39*(3), 41-63.

Postman, N. (1985). *Amusing ourselves to death: Public discourse in the age of show business.* New York: Viking.

Sigman, S.J. (1995). *The consequentiality of communication*. Hillsdale, N.J: Erlbaum.

Turkle, S. (2011). *Alone together: Why we expect more from technology and less from each other*. New York: Basic Books.

The author may be contacted
David Paterno
d.paterno@massey.ac.nz

Sidekicks: Promoting Students' Personal and Social Skills

Patrick Sheehan, Elizabeth Stanton, & Philomena Renner
Counselling and Psychological Services
University of Sydney

Abstract

The literature on student mental health suggests that students frequently seek help from family and friends when they experience distress. Past research also indicates that peers lack effective helping skills to support a friend in need. In 2013 and 2014 a five-session program named Sidekicks was piloted by the Counselling and Psychological Services (CAPS) at the University of Sydney to promote peer support capacity. The program aimed to train and equip students to effectively manage a situation where their support would make a difference to a fellow student. The program provided a theoretical overview of psychological issues consistent with Acceptance and Mindfulness approaches to mental health. In addition, students were provided skills training in empathic listening and responding, self-regulation, and referring to professional help.

This study aimed to report the effectiveness of that program. Scores for measures completed pre-program were compared to scores for measures completed post-program on outcomes of confidence, stigma, and instances of helping others for 58 program completers. Data were analysed using paired t-tests and Wilcoxon Signed Rank Tests. These analyses indicated that the program resulted in a statistically significant reduction of stigma in regard to someone consulting a mental health professional, a reduction in stigma regarding self referral to a mental health professional, and an improvement in perceived self-confidence regarding peer assistance. While there appeared to be no changes in the frequency of peer assistance, the Sidekicks program results suggest its effectiveness in both increasing confidence regarding peer assistance, and attitude change, i.e., stigma reductions in terms of acceptability of access to professional support. The implications of these findings are discussed in reference to integrated student development and developing social capital.

Introduction

Emerging adulthood, the age period from late teens through the mid 20's in Western cultures, has been theorised to have distinctive developmental characteristics (Arnett, 2007). This stage of transition from adolescence to adulthood potentially offers the excitement of exploring a wide range of experiences: the pursuit of various educational interests, greater independence from the family of origin, exposure to more diverse worldviews, and with luck, growing into a well rounded person. In turn, this period from 16 to 25 years of age also offers challenges for some individuals: in the process of identity exploration they may experience increased instability as a result of sorting through various future possibilities (Arnett, 2007). In addition to this, the prevalence of several types of risk-taking behaviours is at its highest given the conditions of minimal adult supervision, and relatively fewer family/partner commitments (Arnett, 2000).

Given that there appears to be developmental periods in emerging adulthood that are vulnerable to instability and the adverse consequences of risk taking behaviour, it is important to determine the most common ways in which these individuals seek the help of others to obtain a sense of stability, and to determine the effectiveness of these stabilising methods. Adolescent populations in Australia are more likely to seek help for emotional difficulties from friends and family rather than formal sources of help, with friends seen to be the preferred source of social-emotional assistance overall (Boldero & Fallon, 1995; Schonert-Reichl & Muller, 1996). This result has also been replicated in university populations of emerging adults. Survey data from a university wide Mental Health Census conducted by the Counselling and Psychological Services (CAPS) at the University of Sydney was completed by 2567 University of Sydney students aged between 16-25 (Renner, O'Dea, Sheehan, & Tebbutt, 2014). Results suggested that university students in the emerging adult demographic were consistent with adolescents in their help seeking behaviours and were most likely to turn to friends (73%) for support when and if they experience emotional difficulties.

Results from this survey also interestingly suggested that only 28% of these respondents were willing to seek help from either psychological services or health care professionals.

Rickwood, Deane, Wilson and Ciarrochi (2005) sought to explain the reasons for this help seeking behaviour in adolescents and emerging adults by utilising self report and focus groups with a sample of over 2500 young people from Australia aged between 14 and 24. The authors concluded that young people turned to their friends and family because they were more trusted sources of help in comparison to the often-unknown quantity of a mental health professional. The authors suggested that there were four additional barriers to seeking help from mental health professionals in young people: personal beliefs that one should solve their own problems, personal characteristics of low emotional competence, negative attitudes and beliefs about help seeking, and fear of being seen as weak for consulting a professional for mental health concerns. Contrastingly, having supportive social influences and a knowledge of the sources of help available facilitated an increase in the likelihood of consulting a mental health professional when needed.

Given the inevitability that emerging adults will likely seek help for emotional difficulties from friends before any other source of formal help, Rickwood et al. (2005) commented on the potential of "gatekeepers" in the community who could be provided with training in responding effectively to the emotional difficulties of others. Gatekeepers are individuals that are in positions to connect highly distressed people to appropriate services (Frederico & Davis, 1996). With sufficient training, gatekeepers in university populations may also be able to help stabilise peers who are reporting low levels of distress (Thompson, 2014).

There are three costly consequences to having untrained 'gatekeepers' in the student body of a university. Firstly, without such training, those going through difficulties that turn to their peers for help may be in some cases adversely affected. For example, Drum, Brownson, Denmark, and Smith (2009) found that among a sample of 26 000 U.S. college students reporting serious suicidal ideation and attempts, the majority of those who talked to someone sought out help from a peer (67%). However, only 52% of those individuals found it helpful to do so.

The second costly consequence to having untrained gatekeepers in a university community of students is that well-intentioned gatekeepers may not have the confidence to know what help will be effective. For example, a report by Robertson, Blanchard, Coughlan, & Robertson (2014) provided qualitative focus group data from medical students at the University of Sydney. These students suggested that young people want to assist other young people in mental well being issues, but do not know how to go about doing so, other than hoping that they consult their physician.

The third costly consequence to having untrained gatekeepers in the student body of a university is that highly distressed students seeking help from their peers may not be linked in with formal support services. For example, there is evidence to suggest in a population of high school teachers that some gatekeepers who endorse attitudes of greater stigma towards those who consult heath professionals for emotional difficulties may be less effective in their gatekeeping role (Wilson & Deane, 2000). This suggests that gatekeeper training may need to be evaluated in how effectively it leads to changes in stigma-consistent attitudes associated with help seeking, in addition to evaluating how well it equips helpers to respond to distress.

Three studies to date have examined the effect of gatekeeper training in university populations in terms of how the program addresses some of these concerns to promote peer support capacity. The training of gatekeepers in university populations with a specific focus on suicide intervention was trialed by Pearce, Rickwood and Beaton (2003) at the University of Canberra. The suicide intervention project (SIP) aimed in three sessions to train individuals to assess suicidal behaviours, talk about current feelings and refer to specialized help if required. The training resulted in improvements from pre-program to post-program on measures examining attitudes to talk about

feelings, social distance attitudes to mental illness, perceived behavioural control, intentions to talk to those in distress, and perceived social connectedness at university. No changes were reported in the number of instances of helping others at two-week follow up.

Hatcher, Nadeau Walsh, Reynolds, Galea, and Marz (1994) focused their skill building in a sample of 30 college students more directly on the skills of active/empathic listening in line with Rogerian counselling methods. The results of their intervention demonstrated that skills training in empathic listening and non-judgmental listening improved empathic concern and perspective taking compared to students who did not receive this training. Additionally, college students demonstrated greater improvements in these outcomes compared to high school students who engaged in the same training. This result suggests that individuals aged 17 and older have a developmental readiness and capacity for changes in empathic communication if these skills are trained.

Morse and Schulze (2013) provided peer mentoring training program at the Worcester Polytechnic University which focused on multiple areas: understanding the nature of emotional problems, skills in empathic listening, and effective action to suicidal behavior and high levels of emotional distress. The authors found that their six-session program resulted in improvements to participants' confidence for helping others and skills in responding to suicidal behaviour as measured by the Suicide Intervention Response Inventory (SIRI: Neimeyer & Bonnelle, 1997).

In addition to this, the results of their study demonstrated reductions from pre-program to post-program in self-reported stigma associated with mental health and help seeking. The authors of the study hypothesised that the participants' changes in measures of stigma reduction were potentially related to the open and frank discussions about mental health carried out in the training, the use of de-stigmatising language by the training facilitators, and familiarising participants with local counselling resources.

Multi-faceted interventions of this nature, which train gatekeepers in the student population to better understand the nature of emotional instability, respond to emotional instability with empathic listening skills, and respond to suicidal behaviours with effective action, are important on a number of levels. Firstly there is preliminary evidence that they can broaden the personal and social skills of students in terms of their confidence to effectively manage a situation where their support would make a difference to a fellow student. Secondly, the intervention may be able to enhance the peer support capacity of the university community by increasing the instances of non-formalised peer support. Thirdly, the intervention may possibly reduce attitudes of stigma around consulting a mental health professional. The present study aimed to evaluate whether a program promoting peer support capacity targeting the emerging adult demographic would result in these hypothesised improvements to the participants of the program.

Materials and Method

Participants

Participants for the program were recruited in the following ways:

1. Advertisements placed on the University's Facebook page in the week prior to commencement of the training program.

2. Training facilitators speaking to students at the start of psychology, education and social work lectures.

3. Emails describing the program were sent to secretaries of clubs and societies across the university. An unknown number of these clubs and societies then forwarded this information on to their members.

Procedure

The Counselling and Psychological Services (CAPS) at the University of Sydney sought permission from Charles Morse and his colleagues at the Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI) to utilise and adapt their Student Support Network Program (SSN). The SSN program was listed on the Suicide Prevention Resource Center's Best Practices Registry in 2010. Morse and his colleagues have ensured that their lesson plans are freely available for campuses to utilise and alter as necessary (Morse, 2013).

This six-hour course was delivered in six one-hour sessions across six consecutive weeks. All workshops were conducted by two facilitators (ES and PS). At session one, participants were provided with a manual of supporting documents. The content covered in each respective week of training included: 1) Understanding mental health from an Acceptance and Commitment Therapy perspective, 2) Responding to distress using empathic listening skills, 3) Responding to distress characterised by low mood or anxiety, 4) Responding to drug or alcohol concerns, 5) Responding to suicidal thoughts and behaviour, and 6) Helping friends to get help and responding effectively to people who do not wish to receive professional help.

In order to reduce burden to the counselling service and in response to the feedback of past participants, the second semester of 2014 cohort completed the training in five sessions across 5 consecutive weeks (instead of six sessions across six weeks). The content from sessions 3 and 4 were combined into one session.

Detailed descriptions of each session's activities and outline can be found in Morse's (2013) program description. The sessions are designed to be experiential and highly interactive.

The basic learning outcomes of the training were as follows:

- Engage students with ideas of experiential avoidance and its link with adverse mental health.

- To identify that the helper role is not to solve people's problems but rather to listen empathically, and guide people to areas of greater self acceptance and connection with values. This was practised regularly via role-plays.

- To obtain knowledge about professional mental health services and how to refer to professional local health services when necessary.

- To learn and practice responses to suicidal behaviour supported by the scientific literature.

- To learn and refer to stages of change model when dealing with resistance to help.

At the conclusion of the training, participants were instructed to attempt to incorporate the skills learnt into their interactions with peers. Without any obligation, various students stayed in touch with the program directors either via seeking support on how to use skills in a particular situation, or volunteering at various CAPS community events.

Pre-program measures

The evaluation reported in this article was carried out with the first 58 participants who completed the training. Participants were given questionnaires before the first session and at the end of the last session. The questionnaires were linked via numbered ID but no name.

The pre-program questionnaire asked participants to provide basic socio-demographic characteristics. Participants were then asked the following:

- How confident are you to currently help a friend in distress (1. Not at all, 2. Slightly, 3. Moderately, 4. Very).

- How many instances in the past two weeks have you provided help to a friend in distress? (Please write an approximate number).

- What is your main reason for attending the training?

Finally, participants filled out two related measures of help-seeking stigma for emotional difficulties: the Social Stigma for Receiving Psychological Help Scale (SSRPH; Komiya, Good, & Sherrod, 2000) and the Self-Stigma of Seeking Psychological Help (SSOSH; Vogel, Wade, & Haake, 2006). The SSRPH examines stigma associated with seeking professional help. There are five questions in total. Participants are required to rate questions on a scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). The items are summed so that higher scores reflect stronger attitudes of stigma towards a member of the public consulting a mental health professional. Studies utilizing this measure indicated a strong internal consistency with Cronbach-α statistic ranging from .73 to .82 (Komiya et al., 2000; Tucker, Hammer, Vogel, Bitman, Wade, & Maier, 2013). The SSOSH is a 10-item questionnaire that measures reductions in self-acceptance and self-esteem that may result from seeing a psychologist for emotional difficulties, e.g. "I would feel worse about myself if I could not solve my own problems". Items are rated on a five-point Likert-scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), such that higher scores are reflective of a stronger self-stigma for consulting a psychologist. Cronbach-α statistics suggest a high internal consistency ranging from .89 to .92 in two different studies (Vogel et al., 2006; Tucker et al., 2013).

Post-program measures

Post-program questionnaires involved the same pre-program measures and ratings of confidence to effectively help someone in distress, as well as noting the number instances of helping people in the past two weeks. In addition to this, participants noted if they would recommend the training to other students on campus.

Participants also filled out evaluation style questions on a 5-point Likert-scale from 4 (Strongly agree) to 0 (Strongly Disagree). The questions asked participants to rate the following:

- Whether the training helped them to re-examine their current thinking and behaviors about helping others

- Whether the training was helpful

- Whether as a result of attending they are likely to adopt some new attitudes and/or behaviors in helping others

- Whether they were likely to try to learn more about the ideas/skills introduced in the training

- Whether they felt stressed about helping their friends.

Statistical analysis

Changes in outcome measures and self-report ratings of help-related behaviour were evaluated using matched pair t-tests and Wilcoxon signed-rank tests that were two tailed at an α of .05.

Results

Participants' characteristics

Participants from 4 cohorts of training programs across two academic years (2013 and 2014) completed questionnaires at the initial and final sessions of the program. The final sample comprised of 58 individuals (41 females and 17 males) whose ages ranged from 17 to 46, with a mean age of 22.4 (SD= 5.00). 46 of those individuals were aged between 17 and 25, meaning that 79% of the sample were individuals who fall into the emerging adult demographic. Table 1 shows a summary of the reasons participants attended the program. The majority (65.5%, 38/58) of participants indicated that their reason for attending related to wanting to be more effective in

helping others in their life. A further 20.5% (12/58) of participants indicated that they wished to not only be more effective in helping others, but also wanted to learn how to manage their own stress.

Table 1. Summary of reasons for attending the Sidekicks program

Reasons	%
Wanting to be more effective in helping others	65.5
Be more effective in helping others AND learn how to manage my own stress	20.5
Curiosity about the program material	7.00
To obtain life skills for current or future workplaces	7.00

Selection of parametric and non-parametric tests

A Shapiro-Wilk's test along with a visual inspection of histograms, normal Q-Q plots and box plots were carried out for the differences in scores between pre-program and post-program on the four dependent variables (Shapiro & Wilk, 1965; Razali & Wah, 2011). Results of the Shapiro-Wilk's test indicated that differences between pre-program and post-program scores were not normally distributed for the following three dependent variables: confidence to effectively help a friend in distress (S-W (58) = 0.834, p < .0001); instances of helping someone in distress in the past two weeks (S-W (58) = 0.656, p < .0001); scores on the SSRPH (S-W (58) = .954, p < .05). The fourth and final dependent variable (differences between pre-program and post-program scores on the SSOSH) showed evidence that normality is a reasonable assumption in reference to skewness (-0.323, SE = .314), kurtosis (0.687; SE = .618) and the Shapiro-Wilk's test of normality (SW (58) = .970; p = .167). The boxplot did not indicate the presence of any potential outliers. A relatively bell shaped distribution displayed in the histogram as well as a Q-Q plot with points distributing closely around the diagonal line suggested evidence of normality.

Given that the difference in pre-program to post-program scores in three dependent variables appeared to differ significantly from normality, thus violating an assumption of the paired t-test, it was decided that a Wilcoxon signed-rank test would be carried out to analyse these variables with α being set at .05. All assumptions of the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank test were met. That is, paired values were randomly and independently drawn, the dependent variable was continuous, and the measures had at least one ordinal scale of measurement.

Help provided to others

A Wilcoxon Signed-Ranks Test indicated that ratings of confidence to help others at post-program (M = 2.0, SD = 0.57) were statistically significantly higher than ratings of confidence to help others at pre-program, (M = 1.5, SD = 0.68) Z =4.79, p < .001. The same test indicated no changes of statistical significance to self-reported instances of helping a person in the two weeks prior to the program's first session (M = 1.8, SD = 1.60), compared to the two weeks prior to the program's final session (M = 2.3, SD = 2.83) Z = -1.02, p = .486. A summary of the descriptive statistics and comparison between pre-program and post-program measures for attitude change and behaviour change is provided in Table 2.

Table 2. Wilcoxon Signed-Rank test and t-test statistics for pre-post differences

	Pre (N=58)		Post (N=58)		Test Statistic	
	M (SD)		M (SD)		t	Z
Perceived confidence to help others	1.50	(0.68)	2.00	(0.57)	-	4.79**
Instances of help (previous 2 weeks)	1.83	(1.60)	2.28	(2.83)	-	-1.02
Stigma regarding self-referral for professional help (SSOSH)	23.50	(6.62)	22.20	(5.29)	2.18*	-
Public stigma of receiving professional help (SSRPH)	13.05	(3.53)	12.18	(3.45)	-	-1.98

t = t-test statistic , *Z* = Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test statistic
* *p* <.05
** *p* <.001

Stigma around seeking psychological help

A paired t-test indicated that self reported ratings of self-stigma for seeking psychological help, as measured by the SSOSH scale, were significantly higher at pre-test (M = 23.5, SD = 6.62) compared to post-test (M = 22.2, SD = 5.29, t(57) = 2.18, p < .05). A Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test indicated that self reported ratings of public stigma of receiving professional help, as measured by the SSRPH scale, were also statistically significantly higher at the first session of the program (M = 13.1, SD = 3.53) compared to the final session of the program, (M = 12.2, SD = 3.45) Z = -1.98, p < .05.

Satisfaction with the program

All 58 participants in the sample indicated that they would recommend the program to other students on campus. Table 3 summarises the Likert-scale ratings of feedback from participants about the usefulness and value of the program. 95.1% of participants either strongly agreed or agreed that the program helped them to re-examine current thinking and behaviours about helping others. 95.1% of participants either strongly agreed or agreed that the workshop was helpful. 100% of participants either strongly agreed or agreed that they are likely to adopt new attitudes and/or behaviours in helping others. 95.1% of participants indicated that they strongly agreed or agreed that they are likely to try to learn more about the skills introduced in the program. 80.5% of participants indicated that they either strongly agreed or agreed with the statement that they feel less stressed about helping friends as a result of the workshop.

Table 3. Feedback about the Sidekicks program

Questions	%				
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The program helped me re-examine my thinking and behaviours	78.00	17.10	4.90	0.00	0.00
The program was helpful overall	80.50	14.60	4.90	0.00	0.00
I'm likely to adopt new attitudes and/or behaviours	75.60	24.40	0.00	0.00	0.00
I'm likely to learn more about the skills introduced in the program	68.30	26.80	4.90	0.00	0.00
I feel less stressed about helping others as a result of the program	41.50	39.00	14.60	2.40	2.40

Discussion

This study aimed to determine the effectiveness of a program that intended to enhance the personal and social skills of helping peers in a sample of university students who primarily fall into the emerging adult demographic. The program itself aimed to train and equip students to effectively manage a situation where their support would make a difference to a fellow student. It was hypothesised that participation in the program would improve perceived self-confidence regarding peer assistance, as well as increasing the frequency of instances in which participants provided assistance to their peers. It was also hypothesised that participation in the program would result in attitude change regarding the stigma of consulting a mental health professional for participants.

The evaluation found a number of benefits for participants of the program. Post-program feedback data suggested that the program appeared to be very well received by participants. Not only would all participants recommend the program to others, in addition to this, the program appeared to reduce stress around helping others and was deemed to be helpful for the majority of participants.

In comparing data from the final session of the training program with the first session of the program, participants endorsed an improvement in perceived self-confidence regarding peer assistance. Participants also reported statistically significant reductions in stigma regarding self referral to a mental health professional, and reductions in stigma regarding any member of the

population consulting a health professional. The only hypothesis not met was that there were no changes in the frequency of peer assistance over the duration of the program.

Results from this study are consistent with previous interventions involving university populations that have aimed to enhance the helping skills of students with their peers (Morse & Schulze, 2013; Pierce et al., 2003; Hatcher & Nadeau, 1994). In summary, these results suggest that interventions targeting skills in empathic communication, and complementary skills associated with playing the role of a 'gatekeeper' to mental health services, have the potential to improve the confidence of students in providing effective help to their peers. The results also indicate that such interventions can potentially be utilised to target stigma reduction regarding help seeking with professional services for emotional difficulties.

While the program saw changes in self-reported attitudes and self-perceived confidence, there was no statistically significant increase to the instances helping behaviours (i.e. the instances of providing help to peers in the two weeks prior to the program compared to the final two weeks of the program). While it was hypothesised that having an increased confidence to help others would logically lead to increased instances of helping behaviours, this null finding is also consistent with a suicide focused training provided by Pearce et al. (2003) in a university setting. In accounting for null change in the instances of talking to someone about their emotions in the two week period prior to the commencement of training compared to the two week period following training, Pearce et al., (2003) suggested that the null finding may be due to two main factors; firstly, that the frame of time in which the behaviour being measured was very short; secondly, that there is potentially a low reliability of measurement when the question posed to participants does not ask for a concrete and unambiguous behavioural outcome. A more poignant suggestion by Pearce et al., (2003) for the null finding is that while instances of help may not change, the way in which conversations are carried out may change. That is, respondents may take a more mature stance with conversations about distress, and may in fact set healthier boundaries around these conversations rather than take an overly intrusive approach with their peers. This was not measured directly, but the feedback about the present program suggests that 100% of the respondents indicated that they were likely to adopt new attitudes and/or behaviours when helping others, suggesting that help being provided to peers following training may have changed in its nature and not in its frequency.

The validity of the overall findings of the study are somewhat limited by the lack of a wait list control group to rule out maturation effects. Another limitation of this study is that the small number of variables measured makes it difficult to determine the mechanisms of action leading to changes in the outcome variables (i.e. changes in stigma related attitudes and confidence in helping peers). Specifically, it was unclear as to whether changes in the confidence to provide help to distressed peers was due to students being more equipped with skills to respond to distressed peers, or was simply due to changes in self-efficacy to assist others. Future research may be able to determine what variables moderate and mediate changes in confidence to assist peers.

Focusing on the area of stigma-related attitude change, it has been hypothesised by Morse and Schulze (2013) that the mechanism of action to shift stigma in the participants of their training program was a combination of factors such as: using language in their training that was de-stigmatising, frank discussions regarding mental health, and greater familiarisation with the local counselling services at the university. An alternative explanation for stigma change is also offered by theories on empathy and intergroup relations. Gaertner and Dovidio (2008) propose that humans empathise with others who they believe share their attitudes, interests, preferences and chronic concerns. In addition to this, Thompson (2014) proposes that education can reduce empathy biases by focusing on commonalities between cultural groups. The Sidekicks program is pedagogically consistent with this approach. Rather than emphasising emotional distress as being symptoms of mental health disorders (and potentially creating a categorical distinction between those with a disorder and those without), emotional difficulties were instead formulated as difficulties that result

from experiential avoidance and low psychological flexibility, as per acceptance and mindfulness approaches to mental health. Thus, it was the hope of the program facilitators that stigma could be reduced by students empathising with the human condition, and that consulting a professional for psychological distress is not exclusively for the 'disordered'.

Future research may be able to examine whether changes to mental health literacy, empathy, perspective taking and similarity bias mediate reductions in stigma. This analysis of the mechanisms of action may assist universities in tailoring their programs promoting peer support capacity so that they can most reliably foster the development of empathic, supportive, and open-minded adults.

At a broader level, programs such as the Sidekicks program may set up a system of social capital in peer groups within the university community. Social capital has been defined as the collective value that results from a web of cooperative relationships between individuals who mutually help to facilitate the resolution of problems (Coleman, 1990). In the current context, participation in training like Sidekicks may establish an environment of mutual benefit for the helper and helpee. That is, one may feel a sense of value for providing a civic duty of helping others skilfully, and doing so may set up a norm of reciprocity within that peer group.

While the transition from adolescence to adulthood may at times be turbulent, destabilising and alienating, the results of this study suggest that interventions in response to this can go beyond the individual and foster the helping skills of those who are turned to most frequently for assistance: the peer group. If the university student community engages with such training, there is the potential for two beneficial outcomes among students: more effective responses from peers during periods of personal destabilisation, and the development of a more integrated student who can take away lifelong skills in perspective taking and empathic communication.

References

Arnett, J. (2000) Emerging Adulthood: A theory of development from late teens through the twenties. *American Psychologist, 55,* 469-480.

Arnett, J. (2007). Emerging adulthood: What is it, and what is it good for? *Child Development Perspectives, 1,* 68-73.

Boldero, J. & Fallon, B. (1995). Adolescent help-seeking: What do they get help for and from whom? *Journal of Adolescence, 18,* 193-209.

Coleman, J.S. (1990). *Foundations of social theory.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Drum, D., Brownson, C., Denmark, A., & Smith, S. (2009). New data on the nature of suicidal crises in college students: Shifting the paradigm. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice, 40,* 213-222.

Frederico, M. & Davis, C. (1996). Gatekeeper training and youth suicide prevention. *Report for youth suicide prevention initiative: education and training consultancy.* Department of Health and Family Services, Canberra.

Gaertnar, S.L. & Dividio, J.F. (2008). Addressing contemporary racism: The Common Ingroup Identity Model: In C. Willis-Esqueda (Ed.), *Motivational aspects of prejudice and racism: The Nebraska Symposium on Motivation*, Vol. 53 (pp.111-133). Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

Hatcher, S.L., Nadeau, M.S., Walsh, L.K., Reynolds, M., Galea, J., & Marz, K. (1994). The teaching of empathy for high school and college students: Testing Rogerian methods with the Interpersonal Reactivity Index. *Adolescence, 29,* 961-975.

Komiya, N., Good, G., & Sherrod, N. (2000). Emotional openness as a predictor of college students' attitudes toward seeking psychological help. *Journal of Counselling Psychology, 47,* 138-143.

Morse, C. (2013). Teaching mindfulness and acceptance within college communities to enhance peer support. In J. Pistorello (Ed.), *Mindfulness and acceptance for counseling college students.* (pp.203-223). Oakland: Ca: Context Press.

Morse, C., & Schulze, R. (2013). Enhancing the network of peer support on college campuses. *Journal of College Study Psychotherapy, 27,* 212-225.

Neimeyer, R. A., & Bonnelle, K. (1997). The Suicide Intervention Response Inventory: A revision and validation. *Death Studies*, *21*, 59–81.

Pearce, K., Rickwood, D., & Beaton, S. (2003). Preliminary evaluation of a university based suicide intervention project: Impact on participants. *Australian e-Journal for the Advancement of Mental Health, 2:1,* 25-35.

Razali, N.M. & Wah, Y.B. (2011). Power comparisons of Shapiro-Wilk, Kolmogorov-Smirnov, Lilliefors and Anderson-Darling tests. *Journal of Statistical Modeling and Analytic, 2,* 21-33.

Renner, P., O'Dea, B., Sheehan, J., & Tebbutt, J. (2014). [University of Sydney, Student Mental Health Survey]. Unpublished raw data.

Rickwood, D., Deane, F., Wilson, C., & Ciarrochi, J. (2005). Young people's help-seeking for mental health problems. *The Advancement of Mental Health, 4*, 218-251.

Robertson, S., Blanchard, M., Coughlan, F., & Robertson, A. (2013). How did we score? Engaging young people in the development of a National Report Card on Mental Health and Suicide Prevention. Young and well Cooperative Research Centre. Retrieved from http://www.mentalhealthcommission.gov.au/media/ 62010/HowDidWeScore_ 100513_final.pdf.

Schonert-Reichl, K.A. & Muller, J.R. (1996). Correlates of help-seeking in adolescence. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 25(6),* 705-731.

Shapiro, S.S. & Wilk, M.B. (1965). An analysis of variance test for normality. *Biometrika, 52,* 591-611.

Thompson, R. (2014). *Beyond reason and tolerance: The purpose and practice of higher education.* New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Tucker, J.R., Hammer, J.H., Vogel, D.L., Bitman, R.L., Wade, N.D., Maier, E.J. (2013). Disentangling self-stigma: Are mental illness and help-seeking self-stigmas different? *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 60,* 520-531.

Vogel, D., Wade, N., & Haake, S. (2006). Measuring the self-stigma associated with seeking psychological help. *Journal of Counselling Psychology, 53* 325-337.

Wilson, C. J., & Deane, F. P. (2000). *If we can't seek help, how can the kids?* Paper presented at the inaugural Illawarra Institute for Mental Health Conference, November 2000, Wollongong, Australia. Retrieved from http://socialsciences.uow.edu.au/content/groups/public/@web/@health/documents/doc/uow039039.pdf .

The authors may be contacted via
Patricks Sheehan
patrick.sheehan@sydney.edu.au

Online Orientation – A Blended Learning Approach to Student Transition

Marie-Jo Wilson and Vandana Minhas-Taneja
University of Auckland

Abstract

A report on first year transition at the University of Auckland recommended a number of changes. This launched an entirely new approach, and in 2015 the face-to-face Orientation Program was overhauled and a new Online Orientation course went live for undergraduates. The launch was the culmination of nearly three years of work to improve the transition experience and was part of a broader change process across the institution to better meet the needs of students new to tertiary study. Online Orientation exceeded expectations in being on time, on budget, with 88% of all new students accessing the course – higher than our already ambitious target of 80%, receiving very positive feedback from students and staff.

Nevertheless, there were several key learnings along the way. This paper explores those learnings by examining how:

- *Best practice and innovation drove the project forward*

- *Students expect institutions to use technology to engage them in the learning process, and that blended learning environments are now the norm*

- *Online learning has now become the dominant method for adult learners. It also improves access for students with disabilities and assists ESL students who have the additional cognitive load of interpreting what is being said before being able to comprehend and develop understanding.*

Introduction

The University of Auckland is a large research-led institution which spans over six campuses and has approximately 40,000 students. Of the student population, roughly 13% are from overseas and 80% are from the Auckland region. Each year, approximately 5,000 new first year undergraduates enrol with the University.

Context and background

In 2012, the University of Auckland commissioned market research company, Colmar Brunton, to undertake a survey of incoming first year students prior to arriving on campus. A follow-up survey was also conducted eight weeks into the first semester. The surveys gauged students' perceptions, hopes, expectations and fears prior to starting at the University, and then examined the students' reflections on their experience of settling into University two months later. In addition, two interns from Bowling Green University, Ohio, were tasked with desk research, interviewing key internal stakeholders and identifying current University Programs and best practice in key first year transition areas. Their findings, along with the results of the surveys, were compiled into a report making some high-level recommendations to the University on how to improve the first year transition experience. A number of these recommendations related to Orientation week and the information students receive prior to arrival. Because the suggested improvements were sweeping and involved stakeholders from across the University, a working group was formed, which in turn became our net of influences (Krause & Coates, 2008) to advocate for this project across the University. This paper looks at one aspect of the improvement process – the development and delivery of Online Orientation.

Rationale

The University operates a broad range of programs and services aimed at retaining students and encouraging academic and social engagement, all with a view of improving the student experience

and outcomes for students (Tinto, 1998). These range from personal wellbeing services such as counselling; emergency financial assistance; and assistance for students with disabilities, to engagement services such as sport and recreation activities; support for clubs and societies; and peer mentoring. Some Programs, such as the Tuākana mentoring and tutoring scheme and the First Year Experience Program are run through faculties, while others, such as the UniGuide Program (which pairs new students up with a senior student at Orientation), are operated centrally. Programs such as Student Learning Services are focused on improving academic skills, while others, such as student events or student leadership programs, aim to help students maximise the 'out-of-classroom' aspects of the student experience (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). All of these groups have a vested interest in conveying information to students during Orientation and all compete for students' attention during this time. Other groups are less focused on issues of first year transition, but arguably place even more value on Orientation because it is their only chance to give students vital information. The previous Orientation Program spanned a full week, with a range of face-to-face general information and faculty-specific sessions which new students could elect to attend; it is estimated that only a third of all first year students attended.

A number of concerns were raised about the previous approach:

- The face-to-face Orientation was too long. The time requirement contributed to low attendance (students weren't prepared to sacrifice a week's income or vacation to attend Orientation).

- Too much information was given to students at Orientation. A slower release would be more effective, timed to coincide with interest/need.

- There was a duplication of material and/or messages.

- More online material should be available to students at any time. Students are actively seeking information from the University website and social media pages well before the beginning of the semester. With ongoing changes to the digital environment, it was essential for the University to introduce an online element of Orientation (Hanna, 1998).

In 2013, work began on restructuring the face-to-face elements of Orientation and creating an Online Orientation resource to address these concerns.

Implementation

Developing a university-wide approach

In order for anything university-wide to be successful, there needs to be a high level of communication, buy-in, investment, and collaboration across a wide variety of areas; including faculties, service divisions, central staff professionals, and students (Kift, S. M., Nelson, K. J., & Clarke, J., 2010). The concept of collaboration has been highlighted in student affairs literature for some time. Learning Reconsidered: A Campus-Wide Focus on the Student Experience (Keeling, 2004) is grounded in identifying crucial aspects of creating an integrated approach to academic learning and holistic student development. Building on this, Learning Reconsidered 2 was written in 2006, creating a practical guide for implementation. Here, the authors explain that collaboration, if forced, can become superficial. They provide practical strategies to developing successful partnerships which advise to start small, identify and support champions, focus on real problems, initiate conversation, expect and manage conflict and evaluate the outcomes (Keeling, 2006).

Thus, this project was firmly grounded in a third generation approach (Kift, 2009) involving collaboration at strategic and operational levels, with:

- A governance group drawn from various parts of the University.

- A working group comprising faculty and service division staff, both academic and professional.

- A project team made up of personnel from all parts of the institution.

Cross-disciplinary input was crucial to ensure the online resource was not only fit for purpose, but had broad institutional support.

Gathering data and evaluating outcomes

At every stage of the change process, gathering and analysing data was critical. In-house research formed the basis of the business case for change, alongside the data capture undertaken by Colmar Brunton. Work was also undertaken to analyse the financial impacts of the change and examine the institutional benefits in terms of student retention. The student voice was also a powerful driver of the change (Fielding, 2004), with various student groups consulted throughout the project implementation. While the results of student consultation provided useful data, the working party was also mindful of the concerns around implications that the group has one "voice" and that a "monolingual assumption is illusory" (Robinson & Taylor, 2007, p.6).

A variety of data was used to evaluate the project's success. Quantitative measures, such as the number of students logging onto the site, the amount of time they spent on each section as well as the demographic information on which types of student were accessing which pages has proved extremely useful in making iterative changes to the resource post-pilot phase. Qualitative evaluation, or 'perceptual findings' (Nora & SNYDER, 2008-2009), has been gathered from student users of the resource as well as staff across the University who have a role to play in student transition, to gauge the effectiveness of the new tool.

Student expectations

The development of Online Orientation took place against the backdrop of significant expansion in online learning at the University. The first MOOCs went live in 2014 and a new compulsory online course in Academic Integrity for enrolled undergraduates launched at around the same time. This institutional appetite for online learning reflects the growing expectation among students that they should be able to engage in self-directed learning at their own pace (Dobbs, Waid & del Cameron, 2009) and that students from non-traditional backgrounds in particular are more likely to benefit from the flexibility and autonomy that this method of learning affords (O'Malley & McCraw, 1999).

Results

Google Analytics

The results from the launch of Online Orientation were pleasing in terms of the number of students accessing the modules. Google Analytics allowed us to analyse detailed statistics about Online Orientation's traffic and traffic sources.

Further analysis was required to review online engagement (Krause & Coates, 2008) and to assess student behaviour on pages that were interactive in comparison to those that contained static text. Analysis of time spent on particular pages revealed that content the University thought would be important to new students was not viewed in the same way by the students themselves.

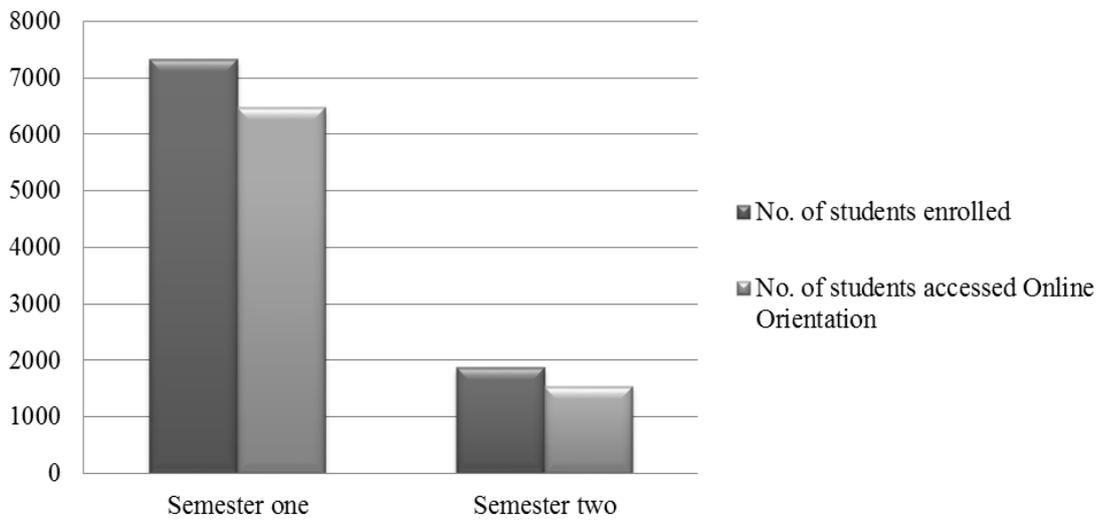**Analysis on student access to Online Orientation 2015**

Figure 1. Results from 2015

Analysis using Google Analytics allowed us to review how well each page was received by students and the average time students spent on those pages. This allowed us to evaluate certain pages' relevance, review content in those pages, and show our stakeholders that information presented in an interactive way, whether it's videos, games or quizzes, is well-received by students. However, we noted that 'gamification', while attractive and appealing to students, and increasing the likelihood of repeat visits, doesn't necessarily result in an enhancement in student learning (Zhu & Grabowski, 2004). This is why it was important to maintain a good balance between games/quizzes and information in static text.
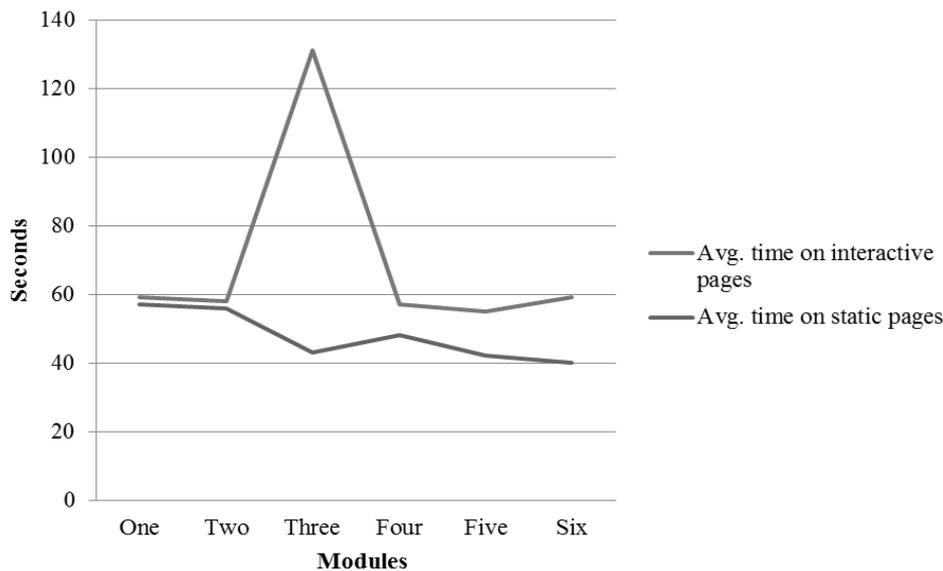

Figure 2. Analysis on time spent on pages.

Interactive maps

Living in an age where technology is an integral part of students' lives (Prensky, 2001), the way information is presented by the University is critical to engagement. We explored ways to communicate certain information to students in an interactive way that would appeal to them while also allowing them to process core information about the University before they came on board. One of the biggest successes of Online Orientation was the interactive maps, which allowed

students to get to know the campus and its facilities well before they physically stepped onto campus during Orientation (Herrington, Oliver, & Reeves, 2003).
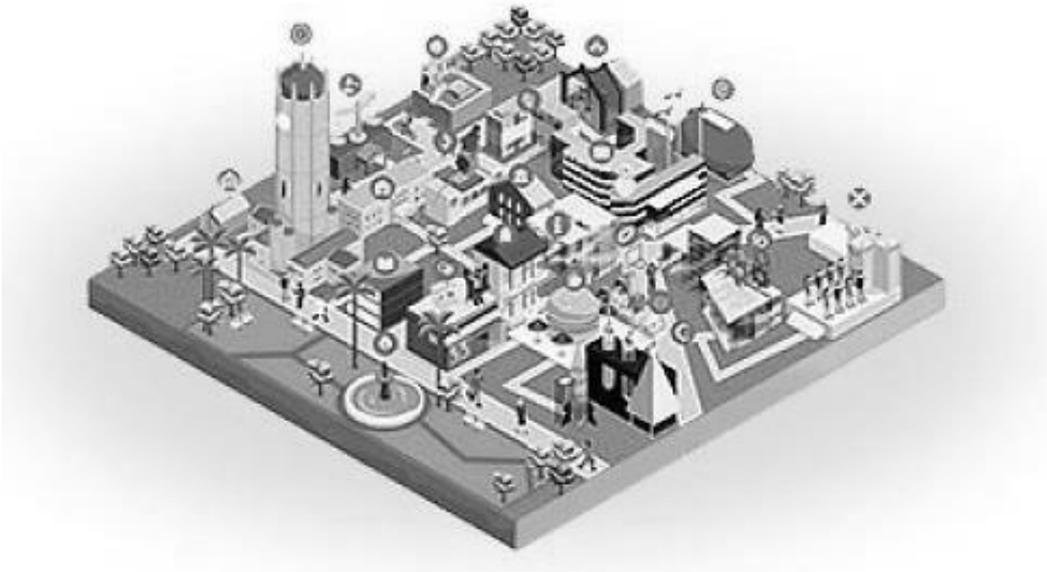

Figure 3. Interactive map of City Campus.

Cohort-specific information

Information was tailored to our diverse population of students (O'Neill, Singh, & O'Donoghue, 2004), including where they came from (whether it was outside New Zealand or outside Auckland), which equity group/s they belonged to and their faculty of study. This tailored approach was well-received by students, with 67% reporting that the content presented was relevant to them and their studies.

Faculty Orientation Day

The project included making changes to the face-to-face component of Orientation as well as introducing the online component. Online Orientation was designed to complement the face-to-face element, dedicating an entire module to providing students with information about their Faculty Orientation Day and its benefits. Faculties were highly engaged in this project, creating 'welcome' videos for inclusion in the module, which encouraged students to attend their Faculty Orientation Day. Messages about key Orientation events were also posted in this module to get students excited about the social aspect of Orientation. All material presented in Online Orientation promoted social and academic participation (Tinto, 2005) and resulted in a dramatic increase in students attending their Faculty Orientation Day and Orientation events.
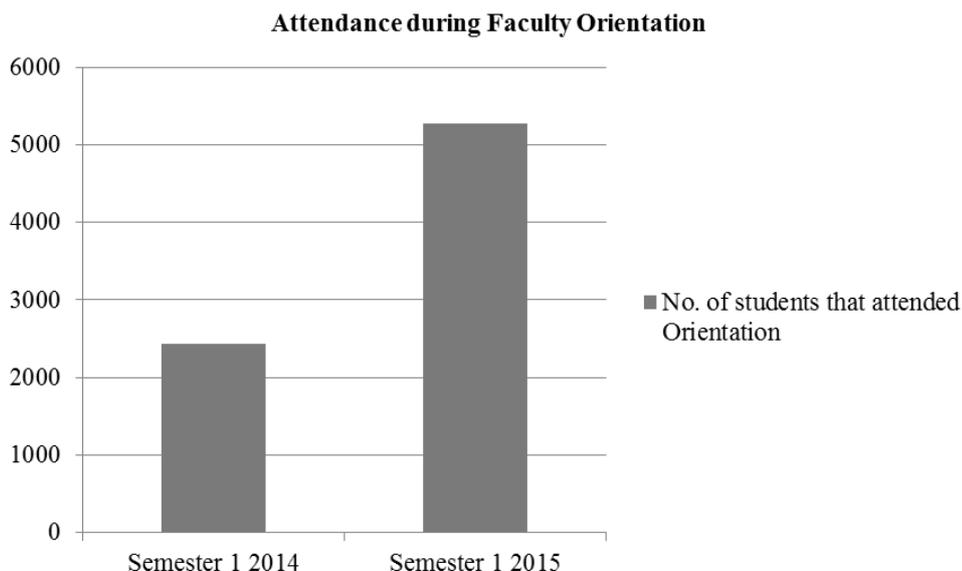
Figure 4. Comparison of Faculty Orientation attendance between 2014 and 2015.

Discussion

It is clear that the implementation of Online Orientation and the restructure of the face-to-face components of Faculty Orientation have largely addressed the problems uncovered by the initial report. Faculty Orientation attendance is up, interaction with the Online Orientation resource is high and feedback from students is encouraging. Similarly, staff who engage with students during their transition report that there is an improvement in the levels of preparedness in the first weeks of the semester and that the nature of questions being asked at the University's Student Information Centres and call centre are more thoughtful and considered, reflecting a quicker transition for some students.

Results from post-implementation student survey indicate that students who engaged with Online Orientation are more likely to feel they have transitioned well. This supports the arguments of Kuh, (1993) among others, that meaningful changes in students' knowledge, understanding, personal learning and development occurs in a variety of ways, both inside and outside the classroom environment (Kuh, 1993).

Colbert's paper on an online learning pilot for first years in English at the University of Wolverhampton found that full participation in online activities was a good indicator of student commitment to the module in general (Colbert, Miles, Wilson & Weeks, 2007). However, with all blended learning initiatives it is difficult to say with any certainty whether online learning in particular contributes to better student success at University (Lizzio, 2006).

> *It is assumed, and logically so, that all of these [technological] advancements do not only serve to enhance our communication and teaching, but that the ultimate benefit associated with instructional technology comes in the form of enhanced student learning and, subsequently, persistence to graduation. Yet, with as much riding on this new technology researchers, educators, practitioners, and proponents of these new electronic tools, there is a huge gap in the research literature specifically devoted to the empirically- and theoretically-driven investigations of the link between technology and performance indicators/ outcomes such as grade performance, course completion, re-enrolment, persistence, and graduation rates. (Snyder & Nora, 2009, p.16)*

Clearly more work is required to better understand the connections between technology, the student experience and student outcomes (Robinson & Hullinger, 2010).

Conclusion

This paper has explored the various ways best practice and innovation underpinned the development of an online resource. We have demonstrated how capturing and analysing data assists with key developments and achieving institution-wide support. Changing how and when students are presented with information by moving to a blended model has achieved pleasing results. Overall, the outcomes from Online Orientation have exceeded expectations. The post-implementation survey revealed that students welcomed additional online material drip-fed and tailored to their needs and enjoyed the deliberately 'student-friendly' voice of the resource.

As Online Orientation continues to be embedded into the students' transition experience, work continues to make the resource accessible, relevant and engaging. One of the challenges for the institution is to take key content which does not necessarily lend itself to gamification and find innovative ways to present it. We note that while gamification is clearly desirable – and even expected among large sections of the student community, the challenge for the institution is to gauge whether this has true learning benefits for all. Further research in this area is welcomed.

References

Colbert, B., Miles, R., Wilson, F., & Weeks, H. (2007). Designing and assessing online learning in English literary studies. *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education 6*(1*)*, 74-89.

Dobbs, R. R., Waid, C. A., & del Carmen, A. (2009). Students' perceptions of online courses - The Effect of Online Course Experience. *Quaterly Review of Distance Education 10*(1), 9-26.

Fielding, M. (2004). Transformative approaches to student voice: theoretical underpinnings, recalcitrant realities. *British Educational Research Journal*, 295-311.

Hanna, D. E. (1998). Higher education in an era of digital competition - Emerging organizational models. *JALN, 2*(1), 66-95.

Herrington, J., Oliver, R., & Reeves, T. C. (2003). Patterns of engagement in authentic online learning environments. *Australian Journal of Educational Technology, 19*(1), 59-71.

Keeling, R. P. (2004, January). *Learning reconsidered: A Campus-wide focus on the student experience.* Retrieved from https://www.naspa.org/images/uploads/main/Learning_Reconsidered_Report.pdf

Keeling, R. P. (2006). *Learning reconsidered 2: A practical guide to implementing a campus-wide focus on the student Experience.* Retrieved from student affair administrators in higher education: https://www.myacpa.org/pub/documents/LearningReconsidered2.pdf

Kift, S. (2009). *Articulating a transition pedagogy to scaffold and to enhance the first year student learning experience in Australian higher education.* Sydney: Australian Learning and Teaching Council.

Kift, S., Nelson, K., & Clarke, J. (2010). Transition pedagogy: A third generation approach to FYE - A case study of policy and practice for the higher education sector. *The International Journal of the First Year in Higher Education, 1*(1), 1-20.

Krause, K.-L., & Coates, H. (2008). Students' engagement in first-year university. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education, 33*(5), 493-505.

Kuh, G. D. (1993). In their own words: what students learn outside the classroom. *American Educational Research Journal, 30*(2), 277-304.

Lizzio, A. (2006). *Designing an orientation and transition strategy for commencing students.* Retrieved from Griffith University: First Year Experience Project : https://www.griffith.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0008/51875/Alfs-5-Senors-Paper-FYE-Project,-2006.pdf

Nora, A., & Snyder, B. P. (2008-2009). Technology and Higher Education: The impact of e-learning approaches on student academic academic achievement, perceptions and persistence. *J. College Student Retention, 10*(1) 3-19.

O'Malley, J., & McCraw, H. (1999). *Students perceptions of distance learning, online learning and the traditional classroom.* Retrieved from http://www.westga.edu/~distance/omalley24.html

O'Neill, K., Singh, G., & O'Donoghue, J. (2004). Implementing eLearning programs for higher education: A Review of the Literature. *Journal of Information Technology Education, 3*, 314-323.

Pascarella, E. T., & Terenzini, P. T. (1991). *How college affects students: Findings and insights from twenty years of research.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Prensky, M. (2001). Digital natives, digital immigrants part I. *On the Horizon, 9*(5), 1-6.

Robinson, C., & Hullinger, H. (2010). New benchmarks in higher education: Student engagement in online learning. *Journal of Education for Business*, 101-109.

Robinson, C., & Taylor, C. (2007). Theorizing student voice: values & perspectives. *Improving Schools, 10*(1), 5-17.

Snyder, P. B., & Nora, A. (2009). Technology and higher education: The impact of e-learning approaches on student academic achievement, perceptions and persistence. *Journal of College Student Retention, 10(1)*, 3-19.

Tinto, V. (1998). Colleges as communities: Taking research on student persistence seriously. *Review of Higher Education*, 167-177.

Tinto, V. (2005). Taking student success seriously: Rethinking the first year of college. *In Ninth Annual Intersession Academic Affairs Forum, California State University, Fullerton*, 05-01. Retrieved from Ninth Annual Intersession Academic Affairs Forum: http://www.uky.edu/ie/sites/www.uky.edu.ie/files/uploads/CF _Taking%20Student%20Success%20Seriously..pdf

Zhu, L., & Grabowski, B. (2004, October). *The effects of various animation strategies in facilitating the achievement of students on tests measuring different educational objectives.* Retrieved from ERIC: http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED485081.pdf

The authors may be contacted
Marie-Jo Wilson,
m.wilson@auckland.ac.nz

Vandana Minhas-Taneja
v.minhas-taneja@auckland.ac.nz

Engaging Pacific in the Mainstream

Linda Aumua
Director of Pacific Centre for LearningTeaching & Research
Falaniko Tominiko
Principal Academic Advisor Pacific
Unitec NZ

Abstract

This paper is part of a presentation at the Australian and New Zealand Student Services Association (ANZSSA) Conference held in Hobart, Australia, 7th-9th December 2015, entitled 'Engaging Pacific in the Mainstream'. It looks specifically at how the Centre for Pacific Learning, Teaching & Research at Unitec New Zealand, has engaged with its Pacific students studying there from 2010 to 2014.

The term Pacific is a generic term used to describe a group of people who originated from a number of separate islands located within the Pacific Ocean region. 'Pacific' is not a "race" of people, and it does not represent a homogeneous population. Despite having "similarities", the separate island states have vastly different languages and practices. For this reason, there is no "one size fits all" solution to engaging with Pacific students. At Unitec, many different initiatives and programs are applied all with the one goal in mind, i.e. engaging with Pacific students and helping them to succeed. Given the diversity of Pacific students at Unitec, it makes sense to also be diverse in the ways we support and help them. The following paper outlines the many different initiatives that have been applied at Unitec to provide support to its Pacific student population.

The first part gives a brief background of the Pacific demographic makeup of New Zealand, and discusses why New Zealand has made it a priority to support Pacific students in tertiary education. The second part discusses Unitec's commitment to supporting Pacific through; (i) the existence of the Pacific Centre for Learning, Teaching & Research, (ii) the development of the Pacific Success Strategy and (iii) the influence of the Fono Faufautua. The third part looks at the methods used by Unitec to support and assist Pacific students, starting with the Nakuita model that provides the foundation for Pacific engagement, as well as discussing the various initiatives that have been used to improve success rates for Pacific students. The last part will provide an analysis on how successful the initiatives have been at Unitec by looking at the success rates of the Pacific cohort during the 2014 academic year.

The Pacific demographic

The 2013 New Zealand Census recorded the Pacific population of New Zealand to be 295,941, making up 7.4% of New Zealand's total population. This was an 11% increase from the 2006 census figure of 265,974. The 2013 New Zealand, Pacific population was made up of; Samoans – 144,138 (48.7%); Cook Island Maori – 61,839 (20.9%); Tongan – 60,333 (20.4%); Niuean – 23,883 (8.1%) and other minor Pacific groups – 5,748 (1.9%). The majority of Pacific people (92.9%) resided in the North Island, with Auckland having the most of the Pacific population (65.9%).

The initial results from the 2013 Census shows that economically, Pacific people's income is 34% lower than the national average of $18,000.00 a year (Auckland-Council, 2014). This immediately puts them at a disadvantage compared with the rest of the New Zealand population. In terms of unemployment, this report also shows that the Pacific population unemployment rate is disproportionately higher at 11.8% compared with the national average of 5.7%; and that only 21.8% of the Pacific population owned their own home compared with the national average of 53.2%, with a large number of Pacific people in Auckland being tenants of community housing, and more likely to live in overcrowding households. These socio-economic issues all contribute to the problems Pacific people face in many aspects of life in New Zealand, especially education.

Data from the New Zealand Qualification Authority (2015) shows that 67.8% of Pacific students in Auckland are in schools that have a decile rating[1] of 1-3. In terms of the socio-economic makeup, these are amongst the poorest areas/suburbs of New Zealand. This data also shows that a considerable number of Auckland schools (88%), now have 50% or more Pacific students attending; and that, despite this large number, only an underwhelming 27% of Pacific students achieve University Entrance and 19.1% of the students end up unemployed, and not in any form of education or training. As a result when Pacific students enrol at Unitec, they are likely to have only NCEA level 2 or no secondary qualification at all. Of those Pacific students that do enrol, 32% would have come straight out of high school, 32% would have been working while 12% would have been previously unemployed (NZQA, 2015). These statistics clearly illustrate why the Pacific cohort from the outset would need the extra help & support while studying at Unitec.

Why support Pacific?

Firstly, according to Johnson & Inoue, (2003, p.254) diversity is a fact of life and efforts to build a common culture often privilege the dominant culture. In New Zealand, the dominant culture is the European culture. It is even more dominant than the indigenous culture of the country, the Maori. At only 7.4% of the country's population, the Pacific people are indeed a minority in New Zealand, despite there being considerably more Niueans and Cook Islanders in New Zealand than their respective home islands; as well as large numbers of Samoan and Tongans which number at a slightly lower number than those of their respective homelands. Despite the minority status, the Pacific population is a fast growing one and because of that, they need to be recognised as a unique group that exists within the New Zealand general populous.

The need to support Pacific students in education is not only necessitated by the statistics, but also by the policies and strategies which have been put into place not only by the Ministry of Education, but also by other government departments such as the Tertiary Education Commission, Education Review Office and the New Zealand Qualifications Authority. Each of these departments has formulated a specific plan, framework or strategy that ensures Pacific education is given priority and attention within their respective departments. The latest versions of these policies are:

- Ministry of Education (MoE) Pasifika Education Plan 2013-2017
- Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) Pasifika Framework 2013-2017
- Education Review Office (ERO) Pacific Strategy 2013-2017
- New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) Pasifika Strategy 2012-2015

The Ministry of Education's main objective for the Pacific in the tertiary sector is to enable Pasifika learners to attain higher levels of tertiary education through increasing participation, retention and completion of tertiary level qualifications (2013). Its target is that Pasifika leaners participate and achieve at all levels at least on a par with other learners in tertiary education. In actual fact the Government has been making this a goal as early as 2002.

> *The Government's Pasifika Education Plan for tertiary education nominates as its focus 'increasing participation and achievement, improving retention and encouraging higher levels of study' (Coxon, Anae, Mara, Wendt-Samu, & Finau, 2002, p.122)*

The framework also outlines the Ministry's goals and actions it will employ in order to achieve their objective. The Tertiary Education Commission is responsible for funding a tertiary education system that assists all Pasifika New Zealanders to reach their full potential and contribute to the social and economic well-being of New Zealand (2013, p.2). Like the MoE Pacific Education Plan,

---

[1] According to the Ministry of Education, 'Deciles' are a measure of the socio-economic positions of a school's student community, relative to other schools throughout the country. Decile 1 schools are the 10% of schools with the highest proportion of students from low socio-economic communities, whereas Decile 10 schools are from the highest socio-economic areas. The lower the school's decile rating, the more funding they receive.

it has key objectives to ensure the tertiary education system is responsive and collaborative to Pasifika learners. The Education Review Office also has policies to better support Pacific learners. Its vision is that Pacific learners will achieve a high level of education and success, and it aim to achieve this by developing a high quality evaluation that contributes to a high quality education for all Pacific learners (2013, p.1).

Pacific Centre for Learning Teaching & Research

The first step to supporting Pacific students at Unitec is acknowledging that they are an important group of students. Unitec does this by acknowledging Pacific students as a 'priority group'. Other groups of students identified as priority groups are Maori, students with disabilities, international students, and the under 20 year olds or 'youth guarantee'[2]. These priority groups are also identified by the Ministry of Education as groups that tertiary institutions should make a commitment to supporting.

Secondly, there should be a team or department within the institution whose main purpose is to provide the support to these priority groups. According to Anae, Anderson, Benseman & Coxon (2002, p.63) one of the main initiatives that has helped Pacific students achieve better at tertiary level was having an office or a centre specifically dedicated to supporting Pacific students at the tertiary institution. At Unitec, there is the Pacific Centre for Learning, Teaching and Research (PCLTR). At present, the PCLTR consists of nine members who each play a different role in terms of supporting and assisting Pacific students at Unitec.

Unitec Pacific success strategy 2010-2015

In order for a tertiary institution to be able to support their Pacific students, it is vital that there is a strategy or policy put in place that provides direction for the institution as well as setting out the goals the institution has for its Pacific students and community. For this, the Unitec PCLTR has developed the Unitec Pacific Success Strategy 2010-2015. The strategy is made up of four main goals:

- To Increase Pacific participation and perspective in governance and operational decision making.
- To develop, enhance and maintain relationships with Pacific communities
- To ensure successful participation, completion and progression of Pacific students within Unitec Programs.
- To contribute to the relevance of Programs to Pacific communities.

A strategy is only as good as the influence and ability to implement within an institution. Although the Pacific Success Strategy was developed by the PCLTR, the onus is with the entire institution to work towards achieving the goals set out in the strategy, not just the PCLTR. This is evident in the requirements of most departments to have their program leaders report on how the strategy is being met in their various programs.

Fono Faufautua

To ensure that Unitec honour their commitment to Pacific students, a Pacific advisory board known as the Fono Faufautua was set up. The board is made up of seven to eight prominent members of the Pacific community who meet monthly to discuss Pacific issues relating to Unitec. The Chief Executive of Unitec, the Dean who overlooks the PCLTR, the Director of the PCLTR and the Pacific Student Representative also sit on this board. During the monthly meetings, Unitec Deans, Heads and Managers are invited to attend, and present to the Fono how their respective departments

---

2 According to the New Zealand Tertiary Education Commission, Youth Guarantee initiatives are about improving the transition from school to work for students aged 16 to 19 years who are studying towards NCEA levels 1 or 2 or another qualification at levels 1, 2 or 3 on the New Zealand Qualifications Framework.

are applying the Pacific Success Strategy to their programs etc. The Fono is a sitting committee under Unitec's Council and this status gives them a good standing within the Unitec institution.

At the institutional level, most of the committees within the institution also include a Pacific staff representative as a voice for the Pacific community at Unitec. These committees include the Academic Board, the Learning & Teaching Committee, the Research & Enterprise Committee, and the representatives on these boards include the Director of the PCLTR and the Principal Academic Adviser Pacific, also from the PCLTR. These positions ensure that Pacific needs are met at both the governance and the institutional levels.

The Nakuita model

The PCLTR is currently made up of nine members. With fifteen departments and hundreds of Pacific students spread across these departments, the PCLTR came up with a way of supporting these students, without directly providing the support themselves. To do this, the PCLTR adopted the Nakuita model. The Nakuita (Fijian for octopus) was developed by the PCLTR Director, Linda Aumua in 2008, to inform the work of the centre. The octopus has one central body which metaphorically refers to the centre and its tentacles as the Pacific support provided through the learning development lecturers infiltrating the departments and services (Thompson, McDonald, Talakai, & Taumoepeau, 2009, p.2). This model is based on the PCLTR having relationships and links with these departments. Of the nine members of the PCLTR team, only four members actually work with students. There are three Pacific Development Lecturers, and one Postgraduate Development Lecturer. It is therefore logistically difficult for these four members to provide support to all of the Pacific students at Unitec. Through the Nakuita model, the PCLTR works with and supports designated staff members from various departments to support Pacific students within their departments. The support can vary from having a member of the PCLTR work with the designated staff member, or simply providing information and resources to allow the designated member of the department to provide the necessary support for their students. Most often the designated member of a department is a Pacific staff member themselves, but in some departments where there is no Pacific staff member, this role has been taken up by a non-Pacific staff member. Members of the PCLTR are allocated departments and they become the contact person between the PCLTR and the specific departmental Pacific support person.

Through the Nakuita model, the PCLTR also connect themselves with other support services at Unitec. They provide the same support to these services as they do to the academic departments. The support services provide support to the mainstream student population, and through their relationship with the PCLTR, they are also able to help and support Pacific students who come to them for support. Representatives from these various support services are invited to be part of the weekly PCLTR team meeting where they discuss issues around supporting Pacific students. According to Anae and Suaali'i (1996), existing services for Pacific students were fragmented and needed to be integrated and consolidated to become more effective, (cited in Coxon et al., 2002, p.129). The Nakuita model allows for the services at Unitec to be consolidated and effective.

The four P's

Over the last five years, a number of initiatives have been put into place to help increase Pacific success rates at Unitec. These initiatives can be categorised into four main groups, collectively known as the 'Four Ps'. The four Ps are: People, Participation, Place and Promotion. Firstly, 'people' are an important part of the equation. There needs to be people willing to help in order for change to occur. Secondly students need to be encouraged to 'participate' in the initiatives that have been set up. If there is no participation, there is no success. Thirdly, students need a 'place' to call home. Home is a place of comfort and safety and if students are made to feel comfortable and safe, they are more likely to succeed. Lastly, there needs to be constant 'promotion' of Pacific. Without promotion, initiatives fail. Pacific successes also need to be promoted so that other Pacific students

can see that if their Pacific peers can succeed, so can they.

1. People

- **Pacific staff**

  Having Pacific staff at the institution is an integral part of helping Pacific students achieve. According to Benseman, Coxon, Anderson, & Anae, students value of Pacific staff members as role models and mentors (2006, p.158). The number of Pacific academic staff at tertiary institutions is generally lower than Pacific non-academic. Regardless of low academic staff numbers, these non-academic staff are invaluable in providing a Pacific presence, especially in dealing with administrative issues (Benseman et al., 2006). Goal 1(c) of the Unitec Pacific Success Strategy 2010-2015 aims to increase the capabilities of Pacific staff at Unitec. In 2009, the ratio of academic to allied staff was 42% and 58% respectively. In November of 2015, the ratio was 47% and 53%, a 5% increase in the number of Pacific academic staff at Unitec (Tominiko, 2015, p.2). The more capable a staff community is, the better they are able to support their students. In 2015, there were a total of 110 Pacific staff members at Unitec. The PCLTR maintains close relationships with the Pacific staff at Unitec and run a Pacific Day once a year for all Pacific staff to come together to discuss issues around Pacific support as well as to network and socialise with other Pacific colleagues.

- **Departmental Pacific support person**

  As mentioned above, a way that Pacific students can be supported in departments without necessarily having direct involvement from PCLTR members, is to have an allocated departmental Pacific support staff member from that department. They will be responsible for monitoring the success and attendance of Pacific students in their department, and if necessary, contact the PCLTR if they need any assistance. Their presence is especially important in supporting first year students in tertiary studies. Research shows that many students who are new to the culture of tertiary study lack the discipline to keep up with their studies (Benseman et al., 2006, p.154). A staff member monitoring and following them up would ensure that first years don't fall into such traps.

- **Pacific development lecturers**

  According to Anae (2002, p.67) the absence of familiar faces, lack of engagement with lecturers and the unfamiliarity of the academic work are barriers to student success. The lack of engagement with lecturers can be partly due to the fact that the numbers of Pacific lecturers in tertiary education are relatively low. For this reason, the PCLTR have four Pacific Development Lecturer (PDL) positions whose primary role it is to provide academic assistance to the Pacific students. Three of the PDLs work with undergraduate students while one specifically works with postgraduate students. They provide general academic assistance for students from all departments, and work closely with Development Lecturers from other student service centres to provide this support. In some cases, the PDLs have a regular group of students who come to them for academic help and this regular contact creates the familiarity between the PDL and the student, which is often missing between students and lecturers.

- **Peer writing assistants (PWAs)**

  In an attempt to increase contact with Pacific students, senior Pacific students with good academic records were employed on a part-time basis as Peer Writing Assistants (PWA) to help provide academic support mainly with essay, report and assignment writing. This was a collaborative effort between the PCLTR, the MAIA Maori Learning Centre, and the Te Puna Ako Learning Centre. According to Benseman et al., (2006, p.156) tertiary students felt that their peers were the greatest influence on their academic participation when they

entered tertiary education. We found this to be rather accurate as a large number of students regularly sought the help of the PWAs. Together the PWAs and the PDLs were able to provide academic support to large number of Pacific students.

- **Pacific mentoring**
  Research has shown that role models influence students long before they arrive to enrol in tertiary education (Benseman et al., 2006, p.159). The same research also shows that students were very receptive to the support and information offered by their role models, as they felt they were in the best position to offer advice. Given that there were many initiatives set up to provide academic support, there was also a need to provide a vehicle for pastoral support. For various cultural/personal reasons, Pacific students seldom seek the help of counselling and financial services on campus etc. Most often, their personal issues are kept to themselves and eventually this affects their abilities to cope with their studies. Knowing this about Pacific students, a mentoring program was set up to provide pastoral support as well providing a person for students to go to when they had personal issues to deal with. The mentors were staff members who volunteered to be a mentor to a group of students. In some cases, the mentor for a particular group of students was also their department's Pacific support person as the two roles were somewhat connected. As a cohort, the mentors would put on a shared lunch at least once a semester to bring together their students, and to create a family environment for them.

- **Pacific student representative**
  The Unitec Student Union also provides a vehicle for supporting Pacific students. A Pacific student representative position is a priority position on the Unitec Student Council that is elected by the students every year. The Pacific representative on the council is the voice of Pacific students, and is also responsible for organising and running the Pacific cultural events that are run by the Student Union every year. The Pacific student representative is also invited to regularly attend and contribute to the CPLTR. Fono Faufautua and general Pacific staff meetings as the representative of the Pacific student body. The student representative is also very much involved in many of the initiatives that are set up to support students. With their connection to the student body, they are able to encourage and rally students to attend and make use of the services and initiatives provided by the PCLTR and staff in general.

  2. **Participation**

- **Pacific orientation**
  In order to familiarise Pacific students with Unitec and tertiary studies, a specific Pacific Orientation is held every year for the students. This is organised and led by the PCLTR, with other Pacific and general staff helping out. This is usually held over one day and usually takes place a week before semester starts. This is done on purpose as when students arrive during the first week, they get overwhelmed with mainstream and departmental orientation week programs. When students attend the Pacific Orientation, they are introduced to Pacific staff members as well as various services that they would need while attending Unitec. This is also their first introduction to the PCLTR team, and it is here that the connection with these students is first made. The Pacific Orientation is also a good opportunity for Pacific students to get to know one another so that when the actual semester starts the following week, the chances are they will already be familiar with some peers they had met at the Pacific Orientation.

- **Pacific Fanau evening**
  An evening for the students and their families is held three weeks into the first semester, and is a chance for families to come on to campus and see and experience some of the things

that their student family member experiences. Not only are they given a chance to have a look around campus, they also have the opportunity to meet with lecturers and listen to senior Pacific students share their experiences/challenges in tertiary education. This event allows the families of the students to become part of the extended Unitec Pacific community. In the case of Pacific students, family obligations sometimes get in the way of their studies. Although families were usually supportive of their involvement in education and expected academic success, this was not always the case (Benseman et al., 2006, p.155). If the family understands the time and commitment a student needs to commit to their studies, this would likely prevent them from putting any more pressure on their family member with regards to other family commitments etc.

- **Assignment retreats**

  Assignment retreats are held at least twice a semester. The main purpose of these retreats is to provide a space for students to come and complete any assignment or work they have due. Sometimes students do not have an appropriate place at home to work, or they may be a parent and can't find time between attending lectures and running a household to complete any assignments they have. Assignment retreats are typically held on a Saturday and usually run from 9am to 5pm. It usually takes place on campus in a large study area where students attend and work all day. The CPLTR provides food throughout the day and staff members are present also in case students require any assistance with their work. Sometime beforehand, students inform the CPLTR what specific help they need, and the CPLTR makes arrangement to have the appropriate lecturer or staff member attend the retreat to help those particular students with their assignments etc. According to Coxon et al., (2002, p.129), a great way to help Pacific success is to provide departmental Pacific tutors/tutorials and liaison tutors. We have found this to be very true.

- **Pacific events/workshops**

  There are many events and workshops at Unitec that benefit Pacific students. The library has a staff member specifically responsible for supporting Pacific and as part of their role, they run library workshops. The staff member has catalogued all books/references that contain Pacific knowledge or make reference to Pacific with a Pacific code to enable easy access and to promote Pacific knowledge. The PCLTR also run workshops on topics such as essay writing, exam preparation and time management. There are also workshops catered for finding employment for students after they graduate. There are always lunches put on for students just to bring them together to socialise and network.

  3. Place

- **Pacific centre**

  The provision of a dedicated space is important to the success of Pacific students. Facilities should be accessible and welcoming to Pacific students (Anae et al., 2002, p.69). The PCLTR provides a space where students can work. There are two rooms that can be closed off for quiet group work as well as areas outside with tables where students can sit and discuss work. There are also six computers available for students to use to work on assignments etc. The good thing about having these spaces located next to the office of the PCLTR members is that students have much easier access to the staff when they need help. In most cases, Pacific students will get immediate access to help from the PCLTR staff, compared with other services where students need to make bookings days in advance. A shared space like this allows the staff and students to interact more, and creates a homely and welcoming environment for the students on campus. Other departments have also created spaces for their own students to provide a similar atmosphere to that of the PCLTR study and computer space. For most tertiary institutions, acquiring space may be difficult;

however, simply having a small room or office which students can call their own space goes a long way to making students feel comfortable and welcome at tertiary institutions.

- **Pacific intellectual space**
  It is also important to acknowledge that Pacific culture and practices have a place in the modern day curriculum. In some cases, lecturers and tutors are unprepared to teach a culturally diverse student population. Culturally responsive pedagogy for teacher education prepares them to be sensitive to the cultures of their students and to use their understandings about how culture influences their learning in their day-to-day planning for teaching students (Stoicovy, 2002, p.80). For this exact reason, the PCLTR runs workshops for staff to attend as professional development. The first workshops discusses the practices and customs of Pacific culture, and the second workshop looks specifically at how to teach Pacific students effectively. These include, but are not limited to the points below:
  - o Teaching that is student centred.
  - o Teaching that ensures academic and social engagement between learners and lecturers.
  - o Commitment to high-achievement standards and the expectation that all students can achieve.
  - o Active willingness to make these standards accessible through academic support processes—e.g. academic tutorials and individual assistance, including goal setting.
  - o Access to resources—e.g. developing familiarity with libraries, assistance with access to texts, fostering use of computers.
  - o Accessible pastoral care.
  - o Functioning within a 'staircasing' environment that provides links from one level of qualification up to the next. (Benseman et al., 2006, p.160)

  Pacific content in programs is also important to appeal to Pacific students. In most cases, the various departments invite lecturers from the PCLTR and from outside of the institution to give guest lectures in their programs with a focus on Pacific. As a follow on, the PCLTR is also invited to give guest lectures on engaging in Pacific research, as well as applying Pacific methodologies to research conducted by Pacific postgraduate students doing research. Once every two years, the PCLTR organises and runs the Pacific Research Symposium where Pacific staff and postgraduate students get to share their research projects, and in return get feedback from the Unitec research community.

- **Cultural space**
  Equally important to having a study space, is a cultural space where Pacific students can feel at home. Unitec has a Pacific fale (house) on campus. It is often used for cultural practices such as kava ceremonies, and a Samoan tattoo exhibition has also been held in it. Like the marae is to Maori, the fale represents the Pacific community at Unitec. Similarly the University of Auckland has a much larger and modern Pacific fale on its campus as a symbol of its Pacific community.

4. **Promotion**

- **Pacific marketing advisor**
  Research has shown that events and associations are an effective way of profiling the Pacific presence in tertiary institutions and a method of providing peer groups for students who may be feeling isolated. Some institutions have been developing a Pacific presence in their operations, student recruitment and philosophies (Benseman et al., 2006, p.159). A Pacific Marketing Advisor role at Unitec ensures that there is a strong Pacific identity within the institution, but also promotes the Pacific identity that the institution has outwardly into the community. Under the advice and leadership of the Pacific Marketing Advisor, Unitec is seen to be participating in Pacific community events. Participation in Pacific community

events builds the reputation of Unitec as an institution that is culturally in tune with the Pacific community. Pacific languages and cultures are also promoted and celebrated at Unitec. Throughout the year, Pacific language weeks are celebrated with a Pacific song-writing competition bringing all the different groups together. Culture is celebrated through cultural food and dance festivals run by the student union. For recruitment purposes, successful Pacific students are also used in promotional material as well as television advertisements. Again this not only attracts Pacific students to Unitec, it illustrates Unitec's commitment to the Pacific, as well as giving the message that Pacific students succeed and do well at Unitec.

- **Pacific websites**
  The PCLTR has a direct link on the Unitec corporate page. It is clearly set up on the home page and easy to navigate. The Pacific link on the website is filled with images of real Pacific students studying at Unitec, and this gives a strong Pacific feeling to the website. Pacific staff are also used as models in mainstream Unitec links, and this confirms the multicultural identity of Unitec. Unitec has also embraced social media with the PCLTR having an official Facebook page. The page is very successful in engaging with Pacific students as well as promoting Pacific events that are happening on campus.

- **Pacific graduation**
  Every year around September/October, the PCLTR honours all Pacific graduates by putting on a Pacific Graduation Dinner for them. Although initiated by the PCLTR, the running and organisation of the dinner is a combined effort between Pacific staff from a number of departments and services within Unitec. The costs are largely subsidised by the centre with graduates attending for free and family members paying a hugely discounted price. Heads and deans from various departments are invited to attend and share in the celebration of Pacific success at Unitec. This is an opportunity for families to celebrate the success and achievement of their family members, as well as the lecturers and tutors of the graduates. It is also in keeping with Pacific cultural practices of a collective celebration for the achievements of individuals. Pacific students who are still studying are also encouraged to attend the dinner as this is a good way of encouraging and motivating them to work hard and complete their studies.

Result

In 2014 the average success rate for Pacific students at Unitec was 76%. In the same year, 16 of the 24 departments achieved a success rate of 76% or greater for their Pacific student cohort. Of these sixteen departments, ten departments were proactive in supporting their Pacific students by implementing three or more of the initiatives available to support Pacific students. The remaining six departments, Architecture, Landscape Architecture, Community Health, Medical Imaging, Natural Sciences & Osteopathy, all managed to achieve 76% or greater success rate without necessarily implementing any of the initiatives. Two of these departments (Medical Imaging & Osteopathy) employed none of the initiatives described above. Despite their successes with little to no use of the initiatives, it is of interest to note that these six departments generally have the lowest number of Pacific students enrolled. Both Medical Imaging and Osteopathy in any one year can have only one to three Pacific students enrolled. In a situation where the numbers are very small, success rates can be extremely skewed either way depending on the number of passes and fails. The ten departments that had implemented three or more initiatives generally have large numbers of Pacific students enrolled.

Of the eight departments that scored success rates of less than 76%, three departments (Accounting Finance, Foundation Studies & Civil Engineering) implemented three or more initiatives. This goes against the expected trend and shows that in some cases, the amount of assistance given doesn't

always guarantee success. Foundation Studies has more Pacific students than any other department, and the students enrolled in this department are also the students who generally need the most assistance. The remaining five departments, Computing, Language Studies, Sport, Construction, Plumbing & Gas Fitting all fall below the 76% average and have been the least proactive at implementing initiatives to support their Pacific students. Language Studies & Sport regularly have good numbers of Pacific students enrolled.

In conclusion, it is fair to say that the initiatives that have been put in place are having a positive effect on increasing the success rates of Pacific students at Unitec. If we look at the overall progression of Pacific success between 2009 and 2014 we note that it has grown from 62% to 76%, a 14% increase. Comparing this with mainstream and Maori, their success rates for the same duration have only increased 6% and 9% respectively. From these statistics, we can presume that the initiatives set out above are generally producing positive results for Pacific students at Unitec.

References

Anae, M., Anderson, H., Benseman, J., & Coxon, E. (2002). *Pacific Peoples and tertiary education: Issues of participation*. The University of Auckland.

Auckland-Council. (2014). *Auckland profile. intial results from the 2013 census*. Auckland.

Benseman, J., Coxon, E., Anderson, H., & Anae, M. (2006). Retaining non-traditional students: Lessons learnt from Pasifika students in New Zealand. *Higher Education Research & Development, 25*(2), 147-162.

Coxon, E., Anae, M., Mara, D., Wendt-Samu, T., & Finau, C. (2002). *Literature review on Pacific education issues*. The University of Auckland.

ERO. (2013). *Pacific strategy 2013-2017*. New Zealand: Education Review Office.

Johnson, K., & Inoue, Y. (2003). Diversity and Multicultural Pedagogy: An Analysis of Attitudes and Practices within an American Pacific Island University. *Journal of Research in International Education, 2*(251), 250-275.

MoE. (2013). *Pasifika education plan 2013-2017*. New Zealand: Ministry of Education.

NZQA. (2015). *Annual report on NCEA and New Zealand Scholarship data and statistics (2014)*. Wellington: New Zealand Qualification Authority.

Stoicovy, C. (2002). A case for culturally responsible pedagogy. *International Research in Geographical and Environmental Education, 11*(1), 80-84.

TEC. (2013). *Pasifika Framework 2013-2017*. New Zealand, Tertiary Education Commission.

Thompson, S., McDonald, F., Talakai, M., & Taumoepeau, V. (2009). Training manual for teaching & working with Pacific students. *Good Practice Publication Grants*: Ako Aotearoa

Tominiko, F. (2015). *2015 Unitec Pacific staff report*. Unitec New Zealand.

The authors may be contacted
Linda Aumua
laumua@unitec.ac.nz

Falaniko Tominiko
ftominiko@unitec.ac.nz

Aiding Transition and Academic Success
Beyond the Classroom:
A First-Year Mentoring Program

Laura Burge
Residential Education Manager
Accommodation Services
La Trobe University

Abstract

Students face a range of serious challenges when adjusting to university life, particularly those who are required to move away from home in order to pursue their studies. Through a study of a first-year Academic Mentoring Program facilitated by Accommodation Services, La Trobe University in Melbourne, Australia, this paper draws attention to how services located outside the traditional university academic structure can, and do, play a proactive and instrumental role in aiding first-year student transition, engagement, and academic success. This paper further highlights the underlying principles transferable to other student residential communities or a wider university setting.

Introduction

As is now commonly acknowledged, first-year college students face a range of serious challenges when adjusting to university life (Bowles, Dobson, Fisher, & McPhail, 2011; Brinkworth, McCann, Matthews, & Nordstrom, 2009; McInnis, 2001; Stevens & Walker, 1996; Thurber & Walton, 2012). In particular, those who are required to relocate in order to pursue their studies experience an even greater array of difficulties; adjusting to a learning environment that requires greater autonomy and individual responsibility, compounded by living away from home for the first time, and, in most cases, leaving behind well-established family and social networks (Brinkworth et al., 2009; Coates & Edwards, 2009; LaNasa, Olson, & Alleman, 2007). As McInnis (2001) commented, "…students are at their most vulnerable in the first year in terms of their likelihood of academic failure, and they are most at risk with respect to a range of potential social, emotional, health and financial problems" (p. 106). Many students in their first year find university an alienating and lonely place.

As a result, targeted first-year transition and mentoring support programs have become increasingly common within universities around the world (Andrade, 2007; Glaser, Hall, & Halperin, 2006; Jacobi, 1991; Quinn, Muldoon, & Hollingworth, 2010; Robinson, Burns, & Gaw, 1996; Tang, 1993; Tremblay & Rodger, 2003; Treston, 2006). In the majority of cases, such programs have emerged through college based initiatives, and have been designed and implemented as support strategies to reduce attrition, enhance transition, improve academic success, and generally foster engagement (Jacobi, 1991; Quinn et al., 2010; Treston, 2006; Tremblay & Rodger, 2003). Initiatives range from orientation activities, (e.g., meet and greet opportunities or social gatherings prior to the commencement of the academic year), to buddy programs; (pairing later year students with new arrivals), to academic mentoring programs; (grouping students by course or subjects; or the provision of study skill services through academic skills departments) (Andrade, 2007; Bowles et al., 2011; Jacobi, 1991; Quinn et al., 2010; Robinson et al., 1996; Tinto, 1998; Treston, 2006). However, whilst such programs have long been considered the domain and responsibility of academia (Quinn et al., 2010), there exists increasing recognition of the important role of services outside the traditional university structure, in this case, a student accommodation and residential life department, and its involvement in aiding engagement and learning beyond the confines of the classroom (Burge, 2012; Coates & Edwards, 2009; Krause, 2005; Parameswaran & Bowers, 2012; Rice & Lightsey, 2001; Steffes, 2004; Terenzini, Pascarella, & Blimling, 1996). Through a study of a first-year mentoring program in place within the Accommodation Services department, La Trobe University in Australia, this paper will draw attention to how support services and departments located outside of the academic structure can, and do, play a proactive role in aiding first-year

79

student transition, engagement, and academic success.

Institutional context

A multi-campus university, La Trobe, had approximately 36,000 students enrolled in 2014, close to 15,000 (41%) of which were in their first year (LTU Planning and Institutional Performance Unit, 2015). Accommodation Services, one of the largest university owned and managed student accommodation providers within Australia, houses 2,400 students across seven campuses, with 2,200 residing at two main sites: Melbourne (located 14 kilometers from the city center) and Bendigo (situated approximately 150 kilometers north-west of Melbourne). Students are housed within several buildings or residences across both sites including Chisholm, Glenn, and Menzies at the Melbourne campus and Hillside Apartments, Terraces, Units and Villas at the Bendigo campus. Around 1200 (50%) of all residents are in their first year of study. Facilitated by the Residential Education staffing team, (including seven staff members across the two sites), Accommodation Services offers a number of academic and social support programs in its effort to enrich and engage residents, including pastoral care and welfare, community and outreach activities, student leadership opportunities and academic mentoring and support. Whilst these programs operate most effectively as an interlocking suite of support services, academic mentoring beyond what is provided through the classroom is considered particularly important. Such programs are particularly targeted at addressing the needs of first-year students who experience the most difficulty in terms of transition from high school to university academic structures and styles of learning (Bowles et al., 2011; Brinkworth et al., 2009; McInnis, 2001; Thurber & Walton, 2012). Accommodation Services' first-year academic mentoring program, in particular, is one of the most distinctive support programs of its kind, and has proven particularly effective in aiding and enhancing student transition and academic success within the residences at La Trobe University.

Accommodation services academic mentoring program

Accommodation Services' mentoring program was first introduced in 2003 within the Menzies residence at the Melbourne campus, involving approximately 200 first-year students. Focusing on three key goals (transitioning students to the university environment, facilitating engagement, and promoting learning and academic success), the program ran successfully with positive feedback from those involved for four years, and, as a result, was expanded to encompass all first-year residents at both the Melbourne and Bendigo campuses from 2007 onwards. The program involves the assignment of all new first-year residents to discipline specific study groups, which meet every week on a Monday evening for the first six weeks and fortnightly thereafter, totalling to around 17 contact hours for the year. Mentoring sessions involve approximately 20 students in each group and are hosted by a trained undergraduate student (usually within their second, third or final year of study), known as an Academic Mentor, who also lives within the residences and is enrolled within the same course or academic focus. Students in this position undertake the role primarily as volunteers, receiving only a rent reduction (40% of their accommodation fees for the year) and recognized skill based training as a tangible reward for their involvement.

All mentoring sessions, whilst structured, remain student-focused and student-led, and incorporate a diverse and tailored range of programs and activities, including visiting academics, guest speakers, career mentoring, and workshops on essay writing, referencing and exam preparation. Importantly, session topics are scheduled in accordance with common problems or issues faced by first-year students at particular times during the year, with topics determined based on feedback from students themselves and from research regarding the first-year experience (Bowles et al, 2011; Glaser et al., 2006; Kuh, 2007; Pitkethley & Prosser, 2001). Early sessions focus on ice breaker activities, timetabling, tours of university grounds, expectations of lecturers and tutors, library tours, and goal setting for the year. As the year progresses, the focus turns to essay writing, information regarding practical activities or laboratory classes, study techniques, learning styles, exam preparation and

visits from academics or later year students speaking to groups regarding subject selection, career progression or life lessons. At all times, Mentors are encouraged to seek feedback from members of their group as to topics of relevance to ensure students remain engaged and active participants in their own learning and development (Cook-Santher, 2002; Hodge, Magdola, & Haynes, 2009; Terenzini et al., 1996).

Program features

Australian programs are primarily staff-led, short-term, voluntary, and in many cases, rely on students themselves seeking assistance (Glaser et al., 2006; Quinn et al., 2010; Tremblay & Rodger, 2003; Treston, 2006). Living learning communities, common within US based residential halls, generally require students to live within a designated residential space managed by student affairs staff and enroll in a common set of courses (Andrade, 2007; Benjamin, 2007; Rice & Lighsey, 2001; Soldner & Szelenyi, 2008). The Accommodation Services Mentoring Program differs from other Australian and US programs in several key ways. Firstly, the program relies heavily on students themselves playing a key role in the facilitation of the program. Prior to the commencement of every year, those selected as Mentors are involved in a carefully structured and comprehensive training program. Training activities and sessions are designed to not only provide those students in the role with generic attributes required for leadership, team building and effective communication, but also with the skills needed to meet the diverse needs of the first-year residents they will mentor. This includes general health and well-being training (in first aid and mental health first aid), and academic skill based training in how to host effective mentoring sessions, facilitate innovative ice breaking games and assist students who may be experiencing academic or transitional difficulties. Mentors are also provided with a study group planner, a workbook designed to provide them with a recommended structure for sessions, including ideas for learning activities, games and student handouts. Taking a 'carrot' approach to promoting attendance, a minimal budget ($20AUD) per head is also assigned for spending on incentives, which may include snacks and treats or subsidizing a social activity like a group meal or an excursion to a relevant museum, art gallery, local exhibition or industry based worksite.

Secondly, to encourage awareness and support for the program, prior to arrival, first-year students are advised of the nature of the program, its role in student transition and academic success, and the expectation that part and parcel of living on campus entails mandatory involvement throughout the year. Students are also welcomed and integrated as early as possible, with Mentors contacting students prior to arrival via e-mail or invitations to dedicated social networking groups or forums. Mentors then connect with new students as they move into residence inviting them to attend an Accommodation Services-wide 'meet and greet' activity scheduled during the orientation program held in the week prior to the commencement of classes. At this activity first-year students have the opportunity to formally meet their Mentor and the other students who will form their study group for the remainder of the year.

The third, and perhaps most distinctive feature in comparison to most US-based programs, is the compulsory nature of the program. As sessions commence and progress, attendances are tracked and reported directly to staff within the Residential Education team, who monitor the program and ensure student Mentors are both efficient in their role and provided with appropriate support and supervision. Residents who miss more than three sessions are contacted via email by staff to explore reasons for their absence, and exceptions are made on occasions for those with family, class commitments or other legitimate explanations. Those who are unable to attend on a regular basis due to such reasons may be required to attend meetings with a staff member or a Mentor in their own time. Non-attendance is perhaps surprisingly not of concern, and on average, around only 50 students (4.2%) of the 1200 expected to be involved, are required to be contacted by staff each semester.

Finally, it is important to note that the Accommodation Services' mentoring program is not offered alone, but operates in conjunction with a suite of additional complementary academic support programs. These include (a) specialist subject tutoring service which provides free tutoring to residents in need, (b) a textbook library borrowing scheme involving the purchase of core student textbooks which are then loaned to residents on a semester basis, (c) an academic support program, known as the 'Net Program,' for those students classified 'at risk,' (d) an Academic Associate program which invites academic staff from within the La Trobe University community to attend events as guest speakers or career mentors, and finally, (d) the overall celebration and recognition of high achieving residents through an annual Accommodation Services Academic Gala Dinner.

Transferability of the program

There are a number of elements of the Accommodation Services Mentoring Program which are transferable and can be utilized to facilitate positive outcomes for students at other accommodation sites and within a wider university environment. In particular, the value of the program is largely due to the quality of peer connections formed between students as part of such programs. As the literature suggests, students are similar in age and often have personal experiences in common; they enjoy the opportunity to meet new people who are studying similar subjects or course work and feel comfortable discussing concerns or issues they may be facing (Glaser et al., 2006; Terenzini et al., 1996). Students involved in this particular program have frequently indicated that that they feel comfortable asking their Mentor questions regarding university life – including anything from where to find a lecture theatre, to what was expected of them in class, to what other university support services were available. As a first-year resident stated in an end of year evaluation (Accommodation Services 2015):

> *Having the support from someone who has been where you are is one of the most beneficial aspects [sic] of the Mentoring Program. It is also good that the Mentor is close to our own age and this makes them more approachable than lecturers or tutors.*

The provision and facilitation of peer connections upon arrival to university as part of the mentoring program also meant that students felt, as Tinto (1998, p. 170) describes, "socially integrated," with the data indicating that early opportunities to make friends, meet new people – particularly those within their own course of study and year level – helped them to feel part of their residential and university community.

The program also plays an important role in facilitating students' understanding of University academic expectations, and their new learning - and additionally, in the case of residential students, living environment. As Bowles et al., (2011, p. 62) indicates, "…the initial student experience is pivotal in establishing attitudes, expectations, motivation and approaches to learning." Indeed, research suggests that large numbers of students withdraw or fail because of adjustment or environmental factors, and thus the early provision of information and the availability of support services for students at this crucial time can be critical in laying the foundation for persistence (Brinkworth et al., 2009; Pitkethly & Prosser, 2001; Tinto, 1998). Those involved in the mentoring program have noted that they felt it assisted in finding their way around university grounds, their adjustment to university teaching styles, citation of materials, and understanding their timetable.

Finally, the fostering of an enriching and supportive learning community beyond the classroom, one which is complementary to the lecturers, tutorials and academic support services provided by the wider University, is also a crucial element of the program. According to research, a strong campus culture, a connected, engaged and involved student cohort, and the opportunity for 'whole experience learning,' (e.g., internships, research opportunities, service learning, out of class interactions, peer mentoring programs and extra-curricular activities), are key factors in the enhancement of the formal curriculum and the academic success and persistence of students (Bowles et al., 2011; Coates & Edwards, 2009; Hodge et al., 2009; La Nasa et al., 2007; Rendon,

1994; Steffes, 2004). In the case of this particular program, Mentors and mentoring sessions played a key role in encouraging and promoting discussion and debate, inviting feedback, interaction, and social engagement, both within sessions and beyond, with many involved indicating that they felt they belonged to a learning community encouraging academic success. As one student commented:

> *In many ways, coming to college should have been really overwhelming. Meeting my Mentor, attending the study sessions and generally feeling part of a community which cares has made the world of difference – I can't imagine how I would have coped otherwise.*

Importantly, the Accommodation Services mentoring program has the potential to serve as a valuable model for peer to peer mentoring within the higher education environment. Institutions wishing to initially trial the value of such a program could consider implementing and evaluating the impact of a shorter, six week version, focusing primarily on providing transition support and guidance, and fostering key relationships and community building between first-year, later year students and staff during this crucial transition period. Alternatively the program could be modified to offer a combination of both face-to-face and online sessions. This would provide greater flexibility for student mentors, those first-year students involved in the program, and staff monitoring interaction and engagement. Finally, a version of the mentoring program could be provided to a limited focus group of first year students, thus permitting greater analysis of the impact of the program based on student involvement.

Conclusion

When reviewing the merits of this particular mentoring program, it is important to acknowledge that there are a number of prerequisites and requirements which facilitate its success and which may challenge its effectiveness if transferred to another residential or wider university setting. In particular, funding is required to remunerate the student Mentors involved in the program and for the incentives used to encourage first-year students' regular attendance. Further, monitoring attendances and supporting both the Mentors and residents involved in the program can be time-consuming. The program is also heavily dependent on the interest and skill set of the student volunteers who commit to training, planning and preparation prior to each session and attending regular meetings with staff and senior student leaders who assist with week-to-week operations. There may, therefore be considerable variation between the abilities and talents of the Mentors and staff which may impact the outcomes reaped by the first-year students. Finally, it is important to acknowledge that the results of this study emerge from implementation within a single Australian institution, and may not be transferable to those higher education institutions or student accommodation sites which vary in structure or size.

Regardless, support services provided beyond the traditional confines of the classroom, such as this residentially based peer mentoring program, play a key role in assisting students to manage the myriad of social, emotional, and academic challenges associated with transitioning to university. As such, Accommodation Services continues to see value in maintaining and strengthening the program, which has become very much part of the ethos, and something which students embrace as part of the residential and university first-year experience at La Trobe.

References

Accommodation Services (2015). Annual Student Experience Survey. Melbourne: La Trobe University.

Andrade, M.S. (2007). Learning communities: Examining positive outcomes. Journal of College Student Retention, *9*(1), 1-20. doi: 10.2190/E132-5X73-681Q-K188

Benjamin, M. (2007). Role construction of residential learning community peer mentors. The Journal of College and University Student Housing, *34*(2), 31 - 40.

Bowles, A., Dobson, A., Fisher. & McPhail, R. (2011). An exploratory investigation into first year student transition to university. In Krause, K., Buckridge, M., Grimmer, C. and Purbrick-Illeck, S. (Eds.) Research and Development in Higher Education: Reshaping Higher Education, 34, 61 – 71. Retrieved from http://www.herdsa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/conference/2011/papers/HERDSA_2011_Bowles.PDF

Brinkworth, R., McCann, B., Matthews, C., & Nordstrom, K. (2009). First year expectations and experiences: student and teacher perspective. Higher Education, *58*, 157- 173. doi: 10.1007/s10734-008-9188-3

Burge, L. (2012). Infinite possibilities: Exploring opportunities for non-traditional students to become global citizens. Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning, *13*, 6 – 18. doi: 10.5456/WPLL.13.S.6

Coates, H., & Edwards, D. (2009). Engaging college communities: The impact of residential colleges in Australian higher education. AUSSE Research Briefing 4, Australian Council for Educational Research, Camberwell Vic. Retrieved from http://www.acer.edu.au/research/ausse/reports

Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2013). Research Methods in Education. London: Routledge.

Cook-Santher, A. (2002). Authorizing students' perspectives: Toward trust, dialogue and change in education. Educational Researcher, *31*, 3 – 14. doi: 10.3102/0013189X031004003

Cresswell, J. W. (2003). Research Design: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Glaser, N., Hall, R., & Haleperin, S. (2006). Students supporting students: The effects of peer mentoring on transition, belonging and retention amongst first year university students. Australian and New Zealand Student Services Association, *27*, 4-19. Retrieved from http://ro.uow.edu.au/jutlp/vol6/iss2/5

Hodge, D. C., Magolda, M. B. B, & Haynes, C. (2009). Engaged learning: Enabling self-authorship and effective practice. Liberal Education, *95*(4), 16 – 23. Retrieved from http://0-search.proquest.com.alpha2.latrobe.edu.au/docview/209820847?accountid=12001

Jacobi, M. (1991). Mentoring and undergraduate academic success: A literature review. Review of Educational Research, *61*(4), 505 – 532. doi: 10.3102/00346543061004505

Kuh, G. D. (2007). How to help students achieve. The Chronicle of Higher Education, 43(41), B12 – B13. Retrieved from http://0-search.proquest.com.alpha2.latrobe.edu.au/docview/214653791?accountid=12001

LaNasa, S. M., Olson, E. & Alleman, N. (2007). The impact of on-campus student growth on first year student engagement and success. Research in Higher Education, *48*(8), 941 – 966. doi: 10.1007/s11162-007-9056-5

McInnis, C. (2001). Researching the first Year experience: Where to from here? Higher Education Research & Development, *20*(2), 105 – 114. doi: 10.1080/07294360120064376

McKenzie, K. & Schweizer, R. (2001). Who succeeds at university? Factors predicting academic performance in first year Australian university students. Higher Education Research and Development, *20*(1), 21 – 22, doi: 10.1080/07924360120043621

Muldoon, R. L. and Macdonald, I. (2009). Building learning communities in residential colleges. Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice, *6*(2), Retrieved from http://ro.uow.edu.au/jutlp/vol6/iss2/5

Paramaswaran, A. & Bowers, J. (2012). Student residences: From housing to education. Journal of Further and Higher Education, 1 – 18, doi: 10.1080/0309877X.2012.699515

Pitkethly, A. & Prosser, M., (2001). The first year experience project: A model for university-wide change. Higher Education Research and Development, *20*(2), 185 – 198, doi: 10.1080/758483470

Quinn, F., Muldoon, R. & Hollingworth, A. (2010). Formal academic mentoring: A pilot scheme for first-year science students at a regional university. Mentoring & Tutoring: Partnership in Learning, *10*(1), 21 – 33. doi: 10.1080.13611260220133126

Rendon, L. (1994). Validating culturally diverse students: Towards a new model of learning and student development. Innovative Higher Education, *9*(1): 33 – 52, doi: 10.1007/BF01191156

Rice, N. D. & Lightsey, O. R. (2001). Freshman living learning community: Relationship to academic success and affective development. Journal of College and University Student Housing, *30*(1), 11 – 17.

Robinson, D. A. G., Burns C.F. & Gaw I. C. F (1996). Orientation programs: A foundation for student learning and success. New Directions in Student Services, *75*. doi: 10.1002/ss.3719967507

Soldner, M. & Szelenyi, K. (2008). A national portrait of today's living learning programs. The Journal of College and University Student Housing, *35*(1), 9 – 13.

Steffes, J. S. (2004). Creating powerful learning environments beyond the classroom. Change, *36*(3), 46 – 50. doi:10.1080/00091380409605580

Stevens, C. D., and Walker, B. M. (1996). How residential college students adjust socially and emotionally to first year university. Higher Education Research and Development, *15*(2), 201 – 221. doi: 10.1080/0729436960150206

Terenzini, P. T., Pascarella, E. T. & Blimling G. S. (1996). Students out-of-class experiences and their influence on learning and cognitive development: A literature review. Journal of College Student Development, *37*(2), 149 – 162.

Tinto, V. (1998). College communities: Raking research on student persistence seriously. The Review of Higher Education, *21*(2), 167 – 177. Retrieved from http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/review_of_higher_education/v021/21.2tinto.html

Thurber, C. A. & Walton, E. A. (2012). Homesickness and adjustment in university students. Journal of American College Health, *60*(5): 415 – 419, doi: 10.1080/07448481.2012.673520

Tremblay, P. F. & Rodger, S. (2003). The effects of a peer mentoring program on academic success among first year university students. The Canadian Journal of Higher Education, *33*(3), 1 – 8. Retrieved from http://ojs.library.ubc.ca/index.php/cjhe/article/view/183438/183391

Treston, H. (2006). Peer mentoring: Making a difference at James Cook University, Cairns – It's moments like these you need Mentors. Innovations in Education and Training International, *36*(3), 236 – 243. doi: 10.1090/135580099036030

The author may be contacted

Laura Burge
L.Burge@latrobe.edu.au

Appendix

Table 1: Mentoring program topics

Session(s)	Week	Topic(s)
Pre-Arrival	0	Mentor to make contact with all students to introduce themselves and program
1	1	Orientation and Overview of the Mentoring Program First opportunity for students to meet Mentor and other group members Tour of campus Icebreaking activities Overview of year and sessions ahead
2	2	Introduction to University Life Opportunity for Mentor to explain the 'ins' and 'outs' of Uni life Lectures and Tutorials Goal Setting Common Transition Issues
3	3	Self-Management Discussion of topics including stress and time management Study-work-life balance
4	4	Library Tours Tours of the University library jointly hosted by librarians and Mentors
5	5	University Academic Skills Service Presentation Presentation by academic support staff regarding their services and support available to all students
6	6	Subject Specific Session Opportunity for general question and answers or focus on specific subjects or assignments relevant to the group
7 & 8	8 & 10	Visiting Academic or Later Year Student Presentation by a visiting staff member or later year student within the College or field Opportunity for question and answer
9	12	Great Debate Large scale hotly contest debating event involving all first year students and Mentors
10	14	Exam Preparation Final formal chance for students to meet with Mentors and other group members to prepare for the study break and exam period. Mentors to assist by providing pop quizzes and practice exams
Semester Break		
11	16	Reenergizing Session A welcome back to the second term of the year. Mentor to recap the previous semester and provide an overview of forthcoming sessions Chance to focus on common problems associated with second semester including disengagement and discuss any concerns resulting from academic performance
12	18	Subject Specific Session
13	20	Visiting Academic, Later Year or Guest Speaker
14	22	Trivia Night A large scale event bringing all first years together and engage in a fun filled evening of trivia and games with their other group member, Mentors and staff.
15	24	Handover Session A chance for first year students interested in applying for a Mentor position to jointly host a session on a topic of their choice.
16	26	Exam Preparation
17	28	End of Year Celebration An activity of the group's choice to celebrate the conclusion of their time as a first year student and recap on lessons learned and goal setting for the year ahead.

Online Counselling:
A New Landscape for University Counselling Services

Kellie Cathcart
Counsellor
University of Newcastle

Abstract

Online counselling is an emerging mode of therapy being offered to support individuals within the community and tertiary education facilities. The online option offers increased accessibility, convenience and affordability of services. Whilst not without pitfalls, the uptake of such services is increasing, especially within the adolescent and early adulthood population. In embracing this new mode of delivery of counselling services the University of Newcastle has developed a three-stage approach to offering online counselling services to increase the visibility, accessibility and sustainability of counselling services on campus. The first step is the development of a website with weekly blog posts on issues affecting student health and wellbeing as well as the inclusion and review of other internal and external online resources including smart phone applications, and tip sheets to allow flexibility in accessing information. The second stage is online drop-in sessions for students to be able to ask questions and get advice from a counsellor without having to make an appointment. The third stage is offering individual online sessions using messenger and video chat software. The uptake of the online services has been growing with the help of successful engagement and promotion activities; early results indicate students who otherwise wouldn't have engaged with counselling as well as those who would have, are utilising the services. Further evaluation will help refine the services and direct the growth and sustainability of online counselling services for university students.

Rationale

Online counselling is quickly becoming a popular model of support, especially within the adolescent and young adult population. Key services like Lifeline, Kids helpline, Suicide call back service and headspace offer an online counselling service component to their service provision. Numerous benefits of online therapy have been identified with the most frequently cited reason being an increase in convenience and access for both clients and therapists (Rochlen, Zack & Speyer, 2004). Other benefits identified have been an increased volume and ease of disclosure of information as the client feels disinhibited, a diminished power differential (Rochlen et al., 2004) and stigma associated with help seeking behavior when not face-to-face (Mitchell & Murphy, 1998), enhanced self-reflection and ownership of therapy when using text based methods (Rochlen et al, 2004) and an increased availability and accessibility of multimedia resources available online for easy dissemination to the client (Grohol, 2000). Despite the benefits, challenges have also been identified including missing nonverbal cues, misreading, time delays, writing and typing deficiencies, cultural clashes and security to name a few (Rochlen et al., 2004).

Despite these challenges research has shown that within the general community online counselling options are comparable to more traditional models of counselling, with text chat and e-mail sessions identified as more effective than forum and webcam sessions (Barak, Hen, Boniel-Nissim & Shapiro, 2008). In addition to this a recent review of online counselling in tertiary education identified that online clinically assisted cognitive behavioural therapy programs were successful in reducing stress, depression and anxiety scores in university students (Davies, Moriss, & Glazebrook, 2014). This same review indicated that those students who had previously engaged in counselling were more accepting of online services (34% compared to 16%) indicating an acceptability of online therapeutic intervention by university students.

As well as becoming more accepting of online therapeutic intervention, students are also demanding greater access to therapeutic resources for support offered outside of traditional working hours. In Ireland, Trinity College students were able to e-mail questions to counsellors who would

respond by posting the question and their response on a website allowing all students to see the question and response (Richards, 2009). This pilot resulted in 664 registered users, 50 questions from 41 students across 15 months with over 7000 views in total. This highlights the potential larger impact that online therapeutic interventions can have in reaching larger numbers of students. Furthermore, 77% of the questions were submitted outside normal business hours, indicating that students are seeking alternatives to the more traditional methods of counselling offered at universities.

Increasing strain on resources coupled with increasing demand for service from students means that universities need to not only be more flexible in their delivery of services but that the approach can no longer be a reactive one based on student enquiry. Services need to consider not only treatment delivery but also prevention and health promotion in their service delivery. One model proposed by the Hunter Institute of Mental Health (2015) suggests that services can offer primary, secondary and tertiary prevention as well as health promotion within treatment services as shown in diagram 1 below.
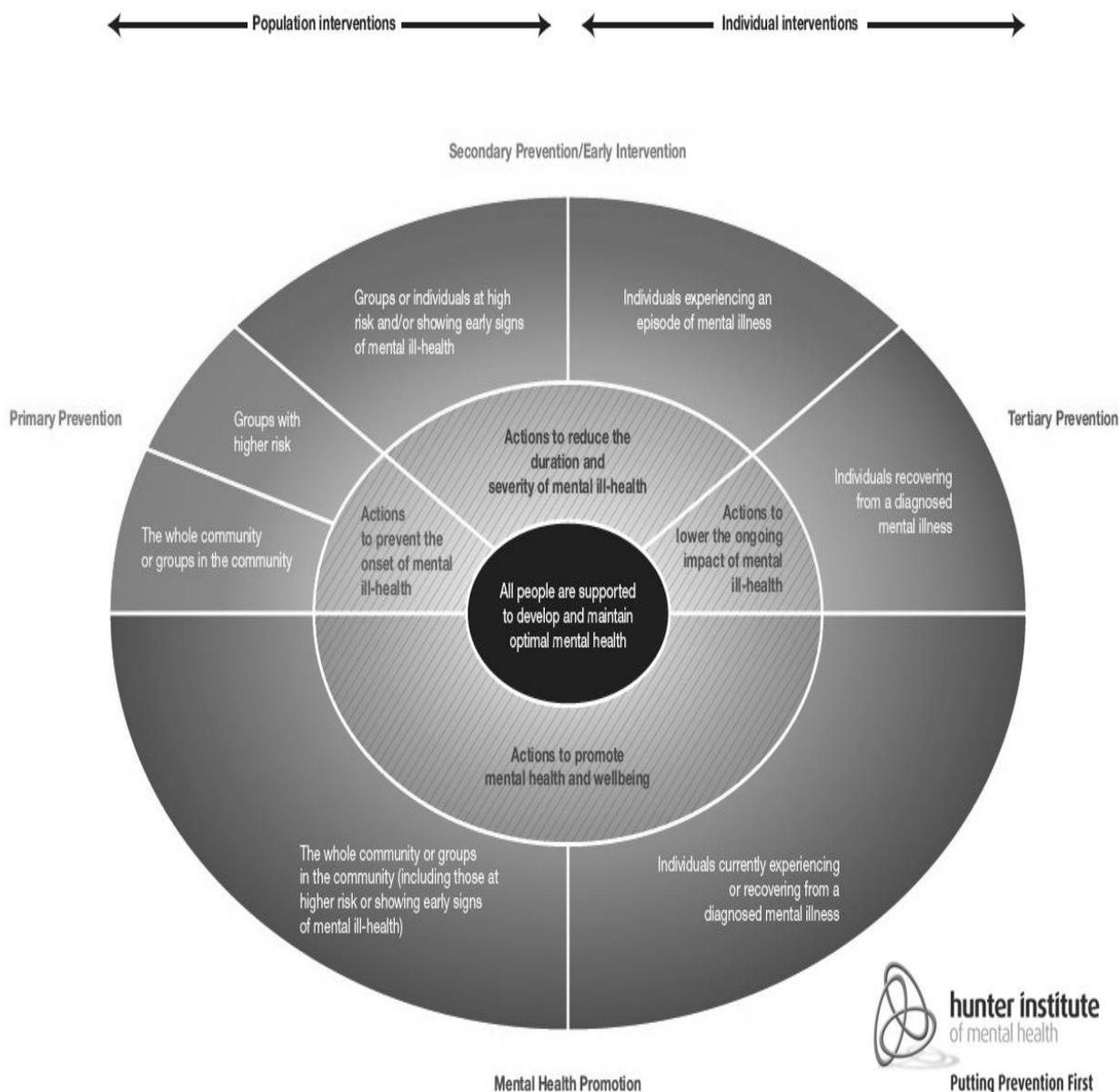
Diagram 1. Primary, Secondary and Tertiary Prevention and Health Promotion in service delivery as proposed by the Hunter Institute of Mental Health, 2015.

The principles of prevention and health promotion should be taken into account along with the research results in considering the implementation of online counselling services in any tertiary facility.

Background

Since commencing in 2013 the Online Counsellor Position at the University of Newcastle (UoN) has been in Development and Pilot phase of services. Initially the ground work investigating the legal requirements for the position and researching any other existing programs was conducted to ensure that a quality service would be offered, which utilised existing services and programs available. Setup, design and promotion of the UoN online counsellor was then undertaken. Difficulties in promoting the service amongst academic and faculty services were encountered which resulted in a slow uptake of the online counselling role. Planning for 2015 was focused on different recruitment and engagement strategies to address these difficulties.

The model

Online counsellor blog

An Online Counsellor Blog was developed, which gives students access to regular posts on mental health, general health and wellbeing, and other issues impacting on students, as well as reviews of online resources and smart device applications to assist students. It also has links to tip sheets developed by the counselling service, online resources and programs offered and local community services available. This page is the hub of the role and links to social media promoting the service as well as advertising the ways in which help can be sought. This is both a primary prevention strategy which aims to prevent the onset of mental illness within the university community, and a health promotion strategy that encourages community members to act to help others and develop personal skills.

Drop-in services

Skype Drop-in sessions with the Online Counsellor are offered 4 times per week during semester and reduced times between semesters. Two of these times are offered outside normal business hours in line with previous research suggesting that students utilised and requested more flexible methods of contact with support services. The drop-in service offers a secondary prevention service as it allows early access to services and promotes reduction in the severity and duration of mental ill health until ongoing services can be facilitated.

Online counselling sessions

Individual counselling sessions are offered via Skype and Black Board Instant Messenger (BBIM). The Skype Sessions are available via text and video chat facilities whilst the BBIM sessions are only offered via text. Individual sessions are available, mainly during normal hours of operation but a limited number of evening sessions are also available to students.

Engagement strategies

A number of staff and student engagement strategies have been employed, including promotion through the Student Communications Team's existing social media accounts for students across Facebook, Twitter and Instagram which have over 25,000 followers between the three services. Faculty social media accounts for students also featured the online counselling resources towards the end of 2016. Advertisements, reviews and news items relating to the Online Counselling Resources were also included in staff communication networks including blogs, Yammer and electronic newsletters. Other opportunities have also included university media interviews both online (YouTube channel) and in print media, regular articles in student publications, attendance and promotion at campus and community events, faculty meetings and workshops.

Outcomes

The blog

The total number of hits on the blog over the period from January to December 2015 was 10,864. The average number of hits per day was 29 with a peak of 162 hits per day. The visits per month to the site range between 575 and 1362 with peaks in May (1197) and September (1362) as seen in Table 1 below.

Table 1. The Blog's total views per month and average views per day from 30th January to 30th December 2015

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Views per month	3	359	1096	575	1197	1023	694	748	1362	1022	1046	715
Avg per day	2	13	35	19	39	34	22	24	45	33	35	23

The main referral source for the blog is from internal UON sources (54%), and the Student Communications Team social media pages (23%). The search terms from external search engines (23%) included "UON online counselling" and "online counselling". There were some searches specific to community counselling options in areas where university campuses are located, which resulted in clicks through to the UON Online Counselling blog.

The most commonly viewed page is the home page that has the weekly blog posts (3132). Second is the Online Counselling page (1226), followed by Topics of Interest/Archives (584) and Online Resources (402). Of the blog posts, the most frequently accessed were those around stress and anxiety.

Skype drop-ins

Over the two semesters of 2015 there were 61 individual contacts during the Skype drop-in hours, 49 of which were referred for ongoing individual counselling. Evening sessions were more frequently used, with only two of the evening sessions across both semesters not having any contact compared to eleven daytime sessions not being utilised. During peak times, all times were utilised. The largest number of contacts for any one drop-in was seven students.

Students who made contact during the drop-in sessions did so for the same reasons as those accessing face-to-face counselling services. These included relationship difficulties, sexual health, depression, anxiety, stress around university studies and assistance with adverse circumstances processes. There was a trend for students who used the Skype drop-in and were subsequently referred for ongoing online counselling to use the drop-in sessions again in the future, either to check in for what is sometimes referred to as a booster session in face-to-face therapy or to give positive feedback on their success.

Individual sessions

The majority of students who engaged in individual online sessions were referred from Skype drop-ins. Other referrals were through direct contact via e-mail or from Student Support Advisors (SSA) who offer initial needs assessments to students seeking a wide range of support on campus. For the total students seen (55), twelve sessions were offered using BBIM and 116 sessions on Skype. There was an average of 2.7 sessions per student, with 47% having one session, 28% two sessions, 17% between three and five sessions and 8% using more than five sessions. Internal Counselling Service data reports show that this result is similar to the face-to-face average number of sessions per student for counsellors at the University of Newcastle.

Engagement strategies

The Student Communications Team promoted the online counselling services through its social media accounts every third week during semester using a #HealthyUON hashtag. In addition to this

they produced two different time-lapse videos for the accounts; one specifically around seeking support in May during assessment and exam preparation which resulted in 1,800 views and another in October for suicide prevention coinciding with "R U OK? Day" (suicide awareness day on campus), which had fewer views but increased traffic to the blog. Other media publications included a Yak Media (student organisation) television interview on mental health and stress in university students which was released in October, print articles in Yak's publications, as well as articles for other student organisations on campus throughout the year. Promotion via staff media was also sought, with publication in the UON Blog, announcements on staff social media channels and electronic faculty and campus-wide newsletters.

In addition to these media channels the Online Counsellor also attended events on campus such as Mental Health Week, Sexual Health week, Student Living Support workshops and seminars, Wear it Purple Day and various workshops offered across campus. Academic staff were also offered workshops (which were attended by some) describing what resources are available and how they can refer students to them. Finally, attendance at local community forums and conferences also helped to raise the profile of the service and resources in the local area.

Conclusion

Uptake of the online counselling service has been consistently growing over time with greater utilisation in semester two, 2015. The peak times of the blog and drop-in attendance corresponded with assessment and exam preparation times during the semester, a similar pattern to face-to-face counselling requests. Whilst there is evidence of a higher number of views on the blog following some of the Student Communications Team promotion of time-lapse videos on social media, it was not replicated for all promotions. One explanation for this could be that the topic of that time-lapse video "stress less around assessment time" was of particular interest to the students at that time.

It is clear that the promotion strategies employed are assisting in raising the profile of the online counselling service available for students. The referrals to the blog, coming from internal sites and the Student Communications Team's social media accounts are indicative that the internal promotional strategies are effective. What is unclear is which strategies are working better than others and where the focus should remain to allow for the service to continue to grow.

Utilisation of the Skype drop-in sessions indicates that students are seeking online methods of requesting help and support for their academic studies and well-being. The greater demand on the evening sessions indicates that flexibility, not only in method but also in the time that support is available, is important to students. The uptake so far also suggests that students are more comfortable with the text-based sessions. One explanation for this could be that these students find it less confronting than face-to-face therapy. It is also possible that the therapeutic benefits of writing are also at play here (Suler, 2000).

Whilst the results to date are promising, further evaluation of engagement strategies needs to be undertaken, as does evaluation of the students' experience of the online counselling methods. A comparative evaluation of therapeutic outcomes for online and face-to-face counselling clients would also add greater depth of understanding. Continued growth of the services offered should incorporate the principles of the prevention framework discussed earlier; such strategies may include peer support mechanisms and more online psychoeducation.

References

Barak, A., Hen. L., Boniel-Nissim, M., & Shapira, N. (2008). A comprehensive review and a meta-analysis of the effectiveness of internet-based psychotherapeutic interventions. *Journal of Technology in Human Services 26*(2-4), 109-160.

Davies, E.B., Morriss, R., & Glazebrook, C. (2014). Computer-delivered and web-based interventions to improve depression, anxiety, and psychological well-being of university students: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, *16*(5), 18-39.

Grohol, J.M (2000). *The insider's guide to mental health resources online.* New York: Guilford Press.

Hunter Institute of Mental Health. (2015). *Prevention First: A Prevention and Promotion Framework for Mental Health.* Newcastle.

Mitchell, D.L., & Murphy, L.M. (1998). Confronting the challenge of therapy online: A pilot project. *Proceedings of the Seventh National and Fifth International Conference on Information Technology and Community Health,* Victoria, British Columbia, Canada.

Richards, D. (2009). Features and benefits of online counselling: Trinity College online mental health community. *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, *37*(3), 231-242.

Rochlen, A.B., Zack, J.S., & Speyer, C. (2004). Online Therapy: Review of Relevant Definitions, Debates, and Current Empirical Support. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, *60*(3), 269-283.

Suler, J. (2000). Psychotherapy in cyberspace: A 5-dimensional model of online and computer mediated psychotherapy. *CyberPsychology and Behavior*, *3*, 151-160.

The author may be contacted
Kellie Cathcart
kellie.cathcart@newcastle.edu.au

Using Videos and Narrative to build Understanding and Capacity amongst the Charles Sturt University First in Family Student Cohort.

Dean Storm
Data Administration Assistant,
Kara King
Project Lead,
FirstDegree, Charles Sturt University

Abstract

At Charles Sturt University (CSU) our First in Family (FIF) students are often from at least one of the six equity groups targeted by Higher Education Participation Program (HEPP) funding. The FirstDegree project has been working to explore and enhance the experience of First in Family students, addressing institutional and personal barriers that these students face during their higher education journey. In conjunction with the Western Research Institute, based on the findings of the email survey, the FirstDegree project published the report "Understanding the CSU First in Family Student". The most significant areas of concern, as highlighted in this report, were being able to balance study, family, work and life along with being able to cope financially. Based upon the evidence from the research The FirstDegree Project has developed a support program to facilitate the academic, cultural and social adjustment of students who are the first in their family to attend University. Informed by Wilson's (2011) concept of story editing as a means of facilitating behavioural change to improve outcomes, a series of videos and animations were created that explore the First in Family student narrative. These videos are designed to help students prepare for and navigate their university journey. Online content was designed to enable the user to develop their understanding of university culture, while building their senses of capability, connectedness, resourcefulness and purpose. In the coming year the FirstDegree team hope to provide a study into the impact our resources have had on First in Family student success.

At Charles Sturt University (CSU) our First in Family (FIF) students are often from at least one of the six equity groups targeted by Higher Education Participation Program (HEPP) funding (low socioeconomic backgrounds, from rural and isolated areas, are students with a disability, from a non-English-speaking background, women in non-traditional areas of study and Indigenous people). In 2014, CSU devoted a proportion of its HEPP allocation to a dedicated project to addresses it's First in Family student's needs. The FirstDegree project has been working to explore and enhance the experience of First in Family students, addressing institutional and personal barriers that these students face during their higher education journey. The long term outcome of the FirstDegree project is to increase the completion rate of First in Family students at CSU.

Approximately 70% of CSU's current undergraduate student population identify as the first in their family to attend University, which is higher than the Australian average of 52%. In 2011, Coates and Ransom reported that 26% of Australian First in Family university students considered dropping out in their first year. This number increased to 34% in the later years of their degree. The FirstDegree project is working to improve the institutional understanding of the First in Family student experience, build these students capacity to succeed, as well as their sense of belonging and engagement within the University.

The initial focus of the FirstDegree project was to provide an in-depth analysis of the socio-economic backgrounds of CSU First in Family students and the barriers they face during their time at university. Ethics approval was sought and gained from CSU's Human Research Ethics Committee to conduct an email survey on the student population. The survey was distributed to students through their CSU registered email address. All 17,582 students, identified in the CSU database as being FIF, were given the opportunity to complete the survey.

In conjunction with the Western Research Institute, based on the findings of the email survey, the FirstDegree project published the report "Understanding the CSU First in Family Student". The report found that although CSU already provides significant support services to its students throughout their university experience, there is scope to increase awareness of current services and develop material that is more targeted to the specific needs of students across the different stages of their journey through university. The most significant areas of concern, as highlighted in this report, were being able to balance study, family, work and life along with being able to cope financially. While there is consistency across the overall First in Family cohort, there are distinct differences in the support and information required by the different subgroups of students, specifically: distance vs. internal; full time vs. part time; age; gender and location. An opportunity exists for CSU to deliver support that is specific to the individual needs of each student.

Based upon the evidence from the research The FirstDegree Project has developed a support program to facilitate the academic, cultural and social adjustment of students who are the first in their family to attend University. Informed by Wilson's (2011) concept of story editing as a means of facilitating behavioural change to improve outcomes, a series of videos and animations were created that explore the First in Family student narrative. These videos are designed to help students prepare for and navigate their university journey. Addressing highlighted barriers from our research, they explore the whole of the student lifecycle including motivation to study and staying motivated while studying, expectations of and the of realities university life and work, and the transformational effect of tertiary study on oneself and one's community. These videos have been designed so that academics and service providers can embed them within their lecture materials, websites and learning management systems from the FirstDegree YouTube channel. Animations were also used as a light-hearted way to highlight the pitfalls of procrastination, and to assist first in family students to see where they fit within the big university picture.

In 2015, a further 18 videos that specifically explore the First in Family Indigenous student experience were created. These videos have also been embedded within the University's new Indigenous Student website and are being played on television screens within Indigenous student centres across the University. To date videos in the YouTube Channel have received 5,740 views. 8,000 USB's have been produced containing the videos to be distributed to students during Orientation. Feedback on the videos and animations has been very positive from both students and staff.

Student voice lies at the heart of the website content, which has been designed to build upon the student narratives in the videos and provide resources that allow users to reflect upon their own university journey. Inspired by Lizzio (2006) Fives Senses of Successful Transition Model, the content was designed to enable the user to develop their understanding of university culture, while building their senses of capability, connectedness, resourcefulness and purpose. Videos are accompanied by interactive resources, student quotes and tips as well as links for further assistance. A key part of the website is the Your Stories page where First in Family students can upload their own university story and photo, as well as search and read the stories of others. These stories are proving to be both a celebration of the First in Family student and an inspiration for others. So far over 80 students have shared their story to the website. In 2015 the website has received 12,466 page views with 8003 unique visitors.

The Student Stories submitted to the website are also being released via social media to increase engagement and also to validate other student's experiences. Engagement with the stories has been high with students providing both words of encouragement and receiving inspiration from them. The video resources are being utilised by the University as well as community groups. For example our Indigenous video series has been supported by and shared on the Bathurst Wiradjuri Elders Facebook page from where they have been shared to other Indigenous social media sites.

A book and a series of posters and postcards of inspirational First in Family student stories submitted via our website has been created and distributed to commencing students in 2016. These are designed to celebrate CSU's First in Family students, offer tips and advice from students to students and to build engagement with the resources that have been created.

Two series of professional development videos have also been made. One that specifically addressed the barriers that Indigenous students face while they study at CSU which have been embedded within the University's Indigenous Cultural Competency Training providing a much needed student voice. The second series made in collaboration with the Disability Services team will be used for disability awareness training within CSU.

As the First Degree project moves into its third year it is hoped that measurable outcomes will be seen from engagement in the created resources. There has been overwhelmingly positive responses from all the students involved in the video resources. These students reported a sense of empowerment and increased confidence in being able to successfully navigate the university system. Members of student's families and wider community have also responded well to the resources and are gaining a greater understanding of the barriers that First in Family students face. In the coming year the FirstDegree team aim to promote and increase the use of the resources that have been created. Although First in Family student attrition and retention rates are caused by a vast amount of factors, the FirstDegree team hope to provide a study into the impact our resources have had on First in Family student success.

Reference

Coates, H., & Ransom, L. (2011). *Dropout DNA, and the genetics of effective support.* AUSSE Research Briefings v.11 June 2011.

Lizzio, A. (2006). Designing an orientation and transition strategy for commencing students. *A conceptual summary of research and practice. First Year Experience Project.* Brisbane, Australia: Griffith University.

Wilson, T. (2011). *Redirect: The surprising new science of psychological change*. UK: .Penguin

The authors may be contacted via:
Kara King
kking@csu.edu.au

ANZSSA Heads of Counselling Services
Benchmarking Survey
2013 Summary Report

Annie Andrews
Director, Counselling and Psychological Services [CAPS]
University of New South Wales

This ANZSSA Heads of Counselling Services Benchmarking Survey 2013 was the second survey of the Heads of Counselling Services conducted by University Counselling Service Managers in collaboration with of the Australian and New Zealand Student Services Association Pty Ltd (ANZSSA). The first survey was conducted in 2010 and a report was distributed to participating Heads of Counselling Services and a summary published in JANZSSA. The 2013 HOCS Benchmarking survey[1] was undertaken as a collaborative partnership with contributions from Gerard Hofmann (Victoria University, Wellington, NZ), Heather McLeod (Australian National University, ACT, Australia), and Annie Andrews (UNSW Australia, NSW, Australia). This report summarises the 2013 survey for counselling service managers in the post-secondary education sector, conducted on behalf of the Australian and New Zealand Student Services Association (ww.anzssa.org). The primary aim of the survey was to explore issues related to staffing, administrative processes, service delivery activities, student service users, data generated by the service, and data pertaining to the institution in which the service operates.

Executive Summary

1. Respondents from twenty-nine (29) Australian universities and two (2) New Zealand universities participated in the survey (n = 31).

2. Most counselling service manager positions required postgraduate qualifications (76.7%) and professional registration (70%).

3. The majority of these managers had been employed within the post-secondary/higher education sector for at least 10 years (51.6%).

4. Counselling Service managers were often psychologists (60%) or social workers (23.3%) while other managers identified themselves as nurses (3.3%), mental health practitioners (3.3%) or university administrators (3.3%).

5. Managers were most often responsible for up to two other services in addition to the counselling service (71.4%).

6. The two most common additional services were student services (20.8%) and health and medical services (20.8%), followed by leadership/mentoring services (12.5%), spiritual and pastoral services (12.5%), disability services (8.3%), community/welfare services (8.3%), elite athlete services (8.3%) and careers and employment services (8.3%).

7. Less than half of counselling services had a member of staff who functioned as a deputy manager (46.4%).

8. The majority of counselling service managers spent between 0.20 and 0.60 FTE of their time on direct service management (67%).

9. Seventy-seven percent (77%) of managers spent up to 0.40 FTE of their time on direct service delivery such as counselling students, facilitating workshops or preparing online resources.

---

[1] The results of the survey were analysed by Khandis Blake (PhD candidate, UNSW Australia). The report was drafted and finalised by Khandis Blake and Annie Andrews. Missing data were taken as unavailable and responses that did not conform to the requirements of the question were excluded. A full report can be requested from a.andrews@unsw.edu.au. The full report has been provided to the mangers of the participating counselling services.

10. The majority of counselling service managers spent 0.11–0.40 of their FTE on clinical supervision (70%).

11. The vast majority of counselling service managers worked overtime to satisfy the requirements of their role (83.3%), with 76.9% of those unable to claim overtime pay for the extra hours they worked. Most counselling service managers (62%) indicated that their weekly average of overtime fell between 6 and 10 hours.

12. Operating funds for the counselling service were often allocated as part of the institution's operating budget allocation (66.7%) and/or as a rolling allocation based on the previous year's budget (44.4%).

13. Some 40.7% of services obtained budget support from compulsory student services/amenities fees paid at enrolment.

14. The majority of services reported that they had not received additional budget allocation as a consequence of increases in overall enrolment (84.6%).

15. Fifty-eight percent (58.3%) of managers indicated that between 11–25 staff members reported directly to their role.

16. The established full time effective (FTE) professional staffing load for 'the counselling service across all campuses' (excluding the manager's own role) reported by 54.1% of respondents was 3 - 6 FTE.

17. Psychologists (generalist) and social workers were the most commonly employed professionals (80% and 64% respectively).

18. Administrative and project staff were severely underrepresented, with 52% of managers reporting that they had none of these staff.

19. Seventy-nine percent (79.2%) of managers reported that their current professional staff to student ratio was inadequate for the expected/core service delivery.

20. A ratio of 1:3000–1:3999 was the most common ratio considered adequate (40%).

21. The majority of responders (56.5%) indicated that the true student to staff ratio in their institutions counselling services was between1:3000–1:5000.

22. All respondents offered counselling/psychological services for both local and international students and the vast majority provided these services for minority/indigenous students (96%).

23. The majority of respondents reported over sixty-percent (63.5%) of staff time was utilised on individual counselling appointments, and just over ten percent (10.3%) was spent on urgent/emergency appointments.

24. Most respondents (73.1%) believed the salaries paid to counselling service staff were competitive.

25. The majority of managers reported that their institution's total student enrolment (measured at 31 March 2013) had increased in comparison to the previous year's total (61.9%).

26. Others reported a decrease or little variation in total student enrolment (14.3% and 23.8% respectively).

27. Ninety-one percent (90.9%) of respondents reported that their institution was primarily known as a public college/university and the majority of institutions were found to provide learning mostly via a blend of flexible delivery, distance and on campus attendance (65.2%).

28. Ninety-one percent (90.9%) of respondents reported that their institution was primarily known as a public college/university and the majority of institutions were found to provide learning mostly via a blend of flexible delivery, distance and on campus attendance (65.2%).

29. Most institutions (63.6%) had between 3–5 onshore campuses with 57.1% of institutions offering no offshore campuses, and the remainder having one (14.3%) or between 2–4 offshore campuses (28.5%).

30. More than 534,500 students were eligible to receive services from the counselling services at the institutions surveyed (data provided by N=23).

31. Less than half of all counselling services reported they were able to deliver comparable services to all students enrolled with the institution (45.8%).

32. Others provided comparable services only for students attending some onshore campuses (8.3%) or all onshore campuses (25%; as well as specific offshore campuses, 12.5%).

33. Sixty-eight percent (68.2%) of managers reported that all students had access to a service dedicated to the provision of counselling and psychological assistance, while the remaining 31.8% reported that most students had access to such a service.

34. Most institutions reported having a comprehensive emergency/critical incident response plan that included expertise provided by counselling service staff (87%).

35. All managers reported at least moderate confidence in their institution's preparedness and capacity to respond to a critical event on campus that threatens the safety of one or more persons.

36. In terms of service role and function responsiveness to mental health issues (95.8%), managing challenging student behaviour (87.5%), and strategies to enhance student wellbeing (87.5%) were the most commonly reported areas.

37. The most common services provided by the counselling services beyond face to face counselling services were psycho-educational workshops (91.7%), consultation with institutional staff on student-related issues (95.8%), and provision of a website with student-focused resources (91.7%).

38. Mapping of service strategic goals and operational plans against the institutional strategic plans and relevant key performance indicators (73.9%) as well as regular review of service values, practices and procedures (69.6%) and regular assessment of service efficacy and achievement (69.6%) were the most frequently reported quality assurance activities.

39. Undertaking research pertinent to service delivery was the least frequently undertaken quality-assurance activity (30.4%).

40. The most common supervisory activities occurring within counselling services were ad-hoc case discussion with another team member as required (91.7%), peer consultation with senior team member as needed (79.2%), and peer consultation for at least two hours per month in small groups (87.5%).

41. Almost sixty-three percent (62.5%) of respondents indicated that their service occasionally or regularly offered supervised training placements for interns in psychology, social work and mental health workers.

42. Some services indicated that they occasionally provide opportunities for students to undertake volunteer project work relevant to their degree and career (13%), but the majority indicated that this was either a rare occurrence or did not occur at all within their service (82.6%).

43. In terms of the key characteristics of service accommodation and infrastructure, the majority respondents indicated that client records were adequately protected and secure (91.7%) and the vast majority of respondents reported that furnishings satisfied comfort and OHS requirements (95.8%), and were accessible to students with disabilities (91.7%). However, less than half (45.8%) reported that the service was in a discrete location.

44. The majority of respondents indicated that their service or institution had conducted research on student mental health or student wellbeing (56.5%).

45. Ninety-one percent (91.3%) of services reported that they had conducted Mental Health Awareness programs or workshops in the last two years.

46. Most managers reported observing 'emerging' areas of demand for service delivery in the last 24 months (78.3%). These include an increase in: 'urgent' presentations; requests for online services; levels of psychological distress; high risk - suicidal clients; demand at regional campuses and after-hours appointments; eating disorders and domestic abuse; and sexual assault issues.

47. Fifty-four percent (54.2%) of respondents indicated that occasionally by arrangement, counselling and psychological services were provided beyond the usual business hours of 9am–5pm, Monday to Friday. However, the majority of services never provided counselling and psychological services on Saturday or Sunday (83.3%).

48. Nearly forty-six percent (45.8%) of services reported that they occasionally, on specific request, address the specialised needs of commuter students who travel considerable distances to attend campus and therefore experience reduced opportunity to utilise student services and counselling. To accommodate these students, some services reported utilising telephone (83.3%) or online counselling (20.8%).

49. Most respondents (65.2%) indicated that their service did not provide any services that specifically addressed the needs of part time students who frequently attend class from 4pm–9:30pm.

50. A static website with service information (95.8%) and tip sheets and brochures (87.5%) were the most common resources provided, whereas online counselling (asynchronistic) was provided by only 8.3% of the services.

51. Frequent examples of responses to emerging needs included: urgent appointment options available each day (83.3%); ongoing counselling appointments limited by service policy (75%); and telephone counselling appointments (83.3%).

52. The advertised upper limit of counselling appointments that a student/client could access in one year often varied from 6 to 16 appointments (41.6%).

53. The majority of respondents indicated that the average number of appointments utilised by clients within the counselling service fell between 2.5 and 4.0 appointments in 2013 (90%).

54. Eighty-seven percent (87.5%) of the respondents indicated that their service was unable offer a 24/7 counselling service.

55. Almost forty-six percent (45.8%) of respondents indicated that their counselling service provided no limit on the amount of times a client could access the service in a one-year period.

56. The vast majority of services did not directly charge any student for counselling or psychological services in 2013 (91.3%).

57. Nearly forty-six percent (45.8%) of services were found to utilise a waiting list or unmet demand list and in all of these cases, students registered on the waiting list were offered appointments available due to cancellations.

58. Services used a screening tool (e.g., Kessler 10) to assess the severity of psychological distress prior to placement on a waiting list only in the minority of cases (27.3%).

59. Of those services which utilised a psychological distress screening tool (e.g., Kessler 10), the majority (66.7%) indicated that the service did not had a procedure and stated policy of follow-up for students with acute psychological distress, who were not able to be given an immediate appointment.

60. Within most services (79.2%), at least some service practitioners routinely used a client outcome measure such as OQ45 or ORS/SRS scales.

61. The majority of services (58.3%) sent students an SMS reminder one or two days before their appointment as a strategy to minimise "no shows", however, 20.8% of services did not employ any strategy at all.

62. Eighty-three percent (83.3%) of respondents indicated that their service routinely provided students with information on alternate options for seeking counselling and psychological services and mental health treatment.

63. Most services indicated that they were not able to respond to all requests for counselling appointments within a two-week period year round (63.6%).

64. The average wait time for a first appointment varied, with over 50% of services reporting that the average wait time was between 3–10 days, and 24% reporting that the average wait time was above 10 days.

65. The psychological/psychotherapeutic orientations utilised by professional staff working 1:1 or in workshop formats, reported by all respondents were a cognitive-behavioural and solution-focused orientations; behavioural (e.g. ACT) orientations were also widely used (91.7%), as was Interpersonal Psychotherapy (75%).

66. The majority of services (87.5%) did not utilise a 'consumer or student reference group' to inform and guide service delivery (e.g., from the Student Guild, through the student ambassador program or student volunteers).

67. The majority of services (69.6%) did employ methods for seeking student/stakeholder input to service delivery planning.

68. Client satisfaction surveys were often conducted annually (31.8%) or every two to five years (22.7%).

69. Some routine feedback, evaluation or quality measures utilised by counselling services included: specific feedback templates for each service; online feedback options; and outcome measures e.g. K10 or DASS.

70. Almost half of the services conducted research (47.8%), investigating topics such as student wellbeing and mental health; academic achievement; and attrition rates of students with disability.

71. The most prevalent presenting issues identified by service clients were depression, anxiety, and stress (all 94.1%). Relationship issues (70.6%) and low mood (58.8%) also featured prominently.

72. All respondents reported the use of cognitive-behavioural and solution-focused orientations by professional staff working 1:1 or in workshop formats, and behavioural orientations (e.g., ACT) were also widely used (91.7%).

73. There was much variation amongst institutions regarding the frequency of clients who were assessed by the counsellors as being at risk for self-harm or suicide, with responses varying from 2%–40.4%. The average was twelve percent (12.7%).

74. Less than 2% of service clients were indigenous or from a population minority (e.g., ATSI, Maori, Pacific Islander).

75. Almost eighty-five percent (84.6%) of counselling services reported that they had not received additional budget as a consequence of increases in overall enrolment.

76. Most services indicated that they were not able to respond to all requests for counselling appointments within a two-week period year round (63.6%).

77. More than 79 % of CS managers (79.2%) reported that their current professional staff to student ratio was inadequate for the expected/core service delivery.

78. Less than half of all counselling services reported they were able to deliver comparable services to all students enrolled with the institution (45.8%).

79. Almost fifty-nine percent (58.8%) of respondents reported that there had been an increase in the demand for counselling services in 2013 as compared to 2012; however, just over forty- one percent (41.2%) were uncertain whether or not it had increased or decreased.

80. For 33.3% of respondents, the reported or estimated percentage of students who were eligible for 1:1 counselling services that actually accessed these services in 2013 lay between 6% and 15%, however 44% did not have access to this statistic.

81. Over ninety-five percent (95.5%) of Australian services reported not providing counselling and psychological services (1:1 or in group) to students via Medicare bulk-billed options.

82. Undertaking research pertinent to service delivery was the least frequently used quality-assurance activity (30.4%).

83. The vast majority of services did not directly charge any student for counselling or psychological services in 2013 (91.3%), with 87% of respondents reported that their counselling service did not charge fees. A small percentage indicated that fees were charged only for certain counselling activities including: 1:1 services (4.3%); additionally, fees were charged for "no-show" appointments or cancellations (4.3%) and for services delivered to students enrolled with independent entity related to the institution (4.3%).

84. Nearly seventy-three percent (72.7%) of respondents indicated that their services were not considering any fee introduction. Others indicated that certain fee introductions were under consideration including a small cancellation or 'no show' fee (4.5%).

85. Most services (73.9%) did not provide counselling and psychological services to students enrolled at another institution under a formal MOU agreement.

86. Of the remaining respondents who did provide this service (26.1%), 66.6% of these services considered this arrangement as a strategy primarily aimed at cost recovery, while 16.7% reported that there was a built-in profit margin.

87. Eighty-seven percent (87%) of services did not charge other areas of their institution for services delivered that went beyond core services (e.g., mental health awareness training, leadership programs for elite students etc.).

88. The majority of services (69.6%) did not undertake any pro bono service delivery for an institution affiliated with their institution.

89. Most services (52.2%) indicated that they never offered provision for 'outsourced' options for counselling or psychological services via private practitioners (who, on arrangement, invoiced the service) to students who were undertaking an academic program placement or workplace internship in overseas, rural or regional locations.

90. An additional 34.8% of respondents reported that they occasionally offered 'outsourced service option' if no other option were available.

91. Responses from 23 institutions indicated that more than 534,500 students were eligible to receive services from the counselling services located within the post-secondary sector across Australia and New Zealand.

92. Thirty-three percent (33.3%) of respondents indicated that the actual student cohort percentage attending the counselling service lay between 6–15%.

93. Respondents indicated/estimated that on average, three occasions (2.96) of service were utilised in 2013 by each student accessing the counselling service.

94. Across all counselling services represented in the survey there were more than 52,000 1:1 occasions of service provided.

95. The reported percentage of 'no shows' for counselling appointments during 2012 was 9.85% across the institutions. Respondents reported the percentage of students who accessed only one occasion of service in 2013 was on average 39%. This percentage varied greatly between services, with responses varying between 4% and 53%.

96. The most prevalent presenting issues identified by service clients during 2013 were depression, anxiety, and stress. These were highlighted by the vast majority of respondents (94.1%). Depression was identified by most respondents (93.8%) and 81.3% of respondents identified anxiety and relationship issues as significant contributing factors. Relationship issues (70.6%) and low mood (58.8%) also featured prominently.

97. Regularly identified by counsellors in their assessment of students attending the counselling service was perfectionism negatively impacting on academic achievement (94.14%), panic attacks (94.1%), performance anxiety (82.4%), social anxiety (94.1%), and interpersonal conflict (88.2%). Domestic violence (35.3%) and sexual assault/rape (29.4%) also featured.

98. Across institutions, referral for urgent assessment by a community mental health team occurred on less than 1% of occasions, and an average of 0.3% of cases were referred to hospital causality/emergency services.

99. Respondents indicated/estimated that they referred clients to a GP for psychiatric services referral (government funded or private health insurance) in an average of 0.5% of cases.

100. Direct referral to a psychologist in private practice and direct referral to other allied health service providers occurred on less than 1% of occasions, according to most respondents.

101. All respondents reported that an average of 0.1% of cases were referred to the university based psychology school clinic and respondents referred to other areas of the university on an average of 2% of occasions.

102. Respondents reported that an average of three percent (3)% of students who accessed counselling and psychological services in 2013 were in need of urgent attention because of concern about personal safety or the safety of others (e.g., suicidal intent, domestic violence, stalker, psychosis etc.).

103. Half the institutions (50%) indicated that they did not have any way of knowing how many students enrolled at the institution committed suicide in 2013.

104. More than forty-two percent (41.2%) of managers reported that 'they knew of clients of their service who committed suicide in 2013'.

105. Most services (77.8%) did not collect data on the number of service clients who acknowledged past suicide gestures or attempts.

106. Respondents indicated/estimated that on average thirteen percent (13%) of service clients in 2013 were assessed by the counsellors as being at risk for self-harm or suicide.

107. Only twenty-two percent (22.2%) of the participating services kept data on the number of students who presented with alcohol or other drug overuse or abuse behaviour.

108. Thirty-three percent (33.3%) of services kept data on the number of students who presented with self-harming behaviour (e.g., cutting, burning, self-flagellation etc.).

109. Almost six percent (5.6%) of services kept data on the number of students who presented to the service with internet overuse or online gaming problems.

110. Thirty-three percent (33.3%) of services kept data on the number of students who presented with eating disorders or disturbed eating.

111. The majority of respondents (77.8%) indicated that their service had no firm practice of giving formal diagnoses using the DSM-IV and instead left diagnosis to staff discretion. Diagnosis also depended on the context of the professional relationship, treatment needs, and disability provision needs.

112. Almost seventeen percent (16.7%) of respondents reported that their service model of practice did not encourage formal diagnosis as part of the assessment and treatment process because of concerns about the impact of the diagnostic label on students' future careers or insurance options.

113. Respondents reported the percentage of service clients who had severe problems (likely diagnosis using DSM-IV criteria) in 2013 to be between twenty- two percent (22%) and fifty-five percent (55%), and an average of one percent (1%) of service clients had impairment so severe that the professional staff of the service encouraged enrolment withdrawal for a medical leave period in 2013.

114. All of respondents reported that they had insufficient information about service clients in 2013 that were so impaired that they could only continue with their enrolment with on-going psychological assistance which exceeded the average number of occasions of service per client.

115. Respondents indicated/estimated that in 2013, between five percent (5%) and thirty-five percent (35%) of service clients had mental health concerns due to stress related to academic progress concerns (e.g. academic suspension/exclusion, excessive academic performance expectations, academic failure, fear of failure, negative impact of perfectionism, performance anxiety etc.)

116. All respondents (100%) agreed with the statement: "In the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand heads of counselling services have been reporting over the last decade a steady increase in the complexity and severity of student mental health presentations along with an increase in the proportion of students affected". Fifty percent (50%) of respondents indicated that they had service data which provided some support for their agreement. However, the other fifty percent (50%) agreed with the statement but possessed no hard data beyond professional staff reports.

117.   Eighty-five percent (85%) of respondents indicated that completing the survey had been worthwhile. Fifty-five percent (55%) indicated that they did not have access to some of the data requested. Forty-five percent (45%) suggested that the number of questions could be reduced without reducing the usefulness of the benchmarking.

Communication about this report can be directed to:
Annie Andrews
a.andrews@unsw.edu.au

JANZSSA Submission Guidelines 2016

Manuscripts for submission to JANZSSA must be submitted electronically at

https://submissions.scholasticahq.com/sites/janzssa-journal-of-the-australian-and-new-zealand-student-services-association

JANZSSA publishes Refereed (peer-reviewed by double-blind process) and Non-refereed papers; as well as shorter Best Practice Case Examples, Book Reviews, Reports and Conversation Pieces. Authors should indicate which category they are submitting their paper for by entering one of the above as Keyword/s during their online submission. See below for more details about the different categories.

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.

Journal format

JANZSSA is published in an A4 format.

Article Length:

Manuscripts would normally be fewer than 6,000 words to be accepted.

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

Abstract is required:

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

Page layout required:

Articles for inclusion in JANZSSA in either the referred or non-refereed suctions 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 21 cm in depth x 17 cms wide.

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, graph 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.

https://student.unsw.edu.au/american-psychological-association-apa-referencing-system

http://libguides.murdoch.edu.au/APA

Suitable content for articles submitted for publication in JANZSSA:

Manuscripts 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 manuscripts are of interest to student service staff, and are of a high standard.

JANZSSA publishes both refereed and non-refereed papers:

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 (peer reviewed) Manuscripts:

JANZSSA uses a double-blind peer review process for refereed articles. 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 also remove other identifying information, and replace any such words or sentence with "words removed for purposes of author anonymity" 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:

1. That the manuscript be accepted (usually with minor amendments to be approved by the Editor/s of JANZSSA).
2. That the manuscript be revised and re-submitted with major amendments to be approved by the reviewers
3. That the manuscript not be accepted for the refereed section. (Reviewers may choose to recommend that it be accepted as a non-refereed manuscript, with or without amendments)

Reviewers may also choose to make annotations and suggested amendments within the body of the manuscript. Reviewers will be asked to ensure that their identities are not revealed in the track changes or annotations made as these may be sent back to the author/s. Referees will also return the electronic copy of the manuscript, 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 referees must be in agreement for an manuscript to be published as a refereed paper.

Non-refereed manuscripts:

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

Best practice case examples to show case:

JANZSSA includes 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.

A Showcase Best Practice Report Template is available from the Editors. See contact details below. Use of the template is not compulsory and is offered simply to assist if required.

Reports and reviews:

Reports on aspects of policy and practice within Student Services and the Post-Secondary Education sector are invited. Short reviews of books, articles, journals, reports which would be of general interest to JANZSSA readers are also very welcome.

Quality submissions:

All submissions for publication are required to comply with the layout requirements, and edited for grammar, punctuation and spelling accuracy prior to submission to the JANZSSA co-editors. Manuscripts will be returned to authors for corrections, if required, prior to consideration for publication or distributed for peer review.

Submission deadlines:

JANZSSA publishes issues in April and October each year.

Deadline for submission of non-refereed manuscripts, reports or reviews, and contributions to the section, Best Practice Case Examples to Show Case:
- February 14 for the April issue
- August 15 for the October issue.

Deadline for submission of refereed manuscripts:
- October 30 for the April issue
- April 30 for the October issue.

Enquiries:

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

JANZSSA Co-editors

Annie Andrews
Director, Counselling and Psychological Services
[CAPS]

Dr Cathy Stone
Conjoint Senior Lecturer
University of Newcastle

University of New South Wales   Ph: +61 410 348 794
Ph: +61 2 93855418   E-mail: cathy.stone@newcastle.edu.au
Email: a. andrews@unsw.edu.au

Before submitting your manuscript:

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

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 in full.

- 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 manuscript is for submission for the refereed section of JANZSSA).

ANZSSA Executive Team and Advisory Council

This group also functions as the Editorial Board of JANZSSA

Convenor of State and Regional Group Victoria	Convenor of State and Regional Group Queensland	Convenors of State and Regional Group Tasmania
Gordon D'Rosario Manager, Student Services Holmesglen TAFE Vic 3148 Ph: +61 3 9564 1649 Email: Gordon_DR@holmesglen.edu.au Christopher Jenkin Senior Counsellor/Psychologist Health Wellbeing and Development Caulfield Campus Monash University Vic 3162 Ph: 61 3 9903 2500 Email: Christopher.Jenkin@adm.monash.edu. au	Dr Eva-Marie Seeto Director, Student Wellbeing University of the Sunshine Coast +61 7 5459 4430 eseeto@usc.edu.au Chris Hepperlin Director, Student Support Services Queensland University of Technology +61 7 3138 5598 chris.hepperlin@qut.edu.au	Colin Clark Head of Student Wellbeing University of Tasmania Locked Bag 1335 Launceston, Tasmania. 7250 Ph: +61 3 63 243787 Email: colin.clark@utas.edu.au
Regional Convenor Coordinator	**International Exchange Coordinator**	**Co-editors of JANZSSA**
Vacant	Heather Mcleod heather.mcleod5@gmail.com	Annie Andrews Director, Counselling and Psychological Services [CAPS] University of New South Wales Ph: +61 2 93855418 Email: a.andrews@unsw.edu.au Dr Cathy Stone Conjoint Senior Lecturer University of Newcastle and consultant in higher education student experience Ph: +61 410 348 794 E-mail: cathy.stone@newcastle.edu.au copaconnect63@gmail.com Copy editing by Ruth McHugh ruth@squiddery.com
ANZSSA Conference Convenor Alison Dow Director, Pou Aroha Student Support Unitec Institute of Technology 139 Carrington Rd, Mt Albert Auckland 1025 New Zealand Private Bag 92025, Victoria St West Auckland 1142 New Zealand +64 9 815 4321 (ext: 7763) +64 021 305 564 adow@unitec.ac.nz	**Counsellors Professional Focus Group (Australia)** Jeremy Cass Manager, RMIT Counselling Service RMIT University City Campus Bldg 74 G.P.O. Box 2476V Melbourne 3001 +61 3 9925 4365 jeremy.cass@rmit.edu.au	**Counsellors Professional Focus Group (New Zealand)** Gerard Hoffman Manager, Student Counselling Service Victoria University of Wellington gerard.hoffman@vuw.ac.nz

Information about ANZSSA

The Australia and New Zealand Student Services Association provides development opportunities and sector representation for professional staff working in post secondary student engagement, student participation, student wellbeing and student development throughout Australia and New Zealand. Through meetings, seminars, workshops and conferences, experienced practitioners share information, ideas and research within their areas of expertise.

ANZSSA is focused on:

- The quality of the student experience
- Supporting and empowering students to achieve their educational and life goals
- Enhancing student wellbeing and development
- Improving student success and persistence
- Providing outreach to students at-risk
- Raising institutional student retention rates

Membership

Whilst ANZSSA is based in Australia and New Zealand, anyone is welcome to join us, no matter where you may be located. Full details of current membership categories and registration costs are available via the ANZSSA website members' page at www.anzssa.org

Belonging to ANZSSA will connect you to a community of professionals across many institutions and support areas – including:

International offices - Counselling - Health services - Housing services - Student guild advocates - Learning support - Grievance/Conflict Resolution officers - Chaplaincy and other faith officers - Careers - Academic advisors - Recreation services – First year experience and transition services - Mentor programs - Equity staff - Financial advisers - Student advisors - Disability support - Welfare advisors - Volunteer and leadership program coordinators - Directors and Heads of operational areas.

Professional Development Activities

The ANZSSA Biennial Conference attracts international participants as well as delegates from across Australia and New Zealand.

Regional and State meetings range from informal workshops to visiting speakers and annual conferences.

Members Discussion Board located on the ANZSSA web site at www.anzssa.org provides opportunities for members to share information and collaborate on programs and issues.

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.

Website

http://www.anzssa.org

The ANZSSA web site is a comprehensive resource offering a broad range of information to professionals working in student support and student services' roles.