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Managing and resourcing a program of social integration initiatives for international university students: what are the benefits?

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There has been much concern in the higher education sector recently about the well-being and the safety of slightly more than 200,000 international students studying in higher education in Australia. In recognition of the economic and socio-cultural value of the international student cohort, as well as the significant challenge and risk of studying away from family and friends in a foreign community, CQUniversity has focused for the last two years on improving social integration for over 5000 international students. These students are studying at CQUniversity metropolitan campuses in Brisbane, Gold Coast, Melbourne and Sydney, which are popular destinations for international students. Initiatives to enhance social integration for these students were achieved in partnership with the local community, staff and other students. This paper reports the results of a survey of 446 CQUniversity international students who have had access to these enhanced opportunities for integration as well as a focus-group discussion with staff and students. Results determine the success of these initiatives from the perspective of students as well as key staff and identify further initiatives considered beneficial to supporting continuing social integration.

Keywords: international students; social integration; student surveys

Introduction

In an increasingly competitive global higher education market, the quality of the overall experience of an overseas study sojourn is a vital consideration if Australia is to sustain its considerable income from this ‘onshore’ export. The recent collapse of a number of Australian vocational education colleges such Global College (Thaindian News [ANI], 2009), Sterling College (Lauder, 2010), Meridian International School (Ross, 2009) and Geos College (Lauder, 2010) has emphasised the fragility of this international market and re-focused regulators and providers on the quality of services provided for international students. Aside from the economic benefits, the presence of students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds in our universities allows for intercultural interactions and learning as well as the development of global networks so pivotal for successful engagement in the knowledge society (Kell & Vogel, 2008; Mahat & Hourigan, 2007). In recognition of the economic and socio-cultural value of the international student cohort, most universities now provide student services departments where specialist staff work to ensure international students receive support and guidance in extra-curricular matters associated with an overseas study experience including accommodation, part-time work and general welfare. Many universities also seek to engage international students in

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planned social and learning activities with other students, staff and the local community to promote a sense of belonging critical to the well-being of these students. This paper evaluates the recent efforts of CQUniversity to enhance the social integration and welfare of its international students enrolled in metropolitan campuses at Brisbane, Gold Coast, Melbourne and Sydney and discusses the relevance of such activities to the sustainability of the tertiary international education sector.

Background

This paper explores how Australian universities are able to provide a socially integrated educational experience for approximately 200,000 (Australian Education International [AEI], 2009a) international students currently enrolled in onshore undergraduate and post-graduate programs. Social integration has been identified as a critical factor supporting successful, engaging and satisfying learning experiences (Dunstan, 2009; Love & Love, 1995; Lowis & Castley, 2008). Social integration involves interpersonal connectedness (Ware, Hopper, Tugenberg, Dickey & Fisher, 2008) and is frequently measured by '... individual self-reports of the numbers and types of social relationships, the extent of participation in social activities, or the perception of being an integrated member of the community' (Cohen, Brissett, Skoner & Doyle, 2005, n.p.). Much work in defining social integration has been undertaken in the field of sociology, particularly in relation to mental and physical well-being, and classic studies have demonstrated that socially-integrated people have less risk of suicide and mental illness (see Durkheim, 1897/1951; Faris, 1934). As international students commonly experience comprehensive social separation and isolation as they move from their familiar community into the unknown (Baker & Hawkins, 2006; Seah, 2008), social integration is a critical consideration for them and cannot be assumed to happen spontaneously when they enrol in a university study program in Australia. As social integration or interconnectedness is essential to mental and emotional health and supports better learning outcomes (Severiens & Wolff, 2008), Australian universities are under pressure to support the social integration of their increasingly diverse student populations.

Australia competes successfully with the UK, USA, Canada and New Zealand as the study destination of choice for large numbers of overseas students in domestic schools, colleges and universities. However, it can be argued that the internationalisation of education in Australia may be a predominantly one-way process, with only 1% of Australian students in higher education going overseas to study (AEI, 2009b) and comparatively small numbers studying languages other than English (Clyne, Pauwels, & Sussex, 2007; Crabbe, S., 2007; Healy, 2009). The comparative disinterest and/or inexperience of Australian students in relation to overseas study and study of second languages may also partly explain their reported reluctance or inability to interact effectively with their international colleagues studying alongside them, despite the desires of international students to make local friends (Marginson, 2008). The frequently noted tendency for international students to gravitate towards same-culture groups is problematic here as whilst this engagement helps ease transitional challenges (Lin, 2006), it does not assist international students to integrate with their domestic counterparts and continue to develop their English communication skills (Colvin & Fossil, 2007; Erlenawati, 2009).

International students have made up a steadily growing percentage of total enrolments in the Australian university sector moving from under 19% of all enrolments in 2001 to over 25% in 2007 (Ross, 2008, p. 6). Although the growing presence of culturally and linguistically diverse international students in our Australian universities offers an important

opportunity for ‘cosmopolitan learning’ or learning how ‘things could be otherwise’ (Rizvi, 2006, p. 30), Australian students and teachers may not yet fully appreciate or be able to exploit the resource and opportunity international students bring to the domestic university learning and teaching context. Australian universities with enrolments of both domestic and international students continue to undertake various activities in and out of the classrooms to encourage interaction between the cohorts with only limited success (Marginson, 2008; Sawir, 2008).

Ironically, international students demonstrate high levels of satisfaction in regard to their study in Australia based on their opportunity to meet and interact with students from diverse cultures facilitated by their common ability to use second language English (Smith, Morley, & Teece, 2002, as cited in Mahat & Hourigan, 2007). At CQUniversity, this is one of the most common benefits listed by international students when asked what their Australian education has provided them. They clearly value opportunities for engaging with a multicultural student cohort originating from over 50 countries and social integration with a diverse learning community as part of their university study. However, the challenge of building social integration between the local community and international students attending city campuses where there are few domestic students enrolled, is significant. CQUniversity operates such campuses in Queensland (Gold Coast), New South Wales and Victoria and this paper reports research outcomes on a range of strategies undertaken in the last two years to provide enhanced opportunities for social integration on and off these campuses.

Much of the literature about international students has focused on their encultured approaches to learning, which are frequently inconsistent, if not incompatible, with expectations of the Australian university model. Whilst the reported reluctance of international students to engage in classroom discussion, questioning and interaction is frequently explained in relation to their tendency for passive, teacher-directed, rote-driven learning, it may in fact be related to feelings of awkwardness (Krause, Harley, James, & McInnis, 2005), cultural expectations about the use of class time (Chalmers & Volet, 1997) and language difficulties (Hellsten & Prescott, 2004, as cited in Mahat & Hourigan, 2007). These issues are not necessarily resolved during classes and may be more effectively addressed in social and support activities.

A review of the literature reporting on the successful engagement of international students in their university studies includes significant discussion of ‘transition’, which is a difficult process that domestic students also undergo when they move into university study. However, international student transition is intensified by the fact that they shift to both a tertiary study context and also a foreign country and, in the majority of cases, a second language learning environment. Hence, the difficulties enunciated in studies of student transition, usually focused on the first year experience, are significantly inflated as international students grieve for the loss of family and friends (Seah, 2008). They also experience disorientation and culture shock settling into a foreign community and culture (Kell & Vogel, 2008) and a new geography and simultaneously seek to engage in an unfamiliar learning and teaching model.

Abraham Maslow’s hierarchy of needs has been an influential motivational theory for over 50 years and is a useful reference in delineating the challenges in transition encountered by international students in comparison to domestic students. Maslow reports that lower level needs must be satisfied before we can progress to higher needs and on to self-actualisation and self-transcendence (Huitt, 2004; Koltko-Riveria, 2006; Prescott & Simpson, 2004).

As Figure 1 indicates, there are many more critical challenges for international students entering university than domestic students who study within their home culture

Figure 1. Based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943–1954).

(Ang & Liamputtong, 2008; Khawaja & Dempsey, 2008; Tristana & Slade, 2008). 'Unfamiliarity with the local conditions and norms' makes international students vulnerable to '... exploitation and poverty as well as death and injury by misadventure' (Kell & Vogel, 2008, p. x). This vulnerability highlights the importance of the role that effective social integration can play in assisting international students to establish a sense of belonging and meet their full potential. If fundamental physiological and psychological needs are not met, not only can international students fail to meet their full academic potential, but they may fail to achieve a sense of well-being and may become at risk of personal harm (Kell & Vogel, 2008).

When international students arrive to study in Australia, they are immediately and simultaneously focused on meeting the primary physiological survival needs of food, accommodation and clothing. In many reported cases, this is the first time that these students have had to take responsibility for these needs. They may have never cooked a meal, for example, and may have difficulty sourcing the specific kinds of food they prefer or are required to eat for reasons of faith. Once these basic needs are met, students progress to satisfying security needs. Again, this is not easy for an international student. They may be living on their own or staying with family they have never met. The students can also be concerned about safety and whether they have enough money to support themselves. Domestic students, on the other hand, usually have ongoing access to family, friends, financial support and so on, even as they develop connections in a new study community, although remote-region domestic students attending metropolitan campuses may also experience significant culture shock and disorientation as they acclimatise to a new city and learning environment.

The combination of such intense transitional demands facing international students can result in lack of connectedness, unhappiness, dissatisfaction, isolation and alienation, guilt, anger, tension and so on, all of which are commonly described as aspects of 'grief' (Jiang, Hawkins, & Bransgrove, 1998; Mather, 2007; Seah, 2008). Given the profound and consecutive adjustments required of them, it is hardly surprising that international students

are commonly reported to fail two or more of their subjects in first term or first year of study (Burch, 2008; Levy, Osborn, & Plunkett, 2003). 'Loss and lack of social support have been found to lead to lower academic achievement and negative psychological experiences such as tension, confusion and depression' (Pederson, 1991, as cited in Scanlon, Rowling, & Weber, 2007, p. 9; see also Hayes & Lin, 1994; Hovey, 2000). Clearly, international students are in a position of escalated risk due to the combination of losses and the grief they may feel and the associated effect of poor study outcomes. For these reasons, university efforts to provide a diverse range of social, learning support and integration activities are vital for the success, safety and security of international students whilst also enhancing customer satisfaction and student retention so vital to the long-term sustainability of the Australian international higher education sector.

Despite the rich contributions they make culturally and economically to Australian higher education, international students are frequently portrayed as being a 'problem' for the sector (Marginson, 2008; Seah, 2008). In a review of the literature to date, the challenges of transition and adjustment are perceived to rest primarily with the students rather than providers. When we consider that Chickering and Gamson's (1987) widely-adopted 'Seven principles for undergraduate learning' list 'interaction with staff and students' as critical to successful and engaging learning experiences, it seems imperative for universities to actively promote and measure the social integration achieved in and out of classrooms for their teachers and learners. Problematically, Australian academics, increasingly employed as casual staff, continue to report that they have little time to meet the needs for consultation with these students and may argue that they are not remunerated to do this (Lee & Salamon, 2004). Recent studies report the disappointment of domestic students, even migrant domestic students, at having to work with international students (Burch, 2008; Lee & Salamon, 2004) and some academics have suggested that international students are contributing to a lowering of academic standards by their presence in universities (Burch, 2008; McGowan & Potter, 2008). Whilst reports indicate that students from other cultures, particularly high power distance/collectivist cultures (Hofstede, 1984, 1986), value opportunities to interact with academic staff outside of classrooms even if they fail to interact in classrooms, 'commentary about the unavailability of consultation opportunities is extensive among newly arrived international students' (Hellsten & Prescott, 2004, p. 347, see also Baker & Hawkins, 2006). Such are the barriers to adequate social integration of diverse students and staff in Australian higher education that CQUniversity has worked to address.

CQUniversity has understood the significance of this expectation of academic consultation outside of the pressurised and often linguistically-confronting context of the classroom and academic staff are frequently engaged in professional development sessions that seek to develop their awareness of these issues and capacity to respond. Academics at CQUniversity city campuses have been interacting with international students from very diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds for over 10 years of campus operation. They are experts in anticipating the needs of these students and providing consultative opportunity, extra revision classes, organising assignment specific workshops with the learning support department and so on. Few domestic students study at these city-based campuses, so despite the best efforts of campus staff, the absence of a domestic cohort may be perceived as a dilemma for the institution when considering integration with the host community off-campus.

Social integration initiatives

CQUniversity has implemented a range of student activities and services to promote improved social integration for international students on- and off-campus at Brisbane,

Gold Coast, Melbourne and Sydney over the last two years. These social integration activities commence as soon as the students arrive on-campus. A fully facilitated enrolment process allows students to integrate with staff members from all areas of the campus from marketing and recruitment to academic staff. Students are timetabled into a thorough orientation program, which includes social activities such as luncheon with students and staff and city bus tours. External guest speakers such as community police officers and health fund representatives are invited to participate in orientation. Other social integration activities are scheduled throughout each term. These include:

- sporting activities: cricket (home and away), basketball, volleyball;
- social activities: end of term jazz party, parties to celebrate a wide range of cultural festivals such as Chinese New Year and Indian Independence Day;
- community activities: Dragon Boat Festival, Relay for Life, Seven Bridges Walk, tree planting and charity and fundraising events;
- communication activities: English conversation corner, interviewing skills workshops, oral communication workshops, academic writing workshops;
- work-related activities: practitioner presentations, volunteer conference support, job seeking skills workshops, Tax-help project (ATO); and
- welfare activities: meditation sessions, stress management sessions, parents' club.

In addition students are invited to participate in the campus Environmental Committee, the Academic-student Liaison Group and the Occupational Health and Safety Committee. These provide excellent forums for meeting staff and other students, contributing to the campus environment and enhancing a sense of belonging, inclusion and empowerment for participant students.

Research methods

A mix of quantitative and qualitative research methods was employed to seek feedback from students and staff about the activities that were organised in order to extend the social integration of international students at the CQUniversity Brisbane, Gold Coast, Melbourne and Sydney campuses. First, an anonymous student survey was distributed to investigate how willingly and frequently students had participated in various social and learning support activities organised on- and off-campus: which activities were most popular; what further events they desired; how safe they felt on- and off-campus; and to what extent they felt such social and learning support activities helped them succeed in their academic studies (see Appendix 1). A total of 446 completed paper-based surveys were received from this exercise, which was conducted across campuses from August to October, 2009. Students were selected for inclusion in the sample on the basis of convenience and so surveys were completed by students as they attended classes, events or work areas at each campus as this was non-intrusive for students and convenient to the staff distributing and collecting the survey. Results were collated to percentiles as reported in Table 1.

In order to generate qualitative data that might lead to allowing an understanding of student commentary on social and learning support activities, a follow-up focus-group session was then arranged. Volunteer alumni and staff from all key departments supporting the range of activities for students including student services advisors, learning skills advisors, employment and training staff and academic staff, as well as student association members and alumni, were involved. Student responses from the survey were shared with focus group members to assist discussion and provide feedback on their recent work. Key

Table 1. Social integration of international students all campuses by percentage.

	Sydney	Melbourne	Brisbane	Gold Coast	Ave total
How important are these social and learning activities?					
Very important	59	30	29	69	46.75
Important	33	55	45	31	41
Moderately important	6	12	19	0	9.25
Not important	2	3	7	0	3
How satisfied are you with your level of interaction with the Australian community?					
Very satisfied	25	22	18	36	25.25
Satisfied	64	71	70	61	66.5
Moderately satisfied	9	7	8	3	6.75
Very unsatisfied	2	0	4	0	1.5
Do you think University social activities help you to succeed in your studies?					
Yes	96	93	92	96	93.75
No	4	7	8	4	6.25
How do you rate our ability to provide high quality social and learning activities?					
Very good	44	22	24	48	34.5
Good	53	74	67	52	61.5
Poor	3	3	5	0	3.25
Very poor	0	1	4	0	1.25
How safe do you feel on campus?					
Very safe	59	46	49	76	57.5
Safe	40	51	46	21	39.5
Unsafe	0	2	4	3	2.25
Very unsafe	1	1	1	0	0.75
How safe do you feel when you are not on campus?					
Very safe	18	13	5	38	18.5
Safe	59	65	85	48	64.25
Unsafe	21	19	7	14	15.25
Very unsafe	2	3	3	0	2.0
Have you, or would you tell a friend positive things about these social and learning activities?					
Yes	98	93	93	100	96
No	2	7	7	0	4

themes and shared opinions were identified from transcription of this discussion and are summarised below.

Student survey results

The most popular events attended by students in order of frequency were: Student Orientation (including City Bus Tour), End of Term Parties, English Conversation Corner and Cultural Celebrations such as, Chinese New Year and Indian Independence Party. In answer to the question 'How have these activities added value to your experience at CQU campus?' students responded in order of frequency: helped me make new friends; improved my English; learnt a new skill; it was fun; and learnt about other cultures. When asked which activity type they would be interested in attending in the future, the most popular were: End of Term Parties; Cultural Celebrations; Work Experience options; English

Conversation Corner; Sports; and Work Ready workshops, reflecting a strong desire for informal and social interaction with peers of diverse backgrounds as well as a desire to engage with the local workforce. A summary of survey results for other questions is provided in Table 1.

The answers to Questions 1 and 3 in Table 1 leave no doubt about international student judgements of the value of social integration activities in support of their studies, with 87% of students agreeing that these activities are important or very important and 94% stating that university social activities did promote successful study outcomes. The level of safety that students feel on campuses (Question 5) was also a welcome and decisive result supported by a single and secure campus entry and exit point (except Gold Coast campus), full-time security guards, safety awareness presentations by police-community liaison staff and the introduction of student emergency 24-hour contact card.

In addition to multiple-choice and scaled-response questions, surveyed students were asked a series of open-ended questions where they were asked to provide comment. The majority of students indicated in answer to open-ended questions that finding a job was the most difficult challenge for them in adjusting to life as a student in Australia, followed by the challenge of studying and living within a second language and finding accommodation. Clearly their efforts to interact with the local community in securing work or accommodation, primary physiological needs in Maslow's hierarchy, are not always successful and warrant intensive and ongoing university intervention and support.

When asked who helped them most to adjust to studying in Australia, students nominated, first, friends, both same culture and other culture; closely followed by campus staff, including academic and general staff; and, third, their relatives. Student comments about the value of assistance from staff endorse the ongoing and conscious efforts of staff across university departments to create opportunities for interpersonal interaction with students. Student satisfaction was particularly enhanced by their opportunity to consult with teaching staff and learning support staff.

Finally, the students were asked how the university could further assist international students studying in Australia. The most common responses included: finding a job; more information supporting cultural adjustment; and assistance with continued development of English skills. Students also asked for more activities, particularly off-campus, reflecting a desire to engage with the community in general.

Focus group discussion summary

Focus group interviews are suitable for a group of participants who share an interest in a particular topic and they are frequently performed to generate qualitative interpretations of previously obtained data around the same topic (Berg, 2007). In addition, a focus group discussion allows for participants to interact and learn from each other as they discuss their ideas in relation to a topic and focus groups are more efficient than individual interviews (Flick, 2006). Hence, a focus group interview of staff, which was informed by the results of the students' survey, was deemed to be an appropriate research event where staff could respond to and discuss student commentary about existing provisions for social integration, as well as answer Questions posed by the moderators.

Seven staff, including two alumni from CQUniversity Sydney campus, were asked to respond to student survey results as well as the following questions, which they were provided with several days prior to the meeting. Moderators ensured each individual had the opportunity to speak about each question. Commentary was recorded and transcript reviewed to identify key themes and messages of the group:

- (1) What social integration activities do you believe are available for our students?
- (2) How important do you believe these social integration activities are?
- (3) What activities have been the most successful?
- (4) What social integration activities do you suggest we introduce?
- (5) Do you believe these activities add value to our student's experience at CQU?
- (6) Do you think these activities help students to succeed in their studies?

Focus-group research was confined to the Sydney campus for reasons of convenience as this is where the researchers were situated. Staff selected for inclusion were drawn from departments in the organisation that are replicated in the other campuses. Staff comments are therefore deemed to be representative in many respects.

In answer to Question 1, all staff were aware of a range of activities available to students on-campus and listed social as well as cultural events and sporting events most frequently mentioned when answering this question. Chinese New Year celebrations were heralded as very well attended by all cultural groups and an activity that Australians also celebrate as a city-community and therefore an event that engages students in the local community as well as the campus community. There was a conversation about the need to facilitate further local community interaction for international students and staff referred to, such recent community events as Relay for Life, Plant a Tree and conference work-experience projects as successful initiatives that should be built on. Job-Ready initiatives such as student 'Tax Help' volunteer work and the English Conversation Corner were also deemed popular and effective and the inclusion of group work activities in tutorials was noted as particularly effective for assisting student integration both inside and outside the classroom. It was also noted, however, that the informal tone of extra-curricular activity, such as English Conversation Corner, allowed students to communicate in a relaxed environment and several participants expressed the belief that learning is often more effective when it occurs in a relaxed state. Educational psychologists tend to agree that anxiety is not conducive to maximal performance for learners (Ormrod, 2008) and point out that learner anxiety is heightened when the learning occurs in a second language (Chen & Chang, 2009; Eysenck, 1992).

All staff commented, in answer to Question 2, that they found these social integration activities to be very important. Academic staff commented that it was important for students to get to know the political nature of Sydney city and social events and excursions were suggested as regular offerings. Free activities such as museum visits and city historical-walks were mentioned as easy, local options to extend students' sense of belonging. Provision of information, such as locally available 'learn to cook' and 'learn to swim' classes, was suggested.

Alumni suggested that social integration may be the lowest priority when students have so many competing needs so that inclusion in a university framework for both socialising and engaging with the workplace is a vitally important aspect of a successful study sojourn. This provides a well-rounded study experience to enhance the development of full professional skills including the capacity to network successfully. Student service staff highlighted the risks if students are not encouraged to engage with the campus and local community: '... students can suffer from isolation and loneliness and isolation is a precursor to depression.' The potential loneliness and isolation of international students has been an issue of growing concern in recent years (Kell & Vogel, 2008; Mather, 2007; Sawir, Marginson, Deumert, Nyland, & Ramia, 2008). As 'interconnectedness' and a 'sense of belonging' increase a student's chance of completing their program (Severiens & Wolff, 2008), opportunities to establish these peer-connections are valuable both academically and psychologically.

Most staff felt, in answer to Question 3, that the end-of-term party (barbecue) was a very successful regular event that brought many hundreds of students and staff together in a relaxed environment. One staff member pointed out that measuring the success of any event by numbers attending was not necessarily the true test of success as even if only 20 students attend an activity, they are still engaging socially with others. The Student Association members felt the sports events of cricket, basketball and volleyball were proving to be most popular and also reported on the success of the Parents' Club where shared babysitting was arranged between students with children. Academic staff commented that one-to-one consultations with Learning Skills Unit staff and academic staff were very popular with students and allowed for the development of an informal relationship often expected of teachers in specific cultures of learning but difficult to access in Australian academy.

In answer to Question 4, recommendations for new activities included more activities and events off-campus, such as weekend trips away to Australian areas of interest like the snowy mountains, beach barbecues and walking tours of the city. The possibility of paying mentoring students to assist staff organise these events was discussed and noted by management for further consideration as staff could not always be available to run such activities. Activity clubs, such as chess, movie, musical and book clubs, were suggested and it was noted how many international students have musical and artistic skills. A talent competition (Campus Idol) was suggested. Self-defence classes on campus were suggested as well as possible spiritual clubs and a 'dinner club' where staff might invite students into their home for a traditional Australian baked dinner.

In answer to Questions 5 and 6, staff unanimously and strongly felt that these types of social activities added value to the student experience at CQUniversity. They agreed that these activities helped students succeed in their studies for the following range of reasons:

- they create a balanced study experience, allowing students to perform better on study tasks because of the relaxation of social engagement;
- they contribute to greater happiness and less stress;
- they build confidence and communication skills so that students are more likely to build friends and achieve enhanced work opportunities;
- they increase students' sense that they are not alone in the challenges or problems they face and builds self esteem; and
- they help develop better English language skills.

Clearly, staff from academic and support departments at CQUniversity strongly agree that social and learning support activities are of crucial importance to assist international students achieve their objectives in studying for a university degree in a foreign country. There was a strong conviction in the focus group that social engagement is critical to optimal learning and that failure to provide for this balanced experience of a learning community may impinge of student academic progress and sense of belonging. A recent study endorses this perception claiming that students '... who feel at home, who take part in extra-curricular activities, and feel connected with fellow students and teachers, are more inclined to persist with their studies (Severiens & Wolff, 2008, n.p.).

New campus initiatives resulting from research

The results from this research have validated that CQUniversity is on the right track in relation to the range of social integration activities it offers to its students. However, they

have also revealed that there is still further work that can be done to further enhance campus initiatives.

One major initiative is producing a DVD for new international student orientation to aid their social integration on arrival to Australia. Students will be able to view this DVD online prior to departure from their home country, on arrival at orientation and it can be vodcast to students throughout the term. Essentially the DVD will be in two parts: Australian culture and the Australian university learning environment. Topics will include: finding my place; casual Aussie culture; safety tips; balancing work and play; work rights and responsibilities; setting up personal finances; Australian English; getting the most out of lectures and tutorials; getting help with academic work; finding and using information; arguing with evidence; achieving excellence; and learning and socialising in a second language.

In addition the campus will 'pilot' a mentoring program for new students to enhance their transition to Australian life and learning. The mentoring program assists new students in undergraduate and postgraduate programs to feel at home quickly at CQUniversity and to provide support during their first year of tertiary studies. Student Mentors are students who have successfully completed part of their studies in Australia and have acquired a great deal of information about the tertiary education environment and how the 'system' works.

A recurring theme during the interviews was that students want more assistance to find work, therefore there will be even a stronger focus on promoting the services available to students by our Training Employment & Career Coaching department, which aims to get students job-ready and identify a range of work opportunities for them.

To assist students with their English, the campuses are now providing free of charge, English for Living (EfL) software and assessment tools assists students to continue to develop their English language competence through self-study online. Other initiatives will include:

- a mid-term party for staff and students to encourage earlier social integration;
- Australian culture presentations and workshops;
- regular city walks;
- new social clubs, for example, Monopoly Club and Chess Club;
- expanded network of high quality home-stay providers;
- offering students activities and trips to a variety of venues and attractions such as theme parks, beaches, Australia Zoo, Sovereign Hill and to the snow fields.

Finally, there will be an ongoing commitment to identify and participate in more community engagement activities off and on campus to provide a forum for meaningful social integration.

Conclusion

Results from research reported in this paper provide strong evidence that international students highly value university efforts to enhance their social integration on- and off-campus. In particular, interpersonal interactions with staff and other students in ranging contexts generate high levels of student satisfaction, enhance cultural transition and mitigate the negative effects of culture shock. It is apparent that international students encounter high levels of personal stress and isolation related to essential as well as higher level physiological and psychological needs, particularly in their first term of study. It is also apparent

that universities can and should deploy a range of resources to invest in the social integration of international students to support personal well-being, academic progress and customer satisfaction so that the significant economic and socio-cultural benefits derived from international tertiary education are sustained.

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Appendix 1. Student services survey

☐ Female ☐ Male

1. Which of the following social and learning activities have you attended at CQUniversity Sydney?

(please tick)

- ☐ Student Orientation (including Sydney Bus Tour)
- ☐ End of Term Parties
- ☐ Yoga, Stress Management
- ☐ Sport (cricket, volleyball, basketball)
- ☐ Work Experience (Happiness Seminar, work experience with other employers)
- ☐ Cultural Celebrations (for eg Chinese New Year, Indian Independence Party)
- ☐ English Conversation Corner
- ☐ Work Ready Program, including Interview Skills with Industry (Training Employment & Career Coaching)
- ☐ Community and Environmental activities (eg. Relay for Life, Environmental Committee)
- ☐ Other (describe) _____

2. How important are these social and learning activities at the Sydney Campus?
- ☐ Very important
 - ☐ Important
 - ☐ Moderately important
 - ☐ Not important
3. How have these activities added value to your experience at CQU Sydney campus?
- ☐ Helped me make new friends
 - ☐ Improved my English
 - ☐ Got to know the staff better
 - ☐ Learnt a new skill
 - ☐ Helped me get a job
 - ☐ Helped me to relax
 - ☐ Felt a sense of belonging
 - ☐ It was fun
 - ☐ Learnt about other cultures
 - ☐ Other (describe) _____
4. Which social and learning activity would you be most interested in attending in the future?
(Please rank 1 to 9)
- ☐ End of Term Parties
 - ☐ Yoga, Stress Management
 - ☐ Sport (cricket, volleyball, basketball)
 - ☐ Work Experience (Happiness Seminar, work experience with other employers)
 - ☐ Cultural Celebrations (for eg Chinese New Year, Indian Independence Party)
 - ☐ English Conversation Corner
 - ☐ Work Ready Program, including Interview Skills with Industry (TECC)
 - ☐ Community and Environmental activities (eg. Relay for Life)
 - ☐ Other (describe) _____
5. Have you, or would you tell a friend positive things about these social and learning activities?
- ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
- If no, why not _____
6. What additional social and learning activities would you recommend or like to take part in?
Describe _____
7. What was the most difficult challenge for you in adjusting to life as a student in Australia?
Describe _____

8. Who or what helped you most in adjusting to studying in Australia?
Describe _____
9. How could the University assist international students to adjust to studying in Australia?
Describe _____
10. How satisfied are you with your level of interaction with the Australian community?
- ☐ Very satisfied
 - ☐ Satisfied
 - ☐ Not satisfied
 - ☐ Very unsatisfied
11. How safe do you feel on campus?
- ☐ Very safe
 - ☐ Safe
 - ☐ Unsafe
 - ☐ Very unsafe
12. How safe do you feel when you are not on campus?
- ☐ Very safe
 - ☐ Safe
 - ☐ Unsafe
 - ☐ Very unsafe
13. Do you think University social activities help you to succeed in your studies?
- ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
 - ☐ If no, why not _____
14. How do you rate our ability to provide high quality social and learning activities?
- ☐ Very good
 - ☐ Good
 - ☐ Poor
 - ☐ Very poor