



Community-Campus Summit on International Students

Best practices – Student Welfare

Tuesday, 20 April 2010, 9 am to 12.30 pm

Building H, Room H1.16

Caulfield Campus, Monash University

OVERVIEW¹

On 20th April, Monash University will host a *Community-Campus Summit on International Students*. This extremely important summit brings together State Government representatives, Victorian industry groups, local community organisations, foreign diplomats and Monash University representatives to address key issues impacting on international students.

The Summit will present an opportunity for participants to exchange ideas on a range of issues important to international students. It seeks to deliver in particular two key outcomes: developing a set of actionable items aimed at dealing with key issues directly impacting on international students in areas such as accommodation, transport, safety and security, social inclusion and employment rights. And formulate practical ways in which international students could be more engaged with local communities. By bringing communities and Monash campuses together, we are able to combine the knowledge, ideas and activities, share resources and build on each other's strengths and experiences to ensure international students continue to have a positive, rewarding and high quality experience.

BACKGROUND

Monash recognises the valuable contribution international students make to the cultural diversity of this University. We understand many of our international students seek a better connection with local students and the wider community. The University also recognises the importance of equipping our international students with information about the Australian lifestyle and values so they can better adapt and display greater personal safety awareness, especially as student safety and security is inextricably linked to the student experience. Monash has an ongoing commitment to enrich the student experience and overall learning outcomes by providing a safe learning environment, and greater opportunities for social inclusion.

Student safety and welfare is essential for tertiary institutions in Australia. Developing community-level responses as a means to address student safety is a strategy that is of particular relevance for students studying at a regional campus.

Safety and social inclusion applies to all students, and is particularly pertinent to students who are studying away from their home and own support networks. Attitudes of some sections of the community are based largely on misconceptions including international students are: taking domestic places; a revenue source; only after permanent residency; and reduce the quality of education provided by the sector. There has been very little done at a national and state level to promote the benefits of welcoming international students into the community and communicating the important part they play in enriching the multicultural fabric of our society¹.

There are broader issues which also play a significant role in the student experience – lack of personal safety awareness, a tight rental accommodation market, rising living costs, inadequate English language proficiency in social situations, and the reliance international students have on public transport especially when travelling to and from work. In addition, the higher education sector may not have a complete understanding of the depth of the student safety issue because of the reluctance of international students to report criminal activity due to a perception it may adversely impact an existing visa or future visa application.²

There is widespread agreement across the sector that more can be done to ensure students feel safe and supported. A collaborative effort is required from Federal and State Governments, education providers, community groups, student associations and local councils to develop a comprehensive national strategy to significantly address the issue. Inaction will lead to broader implications for international education and co-dependent industries such as tourism and business².

ISSUES

There are two main aims of campus community programs. The first is to make possible academic progress and personal development of international students through community recourses, and the other is to use these students and scholars to strengthen the international connections with the community. The internationalization of community resources is part of the growing trend to continuing education and lifelong learning³. Outlined below is some important issues that affect student welfare, with focus on the impact on international student welfare.

General Safety

A Victoria University study, *Community Safety of International Students in Melbourne: a scoping study* found that while the vast majority of students surveyed felt Melbourne was a safe place to live, work and study, fewer international students (78 per cent) felt safe than did domestic students (86 per cent), with more than half (57 per cent) of the international students finding Melbourne less safe than they had expected⁴.

Suitable transport

International students are unable to get concession on public transport in Victoria or NSW, which can act as a disincentive to live further from campus and impacts negatively on affordability. Also students may choose to walk instead¹.

Suitable accommodation

According to Monash Residential Services (MRS), the greatest demand for information regarding off campus accommodation comes from international students. With the cost and availability of adequate accommodation, international students may be forced to find accommodation further from campus due to more affordable rental costs and increased availability or in some cases a safer suburb. This increases travel distance to the university. Additionally, international students can face a number of extra difficulties in negotiating permanent accommodation. In a survey undertaken by MRS, international students were asked to evaluate the benefits of living on campus. Approximately 80 per cent of students reported that living in on-campus accommodation enhanced their ability to study effectively. Other significant benefits included the ability to meet people easily, improve levels of cultural understanding, and greatly enhance their overall student experience at the University. From an academic performance perspective, an analysis of the pass rate of students living in MRS supported on-site accommodation between 2001 and 2008, showed a consistently higher pass rate for both local and international students. These results are particularly useful in understanding the benefits of living on-campus, and warrant moves to further enhance Monash's ability to house our students on campus¹.

Social inclusion¹

According to Monash University's Health, Wellbeing and Development unit, social inclusion is a complex issue that relates to the rights, integration and participation of international students in the community, both within education institutions and the broader community. Activities to encourage social inclusion should take place within the learning environment. However, they should also be provided through supplementary programs which include collaboration between Monash and the local communities and if possible with government support. The degree of social inclusion experienced by international students and their families can have a significant impact on their learning outcomes and their overall experience in Australia.

It is recognised that the success of international students, including higher degree research students, and their ability to adapt, is linked to the university's capability to assist candidates in areas of critical need such as improving English competency and building social networks with Australian students and with those from their own cultural backgrounds. Monash University has developed a range of programs and policies to enhance social inclusion and the engagement of international students. An integrated Orientation Program is provided for all commencing students upon arrival to encourage friendship and cross cultural interaction. Special sessions introduce new international students to our diverse culture and provide them with some skills to enable them to engage confidently with their fellow students and in the community. In addition, mentoring programs embedded within Faculties and the Peer Mentoring Program provides opportunities for engagement and assists students to settle into their new environment.

To facilitate interactions between local and international students outside the classroom, 'Campus Connect' program (<http://www.adm.monash.edu.au/communityservices/globalfriendshipnight/index.html>) has been introduced. The program involves a series of regular community events on all Australian campuses. It comprises a variety of social and educational interactive activities that seek to promote cross cultural interest and friendships among local and international students. Many international students would like to engage with the wider community, get involved in community activities, and be invited into an Australian home but are often unsure how to do this. Monash University staff are asked to participate in the program and it is anticipated that their participation can be extended with better international communication systems. Education providers together with government and community organisations need to take a proactive approach to encourage social inclusion.

Employment rights and protection from exploitation¹

Employment rights and protection from exploitation Employment rights and protections are a major concern for our students. For instance, without adequate funding beyond the requisite amount to secure a visa, many students rely on funds obtained from work. While regulations stipulate 20 hours as the maximum amount that students can work each week, our experience has shown that students often work extra hours to support themselves. It is in this situation that students become vulnerable to exploitation.

This is often a result of students being unaware of their employment rights. Monash has made a concerted effort to inform students of their employment rights, but a more comprehensive national education initiative is needed in this regard.

Adequate international student support and advocacy

Attitudes of some sections of the community are based largely on misconceptions including international students are: taking domestic places; a revenue source; only after permanent residency; and reduce the quality of education provided by the sector. There has been very little done at a national and state level to promote the benefits of welcoming international students into the community and communicating the important part they play in enriching the multicultural fabric of our society.

Forming connections between a campus and its neighbouring communities is important. Higher education institutions need to look at options for connecting with immigrant communities⁵. An important step in creating successful connections is establishing shared leadership.

It is essential to provide on-campus support to international student, including study facilities and adequate transport and accommodation for these students. The Monash Postgraduate Association recently raised concerns regarding a lack of study space on campus, the recent downgrade of one of the postgraduate computer labs, the overcrowded library facilities, the security bus service and the lack of available housing as a source of considerable anxiety to postgraduates which ultimately affects the quality of their work⁶.

CURRENT PRACTICES

Examples in Australia

Monash University is already working hard to create increased opportunities to help integrate international and local students and assimilate our international students into the Monash community. Activities include support services, English language support, work-integrated learning programs, advisory and counselling services, volunteering opportunities, more comprehensive course experience evaluations, inter-campus transport, accommodation assistance, a campaign to employ our own students instead of going through temping agencies, and providing opportunities for Victoria Police to deliver information to students during Orientation¹.

University of Wollongong: A project between the University of Wollongong and the Wollongong City Council and various community groups, jointly funded by the University's Community and Partnerships Office and Internationalisation Committee, was formed to explore ways for international students to feel a greater sense of belonging in the Wollongong community. The finding showed an important link between international students' level of English language proficiency and their social and cultural adjustment to life in Australia. The researchers found that adjustment to life in Australia went beyond just the University, extending to the wider community. The researchers of this study used the outcomes to recommend community organisations and local businesses provide opportunities for international students⁷.

The University of Newcastle Community Connections program is a cross cultural friendship program through which volunteers from the local community link with international students across all levels of study. The program is set up for international students to learn more about Australia and its customs, and to share information about their home country. Students and the volunteer decide how often they will meet and what they will do together. The University also offers a Cultural Connections program which supports the partners of international students, visiting academic members of staff and higher degree research candidates. This program gives the partners access to information about services in the local community, increase understanding of Australian culture and customs, develop friendships and gain confidence in English speaking⁸.

In 2008, the **Victorian government** established the Overseas Student Experience Taskforce, to examine the issues around the overseas student experience in Victoria. The taskforce was led by the Parliamentary Secretary for Industry and Trade, and included representatives from student bodies and education providers. It found that despite the overall overseas student experience being positive, there were elements of the broader student experience coming under pressure with measures needed to ensure that the majority of international students continue to have a positive experience. It is important to note that concerns raised were not unique to Victoria, with similar issues raised in other states and countries. The taskforce recommended an audit of education providers to ensure the highest quality training and quality is maintained; social inclusion and safety policies to be in place

and strengthened; a review of restrictions on paid work for overseas students and feasibility of a student 'hub' dedicated for overseas students be considered⁹.

The **City of Darebin** uses a 'Fair Go for International Students' model to address the complex and multidimensional nature of international student issues.¹⁰

The **City of Melbourne** has established a Multicultural Hub as part of its *Multicultural strategy*. Managed by the Adult Multicultural Education Services (AMES) it offers a friendly place where people from all cultures can meet, share and learn in a safe and supportive environment.¹¹ It has also employed an international students youth worker to organise engagement activities and events

City of Glen Eira has developed a comprehensive student housing policy for the purpose of establishing reasonable locations, design, amenity, car parking and management standards that apply to student housing use and developments within Glen Eira¹²

Examples Overseas

Stanford University¹³: The Community Committee for International Students is a volunteer organisation at Stanford University (California) which supports international graduate students, visiting scholars and their families resourcing people who become friends with Internationals adjusting to life in America. This organization runs several programs including:

- *English in Action* – partners meet once a week for English conversation;
- *Hospitality* – families welcome internationals into their homes for the holidays, birthdays and other occasions;
- *Homestay* – families house internationals for several days before campus housing becomes available at the beginning of the school year;
- *Informal English classes* – held weekly in American culture, slang, writing, history and accent reduction;
- *Professional Liaison* – matches spouses of international graduate students and scholars with American professionals;
- *Potluck/Music night* – held quarterly;
- *Newsletter* – published quarterly reporting on current activities, volunteer profiles and other activities.

At the **University of Massachusetts Boston**⁵ (UMass Boston), the College of Public and Community Service (CPCS) is a partnership in which campus and community have mutual respect and equal authority. CPCS houses the Center for Immigrant & Refugee Community Leadership and Empowerment (CIRCLE), which was also established at two additional University of Massachusetts' campuses. In collaboration with all three campuses, CIRCLE works to design and implement leadership development programs with the state's refugee and immigrant communities.

The CIRCLE partnership at UMass Boston is grounded in four principles for shared leadership, each of which helps establish a partnership in which the campus and community can develop shared goals and have relationships based on mutual respect leading to social transformation:

1. Enabling the community and campus to build a curriculum together that fits the needs of the community;
2. Sharing resources - community-based organizations may serve as adjunct field instructors offering courses, workshops, or internships on site and off campus. Also

by providing waivers on tuition for community members wishing to enrol in a degree program;

3. Joint advising, which involves program participants and representatives in planning and evaluating CIRCLE's activities and priorities; and
4. Taking note of recommendations from the community which contribute to the University's ongoing transformation.

Overseas local council programs

City of Vancouver "International Student Safety Project" is a collaboration between the international education community and social service agencies to improve the safety awareness of international students. The project involved a steering committee comprising Government, Private English School representatives, Canadian Association of Private Language Schools, Canadian Education Centre Network, South Vancouver Community Policing Centre, Langara College, SUCCESS, MOSAIC, UBC, BCCIE. It was guided by a framework including: identifying key international student safety concerns; developing a "Safety Orientation Program" (materials included a PowerPoint presentation, orientation brochure, safety wallet cards, video vignettes, and a facilitator's guide); a website www.student-safety.ca; and a Student Safety and Awareness Resource Bank with links to existing tools and resources¹⁴

Prepared by:

Sarah Robinson, Office of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Global Engagement)

Vanessa Carne-Cavagnaro Office of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Global Engagement)

Eugene Sebastian, Office of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Global Engagement)

READING

¹ Community-Campus Summit on International Students: Vice Chancellor Briefing. Sarah Robinson, Samantha Blair, Eugene Sebastian. Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Global Engagement)

² Education, Employment and Workplace Relations references Committee, Welfare of International Students, The Senate, November 2009, Chapter 3, page 27.

³ *Developing the Campus-community Link in International Education* Gail Hochhauser, 1990.

⁴ Institute for Community, Ethnicity and Policy Alternatives (ICEPA), Victoria University, 2010

⁵ *Strengthening Campus-Community Connections within Immigrant Communities*. Daniel Teraguchi, 2008.

⁶ The space squeeze: A report by the Monash Postgraduate Association on behalf of Caulfield campus postgraduates. February 2010.

⁷ UOW and City join forces to assist international students. View at

<http://www.uow.edu.au/about/community/casestudies/UOW000060.html>

⁸ View at <http://www.newcastle.edu.au/students/international/student-support/living/community-life.html>

⁹ Thinking Global. Victoria's action plan for international Education, September 2008

¹⁰ "Submission to the Inquiry into the Welfare of International Students on behalf of The Darebin Overseas Student Advisory Council and the City of Darebin", Mr Jeremy Liyanage, Coordinator Cultural Diversity, City of Darebin

¹¹ View at

<http://www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/COMMUNITYSERVICES/MULTICULTURALSERVICES/MULTICULTURALHUB/Pages/MulticulturalHub.aspx>, viewed 03/02/10

¹² View at: http://www.gleneira.vic.gov.au/Files/22_09_glen.pdf Viewed 03/02/10

¹³ Community Committee for International Students at Stanford University. View at <http://ccisstanfordu.org/>

¹⁴ View at <https://secure.vec.bc.ca/student-safety.cfm> Viewed 03/02/10