Executive Summary

In February 2009, Professor John Hearn, DVC (International), The University of Sydney, established a Taskforce to investigate key issues affecting the international student experience (from enquiry to the end of first year) while studying at the University and to make practical recommendations on how to address the issues. This included identification of services accessed by international students: accommodation, quality, appropriate and timely provision of information, and issues concerned with social inclusion. The Taskforce comprised members from the International Office, Summer School, International Student Support Unit, CET, International House, International Student Liaison, SUPRA, SRC, University of Sydney Union, Alumni Relations, Sydney University Sport and Fitness and students. The Taskforce has met on six occasions and made 55 recommendations. The most important key issues and recommendations are provided below.

Key Issues

▶ **Access to affordable and appropriate housing (both short and long term) close to/on the campus was seen as the most important issue for international students.**

▶ **Travel Concessions.**

▶ **Students feeling unwelcome (from their arrival at the Airport to feeling lost on campus and perceiving a lack of assistance when encountering problems).**

▶ **Difficulty of obtaining relevant and accurate information about costs, job opportunities, salaries, temporary accommodation, course structures.**

▶ **Confusion regarding the range and benefits of the different Orientation programs.**

▶ **Language and cultural difficulties experienced by students.**

Key Recommendations

1.1 Address housing as an issue of risk to international student recruitment and USYD brand.

1.2 Continue to lobby the State Government for a transport concession for international students to allow them to seek accommodation further from the University.

1.3 Designate 200 beds (10%) on campus for guaranteed first year places or give priority to first year students for on-campus accommodation.

1.4 Introduce increased temporary short- term accommodation with a USYD Alumni/Staff home stay (up to three weeks) through the Australian Homestay Network program as soon as possible and/ or links to the existing USYD Accommodation database. Also offer an Introduction to Sydney program.

1.5 Significantly improve the assistance given to international students in finding accommodation by updating the USYD database and employing more full time staff**.**

1.6 Review the relevant websites to ensure easy navigation, and provision of comprehensive up-to-date information for students and agents which addresses their needs.

1.7   Ensure a positive onshore reaction to the USYD brand by introducing a meet/ greet at the international airport by USYD student/staff volunteers (and native speakers) and/or provide Free Airport pick up for new students.

1.8   Provide an ongoing lounge (meeting place) for international students.

1.9   Review content and format of the orientation sessions and programs, distinguish the benefits of each and communicate these to students.

1.10   Improve the level of cultural understanding and customer service of Faculty Administrators through a new training program.

1.11   Develop a new CET curriculum and additional English support classes for "at risk " students.

1.12   Implement a training program for new supervisors and research students to ensure a consistently high standard of supervision across the University.

1.13   Introduce specific training for teachers of international students and recognition in the teaching load calculations of additional work required of teachers of international students.

1.14   Organise more networking opportunities, social programs and relevant excursions during O week and orientation.

1.15   Appoint a Dean/Director of Graduate Studies to ensure a high standard of assistance to Postgraduate international research students across the university.

1.16   Annually benchmark the USYD student experience against world and Australian universities, using independent research such as the International Student Barometer.

Introduction

In February 2009, Professor John Hearn, DVC (International), The University of Sydney established a Taskforce to investigate key issues affecting the international student experience (from enquiry to the end of first year) while studying at the University. This included identification of services accessed by international students. Specifically, the level of awareness, importance, use and satisfaction with these services. The scope of the Taskforce included accommodation, social inclusion and quality and appropriate and timely provision of information (*see* Appendix 1 for the Terms of Reference). The Taskforce was asked to provide practical recommendations on how to address the issues.

The Taskforce was chaired by Dr Jillian Stewart, Director, International Services Development, and comprised members from the International Office, International Student Support Unit, CET, International House, SUPRA, SRC, University of Sydney Union, Alumni Sydney Uni Sport and Fitness and students (*See* Appendix 1 for a list of members).

The Taskforce has met on six occasions and had three presentations: Mr David Bennett (Associate Director, Portfolio Properties, Investment & Capital Management); Ms Vlasta Haub (Accommodation Officer); and one from Mr Dennis Smith (Manager, University Security).

A survey on the experiences of newly arrived international students (NAISS) was distributed to 1,100 students at the Orientation programs in February 2009, seeking to identify the reasons for choosing to study at The University of Sydney, the level of importance and satisfaction with pre-departure information, airport arrival and daily information sessions and accommodation issues (*see* Attachment 3). Additional research was also tabled at the meeting (*see* Appendix 2 for a full list).

The Final Report follows the key issues identified in the terms of reference: student accommodation, quality, accessibility and timeliness of information and social inclusion and integration into the University community.

Recommendations marked with an asterisk (*****) are recommended to be implemented in time for commencement of second semester, 2009. The remainder are more long-term.

1.   *Student Accommodation*
Access to affordable and appropriate housing (both short- and long-term) close to/on the campus was seen as the most important issue for international students and for 38% of the surveyed (NAISS) students, their most unsatisfying experience.

The Taskforce noted there is only limited temporary accommodation on campus at the Residential Colleges (2,472 beds) prior to commencement of the semester. Students need to book directly with each of the Residential Colleges for either temporary or permanent accommodation or find their own temporary accommodation prior to arrival. Research (NAISS) indicated that students found housing through external websites (37%), the University database website (30%), relatives/friends (28%), and real estate agents (11%). In addition, 38% of the surveyed students found hunting for accommodation to be their most unsatisfying experience.

Key Issues
(a) Student organisations and ISSU indicated that students wanted a guaranteed place to live, the University to rent accommodation for them, and assistance in evaluating/looking at potential accommodation. They noted students were unaware of their rights as tenants and how to go about looking for accommodation and were

unfamiliar with real estate terms. There was a reluctance among agents to rent to students because of a lack of financial documentation. Internet scams were frequent, with either the paid room being non-existent on arrival, or students were provided with overcrowded and expensive accommodation and locked into an expensive 6-month lease. Costs and advice regarding accommodation were frequently out of date and there was limited information about other appropriate commercial websites. The lack of a transport concession and the high cost of transport prevented students from looking at less expensive accommodation further from the University.

RECOMMENDATION

1A   Housing should be addressed as an issue of risk to international student recruitment and to the University brand.

1.1***** There is a need to build additional accommodation as soon as possible.

1.2   Continue to lobby the State Government for a transport concession for international students.

1.3   A demand study should be completed as soon as possible on accommodation needs (Price Waterhouse has quoted $80,000, and then an audit of the study is required, approximately $80,000).

1.4   Investigate temporary ways of increasing accommodation, eg, Queen Elizabeth Nurses Home.

1.5***** A quick fix would be to ask for 200 beds on campus designated for guaranteed first year places or give priority to first year students for on-campus accommodation.

1.6   Investigate increasing temporary accommodation by providing a USYD homestay, offered by alumni and staff (short term, eg, weekend, one week, 3 weeks, one semester or one year) which could be added to the existing USYD website or use a commercial provider such as Australian Homestay Network.

1.7***** Include commercial accommodation websites, including Chinese and other ones, on the ISSU website and update costs and advice prior to the commencement of each semester.

1.8***** Review contents of Housing Officer Student Pack and provide additional information: A personalised pack for new students called *Pre-rental Pack,* including confirmation of enrolment, tips for renters, real estate terms, students responsibilities, standard rental contract, and up-to-date and realistic information on rental costs. Include new multilingual *Rental Rights* flyer on the website and in the Pack.

1.9***** Ensure agents and students understand the need to book temporary accommodation rather than permanent accommodation (unless on campus) prior to arrival.

(b)   Students cannot access the University website for temporary/permanent accommodation until after they have received a Unikey number. This is usually provided on enrolment, but is available beforehand, however, this is not emphasised to students for fear of overwhelming CIS. The USYD student housing database does not check on either the landlords or that the standard of accommodation matched what was described. The Taskforce was aware there were insufficient staff to do so, but was concerned about the legal implications to the University of this practice. The database has not had any major updates since 2000. The Housing Officers work for 8 weeks each half year, 6 weeks before the start of semester, and 2 weeks into each semester. For most of that time, 2 staff are employed part-time.

RECOMMENDATION

1B   Significantly improve the assistance given to international students to find suitable accommodation.

1.10***** Increase the staffing level of the accommodation service by one additional full-time staff member to provide a wider range of services for students.

1.11 Consider redeveloping the USYD database to allow students to access the "temporary listings" prior to arrival, by using their COE reference number.

1.12 ICT to provide a system-wide strategy to address the issue of providing the Unikey prior to enrolment.

1.13***** Investigate using alumni volunteers to assist students to assess accommodation and/or inspect accommodation listed on database.

1.14 Centralise the on-campus accommodation booking service.

1.15***** Have networking opportunities at each daily information session (rather than once a week) to assist students to find flatmates.

1.16***** Upgrade the database to include standard contracts for all people advertising, including standards students are expected to comply with, photographs of listings, reviews by previous tenants.

1.17 Include a specified number of maintenance hours in the next USYD Database Hosting Agreement.

1.18***** Maintain links with a group of real estate agents who are supportive to international students.

2.   *Quality, Accessibility and Timeliness of Information*

International students need to have access to relevant, accurate and easily accessible information about University programs, application and acceptance procedures, pre-departure, accommodation, job opportunities, arrival sessions and orientation programs.

Key Issues

(a) *Student Issues*: Students have indicated some Agents are providing inadequate or inaccurate information about life in Sydney prior to application, particularly concerning job availability, salary levels and accommodation costs. Research (NAISS) indicated that although the pre-departure information (*Road to Success* and *Things to Do Before Leaving Home*) was comprehensive, 40% of students were not getting the pre-departure pack. Agents were not passing information packs on with the Confirmation of Offer letter.

RECOMMENDATION

2A   Review websites to ensure easy navigation and comprehensive, up-to-date information for students and Agents which addresses their needs; consider pre-departure information sessions in the home country; and monitor accuracy of information.

2.1***** Improve the navigation and design of the website for pre-arrival, arrival, daily information sessions, orientation and student assistance.

2.2   Organise pre-departure information sessions in major cities in key home countries, either by the Agents or alumni. Include information about immigration process and requirements, paperwork required, customs issues, need for temporary accommodation, or prepare pre-departure packs for Agents to brief their students.

2.3***** Send HTML file of *Road to Success* and *Things To Do Before Leaving Home* with all Offer/CoE letters and have them in an easy to find place on the website.

2.4***** Include a question on the annual Hobson's International Student Survey regarding the adequacy and accuracy of Agent's information.

(b) There is a perception of a lack of Scholarships for international students and information about Scholarships is not easy to find on the International website. Students perceived a lack of options for healthcare as only one provider is given on the website (the University has a preferred provider contract for the next three years in accordance with the Medicare Health Insurance for International Students). Students indicated that it is difficult to find Faculty advice about course structures prior to arrival.

RECOMMENDATION

2B   Improve web information on scholarships, health providers and course structures.

2.5***** Discuss with the DVC (International) the possibility of increasing the scholarships for international students.

2.6***** Provide clear and easily accessible web information about scholarships for international students.

2.7***** Identify on the website that there is a choice of health care providers.

2.8   Discuss with Faculties the possibility of including more information about course structures on their website, eg, requirements for majors and unit of study outlines (available to Unikey holders only), and feedback about units (eg, see the history website).

3.   *Social Inclusion and Integration into the University Community*

Recent research (*Sawir, E, et al, 2007*) indicates International students are more likely than local students to experience loneliness and depression while at an Australian university. There is a need to ensure international students are made to feel welcome, as well as a duty of care to ensure they are assisted in making friends and fitting into the University community as soon as possible.

Key Issues

NAISS and student organisations indicated students felt unwelcome from their arrival at the Airport to feeling lost on the campus and perceiving a lack of assistance when encountering problems within the university; confusion regarding the range and benefits of the different Orientation programs; no dedicated international student space; and language difficulties. Safety issues were also a concern.

(a) Students perceived a lack of assistance on arrival at the Airport (they are currently requested to go to the Airport Reception Desk and then arrange their own transport). Most other Go8 universities provide a free shuttle bus. There was a lack of awareness of the Airport Reception Desk which links back to students not receiving the pre-departure pack and insufficient information on the web. The NAISS Survey revealed only 32% of students surveyed used it (some reported it closed). Students also indicated there was a lack of USYD-specific knowledge at the Reception Desk. The treatment of international students by customs at the Airport was raised by student organisations. Students who have not yet organised temporary accommodation (which they can do once they clear Customs) are frequently given extra attention by Immigration Officers.

RECOMMENDATION

3A Ensure a positive onshore reaction to the USYD brand by providing USYD student/staff volunteers (and native speakers) to meet/greet at the Airport and/or provide Free Airport pickup for new students.

3.1***** Introduce USYD student/staff volunteers (and native speakers) meet/greet Airport service providing assistance to students to catch the right transport, answering questions, providing information on daily arrival sessions and make an ongoing appointment to meet up with the student on the campus.

3.2 Free Airport pickup for new students should be negotiated with a private company and funded from international student income.

3.3 Investigate the possibility of having a dedicated student line at Immigration. (This has been investigated, but is not possible.)

(b) Student organisations, ISSU and recent research (NAISS) have indicated that students sometimes feel lost on the large campus and that new students felt there was no-one they could ask for practical information on campus. There was no centralised place where students could go to meet others, hang out and find out information. There is no storage space for luggage for new arrivals. NAISS research indicated 58% of full degree students filling in the survey did not attend the Daily Information Sessions. There was the perception, "I've been to one, that's enough", and that they were boring and repetitive. There is no way of tracking who has had all the Orientation information). Student organisations reported the current signage for ISSU, IO and CET in the Jane Foss Russell and the Wentworth Buildings is inadequate.

RECOMMENDATION

3B Review content and format of the orientation sessions and programs, distinguish the benefits of each and communicate these to students and provide a meeting place for international students.

3.4***** Provide a temporary venue for international students to meet until the location of a permanent one is decided. It should have extended opening hours and include wireless broadband, brochures, a base for international clubs, clubs, library, luggage storage, information booth, representatives from Faculties at agreed times, and student volunteers.

3.5***** Provide students with clear information regarding the types of Orientation sessions available – International, General and Faculty – and what they will gain from each.

3.6***** Review the international orientation program to ensure sessions are interesting, and relevant to increase the student satisfaction levels, eg, incorporate networking opportunities at each daily information session to assist students to find flatmates. There is a duty of care to provide information on Safety and Security, Visa information, and cultural adjustment.

3.7***** Consider renaming the Orientation programs to avoid confusion.

3.8***** Contact Facilities and ensure appropriate signage is added to ISSU, IO, and CET.

(c) Students and student organisations perceived a lack of assistance when encountering problems within the University. Language and cultural difficulties, unfamiliar administrative procedures (lack of knowledge about special consideration) mean international students are very vulnerable. There is a lack of timeliness in decisions about special consideration/appeals, exclusions frequently occur mid-semester (fees are refundable, but not living costs). Students are distressed by discourteous, unhelpful and sometimes offensive treatment they have received at the Faculty level when they have gone for assistance. Research students often face language difficulties and cultural difficulties, engaging with their supervisor, understanding the task, and what to do if things are not going well.

RECOMMENDATION

3C   **Improve the level of understanding and customer service of Faculty Administrators, and the level of understanding of students regarding special consideration, and implement a training program for supervisors and research students.**

3.9*****   Incorporate cultural sensitivity training into Orientation programs for all new academic and administrative staff to promote a more caring climate within the University.

3.10***** Design ongoing training in cultural sensitivity and ways to assist international students for customer service staff at the Faulty level and monitor this through the annual PM&D.

3.11   Include verbal and written information at Faculty orientation about special consideration; run articles in the student press; and discuss with Deans the timeliness in resolving special considerations and appeals.

3.12   Implement a training program for new supervisors which includes a mentoring program where experienced and successful supervisors guide new supervisors to successful completion of their students.

3.13***** Provide more information to research students on the nature of the student/supervisor relationship, what to expect, and who to go to if there are difficulties, and regularly monitor their situation.

3.14   Appoint a Director of Graduate Studies to ensure a high standard of supervision across the University.

(d)   Faculties have identified language difficulties among PG Coursework students. IELTS and CET eTests are not meeting the specialised language needs of particular Faculties, particularly Economics and Business. Undergraduate international students, having passed the HSC English level, are facing similar issues with students struggling with university level study and social inclusion. Difficulty in finding all the additional ELS support on the USYD website.

RECOMMENDATION

3D   **Develop a new CET curriculum that addresses Postgraduate university needs and provide additional support classes for students at risk, specific training for teachers of international students, and recognition in the teaching load calculations of additional work required of teachers of international students.**

3.15   CET develop a new curriculum that is more appropriate to Faculty needs.

3.16   Explore the possibility of amending admission procedures for international students who have obtained the HSC to include an IELTS test or provide ongoing English support for these students.

3.17   Faculties consider developing a training program for teachers who are faced with teaching classes of predominately international students and consider adjusting the teaching load model to reflect the additional difficulty and time needed for correction and consultation for international students.

3.18   CET be asked to provide some additional English support classes to students identified by the Faculties as "at risk".

3.19***** USYD and CET website to include a list of ESL support offered by various Faculties.

(e)   Students identified a gap between O Week and Orientation when nothing much happened. The NAISS research indicated students wanted more networking opportunities with other overseas students to find out how to adjust to the western culture, more information about transport, enrolment information, obtaining a driving license, where to find bargain/furniture shops.

RECOMMENDATION

3E   **Further extend the networking opportunities, social programs and relevant excursions during O Week and Orientation.**

3.20***** Organise a social program, trips, supporting tours to discount outlets, markets, etc in the week between O Week and Orientation.

3.21***** Ensure that a session at Orientation and/or during the early part of the semester on adjusting to western culture is provided by native speakers for key ethnic groups. (Perhaps run by the relevant club/society.)

3.22***** Alumni BBQs to introduce international students to Australian family lifestyle.

(f)   **While "Safety Issues" have always been an important session during Orientation programs, it was felt that in the present climate there was a need to re-emphasise personal safety.**

RECOMMENDATION

3.23***** ISSU and Security will organise a monthly Safety Seminar for all students covering crime prevention, safety issues, and topics they raise. These seminars will be promoted through the SRU, Clubs, and societies.

3.24   ISSU will work with UTS and Security to develop a precinct plan.

(g)   **Although Online Surveys on the student experience were regularly conducted by ISSU, there is no capacity to benchmark against other universities and limited resources to design and analyse comprehensive surveys with large numbers of respondents.**

RECOMMENDATION

3G   **Introduce independent annual surveys of the student experience.**

3.25 An independent survey on assessment of the student experience be completed annually to enable benchmarking against world and Australian universities (for instance, the International Student Barometer) and the results posted on the USYD website.

Dr Jillian Stewart
Chair

Appendix 1

Terms of Reference

Objectives
To review the international student experience at The University of Sydney and make recommendations to improve the experience.

Scope
The International Student Development Taskforce will examine and provide recommended strategies to Professor Hearn on the following elements of the international student's experience:

▶ accommodation;
▶ quality and access of information which includes enquiry, application, acceptance, pre-departure, arrival and orientation; and
▶ social inclusion and integration into the University community.

The Task
The Report should provide:
i. identification of services accessed by international students, specifically the level of awareness, importance, use and satisfaction with these services; and
ii. identification of practical strategies the University can implement to improve the delivery of such services, including coordination of services.

Membership
Dr Jillian Stewart, Director, International Services Development *(Chair)*
Mr Peter Ball, Director, International Office
Mr Paul McJannett, CEO, The University of Sydney Union
Mr Alistair Cowie, Director, Student Programs USU
Ms Charleen Griffiths, Acting Director, International House
Ms Lidia Nemitschenko, Head, International Student Support Unit
Mr Kirk Doyle, A/Deputy Director (Government & Student Relations), International Office
Dr Jeffrey Quinn, Director, Centre for English Language (CET)
Mr Rashmi Kumar, President, SUPRA
Ms Charlotte Long, Casework and Policy Manager, SRC
Dr Yinghui Liu, International Student Liaison, Office of the DVC International
Mr Ross Xenos Marketing & Membership Manager, Sydney Uni Sport and Fitness
Mr Sam Greenland, SUPRA
Mr Adrian Cardinali, Student Advice & Advocacy Officer
Ms Hazel Baker, Alumni Relations Programs Officer
Mr Chihong Choi, SUPRA

Observer: Ms Debbie Bowman, Executive Officer, VC & Senior Executive

Meetings
▶ Wednesday March 4, 2009, 9.00-12.00noon (Old Teachers College Room 330)
▶ Wednesday, March 25, 2009, 9.00-12.00noon (Old Teachers College Room 330)
▶ Thursday, April 16, 2009, 2.00-4.45pm (Old Teachers College Room 330)
▶ Wednesday, April 29, 2009, 9.00-11.00am (Old Teachers College Room 330)
▶ Wednesday May 13, 2009, 1.30-3.30pm (Old Teachers College Room 330)
▶ Friday June 12, 2009, 9.30-11.00am, (Jane Foss Russell Building Meeting Room 1)

Appendix 2

Presentations

Mr David Bennett, Associate Director, Portfolio Properties, Investment & Capital Management

Ms Vlasta Haub, Accommodation Officer

Mr Dennis Smith, Manager University Security

Bibliography

Cowie Alistair   The International Student Benefits Post VSU: The University of Sydney
                   Experience The University of Sydney Union
                   Programs Department – Working Papers, 2008

Hobsons   International Student Survey 2008

ISSU   Orientation Online Surveys 2007, 2008

Liu Yinghui   University of Sydney, New Arrival International Student Survey Report,
                   April 2009. Office of the DVC (International)

Sawir, E., et al   Loneliness and International Students: An Australian Study, *Journal of
                   Studies in International Education,* 2007

Appendix 3

Liu Yinghui   University of Sydney, New Arrival International Student Survey
                  April 2009. Office of the DVC (International)

                  Conclusions and Recommendations

Appendix 3

University of Sydney
New Arrival International Student Survey

The University of Sydney is conducting this survey to gain feedback about your experiences (pre-arrival, arrival and orientation) at the University. Your feedback is critical to let us know how well we are supporting you and where we can improve or develop our services to enhance your study experience.

The survey is confidential. You do NOT need to put your name on your survey. Participants will not be identified in any way. The survey will take about 5 minutes to complete.

If you wish to discuss any aspect of the survey, please contact Yinghui Liu on (02) 9036 7513 or email yinghui.liu@usyd.edu.au

Section 1   Personal Details

Your gender   ☐ Male   ☐ Female

Your current study degree   ☐ Undergraduate   ☐ Postgraduate   ☐ Other

Your first language   ☐ English   ☐ Other

Your home country   [_____]

Section 2   Study Location Decisions (Reasons for choosing USYD)

Please indicate the importance of the following factors in your decision to study in the Sydney University:

Items	Importance					Not applicable
	Low		Moderate		High	
Qualification is recognized in home country	1	2	3	4	5	☐
Good academic reputation	1	2	3	4	5	☐
Good international student services	1	2	3	4	5	☐
Location & climate	1	2	3	4	5	☐
Cost of living	1	2	3	4	5	☐
Tuition fees	1	2	3	4	5	☐
Education facilities	1	2	3	4	5	☐
Safe environment	1	2	3	4	5	☐
Education agent's recommendation	1	2	3	4	5	☐
Friendly multicultural environment	1	2	3	4	5	☐

Section 3   Pre Departure / Airport Arrival/ Daily Arrival Feedback

1. Did you receive the International Student Guide:
**   Your Road to Success**   Yes ☐   No ☐

2. Did you use the Airport Arrival Desk?   Yes ☐   No ☐

3. Did you attend the Daily Arrival Session?   Yes ☐   No ☐

4. Please indicate the importance and satisfaction with the following information

Information & Activity	Importance to me					My satisfaction				
	Low	Moderate			High	Low	Moderate			High
Pre-departure information package *	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Airport arrival welcome information package**	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Daily arrival sessions										
Banking	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Safety and Security	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Enrolment	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Housing	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Academic advice	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Visa requirement	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Oversea Student Health Cover	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Public Transportation	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Information about ISSU	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5

- ***Pre-departure information pack** (International student guide: Your road to success/the 'things to do before you leave home/accommodation information/)

5. What other information would you find helpful?

Section 4   Other new student experience related information

1. Which of these university organizations have you heard of?

Yes   No

Yes	No	
☐	☐	International Student Support Unite (ISSU)
☐	☐	International Office
☐	☐	Student Association
☐	☐	Student Union
☐	☐	Supra/SRC

2. Please identify the activities and information you would like available for international students:

	Low		**Moderate**		**High**	**Other**
Ongoing English language training program	1	2	3	4	5	☐
Information sessions / seminars (jobs/culture/migration etc)	1	2	3	4	5	☐
Social activities (eg. BBQ, functions etc.)	1	2	3	4	5	☐
Sports & entertainment	1	2	3	4	5	☐
Sightseeing trips	1	2	3	4	5	☐
network opportunities with local students	1	2	3	4	5	☐
network opportunities older international students	1	2	3	4	5	☐
mentoring programs	1	2	3	4	5	☐

3. What other activities would you like?

4. Please indicate your overall satisfaction with the following information

Items	*Very* Unsatisfied	Unsatisfied	Satisfied	Very Satisfied
Before arrival	☐	☐	☐	☐
After arrival	☐	☐	☐	☐

Section 5   Accommodation

1. *Please indicate the type of your current accommodation*

☐ Temporary accommodation on campus
☐ Temporary accommodation (Hotel/motel/hostel)
☐ Living in friend's place
☐ Permanent accommodation on campus (by contract)
☐ Permanent accommodation off campus
☐ Other, please indicate _____

2. Please indicate the main ways you searched for your accommodation.
You can tick more than one

☐ ISSU Housing officer recommendation
☐ USYD Website
☐ Education Agent
☐ Newspaper
☐ Other website
☐ Relatives or Friends
☐ Real-estate Agent
☐ Other, please to indicate _____

3. If you have not found permanent accommodation the reason is
☐ I don't know where to start
☐ Not enough information available
☐ I don't have enough time to search
☐ I am not satisfied with the accommodation places I visited (quality/price/location)
☐ Other, please indicate_____

4. Please share with us your most satisfying experience

5. Please tell us what has been your most unsatisfying experience

Thank you for your time and co-operation

New Arrival International Student Survey
Office of Deputy Vice Chancellor (International)

New Arrival International Student Report

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In the survey, we primarily set out to investigate the importance of various factors influencing international students' decisions to study at the University of Sydney. A secondary intention of this survey has been to obtain a clearer understanding of how students valued the pre-arrival and post-arrival services with regards to information they received and activities they attended. Thirdly, we wanted to know what kind of activities international students would like to have in campus, especially testing the difference between three groups (full degree Asian students and non-Asian students; SA/Exchange non-Asian students). The fourth aim of this survey is to obtain better information about the accommodation related issues facing new International students.

4.1   Summary of the Findings:

4.1.1   Findings for important reasons to choose study at the University of Sydney

➢ *Good academic reputation* and *qualification is recognized in home country* are the very important and significant reasons that influence full degree Asian students' decisions.

➢ *Good academic reputation* and *location & climate* have a strong important influence upon non-Asian students (both full degree or SA/Exchange students) in their decisions to study at the University of Sydney. *Location & climate* is a very significantly important factor for SA/Exchange non-Asian students who ranked this factor as the top one. This factor is not significantly important for full degree Asian students.

➢ *Education facilities* is an important factor for full degree students, especially for Asian students. In addition to this factor, *Qualification is recognized in home country* and *Friendly multicultural environment* are equal important to all non-Asian students.

➢ Other factors such as *Friendly multicultural environment, good international student services,* and *safe environment* are of medium importance as attractants to all international students.

➢ *Living costs* and *tuition fees* were the least important factors and *education agent's recommendation* was found to be significantly unimportant in attracting international students to choose the University of Sydney.

➢ Furthermore, our test results provide strong evidence that International Students from different countries of origin and different types of study (full degree, SA/Exchange etc.) have significant differences regarding the important reason preferences to study at University.

4.1.2   Findings for Pre Departure/Airport Arrival/Daily Arrival activities

➢ 38% international students (42% full degree, 32% SA/Exchange) cannot receive the *IS Guide* from University at Pre-departure. 68% (70% full degree, 67% SA/Exchange) did not use the *Airport Arrival Desk*. 63% (full degree 58%, SA/Exchange 68%) did not attend the *daily arrival* sessions. The majority of students who did not receive the *IS Guide* are full degree Asian students and most SA/Exchange students did not attend *daily arrival*. sessions.

➢ With regards to information provided during the *daily arrival* sessions international students ranked *enrolment, housing* and *public transportation* as the very important information for them to know. Other information is of medium importance.

➢ Full degree Asian students considered the information in this section as important by ranking each item more than 4 point (5 is maximum) except information for *faculty welcome* and *ISSU*, which both ranked below 4 at 3.93. Full degree non-Asian students valued most information from the daily sessions lower than Full degree Asian students but higher than SA/Exchange non-Asian students. The latter only ranked two information items as important (above the average of 4); the others are all below the average mean of 4.

➢ The majority satisfaction levels for each item are lower than the 'importance level' (especially with regards to the information ranked highly important, the satisfaction level of each were comparatively lower).

4.1.3   Findings for other new student experience related information

➢ More than 70% of international students have never heard of SUPRA/SRC and student associations; nearly 40% did not know about the Student Union and 70% did not know about student organisations.

➢ In terms of extra curriculum activities, Asian students prefer *network opportunities*, useful *information sessions* (immigration, part time job opportunities , job search and

how to prepare a CV.) *mentoring* and *ongoing English training program*). Non-Asian students prefer to have social activities, *sightseeing* and *sports & entertainment*.

➢ The majority of new international students were satisfied with the study environmen*t* and campus facilities but not satisfied with the available information, searching for accommodation and complicated enrolment procedures

4.1.4 Findings for accommodation issues

Many students (50%) cannot find permanent accommodation before the semester commenced. Students stayed in a friend's place, a hotel or other temporary accommodation. The reasons given for continuing in temporary position were: *they can not find a satisfactory place, did not have time to search or did not have enough information about renting.* The main method for international students to find accommodation is from *non-University websites*, (37%). Only 31% students used the University website and 10% of students consulted ISSU.

4.2   Implications and Recommendations

4.2.1   Information for new students should be clearer and easier to access

1. The information provided to new students should be clear, concise and should direct them to understand the first few enrolment steps. It is important to understand from their point of view the problems and how these can be fixed. Different groups of student have different focused areas, so a 'one model fits all' format will not meet different groups of students' expectations.

2. Orientations (ISSU, Union, faculty) should be well organized (cover more important information clearly and not repeat each other).

3. Orientations (ISSU, Union, faculty) need to attract more students to attend and should be a priority action for consideration by relevant departments.

4.2.2   The University should ensure the majority of new students receive or know about the *Road to Success Guide*.

Regarding pre-departure, a problem is that nearly 40% students did not/cannot receive or, do not know about the *RTS Guide.*

4. Improve the website to allow students to look at or download information would be an easier way to ensure all students receive the information rather than email than as the files may be too large to access.

5. It is suggested that before the semester commences, the University should put a **flash** notice on the main page to attract new student's attention and linking this flash to the new international student section will be worthwhile.

The Airport Arrival Desk is important for new students. However, only 32% of students used it, possibly because they did not know of its existence.

6. The University of Sydney should treat this service as the first important "window of opportunity" to meet the new overseas students and reinforce the branding of the university as the premier university in Australia by providing exceptional service

7. Some information packages relevant to the next steps can be distributed from the desk and some basic information flyers that can help students with their enrolment should also be distributed at the desk.

Students reflected that they sometime felt lost in the campus, some felt there was no one they could ask for practical information on campus. In addition, a large number of new students arrived at University after the main orientations.

8. A Welcome Centre or International Student Lounge should be established inside campus in a convenient venue. Such a centre would give a strong focus to international students allowing them an identifiable area "belonging to them" from where all questions could be asked and most answered.

4.2.3. Recognition of organizations to help new international students

Some organizations can very effectively assist new students to settle down, such as international student clubs (Chinese Student Association, Singapore Student Clubs etc.). Using these clubs is another very efficient and easy way to help new students just by providing opportunities for students to engage with them. In this sense, orientation (ISSU) and O-week (USU) should help to actively create opportunities for students to know each other within their own cultural clubs.

9. A student welcome party which includes a session by experienced students on understanding the differences between China (or the relevant country) and Australia,

sharing practical experiences about the western way of life, answering new students questions and recommending multicultural activities should be part of the orientation week activity.

In March 2009, supported by Professor John Hearn, the Sydney University Chinese Student Association (SUCSA) held a big welcome party which gathered 450 new students, the party introduction was in Chinese and students were introduced to practical experiences and urgent questions answered. By understanding the difference between two countries, it will be easier to help new students. At this function they could meet old students and built up long term relationships during their studies, and learn how to access and adapt western style of life. Multicultural activities will be recommended by experienced students.

SUPRA/SRC's main tasks are helping students, but only 23% of students recognized those organizations.

10. SUPRA and SRC need to improve student awareness of them and their function, or otherwise how can they help students? There is also a big concern that postgraduate students normally study in the University for one year, so it is better to let this group to know about these organizations at the earliest opportunity.

4.2.4. Need to consider organizing useful development sessions during semester

From the survey we can draw a conclusion that students, especially Asian students, want to have *network opportunities, information sessions* and *social activities plus free English training program*, but who can assist with these wishes? Most of the clubs in USU are not engaged in these activities. This is the big need gap and is a widely neglected area that no part of the University or clubs in general offer solutions for.

11. There is a need to establish a specific working group (not volunteer but University staff supported by University directly such as an international student liaison or representative) especially to consider and organize these activities to fill in this gap.

4.2.5 Accommodation issues

Most international students may have difficulty in finding accommodation when they just arrive, knowing nothing and lacking information. After a certain period (month or so) they could decide and search for their own desired accommodation by themselves independently or live (share) with friends.

12. University should improve services in this fundamentally important area. by providing easier and open access to University of Sydney website accommodation services and more information linkages to other useful website.

4.3   Conclusion

The results of the survey indicate that University of Sydney services for new students are in need of improvements in service quality and breadth of information. The recommendations in this report should be implemented as soon as practical and services should be monitored annually and regular surveys undertaken to assist the university to track where it is in relation to these matters and avoid the danger of complacency.

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