Paper: Challenges and Prospects of Internationalisation in Australia’s G08 and Universities of Technology

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Challenges and Prospects of Internationalisation in Australia’s G08 and Universities of Technology

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Abstract

Issues of internationalisation are now more important in Australia than ever before. Firstly, the nation’s multicultural society includes international students who come from cultures and nations that regard Australia as part of the invading force in the recent American-led invasion of Iraq. Secondly, the latest Federal Government funding model implies that Australian universities will have to find alternative means to subsidise their income, one of these being increased international enrolment and full fee paying domestic students. Thirdly, there are two schools of thought within universities regarding internationalisation: the senior administration who see the future of their universities dependent on revenue from international programs and academics who see such dependence as the death of academia. In the midst of this political and economic quandary lie our students whose future depends on the outcome of such ideological differences. The first question therefore is how do universities find a balance between the global cultural tension and the forced economic survival without sacrificing the quality of their programs?

Our research is geared towards identifying some of the challenges of internationalisation as well as initiating some strategies to address them. To achieve this, the research tries to identify current issues confronting internationalisation programs such as: resource availability, staffing, international students’ expectations, quality assurance mechanisms by institutions aimed at balancing growth in international enrolment with growth in academic standards; differences in academic cultures and in expectations between staff and international students; cultural awareness programs aimed at enabling staff and students to understand current global cultural sensitivities and changes as well as an appreciation of diversity. Particularly, the research makes a comparative study of G-08 universities with universities of technology in Australia because of the pedagogical differences between the two in approaching innovative and entrepreneurial ideas as well as the delivery of courses. The methodology used is focus group sessions with academic staff members who have international students in their programs, undergraduate and postgraduate international students, undergraduate and postgraduate domestic students, support staff of international programs, and language and international program administrators.

The need to understand the complex issues of international students is neither new nor peculiar to any one university. According to Cameron (2002), Auditor-General of Victoria, “since 1988 when the Commonwealth Government encouraged Australian Higher Education Institutions to become commercially oriented and introduced the HECS system in 1989”, it became clear that international fee paying places may have to leverage the shortfalls from local funding mechanisms. In his 2002 International Students in Victoria Auditor’s Report, it was noted that the state’s revenue from international students was on the rise while at the same time quality assurance measures were said to be monitored. But what were not clear were the criteria of measuring such quality. In a study carried out by Sarris, Taplin and Reilly (2003) University of Adelaide Values Survey Supplement which sampled current alumni and international students of Adelaide University, the need was highlighted for the university to make its presence felt in the international market as well as enhance its corporate image locally and overseas. This again highlighted the publicity and marketing focus of internationalisation. Kember, (2000) in “Misconceptions about the learning approaches, motivation and study practices of Asian students”, opened up new ways of looking at students from Asian countries, from their ability to perform in group environments to expectations from teachers. From 27-28 November 2000, a National Language and Academic Skills Conference was held at La Trobe University, Bundoora with the theme Sources of Confusion. Among the issues of confusion being addressed at that conference was the perceptions of international students and international students expectations of Australian institutions. Papers included Anne Bartlett’s “Confusing the NESB student: When academic feedback unwittingly contributes to masking the linguistic and academic issues”, in which it was argued that unless there are significant changes in expectations, institutional support mechanisms and resourcing for all involved in the training of NESB, students may become complicit in the lowering of academic standards. Other relevant papers were Marie Gaspar’s “Assessment using multiple choice: Implications for testing international students in an undergraduate Commerce subject”; Constance Ellwood’s “Dissolving and resolving cultural expectations: Socio-Cultural approaches to program development for international Students”.

In 2001 the University of Wollongong hosted the same professional conference with a theme Changing Identities which focussed on transformations such as globalisation, corporatisation,
internationalisation, increased accountability, restructuring and new technologies which are reshaping higher education institutions in Australia. Such transformation could also include the questioning of internationalisation as a relevant concept in an era of globalisation. For example, if the world has become one global village or market economy as we are made to believe, would there still exist the need to stratify programs as either international or domestic? One of the many interesting papers from that conference was by Julianne East, “International Students identified as customers: their expectations and perceptions”, which critiques many institutions in Australia that embraced the commercial identity of internationalisation without adequate research and quality assurance mechanisms. There is a body of other literature on the issue of internationalisation but our research aims at extending some of them through first hand focus group interviews of staff and students involved in the process of internationalisation.

Research Target
Our target in the G08 institutions are the Universities of Adelaide, Melbourne, Sydney, Queensland, Western Australia and Monash, while our target Universities of Technology are RMIT, Curtin University of Technology, University of Technology Sydney, University of South Australia and Queensland University of Technology. We also included one non-G08 and Non-University of Technology University, which has a well established international recruitment profile, as a research control. The emphasis of the research is on the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (referred to here as Humanities for convenience). Unlike Business, Engineering and IT related courses, Humanities are third in ranking for attracting international students while in overall university enrolment ratio, they pool one of the largest number of students in almost every university in Australia. At the time of writing this paper, we had only covered about 80% of our targeted institutions. The findings and analysis are based on information gathered from this 80% coverage and should therefore be read as research in progress until the final surveys are carried out later in the year. The outcome of the remaining 20% of our targeted survey might influence our present analysis.

Data reporting.
Due to the confidentiality clause in our research ethics clearance, there will be no direct mention of institutional respondents. All the data are compounded and tagged as G08 or Unitech. Any direct reference to institutions by name is based on information readily available in the public domain or from documents to which we have been given permission to make openly available. To this end it suffices to state that our 20% outstanding coverage is made up of two institutions in one state to be visited. We have carried out focus group sessions with 150 academics, 25 administrative and support staff, 240 undergraduate international students, 136 undergraduate domestic students, 30 postgraduate international students and 13 postgraduate domestic students minus one who withdrew her participation after the interviews. The focus sessions were carried out over a one-year period from Oct 2003.

Commonwealth ideologies of Internationalisation
Internationalisation in Australia could be regarded as an intersection between intellectual capital, multiculturalism and economic opportunism. It is a fast growing industry in the western world. According to DEST (2004) it contributes “$5 billion a year to Australia’s national income, raises an additional $1.8 billion to consumer spending, and creates around 42,000 jobs for Australians”. As a result of this economic driver, the Federal Government in its “2003-04 Budget…provided $113.3 million over four years for a range of measures that will focus on market diversification, promoting Australia’s capabilities, and raising quality and standards”. This is in addition to the establishment of International Centres of Excellence with seed funding of $35.5 million over four years. Such income and government investment confirm the economic direction of internationalisation in Australia. Unfortunately this funding is not reflected in the internal resourcing of universities which is meant to deliver such services or make them a success. Some academics have argued that if internationalisation is only economically driven why force it into the core business of universities? Why not direct such business ventures to the consultancy arm of universities and allow only interested academic specialists to participate? We are then asking if this implies that there are two models of internationalisation, an economic rationalist model from the government and intellectual capital model adopted by the universities? How does this ideological duality affect the services delivered to international students? The University of Western Australia’s Internationalisation Strategy 2000 seems to have some well thought out strategic initiatives between these two ideological positions. Internationalisation, they acknowledged, is “more than recruiting overseas students; more than sending students and staff on exchange; more than providing overseas study leave for staff”. Citing the works of Jane Knight and Hugo de Wit, they summed it up as "the process of integrating an international/intercultural dimension into the teaching, research and service of an
One of the key performance indicators used by UWA to justify an institution’s preparedness to embrace internationalisation is the global representation of its staff profile. For example, about 42% of UWA academic staff was reported as having obtained their highest degrees outside of Australia. On a face value such composition would be a strong marketing strategy for any institution, but internationalisation is more complex than having numerical mix of talents. It is more of a ‘state of mind’ and an ability to synergise such talents into a holistic vision. Our research found that not every member of the various university communities surveyed has embraced such state of mind, but the structure of universities on the other hand does not enable cross fertilisation of ideas across faculties. If we extend this argument, the next question would be from which countries did these 42% academics obtain their degrees, in relation to the countries where the majority of the international students come from? The top ten biggest markets according to the 2003 DEST publication are China, Hong Kong, South Korea, Indonesia, Malaysia, Japan, Thailand, India, United States of America and Singapore. On the other hand, the majority of foreign academics, especially in the G08 universities, are from or studied at Euro-American institutions.

Curtin University of Technology on the other hand has a university cultural diversity network called ‘Country Reference Groups’, a network of staff with expertise from different cultural backgrounds. This group is advisory to the international office of the university. They are geographically zoned and address issues affecting students from their zones and areas of cultural expertise or background. They also have a database of staff expertise and their willingness to act as possible supervisors or co-supervisors of international students. While we could not verify the percentage of Curtin’s academic staff with international qualifications it is worth noting that the integration of such staff expertise is in the right direction. It is not enough to have internationally trained staff if there is no identifiable mechanism to integrate their expertise for the benefit of students and colleagues.

The findings from our research also revealed that although universities have cross cultural development training sessions aimed at assisting staff understand the cultural diversities of their students, only a handful of academics attend such sessions. The reasons for low turnout have been attributed to staff workload and the voluntary nature of such trainings. Some academics are of the view that international students should be made to understand Australian ways of life instead of forcing academics to undergo ‘financially driven’ sessions which do not address what they perceive as the ‘real problems’ confronting international programs.

Our next question was, by internationalisation do we mean the Australianisation of international students, or the internationalisation of Australian students through our curriculum? The complexity of internationalisation in universities as many of them acknowledged is not so much because it is a new state of mind as it is a financially driven initiative from senior management and forced on academics. Universities they say have always had international students and have perceived their programs as catering to the international market. But these have been carried out without the financial dependency which has characterised the new state of mind. The following table from DEST confirms the above views and shows an almost proportionate level of universities’ dependency on international programs to the government’s decrease in university funding since the late 1990s. With a decrease in Commonwealth grants, there are increases in: students’ contributions, fees and charges, and other sources especially international full fee-paying enrolments. For the 2004 updated figures please see (http://www.dest.gov.au/highered/statpubs.htm#financepubs). In 2002/03, Commonwealth Grants dropped to 40% while charges rose to 22% and state government increased to 4%.

### Australian University Revenue by Main Source, 1998-2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>1998 (%)</th>
<th>1999 (%)</th>
<th>2000 (%)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commonwealth Government Grants</td>
<td>50.8</td>
<td>48.0</td>
<td>45.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Government</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student contributions - HECS</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>18.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fees and Charges</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>17.7</td>
<td>18.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investment Income, Donations and Bequests (a)</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Sources (b)</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>14.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total University Revenue ($m)</strong></td>
<td><strong>8,456</strong></td>
<td><strong>8,730</strong></td>
<td><strong>9,328</strong></td>
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Perceptions of Internationalisation

The majority of the respondents have different perceptions of what internationalisation means. We found this definitional variance an important issue that has implications in the way staff and students react to or deal with issues that arise from internationalisation. Many domestic students say they have not consciously thought about the implications of internationalisation for their career. They have always perceived internationalisation as synonymous with having full fee-paying non-citizens on campus but not necessarily in relation to curriculum content. Many of them interpreted it as only a financially driven concept by universities. One of the questions we raised was would a domestic student who attends the same classes as an international student regard his or her degree as an international or an Australian degree? It suffices to ask, if it is regarded as an Australian degree why do universities advertise them as international programs? But if it is regarded as an international degree then Australian students in the same program should logically be regarded and treated as international students, similar to what transpires with International Baccalaureate Diploma programs. But if by internationalisation we mean non-Australian students studying in Australia, then the focus shifts from academic to sociocultural issues affecting overseas students. But unfortunately, the answers given by the respondents did not comprehensively address the complexity of the issues involved. Although domestic students had not consciously considered the issue of curriculum content and context as integral to internationalisation, they are however, interested to know if their degrees would have recognition and applicability outside the country. Academics were also at a quandary to answer this question. Some are of the view that students get an Australian degree while others say that every program is taught with an international perspective irrespective of the discipline and content. Some argue that Humanities courses are (due to their critical and analytic nature) regarded as highly contextualised and require conscious application of international content or cultural integration.

Overall, the majority of international undergraduate students are in Commerce/Business, Engineering and IT related courses. A significant number of international undergraduate students in the Humanities at G08 universities from non-Asian countries are exchange students while the majority of international undergraduate students studying in the universities of technology are enrolled in creative industries related courses such as design, multimedia, film, journalism and communication. It was observed that there were more concerns raised about international programs by academics from G08 universities than those from universities of technology. This observation does not imply that academics from universities of technology are better treated or have better facilities for international programs but rather it was based on the number who were able to vocalise their concerns.

Of all the issues raised, quality assurance and language competency were the most prevalent. The standard of critical writing and expectations are much higher in G08 universities than in universities of technology. The G08 universities are less flexible in lowering IELTS scores and the majority of academics feel that an IELTS score of less than 7 is not sufficient for any international student whose first language is not English, to write and think critically in any humanities discourse. Universities of technology are more flexible in admitting international students with lower IELTS scores but also place such students into special programs designed to assist them to improve their language competency while simultaneously studying some of their award programs. It could be argued that due to the vocational
nature of many of the courses taught at universities of technology, English language proficiency is not as
critical as it is with those in G08 universities whose approach is highly theoretical.

Why come to Australia?
While advertising plays a strong role in the choice of courses made by international students, their
choice of country is determined by many factors: Australia is regarded as a safe country with a high
quality of education; its geographical proximity to Asian countries is a strategic advantage; many students
say that their parents would rather send them to Australia than to America or Europe due to distance and a
sense of alienation; the cost of living in Australia is more affordable than in the US; many choose
Australia either because their families live in Australia or they have relatives living in Australia; and there
is a peace and absence of violent crimes compared to those reported in the US. Exchange students on the
other hand choose Australia because it is an English speaking country, while others come because of
stories from friends who have visited Australia. It must also be reported that some students from non-
English speaking backgrounds choose Australia as a better country to learn English than the UK or USA.
They believe that the Australian English accent is easier to understand than American or British accent.
Many of the students prefer campuses to be in cities where they can mix studies with lots of fun, the Gold
Coast and Surfers Paradise were cited as good examples. Mature aged international students prefer short
courses which they can combine with holidaying in Australia. From the above reasons it seems as though
some universities have been making assumptions from a different premise, for example, a head of school
from a G08 university said, at one stage it looked as if what the international market might have wanted
in coming to Australia was to learn about Australia, a sort of cultural tourism impulse, but now it’s much
more the view that they come here because for various reasons it’s convenient to come here. But that’s
not really what they want their education to reflect. They want the education to be equivalent to and
comparable to the education they can get at home but which can also be applied both at home and
elsewhere around the world.

Expectations and Delivery
Many of the international students interviewed say they are lost and are left in the deep end of
the system. It takes them more time to adjust than is expected by the system. For example, universities
expect students to be ready for normal classes after orientation, which according to both newly arrived
domestic and international students, is just the time they are getting to know how and where to find basic
resources and their whereabouts on campus. If domestic students find our university environments
daunting then international students who would be struggling with both cultural and academic cultural
shock would be justified to say they are lost and are thrown in the deep end. Many of them are unable to
strike a balance between academic challenges and socio-cultural expectations. “Learning how to be so
independent ... going so far away on my own without any friends or anybody that I know from home are
challenging,” says one student. Many international students feel that issues pertaining to their specific
programs are not addressed. It was also observed that almost all the Humanities faculties surveyed depend
on central university internationalisation policies for their activities unlike their Business counterparts
who have established internal faculty policies to deal with international issues. Although there are
established positions for Subdeans International and/or International Coordinators, these are not
separately funded positions dedicated to international programs, rather are added administrative
responsibilities to some senior academics who, in some cases have no direct contact with any of the
international students, but whose role is merely to represent their faculty’s interest at international
committee meetings of the university or to organise international student recruitments with agencies.
International students with problems are either referred to the central university office or are treated like
any other student. In some cases we discovered that some heads of departments have no direct record of
their international students or their progress report until the university international office reports to them
about a student who may not have met the expected immigration performance requirements and are either
in the process of being deported or who are in danger of losing their student visa status.

While many international students complained of incomplete information on the various
university websites about what to expect in Australia, others say that promises made by agents, and the
publicities for the various courses are hyped compared to what they encounter on arrival. International
postgraduate students say they expect more than just academic mentoring from their supervisors. There
were strong complaints about Australian visa regulations which do not allow international postgraduate
students to take leave of absence during their study like their domestic counterparts, to attend to family or
health issues without revoking their visa status or making them go through the whole process of visa
application again. They also require some clarity on the issue of visa expiration. Does the visa expire at
the completion/submission of their study or on the expiration date stamped on their passport?
Sociocultural Issues

While academics placed a lot of emphasis on academic issues, international students placed more emphasis on sociocultural adjustments and integration such as accommodation, city navigation, bus routes, leasing contracts, mentoring, academic cultures of lecture and tutorial styles, lack of authoritative voices from lecturers, referencing styles, romance and social stereotypes. While some of these issues may seem trivial to many people they are of serious concern to many of the students who openly felt that the university system expects too much too soon from them while they are still trying to adjust to their new environment.

Universities with college system accommodation or student housing were identified as helpful to international students’ adjustment at the early stages of their arrival. Those universities without such housing facilities were more challenging for international students. Even though Housing Officers help them secure rental accommodation, the majority of these students say they have never lived on their own before, and having to start such an independent existence in a foreign country meant a huge adjustment for them.

Social outlets was a problem for many international students, especially those from Hong Kong who are used to 24 hour activities. Many international students say they find Australia very superficial. They say that while people seem friendly on the surface, none ventured to be more than polite or even invite them home. People are always trying to be politically correct. “Nobody tells you exactly what they really mean to say…maybe they don’t want to offend us…even our lecturers”. International students in Melbourne say they feel cheated because they pay full fees but are not given students discount cards like their domestic counterparts for local transport.

From what we could gather, a multicultural atmosphere exists on campuses if by that we mean a place where students from all over the world converge. But the problem identified by international students is that such seemingly cultural mixes are deceptive as students cling to their cultural groups. According to an international student “I think it’s a natural thing if you went to study in China you’d immediately be drawn to your safety zone which is the other English speaking people”.

In terms of academic culture, we were made to understand that Australian students have been trained to think critically and independently while many of the international students especially those from Asian countries have been trained to see the lecturer as the authority. Just as we pointed out above, they feel that lecturers hardly tell them exactly what they mean or want but expect them to work independently. American and European students (mostly on exchange programs) did not find too many variations with what they are used to back home. Some American students from the G08 universities feel that too much trust is placed in the hands of students to manage their time and meet up with preset assessments for a whole semester without constant reminders or frequent assessments. According to them they are used to a system of constant monitoring and weekly assessments. It could also be argued that such level of expected independence may seem too daunting for many Asian students who may not know how to manage their time independently without supervision.

Style of teaching affects the level of cross cultural interaction among students. Some of the domestic students who had previously studied in other faculties such as Business and IT prior to switching to Humanities say that Humanities style of teaching does not encourage team or an interactive culture among students because assignments are individually structured. Many of their previous courses were project based. Such team environment enables interaction among students. While this could be regarded as part of the training and orientation process of studying in Australia, it was also argued by the students that university orientation programs were both too short and generalistic and not focused or targeted to meet students’ specific requirements and differences. A proper and longer orientation is required to acclimatise them to the expectations of the Australian academic system.

Impact of Global Insecurity

While this research is not about global politics or its present insecurity, it is worth noting that such tension has some impact on the future relations between Australia and its neighbours and therefore the educational choice made by students from such regions. It will also have some impact on the level of interaction between Australian students and their international student colleagues. While some academics do not see how it could affect their method of teaching, others say that it could engender a culture of censorship and/or sanitisation of course contents and intellectual debate in classrooms, especially where such topics are likely to ignite sensitive racial or sectional political criticism which normally should have enabled open participation. On 25 August 2004, HES reported the case of an extreme right wing student body at the University of Newcastle called the Patriotic Youth League who were “campaigning on an anti-international student platform” and one of the stickers of their campaign warned of Australian ethnic identity being destroyed by an influx of international students. According to that report “Australian ethnic bloodline’ was defined as ‘Euro-Christian’. The ongoing crises in Iraq, in which Australia is involved as
a member of the invading forces, has variously been interpreted as a religious war between Euro Christian capitalism and Islamic nations. Terrorist attacks on western interests have also been called Jihad or Holy war. On 9 Sept 2004 Australian Embassy in Jakarta was bombed as a result of Australia’s involvement in the same war in Iraq. There are about 25,000 Indonesian students studying in Australia while Indonesia has the worlds’ largest population of Muslims. If international students from these regions perceive Australia as a part of an anti-Muslim war, this perception could dramatically affect such students’ choice of country of study. During the course of this research some international students at a G08 university complained of racist posters and graffiti in trams and university notice boards asking foreign students to go home. During the last election, Pauline Hanson’s anti-Asian comments sparked a lot of debate and caused tension among international students of Asian descent.

It could be argued that while on the one hand, the present government’s policy advocates for more international student recruitment, its funding cut for domestic students tends to trigger resentment towards such international students by those domestic students who feel that international students are taking Australian students’ places in the educational system. Similarly, even though the Patriotic Youth League at Newcastle may be attacking the government policy in their campaign, the impact of their campaign on international students has created some anxiety among international students, especially those who have been personally affected through physical and verbal abuse as reported during the course of this research, as well as the HES publication.

Quality Assurance Issues

Resourcing internationalisation programs have been one of the major issues raised by both academic and support staff of international programs. Academics noted that normal teaching workload calculations do not factor in the extra time it takes to address international students’ problems or essays which, according to them, take longer to mark than those of domestic students. The effect is that academic staff members with large number of international students are either overworked or their students are given minimal attention and feedback. It was acknowledged that there is a decline in the academic standard across the board. For example, in order to accommodate international students’ language difficulty, some domestic students say that they are not intellectually challenged enough to put in their best. Even though there was no identifiable conscious effort by academics to lower the quality of their teaching during the course of this research, there was an inherent implication of such during our discussions with them. For example, Australian students in classes with large numbers of international students reported that they do not have to compete or do an extraordinary amount of work to get higher grades because their international counterparts are still struggling with basic linguistic concepts in the areas of discourse. In some cases academics raised their bell curve to achieve some passing grades or lower their minimum expectations as a result of this weakness. Secondly, the pace at which some programs are fast tracked for international students due to financial reasons have meant that many academic programs have become sandwiched into minimal skill set requirements. It was also reported that students’ paid work commitments affect the overall academic standards because many of them juggle between one to three paid jobs and only manage to fit their study around their work schedule. They spend minimal contact time with the university and attend classes only if they have to. The result is that lecturers find it difficult to design more challenging team-based projects or assignments that could enable intercultural exchange between students. These working domestic students say they feel frustrated when placed in group projects with international students because they are forced to do more editing to ensure that the quality of their work is of an acceptable standard. Many of them also make a conscious effort to avoid working with international students because of their work commitments which do not give them the luxury of spending too much time on campus or to ‘nurture’ their fellow students as they call it. The consequence is that international students feel alienated and end up sticking with each other throughout their study. Some international students admitted being marked more leniently because of their language difficulty while some domestic students feel that they are marked more strictly because their international counterparts are still struggling with basic linguistic concepts in the areas of discourse. In some cases academics raised their bell curve to achieve some passing grades or lower their minimum expectations as a result of this weakness. Secondly, the pace at which some programs are fast tracked for international students due to financial reasons have meant that many academic programs have become sandwiched into minimal skill set requirements. It was also reported that students’ paid work commitments affect the overall academic standards because many of them juggle between one to three paid jobs and only manage to fit their study around their work schedule. 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Some international students admitted being marked more leniently because of their language difficulty while some domestic students feel that they are marked more strictly than international students. One of the academics from a G08 university summed up the feelings of some of his colleagues: Internationalisation is detrimental to our program. We’ve lost the potential of the Australian student in general and, although we have two or three in each class of Australians, we certainly don’t have a core number of native English speaker students and I think the reputation has got around, and I’ll use the term reputation, about what we do here and then it becomes very clear that the type of things, especially many teachers want, we just don’t cater to them at this juncture.

Our research shows that in some programs, especially vocationally based courses such as film and design courses, there are some classes with more than 60% international enrolment which puts domestic students in the minority and therefore makes it almost impossible for domestic students to have a large enough pool of local friends to work with. We also discovered that in many of these vocationally based courses some of the international students were more knowledgeable about the technical skills...
required in such courses than domestic students. However, their limited communicative skills made the transfer of this knowledge difficult and frustrating for all parties concerned. In order to accommodate such exceptionally bright and talented international students with language difficulties, some departments tailored their assessment criteria to recognise the skills of such students without emphasising their writing abilities.

Many of the international students also feel frustrated for not being able to express themselves properly. The problem of language competency is a real issue felt by both sides of the debate. But the frustration that language difficulty has caused both the teaching staff and accommodating domestic students has erroneously led to the false assumption that international students with language difficulties are incompetent or intellectually unable to conceptualise basic academic discourses. While it can be argued that the language of discourse is an integral part of its conceptual framework, it can also be argued that the translation of such discourses into other languages does not make the translation any less valid. We can infer from all the comments that language difficulty has been erroneously subsumed with intellectual inferiority.

Conclusion and Strategies for the future

Without the financial pressure attached to internationalisation, many academics say they are more than happy to have adequately prepared international students in their courses as long as their numbers do not adversely affect domestic students. Domestic students also say they would love to have international students in their classes as long as they are all treated equally and not given the impression that university priorities are geared toward international students at the expense of domestic students. It is evident that the problems highlighted above are a result of inadequate preparation by both international students for the academic cultures of Australia, and university administrators for the impact of a huge influx of international students, and the federal government in their funding policy to universities.

There is a need for social outlets for international students such as creating some programs aimed at integrating domestic students with international students. Multicultural weeks have been identified as unsuccessful because instead of bringing both domestic and international students together to share cultural experiences they end up as a forum for only international students. The academic culture of Australian students has changed due to economic hardship, therefore universities need to devise alternative strategies to lure students back to university campuses if they want to build an international atmosphere which includes domestic students.

There is need to invest in resources to help staff cope with the added pressure of internationalisation programs. There is need for discipline specific orientation for international students. Programs need to be staggered to accommodate late arrivals as well as cater for students with more complex problems. Faculties need to establish discipline specific policies and staffing to address specific students problems. There is need to promote social and intellectual mixes outside the classroom such as setting up of reading groups and mentoring relationships among students. There is need to revisit workload calculations to acknowledge the extra effort required to address international students’ needs especially those with language problems. Some students feel that if there are Internet chat rooms or network connections between Australian universities and their countries of origin they would be better equipped with some Australian contacts and friends before coming to Australia.

There are some cultural barriers between ‘reserved’ Asian students and outgoing Australian students. This notwithstanding, there is a significant number of outgoing Asian students who, despite their linguistic inhibitions have made friends with Australian students. So, while language can be a major barrier in the classroom environment, it is less a factor in their social life and interactivity. The work habit of Australian students has a strong impact on their ability to relate with international students. Even among Australian students, there is limited interaction between students. In many cases Australian students graduate with the same friends they came to universities with from high school. One of them said “I haven’t made any really, really good friends at uni. I go to lunch with the same people I’ve known for years, the people I knew before I came to uni. I’ve got some friends in my classes whom I’ve met here, but I don’t see them or do anything with them outside of uni, and so … it’s pretty much just a normal day for me. It’s not actually anything special other than coming here to finish my degree…” According to the UWA Internationalisation Strategy 2000, internationalisation has many dimensions: “the materials which are studied; the courses which are offered; the students who are taught; the staff who teach them and undertake research; the places where teaching takes place; the environment and context within which teaching and research is undertaken. Above all, internationalisation is a state of mind”. We therefore need to make a conscious effort to address the above issues if we want to take internationalisation beyond political and economic rhetoric. There is need to match policies and ideologies with actions. Australia has many advantages against the competitive backdrops of globalisation in establishing world class internationalisation programs especially targeting our immediate neighbours in Asia.
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