EDITORIAL

Before we know it, the ANZSSA Biennial Conference in Canberra will be upon us. If you haven’t already planned to go, I thoroughly recommend you give it some thought. The professional program is great – there is a wide selection of interesting and stimulating papers and workshops in addition to the keynote speakers. It is also so refreshing to meet colleagues working in other educational settings. If nothing else, you can have a great whinge about how terribly over-worked and under-resourced you are, without this coming back to bite you from the people you work with every day.

Also at the conference is the Annual General Meeting of ANZSSA, at which (amongst other things) office bearers are elected. The current executive has given earnest attention to issues given a high priority at the last AGM. Most notably we have a spanking new and useful web site. But what we shall need is some new energy and input into the various positions. Associations such as ANZSSA only deliver services back to members because of our own efforts. If you have ideas, interests, special projects – please get involved.

Meanwhile, enjoy the October 2005 issue of JANZSSA with the usual array of excellent contributions!

Jim Elliott
Editor
JANZSSA
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## Refereed Articles

*Of Rainbows and Reassurance: Why it is important to support LGBTQ students as they enter tertiary education*
Fe Day  
page 3

*How Student Services can Influence the Factors that Relate to Student Persistence*
Ann Jardine  
page 20

## Other Articles

*Promoting an Integrated Campus-wide Approach to First Year Student Retention*
Cathy Stone  
page 33

*A Couple of Raves*
Damian Copley-Finch  
page 41

*Do Academic Orientations Make a Difference? A Preliminary Assessment*
Karen Commons and Xiaodan Gao  
page 47

*Book Review: Into Adulthood: A parent’s guide to Life with an 18-25 year old student*
page 62

*Guidelines for Submission of Articles*  
Page 65

*ANZSSA Executive and Regional and Interest Group Convenors (This group also functions as the Editorial Board of JANZSSA)*  
Page 67

*Information about ANZSSA*  
Page 72

Journal of the Australia and New Zealand Student Services Association: Number 26, October 2005
Of rainbows and reassurance: why it is important to support LGBTQ students as they enter tertiary education

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ABSTRACT

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer or questioning (LGBTQ) students are unevenly supported in tertiary education institutions throughout Australia and New Zealand. This article outlines some of the challenges particular cohorts of students face; discusses difficulties of naming and defining people; and describes some initiatives and their rationales at a new New Zealand university. The author, as an out LGBT student support worker, suggests that while the academic challenge to totalizing identity discourses needs to be acknowledged, nonetheless support of LGBTQ students necessitates all student services staff becoming informed and confident in this area of work. Recent literature is canvassed and personal observations of innovations shared along with hopes for future innovations, sharing of experiences at regional, national and international level and continuations of this discussion.

INTRODUCTION

When I saw the print brochure for a 2004 Australian conference on diversity in Higher Education, I wondered if a strand of the diversity picture which involves some of my time and energy in a busy and committed work environment, was going to be addressed. Therefore, even though my proposal was late, I sent one in, wanting to ensure that within the strands of the diversity mat of this conference, this particular one was present and contributing its strength and vibrancy, its dilemmas and questions, its unique range of positions and perceptions. This article has arisen out of my presentation at that
conference, the workshop discussions we had at it and my reflections on some of the other workshops I attended.

Why is the presence of LGBT voices important?
There are multiple reasons why the presence of these voices matters. Not the least is that if we say diversity, we need to have as many variants as possible, to break down the stereotypes and assumptions all of us always already see the world through: I see what I look for, what looks like me, as I look out. What Rosaldo says about ethnographers applies to all of us:

“The ethnographer, as a positioned subject, grasps certain human phenomena better than others. He or she occupies a position or structural location and observes with a particular angle of vision. … The notion of position also refers to how life experiences both enable and inhibit particular kinds of insight.” (Rosaldo, 1989)

Each of us, in our position or location is sensitised to pick up a range of concerns out of the tremendous barrage of information, events and debate to which our daily lives expose us. Yet as a story-teller and learning development worker, clearly I have a belief in the possibility of people picking up perspectives and insights from each other. As a person who has been part of an out group of staff ever since I started working in student services at AUT in the mid 1990s, over and over again I have heard queer students say, “The best way LGBT staff can help us is to be more visible.” One avenue of visibility is the placing of LGBTQ concerns on diverse agendas, as this paper endeavours to do in this forum, for Student Services as a whole.

The discussion that follows will first outline some reasons why meeting the needs of LGBT students is a crucial issue for people in the higher education setting looking at the impact of stigmatization on people of different life stages and also at the traditions of the institutions in question, which it suggests are not neutral as regards sexuality. Then questions of nomenclature: naming, claiming and shaming, will be explored and it will be suggested that there may be a need to risk speaking or writing in approximate ways simply for the sake of service to students, though it argues that a certain scepticism regarding classificatory systems is vital. Finally some of the strategies, successes and failures in my own institution are described, along with visions of what could be in the future….
YOUTH

For young people emerging into the pressured, yet for many exciting setting of higher education from teenage years and from secondary schooling, there is a particular need for the tertiary institutions to have awareness of and literacy around the kinds of experiences both internal and external, that LGBT students may have been through before they get to our campuses. Indeed some do not make it through to us because of their sexuality - suicide and violence related to issues of sexuality are part of the underbelly of both NZ and Australia.

Just one example is that of Jeff Whittington who in Wellington New Zealand was attending a high school I had taught at some years before and whose siblings and mother I had known. He was killed callously, by two young men out on the town. “Two men accused of killing 14-year-old Jeff Whittington laughed about how much he bled, Wellington District Court was told yesterday.” Jeff, according to a friend, was “quite effeminate and sometimes got picked on and had a reputation for always being on something….”(Myers, 1999) The details of his murder which were revealed in the media reports of the court case were chilling: Wellington and New Zealand gay communities were shattered and in the US The Coalition for Safer Schools reacted with a trenchant challenge to the adults surrounding Jeff: “Teen anti-gay hate is festering and in some cases rampant in many of our schools. In these schools it is the product of inept school administrators and teachers. These people are charged with the health, safety and mental/physical well being of children.” (Myers, 1999)

This was not an isolated incident: unfortunately this kind of violence is endemic: A 1998 La Trobe University report Writing Themselves in: A National Report on the Sexuality, Health and Wellbeing of Same Sex Attracted Young People (Hillier et al 1998) found that “50 percent of these young people had experienced verbal abuse because they were known or assumed to be lesbian, gay or bisexual. Thirteen percent had experienced physical assault, most of which had happened at school.” (Hillier & Walsh, 1999) Similarly, Crowhurst cites the finding of Gay Men and Lesbians Against Discrimination (GLAD) in their 1994 Melbourne report based on a sample of 1002 respondents that “28.6% of lesbians and 25.88% of gay men had experienced harassment while at school or university….” (Crowhurst, 1998)

There is no intention here to characterise the young people in schools as victims: in her 1997 paper Coming Out/Going Home, Maria Pallotta-Chiarolli outlines the resourceful ways in which Australian girls and young women interrogate heterosexism and homophobia and
this is heartening reading, as when a young woman writes in a personal essay entitled Are You the One with the Gay Brother:

“‘I was like a walking disease; I had the gay virus and I might pass it on to the heterosexual guys.’ Homophobic graffiti appears on her house and she experiences abuse on the bus such as food being thrown at her. Despite parental support and complaints, the school offers minimal support. Throughout these experiences, Simone Garske never loses sight of the fact that the problem is not her own, nor her brothers, nor her parents: ‘I was hiding from these gutless wonders at school…My brother was a fabulous person who was gentle, caring and loved me very much…To girls going through similar experiences…if you are sure of yourself and you are not ashamed of your family then show it. It is harder for homophobic people to take because it is their fear of the unknown that makes them like they are…’” (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1997)

However, needing to confront such fundamental challenges at a young age may take its toll and so student services staff and all people dealing with first year students at any part of their induction into the life of the institution need to be aware of the journeys that young queer people, their families and friends, may have had to travel: Illingworth and Murphy, comment on the fact that unlike other young people who can access family support in facing difficulties in their communities, “(t)he situation for LGB students is different. When they turn to their families, they sometimes meet with further abuse. Parents are often unable to cope…” (Illingworth & Murphy, 2004) They go on to describe the effect this has on the ability of the young person in question to trust and to experience the world as trustworthy:

“(o)ne of the most profound losses that LGB adolescents endure is a loss of their ability to trust and a loss of the considerable benefits that attend trust….The wherewithal of LGB adolescents to cultivate …trust is affected by the abuse they receive within their families, peer groups, schools, and communities. Trust is difficult to come by and fragile…requires repeated trust-producing events; yet trust that has taken years to build can be dashed with one trust-destroying incident…” (Illingworth & Murphy, 2004)

In student services, we need to ensure that an unequivocally different climate is set in our institutions, right from the beginning and we have the power to do so, through things like websites, orientations, institutional language and induction programmes.
MATURE STUDENTS

The situation may be slightly different for older students. They will vary over the widest possible spectrum (as will staff) from people who know they are LGBT but tell no-one about it; through those who have experienced stigma and prejudice in jobs and families; to those whose political identity is strongly located in this aspect of their being as humans. In New Zealand, the Lavender Island Research Project which operated out of Massey University found that of its sample of 2,269 respondents, 51% of whom had university qualifications:

“58.7% had been “outed” …
76.6% of men and 64.4% of women had been verbally assaulted because of their sexuality
18.2% of men and 9.2% of women had been physically assaulted because of their sexuality (queer bashed)” (Henrickson, 2004)

Clearly, the previous experiences of each one may be slightly different, but mature LGBT students will bring the imprint of these kinds of encounters with them into our institutions and our ability to respond is likely to have a significant influence on how strongly and comfortably they move into connection and what Tinto calls “fit” with the organisation - which has pronounced impacts on their early weeks and months in their academic programme and conclusively affects their retention and success. (Tinto, 2004)

HISTORY AND TRADITIONS OF THE INSTITUTIONS

The history of the institutions themselves is also not neutral in regard to issues of sexuality and we need to look out for ways in which, without our awareness, attitudes and practices from the past may reveal themselves through us in attitudes, priorities and daily practices. The history of universities is nearly a thousand years old; and for many centuries they remained remarkably similar in form and function: as monastic church-based institutions, with tuition and community extended only to males, homosexuality was not seen as something needing to be referred to. However, neither perhaps was it necessarily denied; perhaps it was even valorized because: “ancient Greeks identified homosexuality with heroism and virtue.” (Holleran, 2004) (For many years, Greek remained a core part of the curriculum
of these institutions and a high-status item of cultural capital.) In many cases, the struggle of women in general in the universities, and lesbian, bisexual and transgender women in particular, has remained quite a different one from that of many men. Polytechnic education is part of a proud tradition of working class literacy and adult education. However, issues of sexuality are not necessarily acknowledged or embraced here either. In addition, many public education institutions in New Zealand and Australia are officially or unofficially linked to “the Christian religion – whose official persecution of homosexuals seems to have started when the emperor Justinian discovered that accusations of sodomy could be used to destroy people whose wealth he coveted” says Andrew Holleran in his review of Louis Crompton’s (2003) *Homosexuality & Civilisation*. (Holleran, 2004)

None of these traditions had anything like the sexual sophistication of many of the pacific cultures contacted by Europe in their first arrivals into these parts of the world three hundred or so years ago. There, learning and sexuality were not positioned as enemies and the South Pacific thus looked to many Europeans like a sexual utopia: as Tapu Misa comments on the sexual influence of the Pacific in her 2004 piece in the New Zealand Herald entitled *You can thank Pacific Islanders for your view of sexuality*:

“…according to Dr Lee Wallace, a women’s studies lecturer at Auckland University, …. the Pacific has played a seminal role in the emergence of modern homosexual identity. … Dr Wallace mounts a persuasive argument in her book Sexual Encounters when she posits that early European encounters with Polynesians opened up new ways of viewing sexuality - particularly homosexuality….In fact, says Dr Wallace, it was these encounters between European and Pacific peoples in the 18th and 19th centuries that gave rise to our modern understanding of homosexual possibilities and identity. Her somewhat subversive readings of the accounts of such historic luminaries as James Cook and his lieutenant Joseph Banks, French artist Paul Gauguin and even the ill-fated William Bligh (of Mutiny on the Bounty fame) reveal plenty of instances of male-male sexual practices involving Polynesian and Melanesian males, which, in pre-missionary days anyway, was seen as normal, openly referred to and not the least bit shameful.

She argues that these encounters forced ethnographers of the Enlightenment era to view sex between men as being not limited merely to the detestable and abominable act of sodomy, but as something altogether different.
Up till then, homosexuality simply didn't exist. In fact, until the late 19th century homosexuality wasn't recognised as a distinct category of person. The word wasn't even invented until 1868 when it made its appearance in the lexicon, in a German pamphlet. …
Meanwhile, in the Pacific, the missionaries were doing a sterling job of wiping out all manner of activity which could be construed as even remotely sexual. They didn't succeed totally. The faafafine of Samoa, the fakaleiti of Tonga, and the mahu of Tahiti, continued to thrive - defying easy definitions, being neither strictly homosexual nor transsexual. As for Maori, there's no reason to suppose they were any less sexually relaxed than their Polynesian cousins.
Dig a little deeper and there's plenty of evidence of what another academic, Dr Leonie Pihama, calls a more fluid, more open attitude to sexuality and gender roles before the influence of the church and colonisation. She says Maori terms which refer to an intimate companion of the same sex indicate not only that same-sex relationships existed in pre-Christian Maori culture, but were also no big deal.” (Misa, 2004)

As inhabitants of an educational system which has been grafted on top of traditions like this, so remote in geography and culture from where it originated, it is vital for us, it seems to me, to acknowledge this dissonance between the indigenous tradition and that of the settler institutions – we are the inheritors of this dissonance and must act within its forcefield, whether we acknowledge this or not: we are not in a position to be neutral observers.

SOCIAL CLIMATE

And so, perhaps the most important reason for us to proactively declare support for queer students as they enter our institutions relates to the current social climate in many cities and towns in our part of the world. The uproar in Australia in 2004 when Playschool dared to present lesbian mothers as part of the known world (McCrossin, 2004) was matched in New Zealand by the new head of the Anglican church being reported prominently in the media as dreaming of a “world without gays” (Masters, 2004). The kind of public outcry such incidents involve may be damaging to many students and certainly the issues raised demand academic acknowledgement and response of some kind. So it was very encouraging when Emma
Davies from my own institution countered some homophobic attacks on LGBTQ parents in our daily paper in December 2004:

“It is the evidence that children of lesbian and gay parents are more likely to be abused, murdered, suffer depression, poverty and achieve lower educational standards than those raised by heterosexual parents? A systematic search of international scientific databases reveals there is not. So why do the Mayor of Auckland, Dick Hubbard, and other esteemed community leaders apparently assert otherwise? Perhaps Weekend Herald columnist John Roughan identified one key when he bravely articulated his homophobia and repulsion of male homosexuality. Powerful gut reactions are hard to counter with research evidence.” (Davies, 2004)

SLIPPERY CONCEPTS VERSUS SILENCE

In an era, however, when classifications have been challenged and the concept of anyone’s “identity” as a single consistent individual has been problematised, nomenclature in this area is particularly fraught (although people wishing to attack LGBTQ people have no qualms about the language they use!) Annamarie Jagose in her 1996 Queer Theory cites Michel Foucault’s assertion that “the discursive critique of oppression, far from correctly identifying the mechanisms of power, ‘is…in fact part of the same historical network as the thing it denounces and (doubtless misrepresents) by calling it “repression” ’ Foucault questions the liberationist confidence that to voice previously denied and silenced lesbian and gay identities and sexualities is to defy power and hence induce a transformative effect.” (Jagose, 1996) Yet she also quotes his argument that “where there is power there is resistance….which is multiple and unstable…coagulates at certain points, is dispersed across others, and circulates in discourse.” (ibid. p. 81) It seems worth the risk to resist the silencing of the LGBTQ voices, at least begin some discussion and see where it leads, not expecting a simple liberatory result.

However, what words to use? “I am not outside the language that structures me, but neither am I determined by the language that makes this “I” possible…What it means is that you never receive me apart from the grammar that establishes my availability to you.” (Butler, 1999) Can you see us as verbs not nouns, universes becoming not
objects being? Some of the names available to us have messages coded in:

**lgbt**

You will notice that I have frequently used this internationally recognised acronym in this paper and a person who is conversant with the discourse may therefore have deduced (correctly) that I am a lesbian, a feminist, and of a certain age ie. over 40 or maybe even 45! Gay men may (and sometimes do) write it GLBT …

**gay**

If I had used this word, however, you might assume that I was rather a person who simply campaigned for social acceptance, was not interested in politics and often did not want to ‘cause trouble’.

**queer**

If I had used this word, however, you could deduce that I was probably under 40, at least acquainted with post structuralism, likely to be an academic and sceptical about political movements that appeal to generalised classifications. I might also be likely to be a man, bisexual or transgender.

"Queer is a product of specific cultural and theoretical pressures which increasingly structured debates (both within and outside the academy) about questions of lesbian and gay identity. Perhaps most significant in this regard has been the problematising by post-structuralism of gay liberationist and lesbian feminist understandings of identity and the operations of power. This prompts David Herkt (1995:46) to argue that 'the Gay identity is observably a philosophically conservative construct, based upon premises that no longer have any persuasive academic relationship to contemporary theories of identity of gender.’ " (Jagose, 1996)

However, it can also be argued that, while this ‘delegitimation’ of discrete identity claims has played an important role in freeing up a space of plurality, ambiguity and paradox which reflects people’s lived experience much more accurately, the fact remains that there is a danger that students (and staff) who “have never experienced a social movement, and given their relative state of privilege…may never have to assert their collectivity” may be seriously depoliticized by ‘queer’:

“For them, gender and sexuality are simply individual choices.” (Kirsch, 200) One wonders what they think if they ever read things like the litany of deaths and beatings that Calum Bennachie compiled in 2001, in which 89 acts of violence against queers taking place in NZ between the years of 1990 and 2001 are detailed. (Bennachie, 2001)
Or perhaps they avoid even reading them because the naming in such articles smells of ‘identity’?

IDENTITY

As Jagose suggests, in the quotation above, ‘identity’ as a concept, has been widely discussed and classificatory systems suggesting stable and homogeneous identity groupings have been widely discredited in academic discourse over the last twenty or so years. The classifications are seen to belong largely to the normative premises of the person standing outside a culture or a group and naming and describing it.

"In my view, all analyses of cultures...must begin by distinguishing the standpoint of the social observer from that of the social agent. The social observer - whether an eighteenth century narrator ...nineteenth century... educational reformer; or a twentieth century anthropologist, secret agent or development worker - is the one who imposes...unity and coherence on cultures as observed entities .... Participants in the culture, by contrast, experience their traditions, stories, rituals and symbols, tools and material living conditions through shared, albeit contested and contestable, narrative accounts. From within, a culture need not appear as a whole; rather, it forms a horizon that recedes each time one approaches it." (Benhabib, 2002)

It seems to me that this certainly rings true, if each of us reflect on even just one of the classificatory labels we might be given and think about the ways in which we act/think/speak LIKE that category and in which ways we definitely don’t. We are mostly involved in negotiating our positioning within most of the cultural groupings we ‘belong’ to, including the sexual orientation cultures. However, like Benhabib, I think that it is still worth looking at the boundaries and interactions of our classifications and our memberships: “(w)e should view human cultures as constant creations, recreations and negotiations of imaginary boundaries between ‘we’ and the ‘other(s).’ The ‘other’ is always also within us and is one of us. A self is a self only because it distinguishes itself from a real, or more often than not imagined, ‘other’.” (ibid, p. 8.) Later in her impressive chapter Redistribution or Recognition? in her 2002 book The Claims of Culture, Benhabib argues for cultural dialogue to disrupt such projections and to reconstruct the boundaries of our common lives.

Journal of the Australia and New Zealand Student Services Association: Number 26, October 2005
“through the recognition of groups that have been wronged historically and whose very suffering and exclusion has, in some deep sense, been constitutive of the seemingly unitary identity of the ‘we’ who constitutes the polity.” (Benhabib, 2002)

HEALTH

There are in addition serious health concerns also that encourage us to get beyond needing to constitute students with ‘other’ sexual practices as different, excluded or confined to a small group, (‘balkanized’ is the word that Benhabib often uses.) HIV/AIDS as a challenge to the health of a society, ideally catalyses a growing sophistication in people’s ability to apprehend and discuss the range of sexual preferences and practices in their community, so that de-stigmatisation takes place while the community as a whole gathers its resources to meet the challenge of aids. There is some urgency in the need for communities to address these aspects of sexual discourse, to become more open and less prudish in the ways all people discuss sexual behaviour: our institutions can give leadership in this field as they strive to do in many others. This is a matter of practical urgency as well as philosophical sophistication.

RESISTING THE ELISION OF DIVERSITIES

It is thus crucial, that we need to be sceptical and suspicious about the tendency of the words we use to reify and to define by excluding and yet somehow privileging the counter term. Yet if we don’t speak, a notional norm can reign supreme (and does in so many places within the academy): the notional, ‘objective’, unreflective majoritarian persona that sees itself as central and all others as marginal. We use words as shorthand while knowing that the realities to which they refer are much more diverse - but if we refuse all of the words we will be left with no way of discussing these zones of human being or the pressures and achievements related to them.

Consequently, as service providers, one of the things we can do for students is to indicate what terms are available to use for these conversations in our particular institutions: for “(t)o be and to become a self is to insert oneself into webs of interlocution; it is to know how to answer when one is addressed and to know how to address others...Strictly speaking, we never really insert ourselves, but rather are thrown into these webs of interlocution...We are born into webs of...

Journal of the Australia and New Zealand Student Services Association: Number 26, October 2005
interlocution or narrative, from familial and gender narratives to linguistic ones and to the macronarratives of collective identity. We become aware of who we are by learning to become conversation partners in these narratives.” (Benhabib, p. 15) Educational institutions and all those working within them have a role to play in assisting this kind of learning in their students.

**Our Strategies**

Auckland University of Technology, the institution of which I am part (one that was a polytechnic and maybe still is - and has become a university but maybe isn’t quite yet) has addressed this area of embodied theory in practice in a variety of ways over the fifteen or so years that I have been observing and participating. Leadership has been given by many people over that time - from within the group itself - but also, significantly with support and at times sponsorship from powerful allies in the institutional hierarchy. A small sample of the activities we have undertaken follow:

‘our group’

In the late 1980s we had a snail mail distribution list that had nothing on it about who we were or what we did. It went to people and invited them to dinners which we held about three times a year, off campus, in someone’s home. They were important times of consciousness-raising, support, relationship building and hilarity. Several of those who were crucial in hosting those evenings are still in the institution over a decade later.

**phone message system**

At one point a lot of communication happened in the institution through the voicemail system and for several years two of the leaders of the group would leave messages on the global message system. “The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Staff Network will be having a meeting on Tuesday at 4pm….” For me, it was always a joy to hear it – and frequently new staff reported their surprise and delight at hearing the words and getting the information about where to attend. Those leaving the messages frequently had some angry or abusive responses from others on staff and I appreciated their steadiness in the face of these - yet it seems to me that the visibility that came through these announcements also helped to create a real sense of the group’s presence as a part of the institutional life.

**funded staff network**

This was more or less concurrent with the phone messages and it is interesting to speculate on how much they contributed each other: at that time networks of staff from several cultural groups had gained funding from the institution to support their networking activities.

Journal of the Australia and New Zealand Student Services Association: Number 26, October 2005
This amounted to sums of less than five thousand dollars or so per annum: yet the financial support contributed greatly to a sense of a diversity and legitimacy for a constellation of voices in the discourse of the institution and led to several significant innovations in terms of structures and activities. It happened that the General Manager at that time had a partner who worked for the Aids Foundation and one day he approached the person who had founded “Our Group” to ask whether an LGBT network existed that would like to be similarly funded. The offer was joyfully accepted and the support has been a crucial element of the several years of event organizing and celebration which has followed.

**pride week**
Some years later, the separate events coalesced into a Pride Week that staff and students organized together and which featured social activities, lectures and workshops and what became an annual “Out and Proud” dinner, to which in some years, invitations were extended to significant allies from within the institution while in others only ‘family’ attended.

**student coordinators**
Four years ago, two student coordinators were appointed and paid hourly for an equivalent of their student fees to help the staff to deliver this programme of activities, to network with students and to advise on services that might be needed.

**the rainbow room**
A small office was given for LGBT students (and staff) in 2001 and was used as a common room. The student coordinators worked out of it and maintained a visitors book and a visible gay presence. Many comments in the book emphasized how valued this haven was by students.

**web site**
In 2004 a website was launched which, though still having teething troubles as regards people trained to update information on it, allows the network to be visible in a quite different way within the institution and from outside as well. It focuses on students, staff and research and can be found at [www.outataut.info](http://www.outataut.info)

**funded staff member**
In 2005 a Student Services staff member has been granted a 0.1 position to support the Student Network, to advise other student services and to ensure that the Campus Life events programme includes regular queer events.
QuTER
Also in 2005, a second regional meeting of a group called “Queers in Tertiary Education and Research” has met to network, organize research symposia, and work towards a national conference later in 2005 and perhaps an Australasian one in 2006. This network contains people from several Auckland-based institutions and the research focus is a particularly lively aspect of it. At its inaugural meeting in 2004, Mark Henrickson presented some of the findings of the Lavender Island research, which “was the broadest survey of these communities and the first strengths-based research initiative…” (News-Medical.Net, 2005) The impetus for such a meeting was in part inspired (as is the name) by some members seeing and admiring the Australian QUTE website, (for an example see http://www.nteu.org.au/getinvolved/equal/queer)

SUCCESSES AND CHALLENGES

challenges
With this plethora of initiatives (and there are several others), some notable challenges continue to be very evident:

- Within Student Services, four LGBTQ people have moved into and out of management positions over the last five years. They would all probably say they have simply chosen a more stress-free life. However, I continue to sit with questions about whether their “difference” might have contributed to the stress they experienced.

- LGBTQ people on occasion still continue to have problems with employment and/or assessment within the university

- It is very hard for students to work on service provision to their peers – training and maturity are needed for this.

- There is still a serious lack of on-going staff or student training in the areas of heterosexism and homophobia - and our institution trains nurses, journalists, advertising executives, laboratory technicians and designers! Student services staff in particular might be expected to identify a lack of training in this area and to work to remedy it – but this has still not happened.

- The curriculum in many parts of the university seems to continue to be impervious to postmodern challenges around

Journal of the Australia and New Zealand Student Services Association: Number 26, October 2005
classification, exclusion, and the promulgation of false metanarratives.

**But let us celebrate the successes**

- Some of the senior academics from our university who are most renowned nationally and internationally are LGBTQ people who are out, proud and highly credible
- The institution acknowledges our network as an integral part of its diversity provision
- The diversity within our community is visible, valued and affirmed in our activities and we have the opportunity to ‘reality check’ with each other and people from other institutions on an on-going basis
- Students have indicated to us that our service innovations have a significant positive impact on their experience of our institution
- Our community adds to the vibrancy and colour of the institutional life through our events, communications and messaging.

**WHERE TO FROM HERE?**

I can see ahead in several directions:

- for our institution - regional Student Services and Academic conferences, research on student needs and satisfaction, establishment of specific support staff, Queer Studies curricula, encouragement of conference presentations and journal publication
- nationally - caucuses in all the tertiary education unions, national conferences, maybe a national journal, sending people to international conferences
- regionally in terms of Australia/Oceania - strands of LGBTQ concerns in all relevant higher education and student support conferences, specific regional conferences for both students and staff, regular support to report back from international conferences to the regional LGBTQ conferences.

The need for change is strong. In 2004, when students at the University of Wollongong campus asked for an LGBT space,

Journal of the Australia and New Zealand Student Services Association: Number 26, October 2005
reporting violence and abuse by other students, rather than the university negotiating with them, police were brought on to the campus. Illingworth and Murphy referred in 2004 to the findings of Price and Telljohann (1991) that “school counselors and the school environment are generally hostile to LGB students. In a national survey of 289 secondary school counselors, 20 percent were concerned about their ability to help this group of students…a quarter of counselors said they found that teachers were prejudiced against gay students, and roughly 40 percent said that schools responded inadequately to those students…” (Illingworth & Murphy, 2004) In a context like this, reading about initiatives like the Rainbow Project at the University of Western Australia in Goody and De Vries’s Herdsa presentation in 2002, provides a vision of what could be, with their hope that “(p)erhaps in the not too distant future straight talk about queer issues will be part of everyday conversations.” (Goody & Vries, 2002, p.281)

For all of the difficulty in finding ways to talk in these conversations and yet not be compromised by our language, there is a certain urgency here: to address the needs of students and colleagues and thus give reassurance; while acknowledging hopes and celebrating rainbows; and perhaps most of all to be upfront, honest and courageous enough to have the difficult dialogues with ourselves and with each other so that all students have the chance to become all that they are capable of and make their contributions to our shared world.

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How Student Services can influence the factors that relate to Student Persistence

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ABSTRACT

The retention of students is of increasing importance to Universities as they operate in a competitive and economically difficult marketplace. Research over the last 30 years has identified a number of factors that play a part in the decision making processes of a student to persist or drop out of university. This paper identifies these factors and then explores how the activities and programs of Student Services relate to them, thereby influencing student persistence.

INTRODUCTION

For those of us old enough to have attended university in the 60s and early 70s, it is likely that we would have been sitting in lecture theatres surrounded by students of Anglo-Saxon origin. The majority of us would have been middle class, arrived straight from school, and of male gender. University with all that it offered (including a very healthy social life as the author remembers) would have been our sole focus during semester.

If we compare the student experience of the 60’s and 70’s with the student experience of 2004 and imagine sitting in the same lecture theatre, examining our fellow students would tell us a very different story. In the intervening years between the 60’s and now universities have had to challenge their notions of a ‘typical student’ and cope with the reality that the student population reflects the mixing pot that is Australian society. No longer do we have the dominant image of a white middle class/upper class Anglo-Saxon male straight from
school treading the hallowed corridors of higher education. Today it is as likely to be a mature aged female of non English speaking immigrant background.

In the last few years, universities have had other strongly held notions challenged. Not only has the picture of a typical student changed but so have student expectations and where students place ‘university life’ in the whole picture of their lives.

As Craig McInnis and Richard James of the University of Melbourne discovered in their national studies of the first year experience in 1995 and 1999, that students no longer fit their lives around university but increasingly expect university to fit around their lives. McInnis and colleagues (2000) identified that students are spending less time on campus than their predecessors and that paid employment has become a major component of many students’ lives. Related to a disengagement from campus life are discernable trends in study patterns and social interaction where students are more dependent on friends for course material and less likely to study at weekends (McInnis 2001). Students are also more mobile and see themselves as consumers paying for a product. In terms of product they have more choice as technology allows more providers to enter the market place. Courses can be taken online. The University of choice does not have to be an Australian University.

Overlaying changing demographics and changing expectations (McInnis et al 2000) is the current economic climate. Universities operate in a world of significant budgetary constraints, growing competition and a potentially shrinking international clientele, as evidenced by recent articles in the print media (eg The Australian Higher Education Supplement, Campus review). All these pressures make it increasingly important for universities to retain the students that first enrol, especially as the idea of promoting life long learning and building lasting relationships with students gains credence. Carefully thought out retention strategies are a key component of long term success for the students and for universities.

WHAT IS MEANED BY RETENTION AND PERSISTENCE?

The terms ‘retention’ and ‘persistence’ are often used in the literature as interchangeable terms. This is due to both being defined in the same broad based terms of either student attendance (eg continuing, voluntary withdrawal etc) or how students’ progress through a degree

Journal of the Australia and New Zealand Student Services Association: Number 26, October 2005
can be measured (eg attrition rates, completion rates etc). For the purposes of this paper, a distinction will be drawn between the two terms. This distinction will highlight the difference between focussing on the actions of individuals as compared with a focus on the actions and responsibilities of institutions. This critical distinction is rarely identified in the literature, although it has been highlighted in the work of Horstmanshof and Zimitat (2003). In this paper persistence is defined as ‘the individual student’s actions to continue with studies regardless of the influences acting upon them’. Retention, on the other hand, refers to ‘the policies, actions, strategies and culture of the institution that are designed to keep a student’.

To put matters into a context, a DEST study of attrition trends in Australian Universities (2004) indicated that attrition rates were significantly higher among first year students than subsequent years, more domestic students dropped out than international students, and for students over 25 years of age the rate of attrition was as high as 34%.

Not all the students in the study will be lost to the university sector as a whole, as the figures do not differentiate between those who have left and those who have left and gone to another institution. However, in current economic climes, the knowledge that a student has gone off to study elsewhere is cold comfort to the institution losing the student.

FACTORS INFLUENCING STUDENT PERSISTENCE

To assist universities in the retention battle, there is now a large body of evidence on the factors that influence students to persist or withdraw. This area of research began in the USA with researchers such as Spady (1970) and Tinto (1975, 1993), espousing theoretical models to explain student departure. Other models (eg Astin 1977, Bean 1980) have emerged since then and significant research has taken place worldwide. This paper will not go into the workings of the various models, however it will explore the factors that many of the models have in common and which have been identified as influencing the decision making processes of students in persisting at or withdrawing from university. The way in which these factors act upon the persistence of individual students has been found to be a very complex process. A single negative factor may be sufficient for a student to withdraw. Relevant to this paper is evidence that has indicated that institutions can positively influence the process (eg
Braxton et al 2003, Rickinson & Rutherford 1995), with the result that the student is more likely to persist.

Before discussing the factors it is worth pointing out that it is important for universities to gain specific information on their particular cohorts of students, in order to have an understanding of how these factors may be operating in context.

Firstly there are the factors that directly relate to the individual student. A search of the literature indicates several factors as influential in the persistence process. Whether students enter university with clear goals and expectations in terms of academic study, career, time needed for study and university expectations have been identified as significant (Bers & Smith 1991, Mutter 1992). If there is wide incongruence between the student expectations of the university environment and reality, or if the student has no clear goals in mind then they may be more likely to withdraw (Watson et al 2004). Several studies (West et al 1986, McClelland & Kruger 1993) have concluded that the level of student commitment to the course and to the institution are significant factors in both academic performance and persistence. In the UK, studies exploring the notion of cultural capital and the role it plays in making the choice to attend university and in what to study at university, have found that students with strong cultural capital are likely to make more informed choices and therefore have more commitment and clearer goals (Ball et al 2002). Linked to this, is the notion of whether the student is comfortable with the institution. While exploring aspects of social capital and university attendance and success, Forsyth and Furlong (2003) have identified that for some groups of students, particularly students from a low socio-economic backgrounds (LSES), the idea of comfort with the institution is important. This is of particular interest for those of us that work in sandstone institutions, where cohorts such as LSES students may be expected to feel less comfortable. An individual’s motivation also influences persistence decisions. Abbott–Chapman and colleagues (1992) found motivation to study to be a significant factor in persistence. Overall for some student cohorts, individual factors have been found to be key in decisions to withdraw (Mackie 2001).

Secondly there are external factors operating on the student from outside the university environment. Our own anecdotal evidence within Student Services coupled with the findings of researchers such as McInnis and colleagues (2000) clearly shows that many students are in paid work and that on average the number of hours of paid
work are increasing. This leads to questions of how the current student population balances paid work with study and what effect this has on persistence. A clear link has yet to be established, although there is evidence that different cohorts are in paid work for different reasons (Krause et al 2005) suggesting that for some cohorts there is more financial pressure. The link between financial pressure and persistence has been established in the research. A British study (Davies 1999) concluded that the effect of financial pressures was only a secondary factor in withdrawal where other factors such as lack of commitment to their course were already impacting negatively on the student. However research has indicated that financial pressures for mature aged students is one of the factors that can influence persistence of students from LSES backgrounds (Forsyth & Furlong 2003, Nora 1990). Recent studies have identified the fear of being heavily in debt as of major significance in persistence (Bennett 2003, Forsyth & Furlong 2003). There is some emerging evidence from student organisations that the fear of debt exists within the Australian context (Heagney 2004).

The effects of the family commitments of a student and their existing support networks (both family and friends) have been a focus of studies. Parental encouragement has been identified as the strongest influencer of persistence and very important in terms of influencing other factors such as goal and institutional commitment (Stage & Rushin 1993). The role of the family has been increasingly acknowledged as an important factor in the student experience within Australia (Krause et al 2005). When exploring social capital, Forsyth and Furlong (2003) discovered that ongoing peer networks can be significant in the decisions to withdraw, especially amongst males who felt they were moving too far away from the culture of their external peer networks.

Thirdly there are organisational factors. These include whether the student has the perception that there is institutional commitment and support, and whether the internal operations of the institution can be easily navigated by the student. Several studies indicate the importance of these factors (Thomas & Yorke 2003). Kuh (2002) examined the relationship between organisational culture and persistence. He concluded that the culture of the institution was undoubtedly linked to persistence. Where students felt valued and affirmed, they were less likely to withdraw. This supported earlier findings of Berger & Braxton (1998) where institutional attributes were linked with social integration and persistence.
Fourthly there are academic factors. The integration of students into the academic life of the university is one of the key components of the persistence model put forward by Tinto (1988) which has been used as the basis for many subsequent studies. Subsequent research has shown that students are entering university without the expected generic skills required for study (Latham & Green 1997) and that students are more likely to withdraw if they do not possess the necessary skills or knowledge (Evans 2000).

Lastly there are social factors. The integration of students into the social life of the university is one of the key components of the persistence model put forward by Tinto (1988). However the concept of ‘integration’ is one that has come under increasing attack. Tierney (1992) argues strongly against the notion of social integration particularly for ethnic minorities. His argument is that the underlying assumption of integration is one of conformity to the norm which could be akin to cultural suicide. He concludes that the idea of integration should be challenged and replaced by the idea of emancipation and empowerment. The question arises as to whether the original interpretation of social integration plays any significant part in persistence within the Australia context. The Australian student cohort is primarily a commuter cohort rather than residential on campus. Where commuter students have been investigated in the USA, social integration was not significant (Mutter 1992). It has also been clearly shown that the trend over the last ten years has been for students to spend less and less time on campus (Krause et al 2005). Regardless of the argument around ‘integration’, it is nonetheless relevant to examine the impact of social aspects of the student experience and I will do this from the perspective of a sense of belonging. Promoting a collegial environment and encouraging a sense of belonging has been identified as a key factor in institutions that are particularly successful in retaining students (Yorke 2001). It has also been identified within the Australian context as being significant in student satisfaction especially where the interaction was with their peers within the learning community (Krause, McInnis & Welle 2002).

Research in Australia (McInnis et al 2000) indicated that two thirds of students felt unprepared for university, approx one third felt they had made poor choices in terms of courses, less than 50% received a lot of satisfaction from studying and only a quarter felt that staff usually gave helpful feedback on progress. This suggests that there is much scope for universities to make the student experience more positive.
and negate the influences of the factors that lead to student decisions to withdraw.

**STUDENT SERVICES AND RETENTION**

How then can Student Services make a significant difference in the retention of students? On a philosophical basis it can be argued that for areas such as counselling and learning skills, retention is at the very core of their work, whether it be an individual counselling session or a group academic skills workshop. Research exists which supports this assertion. Several studies in the USA have for example, found that students who have received counselling have significantly higher rates of persistence than students who sought counselling but did not attend or students who did not seek counselling at all (Turner & Berry 2000, Wilson et al 1997). In the UK, studies by researchers such as Rickinson and Rutherford (1998) support the importance of student services such as counselling in any institutional approach to retention. There is also evidence that suggests an integrated Student Service model is a positive tool in the retention battle (Thomas & Jary 2003) However, the purpose of this paper is not to focus on philosophies or organisational structures, but to highlight programs both common and innovative that have been initiated and developed by Student Service areas and indicate where they relate to the factors influencing student decision making outlined previously.

If we accept the body of evidence that indicates the significance of the first year of study, then it is clear that a well planned program of support for first years is critical. However the author would argue that the retention activities of a university begin before a student receives an offer letter. It is during school life that a university can influence the individual factors that impact on persistence, especially amongst educationally disadvantaged groups where there may be poor cultural and social capital in terms of university study (Reay et al 2001). The more information that can be given through school the more chance the student has of entering university with clear goals and expectations and of making informed choices.

Work with schools is often seen as the role of marketing units, however in educational development terms, Student Services have strong claims to be initiating and running school based programs. To make a long lasting impact, educational awareness programs such as the UK ‘Aimhigher’ program (2005) are being developed to target children from Primary school through to senior High school.

Journal of the Australia and New Zealand Student Services Association: Number 26, October 2005
Emerging evidence from such programs indicates a level of success (BBC 2005). These programs take many forms but many involved taking existing university students back into schools. Programs such as student ambassador programs, student tutoring and student mentoring in schools have the dual outcome of developing cultural capital in High School students and developing leadership skills in our own university students. The University of Western Sydney (UWS) Club Ace program is an example of an approach that targets High School and involves a range of activities designed to demystify university. Other programs such as summer schools, shadowing university students and being a university student for a day have the advantage of introducing the school student to an unfamiliar environment before choices are made. Many universities are also targeting parents and teachers by running workshops focusing on developing educational aspirations and developing resource material both online and hardcopy. It could be argued that giving knowledge to those who can influence school students can develop the social and cultural capital needed to succeed at university.

In terms of organisational factors, Student Services are well placed to have a significant impact both in terms of the individual student and also the organisation. Organisationally, Student Services can seek to influence policy, practice and information flow to ensure that students find the institution relatively easy to navigate and understand. Through regular and close contact with students (often in crisis) Student Services are in a unique position to be able to adopt a student focused perspective covering the entire student university lifecycle. This can then be fed back into key decision making processes such as admissions policies. In institutions in the United Kingdom for example (Thomas and Jary 2003), Student Services have sought to influence through the provision of student support training for academic and administrative staff. This enables staff to gain information on recognising students at risk and perhaps as importantly promoted and highlighted the support services availability to students. In terms of the individual student, activities such as Orientation which have traditionally been under the Student Services domain, provide the opportunity to guide new entrants through the maze of institutional jargon, process and structure. Australian universities such as Deakin are recognising the need to expand traditional orientation to include websites focusing on guiding students through the first six to eight weeks and providing proactive avenues for first years to ask questions in the critical early weeks. The Deakin ‘Ask Me’ initiative, involving both academic and administrative staff, is designed to encourage students to ask for help.

Journal of the Australia and New Zealand Student Services Association: Number 26, October 2005
External factors do not immediately lend themselves to direct organisational intervention. However Student Services can play a part through the development of resources including online resources such as financial guides and workshops on processes to manage finances. Workshops on topics such as time management can also assist a student to manage workloads. At UWS the weekly and semester planners produced by Student Services are very popular items. Access to counselling services can also play an important part in assisting students to overcome negative external influences (Rickinson & Rutherford 1995).

It is in the sphere of the academic and social factors where Student Services can have most influence on the experience of students. Programs commonly developed to support academic endeavours include bridging and preparation programs offered prior to the start of first semester to assist in building academic skill levels and confidence for university study. Peer mentoring and peer assisted learning programs exist in many institutions and not only assist academically but also socially and in helping the student navigate the workings of the institution. In some instances peer mentoring for specific cohorts where additional support can be of benefit is offered such as Muslim women and mature aged students. Workshops and support material on topics such as academic skills, time management, exam stress and what to do if you are thinking of dropping out, also support the student academically. As evidenced by discussions at recent student service focused conferences it appears to be becoming more common for Student Services to explore ways of embedding such support in a systemic way into the normal academic activities as well as offering stand alone programs.

In addition to the traditional forms of support, Student Services are increasingly looking at innovative ways to improve the student academic experience and thereby increase retention. Such innovative programs such as the UWS First Year Support Program include targeted early intervention whereby students ‘at risk’ of dropping out or failing are identified by the academic through a number of mechanisms, early in the semester, and are offered referrals to Student Services for help. Small study support groups, targeting particularly cohorts such as mature aged women or Muslim women are being set up. Some Student Services areas in overseas institutions have assigned staff as advisers to specific cohorts of first year students. The University of Hull’s mature aged student adviser program is an example.

Journal of the Australia and New Zealand Student Services Association: Number 26, October 2005
Many of the programs mentioned above assist in the social integration of the student into university life as they provide the opportunities for students to meet with their peers. Other programs which incorporate online chat/discussion groups such as UWS Campus Connections, can also be useful in connecting students with their peers.

**CONCLUSION**

Student Services have moved a long way from the old welfare approach to the provision of services which resulted in narrow reactive offerings, to a proactive, planned and often integrated approach. Many programs are collaborative efforts between the different areas of Student Services and between Students Services and academic areas. With a range of targeted programs especially aimed at the critical first year and at groups likely to be at higher risk of dropping out, in addition to the normal cycle of offerings, it is clear that Student Services plays a significant part in institutional strategies for retention. Indeed a recent report undertaken for Universities UK (2003) concludes that the role of Student Services is a critical component in student retention and success. Staff within Student Services continue to explore ways of helping students to persist, reach their potential and leave university as successes. We have much to offer and students deserve no less.

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Journal of the Australia and New Zealand Student Services Association: Number 26, October 2005
Promoting an Integrated Campus-wide Approach to First Year Student Retention

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ABSTRACT

Higher Education institutions increasingly are looking at ways of improving the first year experience for students and reducing student attrition. However, first year retention programs can lose their effectiveness when they exist alone, rather than as an integrated, campus-wide strategy. This presentation draws on the experience of staff, working in student support services at a small campus of an Australian regional university, in developing a whole-campus approach to first year student retention. This approach aims to integrate academic, administrative and support strategies, in order to improve the student’s entire first year experience, across all areas of the campus. Discussion will focus on ways in which strategies such as peer mentoring, orientation programs, learning development programs and so on, can be developed and integrated within the academic framework of the student’s program, involving the commitment of both academic and support staff in the planning and delivery of such strategies.

The term ‘First Year Experience’ has become widely used within Australian higher education circles over the past decade. However,
there has been some interest in the first year experiences of students since the early fifties (McInnis, James and Mc Naught, 1995). With the increasing diversity of student populations and the greater economic pressure on universities, there has developed a heightened awareness of the importance of student attrition, from the point of view of both the individual and the institution. “For the student such an occurrence can have far-reaching social and psychological consequences while for the institution it is costly and can be perceived as a poor reflection on its teaching practices” (O’Shea, 2004).

According to McInnis (2001), students are engaging less and less with the university community, resulting in tertiary study becoming more of a ‘solitary’ activity. His study in 1995 examined the process of socialisation involved in the first year of university and explored how the student is an active agent in this socialisation. Basing the study on cohorts from seven Australian universities, McInnis and his co-researchers presented an in-depth analysis of the types of factors and imperatives that impact on student participation, success and motivation. The main findings from this study were as follows:

1. Student disengagement from the academic life of the university was more likely to lead to withdrawal.
2. Lack of identity with a particular faculty or student cohort, little interaction with other students and with other activities on campus contribute to disengagement.
3. 23% of school leavers in first-year university studies were dissatisfied with their university experience, finding they had difficulty adjusting to university style of teaching, comprehending material, had little idea where the course was going and/or finding the standard higher than expected. Dissatisfied students were not as socially connected, being less likely to discuss their subjects with other students and/or to have made friends at university.
4. The availability and approachability of staff were of great importance to first-year students. Preconceptions were commonly held by many students that university academics are impersonal, unapproachable, unavailable and inaccessible.
5. First-year students are reticent to initiate interaction with staff – often overwhelmed by the power relationship and the impression that some lecturers did not appear to welcome questions.
6. Students value highly staff who interact with them. Teachers who engaged in a great deal of person-to-person interaction with their students were rated highly by them as instructors.
7. Feedback from lecturers on their academic performance was of great importance to first-year students. A perception of a lack of
adequate guidance or interest on the part of teaching staff played an important part in the withdrawal of students.

More recently Tanya Kantanis’ 2002 study undertaken at Monash University indicated that the main transition challenges for students included:

- Unfamiliar environment
- New set of peers and friends
- Different teaching styles, disciplinary demands and institutional practices
- Increased responsibility for their own learning
- Balancing freedom and responsibility, competing life demands and expectations

As a result of these challenges, she found that first-year students often feel:

- Isolated – often without familiar faces and unfamiliarity of the campus
- Anxious – everyone else appears to know what they are doing
- Unfamiliar with the terminology used, eg. majors, minors, credit points, honours etc
- Concerned that the pace and style of teaching and learning is different from previous experience
- Intimidated by the amount of reading and written work expected
- Unsure of what is expected in lectures, tutorials, practicals etc, and even how to address lecturers and tutors.
- Worried about letting down themselves and their families, especially if they are the first in their family to come to University.
- Homesick having relocated to study
- Unsupported, especially if they do not know where to turn for advice and assistance

These Australian findings accord with research findings from the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom, summarised by Miller et al (1997) into ten common findings:

1. Withdrawal is usually multicausal; and students seldom react to just one cause.

Journal of the Australia and New Zealand Student Services Association: Number 26, October 2005
2. Withdrawal often follows specific kinds of interactions between the individual and institution, eg. where the student feels the institution has been indifferent or unsupportive.

3. Proactive advising is critical to reducing attrition. Wilson et al (1997) show that counselling (academic and personal) results in a retention advantage. This finding is supported by similar studies by Norman et al (1990) and Metzer (1989).

4. An important factor influencing retention rates is the quality of student/academic staff interactions.

5. Students who integrate into the university tend to stay, while those who are not integrated tend to withdraw. (Tinto, 1993)

6. The more prestigious the institution (higher entry cut offs, sandstone history etc) the lower the attrition rate.

7. Availability of social interaction opportunities on campus reduces attrition.

8. Students with fixed, more certain intentions and long term goals (career certainty/maturity) are less likely to withdraw (Tinto 1993).

9. Students who want to be active in the learning process, rather than passive, are less likely to withdraw.

10. External factors that exist at the time of entry contribute to withdrawal (eg finances and distance) but are more likely to be considered in the decision to attend than in the decision to withdraw.

Taking all these factors into account, Tinto’s model (1993) suggests that the best way of reducing attrition is to ensure the student’s integration at both the personal level of commitment to their course of study and to the particular institution at the social level.

With attrition rates at the Ourimbah Campus of the University of Newcastle running at an average of 26.7% over the past 5 years, the Student Support Unit at this Campus has been working towards developing a whole-campus approach to improving the first year experience and student retention. This approach aims to integrate academic, administrative and support strategies, in order to improve the student’s entire first year experience, across all areas of the campus.

The Student Support Unit at the Ourimbah Campus of the University of Newcastle is an integrated unit comprising the following support services:

- Accommodation
- Careers
- Chaplaincy

Journal of the Australia and New Zealand Student Services Association: Number 26, October 2005
Each service is managed by one full-time staff member, with a full-time administrative assistant supporting the staff in the Unit and part-time staff assisting in some of the areas. Over the past five years or so, the unit has developed a number of first-year retention and support strategies such as a peer mentoring program, known as the SOS Program (Stone, 2000), “Back to Study” workshops for mature-aged students plus a range of general orientation activities including learning support programs.

There were a number of challenges for the Student Support Unit in attempting to develop wider first-year experience programs. To begin with, support and retention of students had traditionally been regarded on campus largely as Student Support Unit responsibilities. On the other hand, the design and implementation of the first-year Orientation Program had traditionally been the responsibility of Student Administration. While the two sections generally worked together cooperatively, there was inevitably some degree of overlap and lack of communication in the planning and running of the respective programs. Additionally, it was at times difficult to involve academic staff sufficiently in the planning and implementation processes, as well as some problems accessing the students to publicise, inform and seek assistance for peer support programs and so on. Student Support staff were also keen to move away from a “deficit” model of student support services and to move instead towards greater mainstreaming of support services and retention strategies across all areas of the Campus – academic, administrative and support areas.

In order to meet these challenges and work towards a campus-wide approach to improving the first-year experience, at the end of 2002 the Student Support Unit invited staff from all areas of the Campus to a “Forum on Student Retention and First-Year Experience Issues”. It received a very positive response, and was attended by representatives from all areas of the Campus. The program for the Forum included presentation of information about common factors influencing student attrition, some of the transition programs already in place on campus and ideas from all areas about what more was needed. From the Forum, there was sufficient enthusiasm to form a First-Year Retention
Committee, with all areas represented, including the four academic Schools, administration, student support, library and Campus management.

This committee has continued to meet on approximately a twice-semester basis, with reporting lines to senior academic administration. It has become an ongoing planning/discussion forum on a wide range of support/retention strategies, including the development of a research project into reasons for student attrition at the Campus. This research project is in its beginning stages, assisted by Federal government equity funding, and will provide the Campus with valuable information about some of the major factors influencing Ourimbah Campus students in their decision to leave. With the help of this information, more carefully targeted retention strategies can be planned and implemented. Some of the immediate benefits from working more collaboratively in this way have been the increased level of cooperation between academic, administrative and support staff, a greater acceptance across all areas of the campus of the need for “mainstreaming” of first-year experience strategies, the development of new programs and improved recognition of existing ones. As a result of this collaboration, there has been improved coordination in the planning and running of orientation and transition programs, as well as an expansion of such activities, including the following:

- SOS Student Mentor program – peer support program for first-year students
- “University - What’s it all about?” sessions for first-year students and parents/family members, targeting school leavers - Q&A sessions with a panel of lecturers, student support staff and student mentors
- “Back to Study – Survival Skills for Mature-aged Students” workshops, incorporating study skills and peer support
- Learning Development programs, including a range of academic skills training
- Drop-in learning support sessions, with tutors available in the Learning Centre, located in the Campus library
- Specific Orientation sessions for international students, rural students and residential students
- Introductory sessions in large first-year lectures, facilitated by Student Support staff, lecturers and student mentors
- Library orientation and information sessions
At this stage it is too early to tell whether the expansion and improvements in first-year transition and orientation programs at Ourimbah in particular, will have any real effect on student attrition and retention. However, the research that is just getting underway at Ourimbah into factors influencing student attrition will allow programs to be more closely targeted to the needs of the students. This will be followed by further research into the effects of such programs on attrition and/or student success. However, from an access and equity perspective, the importance of providing an enriched university transition program in a geographic area of relative academic, social and financial disadvantage such as the Central Coast cannot be underestimated. Much of the recent research into student attrition points to a lack of engagement of the student with the academic institution as being an important factor. Measures aimed at engaging our students, many of whom are coming from disadvantaged backgrounds, by improving their first-year experience, will hopefully not only make a difference to whether they stay or leave, but will also contribute to their reaching their full academic potential.

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Tinto, V. (1993)
At the last ANZSSA biennial conference, the counsellors had a wish list for future material. First or second on that list was for 'techniques that worked'.

So I recorded two 'raves' I deliver to clients fairly early in the counselling process. I have been using these for more than 10 years. They are designed to get concepts in psychology across quickly and in a manner easy for the layperson to understand. They are based on generally accepted concepts, together with some recent information from modern scanning techniques on humans as they 'work'.

The first is about the Fight or Flight Syndrome and is used in Stress Management, Exam Anxiety or general sessions. The second is about human developmental processes and is useful for introducing self-talk examination in general counselling.

These are not designed to be learned treatises but bite size, memorable concepts to be used as templates for normal human behaviour that the student can take away and think about. I also have written copies if they ask.

I think they work because our clientele are intelligent and used to dealing with concepts every day in their student life, this has also determined my counselling style, which is straight forward, down to earth and respectful.

**Fight or flight**

We have the one system for dealing with threat. It is a system that was invented at the reptilian level of life on earth, at least. It may have been before that but it goes back at least as far as the reptiles and it is based at the reptilian level of our brain in terms of dealing with all sorts of threats. It is called colloquially the "Fight or Flight Syndrome" but it really should be "Flight, Fight or Hide".

There are three choices in dealing with these sorts of threats. When we notice a threat coming the area that is structured to deal with this is
right down in the lower part of the brain based around the hippocampus. The hippocampus is a part of the brain designed to deal with very old or deep anti-emotional especially memories. It is called hippocampus because it is vaguely horsehide shaped and wrapped around it are these things like grapes on very thick stalks. That is called the amygdala or the amygdalin bodies and they are the trigger to start the process. The amygdala gets two signals, one comes straight from the sensors, in other words straight from your eyes, ears or touch and the same signal is sent via the cortex so it is subject to the thought process and is somewhat slower than the first one. This explains the kind of double take that we have so you know you walk out on the street - huh, what's that, ah, only a car backfiring.

It deals with the threat by getting us prepared to be physically active and it uses chemicals to do this. The chemicals are produced by the amygdala sending signals to glands to start secreting those chemicals. The first one we would be aware of is adrenalin. Adrenalin goes all the way around the body, but the thing we would become aware of first of all is our heart/lung group speeding up and that is designed to pump blood and oxygen to the brain to get the brain working faster. In reptiles this would have been to make the sensors more acute because the receptors in the brain would be picking it up faster. In humans it is also responsible for speeding up the thought process and so this is the sort of thing that we go through when we have an exam. In an exam you probably notice that if anyone drops something like a pencil case or something everyone leaps for the ceiling because the sound is amplified because our brain is picking up the sense via the hearing and eyesight possibly at several hundred times more than more than we normally would.

There is a second group of chemicals that are produced at the same time but are slightly slower acting. They are called the corticoids collectively. They go to the gut to stop you digesting because digestion takes energy and blood and if you are going to be running away or fighting in order to beat this threat you want all the energy you can muster and the blood out to the extremities of the body where it makes things work properly so it stop digestion. What we feel when it stops digestion could be nausea so we want to throw the food up or constipation or diarrhea so we get rid of it through the other end or just that heavy knot in the gut that feels like it's twisted around, or butterflies in the stomach, if it is slightly less than a threat or it could be other feelings but they are all to do with the centre of the body.
Part of the corticoids is also cortisol, which goes to the skin, and it dries out the skin and makes the skin permeable so that things can get through it whereas your skin is normally and sloughs off its surface. You lose the entire surface of your skin once a month so that's what is creates all the dust in your bedroom, it's all dead skin cells. Because the cortisol dries it out you start getting rashes or irritated skin and start scratching and all that sort of thing. Also at this time the immune system drops out, presumably because it takes a lot of energy to run the immune system and you can do without it while you're fighting the threat. Therefore if your being subject to continued threat you can start getting opportunistic bugs that you normally fight off because your immune system deals with them automatically. They start to affect your health and so you get the odd flu/cold and so on that normally you wouldn't even notice - they start to affect you. Your appetite might drop off, you might start losing weight, all of those sorts of things.

If you did in fact start running away or fighting, your body would start producing a whole new wave of chemicals to help you beat that and part of those chemicals are familiar to most people. They are called endorphins. Endorphins are produced naturally inside of us but chemically they're identical to the opiates, opium, heroin and all of that. In fact the opiates works on the endorphin centres in our brain. The endorphins have a similar effect to the opiates that is they give you a sense of feeling calm and in charge of the world and at peace. If you have ever been engaged in sport you probably noticed that after a good workout you have that feeling at the end of the night, you feel tired but satisfied - feeling you've done something really good and you feel at peace with the world.

The problem is that when we get an intellectual threat, (all of this is based on a physical threat, reptiles have no intellect therefore no intellectual threat) and so it is designed to get us physically active. When you get an intellectual threat you don't get physically active, you sit at your desk or you sit in your bedroom or you sit there going "aaaaaargh" hoping it will all go away. You don't go out and start getting physically active therefore you don't produce endorphins therefore you don't get the calming effect. Therefore if you are feeling upset over a long period it makes sense to go out and do some activity and start producing some endorphins. You do get endorphins from ways as well including chocolate, have a bit of chocolate, it starts producing endorphins, putting on nice clothes, getting into a nice cool bed in summer time - those sorts of things also produce
endorphins but we don't do it because we don't know that that's what is needed.

If we do start to do that and start to look after ourselves we will not get those adrenalin spikes and if we keep on getting adrenalin spikes you get this harsh landing and if you get enough of that you're probably going to get depressed. If you have endorphins in there to give you a soft landing you won't - so think about that.

Basic Developmental Psychology

We come to consciousness while we are still in the womb. There is a lot of evidence that shows that the foetus is thinking at this time, is interacting with itself, it is playing games with its fingers, toes, and it must be an amazing environment because nothing changes. It is constant temperature, the background of the blood rush and the heartbeat in the background, we don’t get hungry because we are fed by the umbilical, we don’t have any particular problems except when Mum crosses her legs or something like that, and we are the centre of the universe essentially, as far as we can determine. We don’t know how a foetus thinks at this level because the brain is different to what we evolve to but we can hear what’s going on outside, we can certainly hear our mother’s voice and recent experiments have found that children can remember music that they heard three months before birth. They are tiny at that stage but music seems to have a connection there.

So, in the middle of this, well I don’t know about idyllic, but of this experience that is tranquil, for some unknown reason we turn upside down one day, bend backward through ninety degrees the wrong way, squeezed for hours and hours, up to twenty hours, into a cold, loud, bright, nasty environment where people stick things up every orifice or our body. It must be the world’s worst nightmare. It’s called the birth trauma and it is traumatic and for any child it is awful. The first comforting thing that happens is being reunited with the mother and while we are wrapped in towels that are probably scratchy to the skin and all that sort of thing, the smell maybe and certainly the sound of the voice of the mother would be comforting.
The first good thing that happens is we get food whether we are breast or bottle fed, it doesn’t matter particularly at this stage but we have this stuff that fills our belly, and then we fall asleep and the whole nightmare goes away. Then we wake up, it’s back, awful, loud and nasty. More food, mouth, belly, and we fall asleep again. And this goes on, and finally we start bonding with the figure that turns out to be our mother, and we start recognising other figures near to us, and children do recognise those figures.

One of the problems, however, in modern days, we are not brought up the way that humans were designed to be brought up. We were designed to be brought up in an extended family or a village, or something like that, where we get an input from a whole lot of people. We therefore get different inputs and a range of things that give some sort of moderation to how we see the world. But in the modern world, we have a nuclear family where two people are supposed to provide everything for us to decide how the world works. That is where the problem lies. We therefore try to figure out what is going on in the world and at this stage, this is really important, children are hard wired to seek attention and affection. It is a survival mechanism because it takes at least three years of intensive care by a responsible person in order for a child just to survive.

That being the case, you must notice when you walk into a room, if there is a baby there, they grab your eyes with theirs and then start smiling or crying, depending on how they’re feeling, and it does attract your attention. You are immediately engaged with them. It’s a survival mechanism.

The problem is that if we don’t get the sort of attention and affection that we crave, it can lead to all sorts of problems. The worst end of the spectrum, it can be truly serious. In Rumania when the Iron Curtain fell, Rumania was run by two very mad people called the Ceaucescus who banned contraception because they wanted the population to build up. But Rumania had this very, very strong Christian tradition and children born out of wedlock were not valued at all. So they were all put into orphanages when they were born, where they were warm enough and got enough food, they were three to a bed, it wasn’t a nice existence but the problem was they weren’t picked up, fondled and goo’d to. Therefore, they died, believe it or not. There was a thing called Fail To Thrive Syndrome where they were given the food but they didn’t take the sustenance from it. They didn’t put on weight and they died. The ones who survived all of that were the ones adopted by the English who found out this was going
on, and virtually all of them had serious psychological problems: autism, schizophrenia and the like.

That doesn’t happen in a normal situation but what does happen is that the child is seeking attention and affection from the nuclear family of two parents. In our modern day, those two parents probably have to work, probably have to do lots of other things and if the child doesn’t get the attention and affection that it is seeking, typically the child does not go “I’ve got defective parents. This is a gyp, I want a different family”. The child goes “there’s something wrong with me or there’s something wrong with the world, and I can’t fix it”. This leads to ongoing problems. It is a hard thought to think “I’m unloveable or I’m not worthy” or something like that, so we suppress it.

This is a problem because there are two ways of going about this. One is called Repression, it is unconscious and it works. The other is called Suppression; it’s conscious where we deliberately try to push something out of our consciousness and it doesn’t work. It is like telling you not to think of a purple polar bear. The thought is suppressed, that takes energy, when we’ve got another problem we need to use our energy on that new problem and pow, up comes the original one “I’m not worthy”. If that happens often enough, it can even get a connection between the two that “this new nasty thing is happening to me because I am not worthy”.

It goes on and on and on. We don’t question it because it feels like truth or it feels like God says. Really what it is, is a small child with a small child’s brain that thinks in terms of magic, being cursed and all these sorts of things, but we don’t recognise that that is where it comes from, so we act as if we are the person described by that small voice in our heads via the self talk. And it comes every time that something goes wrong “You fool, you idiot, you’ve done it again”. And that is the driver. It’s something that if we do question, we will find that it is the voice of a small, hurt child. Once we recognise this, we can do something about it.

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Journal of the Australia and New Zealand Student Services Association: Number 26, October 2005
Do academic orientations make a difference: a preliminary assessment

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ABSTRACT

Research on the experiences of international students and their adaptation to the education environment in NZ has revealed some dissatisfaction relating to the academic experience of international students in NZ. It has been suggested that the discrepancy between international students’ expectations and reality may sometimes contribute to negative views and difficulties with study. Student Learning Support Service at Victoria University of Wellington has designed and trialled a number of academic orientation programmes and materials for international students, in an attempt to ease the transition, raise awareness of possible challenges students may face in a NZ tertiary environment, and ultimately create a more positive and rewarding academic experience. This paper reports on a preliminary evaluation of the influence of our academic orientation programmes on international students’ attitudes and study behaviours. Students who attended the July 2004 orientation, as well as those who did not, were invited to participate in a two-stage research programme. They were interviewed at the beginning of the trimester, and at mid-trimester they responded to a questionnaire. We found that students who had attended our academic orientation programmes tended to demonstrate more detailed awareness of the main skills required in their new education environment. They also tended to apply a wider range of study strategies. We tentatively conclude that academic orientation programmes do make a difference.

INTRODUCTION

Victoria University of Wellington (VUW) experienced a large increase in international students in the late 1990s. This prompted...
Student Learning Support Service (SLSS) to run Academic Preparation Programmes (now called Preparation for Academic Life and Study) for these incoming international students. These programmes, first offered in 1999, were run at the beginning of each trimester and students attended voluntarily. As well as running these programmes from the SLSS office, we also attended International Student Orientation, run by Victoria International. There we introduced ourselves and our services to incoming international students. Over the years our daily practice as learning advisers has continued to inform our understanding of the challenges facing international students and we have fine-tuned our programmes in accordance with our observations. However, although each programme is evaluated and comments from participants are favourable, we are still not sure that our programmes make a difference to the attitudes and behaviours of new students. Therefore this pilot research sets out to gain some insight into whether our orientation programmes make a difference in these respects.

THE ACADEMIC ORIENTATION PROGRAMMES

Student Learning Support Service offers two orientation programmes to incoming international students. The first programme, Academic Expectations at Victoria (AEV), is integrated into the international students’ orientation and is held two weeks before the academic trimester commences. It is a one-hour programme with a power point presentation, a student-lecturer panel, a video and some interactive activities, such as a miniature expectations quiz and questions-answers. Participation in orientation is compulsory for international students at VUW under the New Zealand Ministry of Education Code of Practice for International Education (2002). Thus our AEV programme is normally presented to an audience of between 200 and 600 students. The second programme, Preparation for Academic Life and Study (PALS), consists of two parts: an initial half-day session on the Saturday immediately after the orientation and weekly workshops throughout the academic trimester. This paper refers to the Saturday programme only. This Saturday half-day session provides a range of activities: a video, a SWOT analysis, a tutorial session, a student panel and a mini lecture. Participation is voluntary and around 10% of the new international students join the session.

Through these programmes we hope to give students a clear idea of the expectations the academic environment requires of them. Students
analyse their personal strengths and weaknesses as they see them in relation to this environment. Thus, our objectives, as listed in our programme planning, read:

- To acknowledge students:
  - for taking on a new opportunity
  - for the contribution they will make to our institution
- for the skills they bring

- To help students understand the expectations of Victoria’s educational environment
- To help students identify their needs (in terms of new skills they might need to learn)
- To give students confidence: intellectual, oral, social
- To encourage help-seeking behaviours
- To inform students of academic support available
- To give some background to NZ political and economic systems

Until now, evaluations of these programmes have focused on student satisfaction. Bresciani, Zelna and Anderson (2004) state, however, that satisfaction surveys do not provide information on the achievement of programme objectives nor do they show how the programme might have contributed to student development and learning (p.20). Even though students’ comments show that they are appreciative of our efforts, we still do not know whether attendance at our programmes ensures a more positive and rewarding academic experience for international students at Victoria. Bresciani (2002) proposes that “as educators, student affairs professionals assess the development and learning outcomes of their programs.” Consequently, we decided to attempt to assess the outcomes of our orientation programmes.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Based on our programme objectives (see previous section), our orientation programmes should have the following outcomes:

1) Students understand that academic requirements at VUW may be different
2) Students understand the need to become independent and active learners
3) Students understand the need to become active help-seekers

The first outcome can be further divided into:

Journal of the Australia and New Zealand Student Services Association: Number 26, October 2005
a) Students understand the importance of critical thinking
b) Students understand the importance of referencing

As these outcomes involve long-term skill development and may not be observable immediately, we decided to focus on the effects of our programmes on behavioural/attitudinal change. Thus, the objectives of our research were to find out if

- Students had changed their expectations of the educational environment at Victoria
- Students had changed their behaviours in respect to study habits

The overarching objective of this research was to explore different ways of conducting outcome assessment of orientation programmes.

METHODS

Research design
Two methods were used to collect information for outcome assessment: topic-guided interviews of focus groups, and questionnaires. Interview is not only a good way to obtain rich data, but it is also an excellent way to elicit relevant information. In our case, it gave us opportunities to clarify our questions, or to ask students for explanations of their answers. We chose to interview three focus groups. The main advantages of focus groups are that several students can be interviewed at once and a less threatening environment can be created for participants. Moreover, as this research was our first attempt to assess the outcomes of orientation programmes, restricting it to three focus groups made it more manageable and allowed us to concentrate on the means of eliciting and measuring outcomes. Questionnaire was chosen as a second method to collect information. It was used initially to collect demographic information and then used again as the main method in the second stage of our data collection. Using a questionnaire as a follow-up method was less time-consuming and more convenient in terms of delivery. More importantly, the follow-up aimed at finding out students’ behavioural patterns and this information could be elicited through simple, straight-forward questions.

An initial group interview was conducted with each group within a week of orientation. Students were asked six questions relating to:

Journal of the Australia and New Zealand Student Services Association: Number 26, October 2005
perceived differences between studying at VUW and in their home countries
reasons for these differences
perceived challenges
how they would handle these challenges.

The interviews took less than an hour and were recorded on tape and later summarised. During the mid-trimester break, a survey form was sent to the same students as a follow-up. The survey questions aimed to elicit information on students’ behavioural patterns. In other words, we hoped to assess whether the orientation programmes had made a difference to students’ learning behaviours. The questionnaire consisted of frequency-rated items, yes-no questions and open-ended questions. Most items focused on students’ study habits and asked them what they do and how often they do it.

Participants
Four groups of students participated in our research. Initially, thirteen international students were recruited during international orientation in July 2004 via a volunteering scheme. The students were divided into three groups:
- those who attended the AEV session (Group 1)
- those who attended both the AEV and PALS sessions (Group 2)
- those who attended neither AEV nor PALS (Group 3)
We later decided to include one more group of students who attended neither AEV nor PALS (Group 4). This was mainly because the backgrounds of the students in Group 3 (all postgraduate students from Europe) could affect the research results. Table 1 briefly summarises the four groups of participants.

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<th>Table 1 Summary of participants</th>
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The majority of the participants were commerce students with entrance English proficiency levels of IELTS 6.0 or above, or equivalent. However, two major differences existed among the

Journal of the Australia and New Zealand Student Services Association: Number 26, October 2005
groups. Firstly, their length of stay in NZ prior to the commencement of study at VUW was different. Participants in Groups 2 and 3 had just arrived in the country at the time of the first interview. However, all the students in Group 1 and two students in Group 4 had been in NZ for more than three months and had studied in various institutions such as high schools, language schools or language programmes in tertiary institutions. Moreover, the previous educational backgrounds of the participants were different. All but one student in Groups 2 and 3 had already obtained some form of tertiary qualification (i.e. diploma or degree), but less than half the students in Groups 1 and 4 had these qualifications.

**Analysis**

Measurement of the effectiveness of our orientation programmes is based on the results of two comparisons:

- comparison of the attitudinal differences and similarities between groups 1 & 2 and group 3.
- comparison of the behavioral differences and similarities between Groups 1 & 2 and 4.

The main rationale for excluding Group 3 in the second comparison was that the participants were postgraduate students and were all European students. The similarities in the academic traditions between European countries and NZ make it difficult to determine if these students’ study habits are influenced by their previous tertiary experience or by our academic orientation programmes. A further two participants were excluded from group 2 because one did not respond to our survey and the other was a European student. Consequently, groups 1 and 2 were combined for the second comparison.

Thus we ended up with two groups of students who were reasonably comparable for the second comparison. Both groups were made up of Asian students. There were eight students in the group with orientation and seven in the group without. In terms of prior tertiary qualifications, half of the first group had either a degree or diploma while in the second group the percentage was 43%. Both groups were made up of undergraduate students except for one student in the second group who had enrolled in a graduate diploma.

**Results**

This section is divided into two parts, each part relating to one of the two comparisons mentioned above in the analysis section. The first
part presents the results of the interviews with students during orientation week and thus compares the attitudinal differences and similarities of groups 1 & 2 with group 3. The second part gives the results of our survey of student behaviours at week six of the trimester. This part compares the behavioural differences and similarities of groups 1 & 2 with group 4.

**Interview results**

The interviews during orientation week had two goals. We wanted to know whether our presentations had changed students’ expectations and we wanted to know whether students were planning any particular study behaviours as a result of our orientation programmes.

We found that students who had attended our programmes seemed to have some clear expectations of their new educational environment. They reported that they expected lecturers to teach differently here. Whereas at home, their lecturers tended to teach them all they needed to know in order to pass, they thought that at Victoria they would need to conduct independent research and give individual opinions. They thought that here in New Zealand application of knowledge would be more important than memorization of information. They said that at home, in terms of assignments as well as exams, the final result or product was all-important, whereas in NZ it seemed that the skills or process used to produce the final work were also important. Particular skills seen as challenging were: evaluation and comparison of source materials, paraphrasing and referencing. The group agreed that one of the biggest challenges for them would be studying in a foreign language. They thought time management would become a challenge because of this new language and also because they would be acquiring new skills and having to work more independently than they were used to.

Our group number three who had not attended orientation had some similar expectations as well as some different ones. Like the orientation attendees, they also thought they would need to do some research of their own for assignments and they would need to give their own opinions in assignments. They said that at home summarizing a variety of sources was important whereas here students would need to demonstrate their own thinking and use more quotes in their writing. Like the orientation group, they too stated that at home students had to learn more facts. This group had additional ideas on how class would be run. They believed that students would lead class discussions here whereas at home lecturers lead classes. They thought they would have more contact with their lecturers here than at home.

Journal of the Australia and New Zealand Student Services Association: Number 26, October 2005
Although these two groups often gave similar general expectations, the first group provided much more detail and clearly understood the environment well, especially in terms of assessment. They stated, for example, that they would need to paraphrase a lot whereas the second group mentioned that they would quote more. Paraphrasing is generally the preferred convention for incorporating support material into assignments at Victoria. This first group discussed the need to understand and use specific referencing conventions and they mentioned the need to avoid plagiarism. The second group did not touch on these issues. The first group were articulate in their descriptions of skills required and mentioned analysis, application and critical thinking whereas the second group did not identify these particular skills. The first group mentioned they expected to have to manage time carefully whereas the second group did not touch on this. Both groups expected to spend much time preparing for lectures and reading. The second group did mention one area that the first group had not touched on. This was the expectation of oral proficiency in terms of presentation. The second group also had some ideas about how class was run and how lecturers interacted with students. Some of these ideas were unfounded.

In terms of planned study behaviours, our orientation group had some good ideas. They said they would talk to classmates, tutors, lecturers and us - Student Learning Support. They said they would attend the PALS workshops for international students. They said they would form study groups to clarify concepts. They would ask questions in tutorials and they would prepare before class. In terms of time management, they would use wall planners or personal schedule systems to assign time to all subjects and assignments. They all said they would take and make opportunities to meet and converse with kiwis, not only on campus but also in the broader community.

Our group who did not attend, also stated they would ask friends for help. They would work hard and like the previous group, prepare well before class. They thought they would be very proactive in class and tutorial discussions and above all, they would listen very hard to the lecturer’s tips on how to do assignments. As in the discussion of expectations, this group had less knowledge about specifics. They did not mention our service or workshops. Nor did they plan to ask questions of lecturers and tutors.
Survey results
The survey aimed to find out about students’ study behaviours and any possible differences between the group with orientation and the group without. The summary below reports results of the frequency-rated questions (questions 1 to 8) and then the yes-no and open questions.

Figure 1 shows the average scores of the two groups for questions one to eight. The frequencies ‘very often’, ‘often’, ‘sometimes’ and ‘never’ were given the scores 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively and the average scores shown were calculated based on the frequencies selected. The figure shows that, other than question 3 (searching for extra information) and question 6c (talking to lecturers/tutors about tests/exams), the orientation group generally scored higher than the no-orientation group. This means that the actions carried out by students in the orientation group were more frequent than students in the other group. The difference was particularly obvious in ‘talking to classmates about assignments’ (question 7) and ‘talking to Student Learning Support and other services about your study’ (question 8). Students in the orientation group also more often prepared before lectures (question 2), participated in study groups (question 4) and read about NZ society and culture (question 5). However, the two groups behaved very similarly in ‘participation in tutorials’ (question 1) and ‘talking to lecturers/tutors about course content and assignments’ (questions 6a and 6b).

Figure 1 Comparison of behaviours
The participants’ answers to questions 9 to 11 were similar to a certain extent. For instance, both groups reported that they actively improved their English, although individual participants used different methods
to improve their language. Both groups also reported that they tried to deal with difficulties and challenges in their study, and generally identified essay writing, reading and communicating in English as the main areas of difficulty or challenge. Most of the students in both groups reported talking to lecturers, tutors or friends as the main way of dealing with challenges. Only one student from each group said they attended study skills workshops.

Questions 12 and 13 were related to students’ understandings about examinations and to satisfaction with their study experience. While most students in the no-orientation group thought examinations at Victoria would be different, only half thought so in the orientation group. However, both groups reported they intended using exam preparation tactics such as studying hard, reading more and preparing more. Both groups expressed satisfaction with their academic experience at Victoria so far.

The last question asked for participants’ grades. Only six students in the orientation group and four in the other group provided us with this information. Figure 2 summarises the grade distribution of the two groups. The grades of the orientation group fell within the B and A range, while the no-orientation group’s grades were in the C and B range.

![Figure 2 Grade distribution](image)

**DISCUSSION**

The interviews during orientation week revealed that students who had been to our orientation programmes had a more detailed set of expectations than those who had not. They could identify important
requisite skills of their new educational environment, such as critical thinking, analysis and application. They were clearer about academic integrity issues such as referencing conventions. They realized that their time would need to be managed well if they were to be successful. The no-orientation group were not so specific in their interviews. As they were post-graduates and European it is possible that they did not perceive differences in terms of thinking or time management skills. This would explain why they did not mention these skills. However, our experience in working with other students with similar characteristics reveals that there often are differences in requisite skills between European institutions and ours.

Research shows it is important that we minimize the gap between expectation and experience. Research into cross-cultural and educational adaptation of Asian students in New Zealand reveals that “overall, expectations are more positive than experiences” (Berno & Ward, 2003). Berno and Ward’s report states, for example, that 86.7% of students interviewed expected to get good grades in New Zealand whereas only 28.4% reported that this was their actual experience. This study found that one of the factors associated with successful adaptation in New Zealand was realistic expectations. The authors state that “under-met” expectations lead to more depression and academic and social difficulties. They outline the importance of giving information which realistically portrays student life in NZ. This is what we tried to do in our programmes and our orientation group did seem to have clearer expectations than the non-orientation group. Although we will not test post-course satisfaction levels, we would expect them to be high.

The second objective of the interviews was to check planned behaviours. Again, the orientation group were more specific in what they intended to do. Here again, however, the status of the students in the no-orientation group might have affected their responses. Because they were more experienced in tertiary study they might not have mentioned already-perfected skills such as time management. Overall, though, this group did not plan such a range of strategies as the orientation group and they were unaware of the academic support programmes available to them on campus.

The orientation group’s awareness of a wider range of strategies can also be seen in the survey results. The survey shows that, in comparison to students in the no-orientation group, those in the orientation group were more likely to talk to their classmates and learning advisers about their study as well as talking to their lecturers.
and friends, like the other group did. The proceedings from the first International Student Forum in New Zealand held by Aotearoa Tertiary Students’ Association in 2003, state that newly arrived international students do not understand communication behaviours in New Zealand and that international students often do not know how to act in order to resolve problems (Williams, 2003). A 2002 study of international students at Victoria also showed that some students did not know academic support was available to them (Colgan, 2002). Our survey results clearly show that the academic orientation programmes had not only raised students’ awareness of the range of help available on campus, but had also increased the incidence of accessing such help.

Our academic orientation programme also seems to have made a difference to students’ study habits. Presenters at The First Year in Higher Education conference in Christchurch in 2002 expressed concern about the academic performance of international students at New Zealand universities (Hunter & Pickering, 2002). A 2002 study of international students by Victoria International found that some international students at Victoria felt unprepared for the amount of independent study required (Cronin, 2003). Our survey shows that students who had attended our orientation programmes were more likely to prepare before class. They were also more likely to participate in study groups. Moreover, the orientation group also showed a higher tendency to read about NZ culture and society. During our programmes this activity had been emphasised as an important way to gain better understanding of some course content and to improve English. The difference in the results of the two groups of participants shows that attending the academic orientation programmes may have made students more aware of the different ways to study. These attendees also seemed to have achieved slightly higher in their study, although the connection between higher achievement and attending the academic orientation programme is inconclusive at this stage.

There are two areas, however, where our academic orientation programmes do not seem to have made much difference. The first is in attitude toward exams and tests. The no-orientation group seemed more likely to think exams and tests would be different at VUW and were more proactive in discussing these assessments with their lecturers and tutors. It is possible that this difference was a result of the students in the group having experienced this form of assessment at VUW already, while those in the orientation group had not.
Nevertheless, this may be an area for exploration in terms of future programme planning as well as future research.

The second area of little difference is academic skills workshop attendance. Exit interviews of international students at Victoria in 2001 revealed that there was a need for workshops on the Victoria academic culture and requirements (Victoria International, 2001). Subsequently, weekly skills workshops especially catering for international students have been set up (this is part of the PALS programme) and are usually actively advertised during orientations. However, attendance at such workshops has been unsatisfactory, and this can be seen in our survey as well – the percentage of those attending our workshops was minimal in both groups. It is possible that poor attendance is due to unsuitable timetabling or student workload, but at the moment we do not know the reasons. This is another area which will require further research.

CONCLUSION

This research is a pilot study and conclusions are therefore somewhat limited. Because of the preliminary nature of the work, we were unconcerned by the relatively small sample size. The next stage of research will ensure that samples are larger and more comparative in terms of students’ background and previous tertiary study experience. Although samples were small in this research, the methodology we used, especially focus group interview, enabled us to gather some useful information relating to the effectiveness and impact of our programmes. It seems that our programmes do make a difference. The main difference is in the level of clarity and accuracy with which students are able to articulate their expectations of the new environment. The students who had attended revealed good understandings of the differences in teaching/learning styles and in particular of the skills they would require here. Not only were they able to use terminology like: analysis, application, critical thinking and paraphrasing but it was clear they understood the implications these requisite skills would have for them as learners. This group also had good knowledge of the support available to them. The no-orientation group, on the other hand, did not reveal such a clear understanding of their new environment; nor did they know of customized workshops available to support them. In terms of actual behaviour, there was also significant difference between the two groups. The orientation attendees used a wider variety of strategies to meet the challenge of their new environment when compared with the
no-orientation group. They reported talking with a wider variety of people including learning advisers. They also reported more preparation before class and they had spent time reading about New Zealand society and culture whereas the other group had not done this.

However, in two areas results were unexpected. Neither group actually attended workshops regularly (although at the beginning of the trimester, the orientation group had indicated they would). Secondly, expectations of the no-orientation group in relation to exams were closer to reality. We will build more discussion around these two issues into our next research phase. We will investigate the timing, content and format of our workshop programme in an effort to ensure that it is what students want and that it is presented when and how they desire.

Overall, this research shows that we are on the way to ensuring our international students have realistic expectations of their environment and thus higher levels of satisfaction with their experience. It also shows that orientation programmes have some impact on student behaviours and in particular those behaviours which relate to useful communication around course content and assessment.

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Book Review:
Into Adulthood: A parent’s guide to life with an 18-25 year old student  
Published by Finch

Reviewed by Penny Shores, UNSW Counselling Service

For some years now social researchers have been describing in the media the phenomenon of young adults continuing to study and live at home well into their mid twenties, and the impact that this can have on family dynamics.

While providing some fascinating insights into the political and socio-economic factors behind this social trend, this research failed to provide much insight into the “how” of being an effective parent through this final step towards adulthood.

And while bookshop shelves groan with parenting manuals for every other developmental stage in our children’s lives, little has been available to parents wondering where to draw the line with adult sons and daughters still living within the family home, or how to be supportive without appearing to interfere!

This book will affirm what many parents find out the hard way: that this stage of development confronts both students and their parents with some complex life issues and requires perhaps the most subtle parenting skills yet! In the foreword to this book, Dr Michael Carr Gregg suggests that their book may prove to be the “first real drivers manual for the parents of emerging Australian adults”.

The authors are well qualified for the task. They have drawn on their considerable experience over many years working with students in this age group in their roles as psychologists in university counseling services in Melbourne, Australia.

They outline a model of the normal life transitions of psychological development for late adolescence, as a backdrop against which to understand the specific transitions of proceeding through tertiary studies and the various tasks and demands involved. While acknowledging that the tasks of separation from parents and development of a unique adult identity have always been part of the
challenge for late adolescence and early adulthood, the authors argue that this stage is becoming more prolonged and that the markers along the way are passed in a different way than in the past.

The text is dotted with case vignettes which highlight the authors’ understanding of the needs of both parents and their children during this phase. Edwards and English are very clearly in touch with the raw experiences and emotions of young students coping with the demands of university life in the 21st century. They point out that that each generation has different expectations. They suggest the changing nature of society and work, and the social, financial and political pressures confronting young people in the electronic age means that school leavers may have more realistic visions than their parents.

Yet they are equally in touch with the needs, concerns and difficulties facing parents in this phase who are often facing significant life transitions of their own.

Using the very apt metaphor of the circus, they invite their readers to explore, and learn the “circus skills” required for parenting through this interesting and complex stage. They suggest that perhaps more than at any other stage, learning the art of subtle parenting is central to supporting emerging adults to independence. Each chapter includes specific ideas on how to understand and manage relationships with young adults. It provides warm supportive tips and in particular offers some very clear guidelines for effective communication within families.

Edwards and English have been working with parent groups for a number of years as part of university initiatives to provide better support for students making the transition into the first year of tertiary study. While the book is clearly aimed at the parents of students it will also make worthwhile reading for other parents of young people in this age group.

As the parent of two students in this age range, the themes in this book resonated strongly. When my 19 year old son heard I was writing a book review on this title, he jokingly suggested that there was one simple piece of advice for parents living with 18 to 25 year old students: “Leave them alone!” Not long after, my 21 year daughter wondered aloud whether she might just want to live at home for ever, rather than going ahead with her decision to move out of home. These two interactions with my own young adults seemed to reflect perfectly the recurring theme of ambivalence described through out the book.

Journal of the Australia and New Zealand Student Services Association: Number 26, October 2005
and I was able to take comfort from the advice for parents summarized in the final chapter to “let go but stay connected, always showing that you will love and support them, while at the same time encouraging parents to “be open to exciting challenges and opportunities in their own lives”.

For parents confronting the issues of their own “emerging adults” on a daily basis, this insightful guide will be a valuable resource in assisting their children to make the transition to both tertiary study and adult life.
GUIDELINES FOR SUBMISSION OF ARTICLES

All articles should be submitted electronically using Microsoft Word. However, other commonly used word processing formats may be readable. Contributors will be contacted if there are difficulties in reading articles submitted. Any queries regarding submission format should be directed to the editor. Any diagrams and tables included in the text must be no larger than 21 x 13 cms. Articles longer than 6,000 words may be returned to authors to be shortened. Note: Submission should include a brief abstract.

Articles may include comment and debate on current issues, reports of student services in practice, policy matters, research projects, reviews of relevant books. The guiding editorial policy is that articles are of interest to student service staff, and are of a high standard. Layout should conform to the rules set out in the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association.

Refereed Articles: The Research Programmes and Policy Unit, Higher Education Group, Department of Education, Science and Training advises that JANZSSA is recognized by DEST for publication of refereed articles. The register of such journals is to be found at http://www.dest.gov.au/highered/research/herdc.htm

Authors who wish to submit an item to be published as a refereed article should include a written note to that effect. Contributors should observe a deadline three months earlier than the date noted below for other articles.

The process for refereeing is as follows. The editor of JANZSSA will consult with the Editorial Board to identify three expert referees (who may not necessarily be members of ANZSSA). Each referee will be unaware of the identity of the other two referees. Each of the referees will be provided with a paper copy of the article from which the author's name has been removed. Referees will submit a report back to the editor that contains one of four recommendations. These are:

1. That the article be published without amendment
2. That the article be published with minor amendment, to be approved by the Editor of JANZSSA
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Referees will also return the paper copy of the article, which may contain annotations and suggested amendments to the paper. At least two of the
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**Issues** appear in April and October each year. Deadline for submission of non-refereed articles is January 31 and July 31 respectively.

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Journal of the Australia and New Zealand Student Services
Association: Number 26, October 2005
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INFORMATION ABOUT ANZSSA

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

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

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

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

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

Aims of ANZSSA Inc

The basic aims of ANZSSA are:

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

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

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

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

**Publications**

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

**ANZSSA News** is an occasional newsletter which contains informative articles, news and views relevant to people working in student services.

ANZSSA is on the web at: **Http://www.anzssa.org**

**Membership**

The majority of individual members work directly with post-secondary students in various aspects of student development and welfare. This includes:

- Campus Nurses and Medical Officers
- Careers Advisers

Journal of the Australia and New Zealand Student Services Association: Number 26, October 2005
Another equally important group includes those with related interests, such as:
- College staff
- Student Officers, and
- Teachers and Administrators such as Sub-Deans

Students with an interest in student welfare and development make up a third important section of the membership.

**Membership Fees:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Membership Type</th>
<th>Fee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full Member</td>
<td>$95.00*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Membership (per member)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-4 members</td>
<td>$85.00* each</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5+ members</td>
<td>$75.00* each</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>$50.00*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Overseas</td>
<td>$125.00*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal only</td>
<td>$55.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Included membership of up to 3 special interest groups...

**Group membership**

Institutional membership of ANZSSA is available under the following conditions:
1. Group members must be staff of the same institution (but may not necessarily be working on the same campus or in the same department)
2. Group members must be named at the time of joining; Group membership is not transferable. Group Institutional members may be added during the year.
3. Group members have the same status within ANZSSA as individual members
4. A single institution may take out multiple Institutional memberships.

Membership queries should be directed to:

Acting Treasurer
Ms Donna Christie
Counselling Service
Canberra Institute of Technology
GPO Box 826
CANBERRA ACT 2601
Phone 02 6207 3130
Fax 02 6207 31
donna.christie@cit.act.edu.au