CATERING FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS: THE EXPERIENCES OF FIRST YEAR ASIAN AND NORTH AMERICAN STUDENTS AT RURAL UNIVERSITY

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I hereby certify that the work embodied
in this thesis is the result of original research
and has not been submitted for a higher degree
to any other university or institution.



Heidi L. Randall

DEDICATION

For all Rural University
international students
who have faced the challenges,
remained undaunted,
and gone on to triumph.

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ABSTRACT

International students currently make up almost one fifth of student in Australia, and at Rural University. Because they are living and studying in a new and different culture, these students experience certain difficulties both socially and academically. While the government has established a set of regulations as a guide for universities catering for such students to ensure quality of services, competition has led individual universities to assess the quality of their institution as perceived by the students.

This study was a case study of the experiences of first year North American and Asian students at a rural university (code named Rural University). The data were collected through the process of audio-taped, semi-structured interviews that followed the conventions of Grounded Theory. Thematic analysis was used to establish the meaning contained within the transcripts of the interviews. The study revealed areas where students perceived more support to be needed at Rural University for international students to ensure that they enjoy a positive experience.

The experiences of Asian and North American students were found to have both similarities and differences. Both cultural groups felt that there was a need for more information concerning their accommodation and proposed course of study prior to their arrival, and both groups generally felt that the Australian culture was more laid back than their home cultures. Students from both groups felt that a more extensive cultural orientation was necessary. Both groups also supported the proposed implementation of a mentoring program and felt that this would have alleviated some difficulties they had experienced. However, there were concerns specific to each group. North American students experienced confusion concerning the grading system in use and desired more guidance with subject selection in the form of an academic advisor. Asian students experienced difficulties concerning the information pack due to English level and volume, while the North Americans found it extremely useful. Participants also expressed a need for a form of used textbook bookstore and a more extensive range of Rural University souvenirs. Based on the findings of this research, recommendations were made to Rural University and also for future research.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Introduction

Within the last decade, the number of international students studying in Australia has risen to almost twenty percent (Marginson, 2002). Previously attention has been focussed on marketing Australian Education to these full fee paying students. However, increasingly competition between institutions has demanded close attention be paid to the students perceived quality of their experience in order to uphold reputations. Research outlines several difficulties these overseas students commonly experience in the process of their temporary adjustment to their new culture. Such difficulties include financial difficulties (Grey, 2002; Kaye & Yanhong, 1998; Lacina, 2002; Mori, 2000; Myburgh, Niehaus, & Poggenpoel, 2002), language difficulties (Kaye & Yanhong, 1998; Lacina, 2002; Mori, 2000; Myburgh et al., 2002; Jones, Line, Robertson, & Thomas, 2000), social and relationship issues (Kaye & Yanhong, 1998; Mori, 2000; Myburgh et al., 2002; Jones et al., 2000) and lack of guidance and counseling (Kaye & Yanhong, 1998; Lacina, 2002; Mori, 2000).

Considering the issues that international students face, the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee (AVCC) has established a Code of Practice consisting of guidelines based on the Education Services for Overseas Students (ESOS) Act 2000, in an attempt to maintain a uniform standard of quality provided by Australian institutions. Universities thus provide an array of services in meeting these regulations to cater for the needs of the international students studying on their campus.

Background to Study

Rural University is the code-name for a tertiary institution situated in a rural New South Wales community. At the time of this study the international student population at Rural University consisted of 19.6 % students of all enrolments. In recent years, Rural University underwent a push in marketing to North America resulting in increased numbers of North American students coming to Rural University to study. Also in the current year, Rural University established an ELICOS program for students wishing to learn English. Thus, International students with a lower English ability suddenly became a substantial part of the campus community.

Purpose and Objectives of Study

It was the purpose of this study to examine the current support needs of international students studying at a rural Australian university (Rural University) and if needed to present the administration with recommendations concerning the services provided for these students. The main objectives were 1.) to build a theory concerning the outstanding needs of international students prior to arrival, upon arrival and during their period of stay at Rural University, and 2.) to compare the experiences of students from a non-English speaking background to those from an English speaking background. The precise research questions arise out of the literature review and will be stated at the end of the second chapter.

In the quest to form research objectives, this study reviewed literature concerning common difficulties experienced by international students as they study in a culture that differs from their own. Included is a brief outline of government regulations concerning the provision of services for international students and those services provided by several universities as advertised on their web site.

This study aimed to achieve the proposed objectives through the use of Grounded Theory as a means of qualitative data collection and analysis. Data were collected through semi-structured interviewing of international students in order to build a picture of their experience. As the experiences of the individual students were drawn together, participants were revisited for clarification of finer details and additional information, to complete this image of their perceptions. From this common experiences and needs were identified and discussed.

Structure of Thesis

This chapter gives a general introduction and background to the study, the objectives it aimed to achieve, and a comprehensive outline of the thesis structure.

Chapter TWO provides a review of literature concerning the needs of international students and possible difficulties faced as they study in a culture that differs from their own. Chapter two also includes an outline of government regulations concerning the provision of services for international students as found in the Code of Practice, and a brief overview of services provided specifically for international students by eight universities (including rural university) as advertised on their web site. This chapter concludes with a statement of the research questions.

Chapter THREE justifies Grounded Theory as a suitable means of collecting data for this study and outlines how data was ethically gathered and analysed. Chapter three also describes the setting of the study and introduces the participants.

Chapter FOUR presents the results of the study and discusses the major issues arising from interviews with the participants concerning their experiences prior to arrival, upon arrival and during their period of study at Rural University.

Chapter FIVE compares the experiences of English speaking international students with those of non-English speaking international students. It also provides a further discussion of the main needs expressed by the participants resulting in a list of recommendations for Rural University. Limitations of the study are also mentioned and areas for future research are presented.

Conclusion

International students make up almost one fifth of students in Australian institutions and are an increasing student population on Rural University campus. This study identified several areas where international students feel more support services are needed at Rural University. It also found that there were marked differences and similarities in the experiences of Asian and North American students.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND RATIONALE

Introduction

Recently there has been a sharp increase in the number of international students wishing to conduct part or all of their studies within Australia. The total number of overseas students as stated by Marginson (2002, p. 22) is almost twenty percent of all students studying in Australia. These foreign students are temporary residents by choice, having come to Australia with the aim of achieving academic attainment rather than total adoption of culture (Lacina, 2002; Mori, 2000). Within the tertiary arena, the emphasis has been mainly on marketing and recruiting such international students to particular campuses. However, competition has made institutions increasingly aware of the need to examine and re-evaluate the support services needed by these students both before and after their arrival to ensure that they enjoy a positive experience. Much of this is motivated by the need to protect the reputation of the university and ensure the continued flow of revenue created by full fee paying international students in the future (Barker, 1999; Kaye & Yanhong Li, 1998; Kia & Wood, 2000; Marginson, 2002). Australia's commitment to international students and the promotion of cultural diversity can be seen through the development and enforcement of the Education Services for Overseas Students Act 2000 and corresponding regulations (Grey, 2002).

Issues Faced By International Students

Studies have shown that international students often have difficulty in adjusting to their new culture and academic environment (Al-Sharideh & Goe, 1998; Kaye & Yanhong, 1998; Lacina, 2002; Mori, 2000; Myburgh et al., 2002; Jones et al., 2000). While they have been found to suffer from the same difficulties as native students attending a new university, international

students additionally experience 'unique stressors' (Mori, 2000). Jones, Line, Robertson, and Thomas (2000, p. 101) describe international students as "special needs students" due to the extent of these unique needs. Thus, in order to effectively accommodate international students and ensure optimum benefit from their Australian experience, it is essential for institutions to be aware of the problems international students face and the concerns they may have (Kay & Yanhong Li, 1998; Jones et al., 2000).

Certain common challenges and concerns that face international students include financial difficulties (Grey, 2002; Kaye & Yanhong, 1998; Lacina, 2002; Mori, 2000; Myburgh et al., 2002), language difficulties (Kaye & Yanhong, 1998; Lacina, 2002; Mori, 2000; Myburgh et al., 2002; Jones et al., 2000), social and relationship issues (Kaye & Yanhong, 1998; Mori, 2000; Myburgh et al., 2002; Jones et al., 2000) and lack of guidance and counselling (Kaye & Yanhong, 1998; Lacina, 2002; Mori, 2000). Through understanding such issues, universities may be more able to ensure quality services that meet these needs (Carmical, 2002; Kaye & Yanhong Li, 1998). In addition, international students can differ in culture, ethnic background, and religion. However, it has been suggested that despite these unique challenges, they also share some problems with Australian national students when it comes to adjusting to a culture and academic environment of the tertiary situation (Lacina, 2002; Mori, 2000).

Financial Difficulties

Financial issues and difficulties were found by Kay and Yanhong Li (1998) to be a commonly mentioned concern of overseas students. In a study of 155 international students studying in the United Kingdom, financial concerns were identified as being a major priority and cause of stress during time spent studying abroad. While financial stresses and difficulties are often synonymous with being a university student, it has been suggested that international students suffer a more unique and severe form of stress due to financial issues than do native students (Mori, 2000). Grey (2002) and Lacina (2002) also suggest that large amounts of stress experienced by international students may be attributed to pressure from family back in their

home country to achieve academic success in order to justify the large monetary investments in their education overseas. The need to preserve family honour and reputation may also be an added impetus to the need for academic success.

Language Barriers

International students from non-English speaking backgrounds often find language and communication to be a difficulty (Lacina, 2002, Mori, 2000; Myburgh et al., 2002; Jones et al., 2000). Language difficulties were identified by Jones, Line, Robertson, & Thomas (2000) as the single most unresolved concern of international students, with students expressing a lack in confidence in speaking English with native English speakers. Myburgh, Niehaus, & Poggenpoel (2002) also found that for most students whose native language was not English, language was a barrier and some even felt that it was the biggest difficulty faced during their period of study. In addition, students have indicated a perception that native speakers are often impatient with those who lack proficiency in the dominant language or who speak with a heavy accent (Lacina, 2002).

Different accents and culturally specific idioms and phrases have also been found to cause high levels of stress and be a challenge for international students from both English and non-English speaking backgrounds (Mori, 2002; Myburgh et al., 2002). It is not merely enough for students to be able to speak English, they must also have an understanding of idioms, academic English, and college slang in order to communicate effectively (Myburgh et al., 2002). For this reason international students can misinterpret or be misinterpreted resulting in miscommunications and an increase in stress levels associated with language. This applies to international students from both English and non-English speaking backgrounds (Lacina, 2002).

International students from a non-English speaking background may also experience difficulties in writing Essays in a scholarly fashion for English speaking examiners (Haas & Pardue, 2003). Issues such as "thematic organization, lack of subject-predicate agreement, and inappropriate

use or omissions of pronouns or articles" are aspects of writing which are often difficulties faced by international students as they write at a tertiary level in English (Haas & Pardue, 2003, p. 74). Choe (2001) states that written compositions of students for whom English is a second language tend to contain expressions that are specific to their native culture.

Social and Relationship Issues

International students often express difficulties in adjusting socially and forming new relationships with native students (Al-Sharideh & Goe, 1998; Jones et al, 2000; Mori, 2002). International students need to form new social networks that, due to separation from native culture and family, may differ vastly from those familiar support networks of their home and from those of most native students (Mori, 2000; Lacina, 2002). Cultural differences concerning the way friendship is viewed and valued may also hinder the formation of an effective support network (Lacina, 2002). People may at first appear friendly but later appear insincere and unfriendly because the friendship has not become as deep as had been expected. Social relationships may also be viewed as being less permanent in some cultures (Mori, 2002). This finding was supported by Myburgh, Niehaus, and Poggenpoel (2002), who found that some international students perceived national students lacked a genuine interest in forming friendship bonds, and also felt that the family and social ties were not as close as in their own culture.

Mori (2002) suggests that international students may also experience additional stress from social relationships due to a misinterpretation of apparent romantic attachments. Innocent comments and statements made by members of the opposite gender may be interpreted as 'romantic invitations'. This can result in embarrassment for all involved and add stress to the social life of international students (Lacina, 2002).

In a study conducted in Australia by Jones, Line, Robertson, and Thomas (2000), international students reported that they felt isolated from Australian students, found difficulty in making

friends with Australian students and were concerned that there was no mentoring system in place during the initial stages of their arrival. They felt as though there was no invitation into the Australian tertiary scene. These students also expressed a need for more social activities to be provided by their institution.

Lack of Counselling

The impact of the new cultural environment may create loneliness and culture shock that results in physical ailments such as headaches, insomnia, or mental exhaustion (exhaustion that affects mental keenness and alertness)(Lacina, 2002). This can impede transition into the new culture and may necessitate referral to a counsellor or guidance officer. While there is a potentially increased need for such services, according to Kaye and Yanhong Li (1998), international students are unsure of how they might access the assistance they need. In comparison to native students, international students have been found to be more in need of counselling services than national students, they have also been found to be less likely to utilize these services and more likely to terminate them prematurely (Lacina, 2002; Mori, 2000). This may be due to the fear of the shame associated with using counselling services (Lacina, 2002). International students may also be wary of counsellors of a culture different to their own, and considering the varying background of international students, this may make the provision of assistance more difficult to provide (Mori, 2000).

Need for Same Culture Relationships

The development of relationships between international students whose cultural backgrounds are similar has been found to be an important coping strategy which helps them meet the challenges of studying and living in a different culture (Al-Sharideh & Goe, 1998; Grey, 2002; Mori, 2000). Al-Sharideh and Goe (1998) found that the number of ties international students had with other international students of a similar culture to their own was directly related to their personal adjustment in the new culture. This relationship was seen to be more important than relationships developed with students native to the host culture.

Al-Sharideh and Goe also suggest that bonds between international students of a similar ethnic background are the "most important factor influencing personal adjustment" within a new culture (1998, p. 722). Research by Myburgh, Niehaus, and Poggenpoel (2002) also suggested that international students sharing experiences with peers who had undergone similar experiences lessened the effects of feeling lonely. Grey suggests that having negative experiences in relating to, and interacting with, native students leads international students to prefer staying together and supporting each other. Thus students often prefer to work with students of a similar ethnic group where they feel confident in their interaction and encounter fewer barriers (1998).

Difficulties in adjusting to aspects of their new environment, such as climate and living conditions, were found by Myburgh, Niehaus, and Poggenpoel (2002) to cause students to feel homesick, lonely and isolated. Jones, Line, Robertson, & Thomas (2000) also reported international students experience difficulties due to homesickness. These feelings of loneliness and homesickness were similarly identified by Lacina (2002) and Kay and Yanhong Li (1998), who also found that females are more likely than males to admit to and express such feelings.

Learning and Teaching Style

Mori (2000) points out that international students are under additional stress due to unfamiliarity with the educational system. Students may be accustomed to a particular learning style that, for example, encourages and rewards rote memorization, hence they may find difficulty in adjusting to an academic setting that requires and expects different study habits in order to excel in examinations or which prizes scholarly reasoning and writing. In a study comparing the learning styles of Asian and Australian students (McCormick & Ramburuth, 2001, p. 333) it was found that Asian students tended to use "deep motivation, surface strategies, and achieving strategies" and preferred a more collaborative approach to learning, while Australian students used "deep strategies and surface motivation" and preferred an individual approach to learning.

Research by Barker, Gatfield and Grahm (1999) concluded that the differences in learning style are significant enough to warrant designing specific academic programs to suit differing cultural groups. Haas and Pardue (2003) expressed the need to examine and adjust the material studied in order to cater for the different learning needs of international student, specifically looking at Israeli nursing students studying in America.

Myburgh, Niehaus, and Poggenpoel (2002) also found international students felt they needed longer to complete assignments and needed to work harder which in turn led them to feel more depressed. Jones, Line, Robertson, & Thomas (2000) also found that international students expressed difficulties due to insufficient guidance during course selection.

Government Regulations and Recommendations

As can be seen from the above review, international students have needs and difficulties that differ from native students. Various steps can be taken to encourage international students to develop positive experiences during their period of study despite these needs. The Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee (AVCC) has established a Code of Practice containing guidelines based on the Education Services for Overseas Students (ESOS) Act 2000 which requires each Australian University to provide evidences of its "commitment to it's international students and to ensure the continued high standing of Australia's reputation as an education and training provider" (AVCC, 2002, p. ii). These guidelines outline the services that universities are required to provide for their international students to ensure they are catered for adequately. The Australian Government reserves the right to take action against those universities that do not follow these regulations and abide by the ESOS Act 2000.

This Code of Practice offers universities a 'checklist' to allow them to establish services and practices that follow their recommendations. The Code of Practice guidelines covers issues relating to:

- Promotion and marketing
- Recruitment agents
- Admission
- Pre-arrival information for international students studying in Australia
- Arrival and orientation for international students studying in Australia
- Information for students
  - Academic matters
  - Living arrangements
  - Legal requirements and entitlements
  - Fees and refunds
  - Services
  - Code and guidelines
- University infrastructure
- Student support
- Staff support
- Onshore students returning home
- Partners
- Fee refunds

Promotion, Marketing and Recruiting

Under the guidelines, Australian Universities are required to carefully plan all promotional tours with the correct government agencies and ensure that all regulations belonging to the country of visit concerning the promotion of overseas universities are adhered to (AVCC, 2002, 1.1 & 1.3). All promotional materials used on such tours and in general promotion of universities is expected to provide potential students with accurate and correct information concerning course details, services available, university facilities, and educational and employment opportunities for students (AVCC, 2002, 1.2 & 1.3).

The guidelines specify details concerning contracts made with recruiting agents and expectations concerning the quality of recruiters, payment, monitoring and regular communication and awareness of these expectations (AVCC, 2002, 2.1, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 2.6, 2.7 & 2.10). Universities providing services for international students are also required to "monitor and review student satisfaction with their recruitment agents" to ensure quality services for potential students (AVCC, 2002, 2.8).

Admission

Universities are also expected to abide by specific regulations and have their own "standards and procedures" in place concerning the admission of international students (AVCC, 2002, 3.1). Admission criteria should be published by the university and it is to be ensured that admitted students have the academic level, and where appropriate English level, required to enable international students to gain from their study and to be able t successfully complete their course of study (AVCC, 2002, 3.1, 3.2, 3.3 & 3.4). Universities are also required to examine research proposals before accepting international students into 'postgraduate research degree' programs (AVCC, 2002, 3.6).

The guidelines also state that when universities receive enquiries or applications, they are to reply promptly and ensure that all required information and forms are provided to the interested persons as soon as possible (AVCC, 2002, 3.5).

Pre-arrival information, Arrival and Orientation

Before students embark on their journey to the place of study, universities are required to provide them with clear and specific information, presented in a professional manner, concerning:

- The exact location of the campus;
- Names and telephone numbers of relevant staff to contact in the even of problems on arrival in Australia;

- Cost of living'
- Accommodation;
- Clothing and food;
- Payment of fees;
- Travel arrangement from point of arrival in Australia to the university;
- Information to meet specific needs, e.g. legal, medical, dental, and social security;
- Work prospects and casual employment;
- Contact names for further information. (AVCC, 2002, p. 6; 4.1)

Upon arrival in Australia, universities are to meet international students at the airport, if required, and to provide short term accommodation if it is needed (AVCC, 2002, 5.1). An orientation program should also be conducted upon arrival in order to "reinforce material already provided in the written form"(AVCC, 2002, p. 6; 5.1).

Ongoing Information

Students are to receive accurate and up-to-date information concerning academic matters, living arrangements, legal requirements and entitlements, fees and refunds, services, and code and guidelines (AVCC, 2002, 6). Students are to be informed of relevant academic issues that may include the educational standards and assessment procedures used by the university, course details and accreditation, registration requirements and significant dates of the semester study program (AVCC, 2002, 6.2). Information concerning the proposed living arrangements of the international student should also be presented along with general area and cultural information (AVCC, 2002, 6.3). International students must be made aware of legal issues such as conditions of entry to Australia, employment options and medical assistance arrangements and they must also have access to the Code of Practice (AVCC, 2002, 6.4, 6.7). The guidelines also state that students are to receive specific detailed information concerning the payment of fees, refund policies, and services that are provided for students by the university (AVCC, 2002, 6.5).

University Infrastructure, and Student and Staff Support

Universities should build a network where allocated staff or 'units' are responsible for different aspects of the international students program to insure quality services are provided (AVCC, 2002, 7.1& 7.2). Systems should be in place to monitor and ensure the quality and appropriateness of services and education provided (AVCC, 2002, 7.3).

Universities are to encourage a supportive environment for their international students by monitoring student progress and providing advice and additional support for academic development where needed (AVCC, 2002, 8.1, 8.3 & 8.5). The guidelines also state that counselling services should be provided in order to help international students adjust successfully and overcome any difficulties they may have, and that a directory of assistance for specific needs be developed (AVCC, 2002, 8.4). Staff dealing with international students must be qualified and have appropriate training to ensure that they are aware of the relevant laws associated with the provision of education to international students and also that they are able to deal with any issues that may arise (AVCC, 2002, 9.1).

The guidelines state that universities should not assume that students are going to return to their home country and easily re-assimilate back into their own culture. Hence, they should provide support in the form of advice and possibly counselling prior to their departure. Universities are also encouraged to continue support after their return through an 'alumni association' or similar (AVCC, 2002, 10).

Services Currently Being Provided by Australian Universities

Seven Australian Universities, excluding Rural University, and the array of services they advertise on their website as providing for international students, were examined in the process of this research to gain a general overview of services currently being provided in fulfilment of

the recommendations of the Code of Practice. It is recognized that international students also have access to a range of services and facilities generally made available for all students upon commencement of their studies and during the semester. However, this study merely examines briefly the services specified by institutions to be for the benefit of international students. As information was taken from university websites and links for international students, it must be mentioned that additional services may be provided by the institutions of which the researcher is not aware. While the names of the universities are not specifically mentioned during the discussion, reference for the correct web addresses can be found in the reference list (Centre for Education Development & Academic Methods, 2002; Charles Sturt University, 2003; Deakin University Australia, 2003; International Office, October, 2003; MUOS, 2003; Newcastle University, 2003; Student Recruitment Office, 2003; The University of Melbourne, 2003; Web Services, University of Queensland, 2003).

i) Pre-arrival briefing

University Two and Five specified that there would be a briefing for international students prior to their departure from their home country.

ii) Transportation from airport

Six of the seven Universities examined offered a free service to transport new international students from the Airport to University or place of accommodation upon their arrival in Australia. While University Six may provide this service also, the researcher did not find evidence of this on the website visited. University Three specified that this service covered parents and/or other family members accompanying the student without cost. University Two also offered transport to accompanying persons at a cost of twenty dollars per person. University Three specified that a confirmation letter confirming that flight details were correct and that the students request for transport had been received would be sent to prior to departure from their home country. University Four also offered to find temporary accommodation for arriving international students who were in need of such.

iii) Orientation on arrival

All of the seven universities advertised some form of arrival orientation for international students. University Three and Six specifically mentioned that this orientation would include cultural advice and transition assistance. University Five also conducts arrival programs on a daily basis prior to the commencement of study. University Three conducts an in-semester program aimed at helping international students adjust to their new environment, and, as also with Universities Four and Six, offers some form of orientation mid semester looking back at difficulties students have experienced and how to cope with them.

iv) Peer-support/ mentoring programs

Universities Two, Three and Four all advertised formal peer support/mentoring programs available, upon request and application, for international students in their initial stages of study on campus.

v) Academic preparation courses/ advisors

Universities Six and Seven advertised courses aimed at academically preparing students for their chosen course of study. University Seven offers a four-week study skills course, while University Six offers workshops on writing and studying skills for international students. Universities Two, Three, Five and Seven also provide an office for international students' questions or difficulties concerning educational issues. Universities Two, Four Five, Six, and Seven all offer study and/or language advisors for international students seeking help in those areas, and Universities Four, Five and Seven advertise the availability of international student advisors to help with any more general needs or concerns of students. University One also provides a library coordinator to provide specialist support to international students in the library.

vi) Provision of services

Universities One, Two, Three, Four, Five and Seven have an established committee or foundation aimed at providing services and caring for the needs of international students. University Two advertises an Overseas Student Lounge containing coffee machines and foreign magazines where international student may go to socialise or relax. This particular institution also provides international students with a survival handbook and a regularly published newsletter specifically international students.

vii) Social integration

All of the seven Universities provide cultural and social activities for international student. University Two advertises an international week as one of these activities to encourage networking with Australian students. University Seven also specifies that there their cafeteria serves and on campus stores sell multicultural foods.

viii) Community services

Universities One, Two, Five and Seven specifically mention that there is health services provided on campus for international students. Universities One, Five and Seven state they have counselling provided free of charge. Universities One, Five and Six provide a program that aims to care for the families of international students. Universities Three and Six provide an after hours number/ twenty four hour number for international students to call in case there is an emergency.

ix) Re-entry to home culture debriefing

Universities Two, Four, Five and Six also advertise that they have a program for students prior to their return home, aimed at helping them prepare for difficulties they may encounter when they arrive back in their home country.

While this analysis is perhaps lacking due to insufficient information obtained from the respective websites, it gives a general overview of main services provided for international students and what information they have access to via the respective university website prior to their arrival on campus.

Services Provided By Rural University

The following is an overview of the services provided for international students by Rural University, as specified on the university website link for international students. It is recognised that other services may be offered, however, this overview reflects only those which are advertised on the website as specifically being for the use and support of international students. According to information advertised on the website for Rural University, international students are met at the airport upon arrival and transported to the campus, via downtown Sydney for a meal, free of charge. Guest rooms are available by the university for visiting parents and family. A Travel Scholarship is also available for international students, who meet specified criteria, to assist with travel expenses.

The Director of Student Services at Rural University doubles as the International Student Contact Officer (ISCO). The ISCO, along with other Student Services Staff, co-ordinates support and aids international students with accommodation, orientation, transport information, phone information and financial matters. Rural University provides Briefing Sessions for international students during the orientation process to discuss cultural and social matters. Cultural excursions are also conducted for the benefit of international students. Rural University also promotes an established International Club.

Faculty deans, and the Academic Registrar are available to help students in their academic course and subject selection upon arrival. However, there appeared to be no single centre or contact office. A tutorial service is also provided for students requiring assistance with English,

essay writing or other academic areas and a bridging course is offered prior to the commencement of study if necessary.

Rural University provides a professional counsellor, and also directs students to the Chaplain, Residence Directors, and the ISCO for help concerning minor personal problems.

Contents of Orientation Pack Received on Arrival

Upon arrival, students at Rural University are presented with an Orientation pack containing important information necessary for orientation and university life. Included in this pack for students beginning study at Rural University during first semester 2003 were the following items:

- Welcome letter
- Map of University Campus and list of deans (2 A4 pages)
- 'General Information 2003' (15 A4 pages), containing information on:
  - The University: location and general services.
  - University services: Student services, financial services, religious life, forums/assemblies, Social life, sport and recreation, student associations, clubs, personal equipment, counselling, transport services, ID cards, student work, publications, mail/faxes, telephones, computing services and email, Rural University bookshop.
  - General Information: Motor vehicles, dress and appearance, security, health care, nursing students, insurance, Tax File Number, aviation students, International Students, Arriving at College.
  - Residence Halls: facilities and services, residential guidelines.
  - Contacts: school/community contacts, handy numbers.
- Code of Discipline (6 A4 pages)
- Positive Choices: Drug Free Policy (3 A4 pages)

- Weekly Transport Runs (1 A4 page)
- Around the Place (local businesses and contact numbers) (2 A4 pages)
- Flyer containing information concerning Access/ID cards (1 A4 page)
- Parking Regulations (1 A4 page)
- Forum and Assembly information flyer (half A4 page)
- Library resources and services for students flyer (2 A4 pages)
- Online access to your personal library record (1 A4 page)
- Dealing with Harassment: Guidelines for Students and Staff (5 A4 pages)
- Grievance Appeals and Resolution (2 A4 pages)
- Harassment Policy Statement (2 A4 pages)

Determining Quality of Services

With the increase of international students attending Rural University recently, there is a need to re-evaluate the quality of services that are being provided. There has been an increasing tendency for tertiary institutions to determine the quality of their institution "as perceived and determined by the consumer" (Barker et al., p. 239). When determining the quality of services being provided for international students at Rural University, it is thus essential to find out how international students perceive the services and the nature of their experiences. The following questions are raised:

1. What are the support needs of American and Asian International students prior to and upon arrival at Rural University?
2. What are the support needs of American and Asian International students during the first semester of study at Rural University?
3. What support services are provided by Rural University for International students during these times?

4. Do American and Asian International students feel that the services provided by Rural University prior to and upon arrival and during semester meet their needs?
5. How are the needs of international students from an English speaking background compare to the needs of those from a non-English speaking background?

This process is necessary to ensure their needs are being met by the services that are provided and if not, how they better can be.

Conclusion

This chapter has given an overview of literature outlining the difficulties commonly faced by international students. The government regulations aimed at catering for these needs have also been outlined as presented in the Code of Practice and ESOS Act 2000, and the services several universities provide in fulfilment of these regulations have been briefly outlined. The services provided by Rural University, as advertised on their web site, and the orientation pack presented to students upon enrolment have also been addressed. As a result of the literature reviewed, the research questions were constructed and specified.

CHAPTER THREE

METHOD FOR RESEARCH

Introduction

This chapter outlines a study of the needs and experiences of North American and Asian students studying in a rural Australian university, here after named Rural University. The research method involved the principles of Grounded Theory and data were gathered through audio taped interviews with students and with university staff who provide services to overseas students. The chapter provides a discussion of ethical issues and describes the manner in which data were analysed.

The Setting of the Study

Rural University is situated in a rural New South Wales community. At the time of this study enrolments at Rural University consisted of 19.6 % students classed as international students, originating from a mixture of 23 foreign countries. Prior to this study, Rural University underwent a push in marketing to North American college students resulting in a rapid increase of such students coming to Australia to study at Rural University. Also at the time of this study, Rural University was in the process of establishing an ELICOS programme for students wishing to learn English. Thus, international students with a lower English ability were fast becoming increasing members of the campus student body.

Research Questions

As discussed previously, this study will examine the following questions:

1. What are the support needs of American and Asian International students prior to and on arrival at Rural University?

2. What are the support needs of American and Asian International students during the first semester of study at Rural University?
3. What support services are provided by Rural University for International students during these times?
4. Do American and Asian International students feel that the services provided by Rural University prior to and upon arrival and during semester meet their needs?
5. How do the needs of international students from an English speaking background compare with the needs of those from a non-English speaking background?

The results will be presented and discussed according to the research questions. In this chapter the method used to explore these questions will be outlined and discussed.

Ethical Considerations

Considering the purpose and the direction of the study, the manner by which data were to be collected must be ethically bound. The purpose if this study was to examine the situation of overseas students or international students who enrol in a particular university. The study was not intended to create embarrassment for either the participants or the university. Any findings of the study are directed toward improving the situation of students, improving policy and procedures employed or services provided by the university. In other words, the intention of the study was to provide benefit to all parties involved in the study: both the participants and the institution at which they were studying or employed.

The procedure and data collection involved the principles of Grounded Theory, a standard procedure for qualitative data collection accepted by a wide range of ethics committees. Huberman and Miles (1994, p. 293) stated that it is better to "err on the side of anonymity" when it comes to protecting the identity of participants. In keeping with this throughout this research project, great consideration and care was taken to protect the privacy of all participants.

The identity of the participants was protected by the use of code names. However, code names do reflect the participant's country of origin and gender. Only the researcher, for the purpose of arranging follow up interviews, had access to the lists of codes.

Participants were informed of the ethical code and of their right to appeal to the researcher's supervisor or to the secretary of the Ethics Committee should they feel aggrieved about the study in anyway. Participation was voluntary and participants were informed that they could withdraw at any time if the so desired. Participants were informed of these matters in writing (see appendix 1) prior to the commencement of the study. Faculty members were also made aware prior to interviews that while their names would be coded and every effort made to keep their anonymity, due to the nature of the university and their position, they might be identifiable to various other members of the university community who read the report on the study. Every effort was made to ensure that the participants felt comfortable with the tone and direction of the interview at all times. Participants were also informed that they were able to pass or decline any particular questions if they wished to do so.

To further protect the participants' privacy, transcripts of interviews were typed personally by the researcher and seen only by the researcher and research supervisor in order to establish validity of the themes identified. Participants were given copies of the transcript for their own interview in order to ensure the accuracy of the information and allow the participant the opportunity to withdraw, add to or alter the information if they so chose.

Research Method

This study aims to build a theory concerning the needs of International students at Rural University based on the 'lived experiences' of the participants. Data collected represented the participants' perceptions of their experience and were used to create a holistic picture of their

interaction and experience with the university. Considering the uniqueness of each individual's experiences, systematic and taped interviews were chosen as the means of data collection. Transcripts of the tapes provided the data for analysis. This method is consistent with the conventional methods of qualitative research, specifically that of Grounded Theory (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Huberman & Miles, 1994; Kvale, 1996).

From the 1960s, Grounded Theory has been used to further Educational research. Grounded Theory resulted from a need for a methodology that allowed researchers to become immersed as deeply as possible in the experiences of the participants in order to construct a theory of their experiences and its meaning in relation to their lives, work, and their resulting choices and decisions. This developing theory is grounded within the perceptions as the participants in the study repeatedly interact with the researcher in relation to the objectives of the particular study (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p. 25). Grounded Theory has since provided researchers with a means of stepping into the world of their subjects and seeing their experiences as closely as possibly to the way that the subject themselves see them.

Grounded Theory has been employed in a large number of educational research projects. For example, Buckham (1998) used Grounded Theory methodology to explore the career plans being made by undergraduate arts students. Through in-depth analysis of interviews conducted, she found that the subjects tended to expect few career opportunities upon completing their study. The attitude had been constructed mostly on the experiences of other students.

More recently, Terres (2003) used Grounded Theory as a means of investigating the development of ethnic identity in Latino College students. Analysis indicated that there were two strong categories within the first two years of study: family environment and background, and psychosocial and cognitive development.

Yurkovich (2003) also recently used Grounded Theory in both a tertiary and cross-cultural setting in exploring the factors that influence academic success in American Indian nursing students at a western university. Factors identified included adjustment to culture, focus on academic goals, development of assertive skills and a support network.

Grounded Theory has gained recognition as a respected means of research within the tertiary arena and for gathering data of similar nature to that which is to be gathered and explored during this study. Thus, as was recommended by Stake (1995), the method selected reflected the nature of the objectives of the research.

Data Collection

A brief pilot study was conducted involving two students to practice interviewing techniques and also to tentatively establish the direction of the study and to ensure the nature and clarity of the interview questions. This follows the recommendations made by Huberman and Mills (1994) and Kvale (1996). Initial questions were constructed based on established procedures and services provided for International students by several leading universities (see appendix 2). Questions were both specific and general and were divided into three categories: experience prior to arrival; experience upon arrival; and experience during the study period.

During this pilot study, the North American student indicated that she felt that there was a definite need for greater communication with students prior to arrival and during the period of study. She also expressed concern about the services that had been offered to her prior to arrival and those provided upon arrival and during her period of study. From this brief interaction, specific questions were added to the question repertoire regarding these issues. The Asian pilot participant expressed a need for students to have help upon arrival in orientating them to life on campus and making them aware of where they should go for help. This later student indicated

that there was no one to tell them where to go and where to buy things and that too much information was merely provided in written form, hidden among the sheets of the welcome package or provided by the internet site.

From these interactions, specific questions for the latter interviews were prepared. A final outline of interview questions for student participants is as follows:

1. What communication did you have with Rural University prior to your arrival?
2. Was this communication adequate?
3. Were your expectations prior to arrival accurate concerning your accommodation and Australian lifestyle?
4. Are there areas where you would like to see more support services provided for International students prior to their arrival in Australia? What would have helped you?
5. Were you met at the airport?
6. Did you know what to do during your first day and night in Australia?
7. What orientation did you have to College life, Australian culture and your academic course once you arrived at Rural University?
8. Are there areas where you would like to see more support services provided for International students upon their arrival in Australia? What would have helped you?
9. Are there areas where you would like to see more support services provided for Iinternational Students during the semester? What would help you?

Interview questions for faculty participants were more general. An outline of interview questions for faculty participants is as follows:

1. What is your role in providing support services for international students at Rural University?
2. What services are currently provided by Rural University for international students?
3. What services would you like to see provided for international students at Rural University?

Student participants for the study were randomly selected from a list of students taken from the 'Orana' (Rural University, 2003), a document published annually by Rural University providing the names and photographs of all students. Participants from lecturers and service providers were selected based on the extent of their involvement in providing services for international students. All prospective participants were sent a letter outlining the nature of the study and inviting their participation (see appendix 3). Those who responded to this invitation were met in person and an interview arranged at a time and place of convenience to them. Verbal agreement and attendance at the interview venue at the arranged interview time were seen as indicating willing and informed consent. Initially two group interviews were to take place, one with six Asian and one with six American, however, due to timetabling differences, interviews were broken into smaller groups for the convenience of the participants. In the case of an invitee declining, an information and invitation letter was sent to another randomly chosen student from the remaining list.

The interview protocol required a semi-structured approach in which major lead-questions designated the scope of an interview component, but successive questions depended upon the flow of information. The interviews varied between 15 and 50 minutes in length and each interview was taped and transcribed. Interviews were conducted in an informal and relaxed manner to enable participants to feel at ease sharing personal information, as recommended by Kvale (1996). These transcripts were later returned to the respective participants to ensure they were satisfied with the content and allow opportunity to alter their comments or add more information if they desired to do so (for cover letter see Appendix 4). In one case substantial reconstruction took place to an extent that data may have been lost. Follow-up interviewing resulted in the recovery of this data. In the final stages of the research project, field notes were made of brief conversations had with the participants. In such cases, participants were read the field notes immediately after the conversation to ensure the notes were an accurate reflection of their intended comments.

Interviews with Asian participants were more structured and a list of main questions presented to interviewees prior to the interview to aid in understanding and preparing answers. There was also an incidental ten-minute question time at the beginning of such interviews where participants asked questions regarding the meaning of questions and vocabulary, and for more information on the study.

Data Analysis

Interviews were then transcribed verbatim. Pauses of more than four seconds were marked by the word 'pause' while shorter pauses were marked by '…'. Laughter and thinking words were also recorded.

There were three formal readings for each transcript. The initial reading took place during the transcribing process with the purpose of gaining a general picture of each individual's experience. The transcripts were then read a second time to identify threads of common experiences amongst the individuals. The third reading took place to further explore these commonalities and seek key words and phrases that accurately represented the individuals' experiences. The researcher then went back to the respective participants to clarify responses and obtain more detailed information regarding categories identified from the initial interviews as is compatible with recommendations for Grounded Theory, made by Corbin and Strauss (1990). Such interviews were of approximately 10-15 mins duration. Data were added to initial data and coded compatibly.

The Participants

	Asian	North American	Faculty
Male	1	1	2
Female	5	5	1
Total	6	6	3

Table 3:1 Participants of the study by gender and origin or status.

This study consisted of seventeen participants: three staff members; six Asian first years; six American first years; and a pilot study of one American second year student and one Asian second year student (see table 3:1).

The Asian student in the pilot study was from China, while the American student who participated in the pilot study was from California. Both had been living in Australia for the duration of their study at Rural University on campus as indoor students.

Asian Participants

Asian participants were primarily from Japan and Korea and enrolled in a combination of degree courses and the ELICOS program. All names used are coded to protect the identity of the participating students.

'Him'

Him is a female Korean student currently studying the ELICOS program and living on campus at Rural University in Andre Hall. At the time of this study she had been living in Australia for three months.

'Isook'

Isook is a female Korean student. At the time of this study she had been living in Australia on campus in Andre Hall at Rural University for four months. While she was studying ELICOS, her aim was to move to general classes the next semester.

'Yuna'

Yuna is a female student from Korea enrolled in the ELICOS program at Rural University. At the time of this study she had been living in Australia for 4 months and for the duration of this time had been living on campus in Andre Hall.

'Eri'

Eri is a female Japanese student currently enrolled in a degree program at Rural University. At the time of this study she had been living in Australia for three months on campus at Rural University in Andre Hall.

'Izumi'

Izumi is a female Japanese student currently enrolled in the ELICOS program. She has been living in Australia, on campus in Andre Hall for three months.

'Yu'

Yu is a male Japanese student currently enrolled in the ELICOS program. He has been living in Australia for two months, on campus at Rural University in Watson Hall.

North American Participants

North American participants were from varying states of America and also one student from Canada. The predominant course of study was general studies. All names used are coded to protect the identity of the participant.

'Kristen'

Kristen is a female North American student from California. She has been living in Australia for three months on campus at Rural University. At the time of this study she was enrolled in general studies and residing in Andre Hall.

'Ella'

Ella is a female North American student who has been living in Australia for nine months and has been living on Rural University campus in Ella Boyd Hall for that period of time. Over the most recent semester break she returned home for a holiday.

'Sheri'

Sheri is a female North American who at the time of this study had been living in Australia for 4 months. For the duration of that time she had been living on Rural University campus in Ella Boyd Hall. She was enrolled in general studies. She planned to complete two semesters at Rural University before returning to America.

'Brian'

Brian is a male North American. He had at the time of this study been living in Australia on campus at Rural University in Watson Hall for four months. He was also enrolled in general studies. He planned to return to America upon completion of the current semester.

'Anne'

Anne is a female Canadian. She had been living and studying in Australia at Rural University for four months. She was enrolled in the general studies program and living on campus in Ella Boyd Hall.

'Estelle'

Estelle is a female North American from Florida who at the time of this study had been living in Australia for one month. For that time she has been living on campus at Rural University in Ella Boyd Hall and enrolled in general classes.

Faculty Participants

Faculty Participants were a combination of academic and social support providers for international students. Coded names have been used to protect their anonymity.

'Ms. Jones'

'Ms. Jones' was, at the time of this study, the Dean of Women for the female students living on campus at Rural University in both Ella Boyd Hall and Andre Hall.

'Mr. Smith'

Mr Smith was at the time of this study the co-ordinator of the general studies program and director of studies for the ELICOS program. Previously his position was Overseas Student Officer.

'Mr. Brown'

Mr. Brown had recently joined the faculty of Rural University in the Foundation Studies program. He maintained a 'drop-in' centre that provided support to all students in essay writing.

Conclusions

The nature of this study lent itself to the use of Grounded Theory. A simple review of the literature indicates the suitability of the method. The resulting data and its analysis is examined in the following chapters.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Introduction

This chapter outlines the main issues concerning the needs and experiences of first year North American and Asian international students at Rural University that resulted from the interviews conducted. Due to the massive volume of data arising from the interviews, and the limitations and constraints of this study, it was necessary to only include and discuss in this chapter the issues that were identified as being the most important to both future students and Rural University. Items were prioritized as being such by the researcher. These results are discussed according to the research questions as presented in Chapters Two and Three.

All quotations were taken directly from statements made by the subjects during their interviews. Minor changes or alterations were made to allow smoothness of reading and clarity and have been signaled by the use of square brackets. Omissions within a quote have been signaled by the use of three full stops. Pauses and "thought words" that are found in the interview transcripts have been omitted when quoting unless they have impacted on the meaning of the statement being made. For ease of referencing and location of quotations, transcripts and field notes were compiled into one complete document and pages numbered. The location of the citation in the transcript is signaled by the page number in parenthesis.

Prior to Arrival

Preferred Mode of Communication

Students interviewed indicated that there had been a combination of modes of communication between themselves and Rural University prior to their arrival. Their perceptions as to which mode of communication was more effective also varied greatly from participant to participants.

While Kristen remembered communicating through "email…phone calls…[and] letters", she felt that the "phone calls were… best" and the most informative as she "could ask questions and get responses immediately". While she felt that in "some areas" communication was effective, other areas "could have been explained better" to her such as the arrival procedure (p. 1-2). Ella's pre-arrival communication was also through "emails…phone calls and letters". However, she felt that the emails she received were more useful for her as "a student from [Rural University] was emailing" her "and answering all [her] questions" (p. 1). She also felt that the "phone calls were…really short" (p. 1).

Brian felt he did not have adequate "follow up" when trying to initially communicate with the Aviation department at Rural University. After emailing three or four times and receiving no reply, he called in order to "establish communication" (p. 7). He felt that the most useful communication was "through the mail because it showed [his] agenda" and contained the information needed for his visa application (p. 7). Similarly, Sheri found it difficult to establish initial communication, her mother sending "two emails in order to get the information pack". While the university was on vacation at the time, after establishing initial communication, she found email correspondence to be "pretty good" (p. 7). Anne communicated mostly through email and found this to be "really nice" as she was able to have the answer to any queries "right away" (p. 18). Estelle remembers using the "phone a lot" also, and received "all the

information" needed. She found when she did correspond via email, responses were received within two days (p. 24).

Izumi corresponded through email and felt that her communication with Rural University prior to her arrival was adequate and helpful (p. 30). Eri communicated through "email and letters". She felt that emails were the most helpful as they were responded to "quickly". Apart from wishing for "more visual information" such as "pictures", she felt that there was enough correspondence during this period of time (p. 30). While Him corresponded through email and letters, she also felt that emails were the "most helpful" to her as letters took too long and were "very late" (p. 30). Yu agreed that emails were "quick" and letters were "not good" as they were "very late" (p. 30). Yuna corresponded through "email…fax and letter[s]" and similarly, she felt that email was more useful though faxes were "okay". She found that letters took too long to get to her and because of this her "certification" was "very late". She would have liked more information during this time on the "ELOCOS [course] and cost" of the program (p. 40-42). Similarly, Isook found letters to be "too late", and as a result of waiting for letters she was unable to "come here" until later (p. 40). She also corresponded through email, but felt that "more detail" was needed about her proposed course of study (p. 41).

Due to the broad range of preferences depending on the circumstance of the particular international student, it can be recommended that Rural University continue to correspond with future students using a range of modes including email, phone calls and postal services. Students from Asia with English as a second language did not use phone conversations as a means of communicating prior to arrival, while it figured prominently amongst the North American students.

Information Received Prior to Arrival

Some students felt that there was more information needed prior to their arrival in order for them to better prepare for their time studying and living at Rural University. While some students felt more information concerning their accommodation would have allowed them to know better the things they would need once they arrived, others felt that more information was needed concerning their courses.

Ella felt that prior to her arrival, the information she received was "okay" and she didn't "have any problems" as any questions or queries she did have were "taken care of really easily" (p. 2). Anne also felt that the information she received was adequate for her "at the time" and Rural University provided "on the whole…pretty good support" prior to her arrival. However, she would have liked to have seen "more pictures" to help her "know what to expect" (p. 18-19). Isook received information from students who had previously graduated from Rural University and found that was adequate also (p. 43).

There was from several students a desire for more details for prospective students. Kristen thought that "some areas could have been explained better", such as the "whole arrival" procedure (p. 1-2). While Izumi felt that more information on what she would need to bring would have helped (p. 32). Both Eri and Him supported this view. Eri stated that she "didn't know if [she] had to bring [her] own pillow" and felt that "visual information" such as a "picture of the room" would have aided her in knowing what she would need to bring (p. 32). Similarly, Him hopes that future students are given more "details" concerning the "school, … environment, …position of [the University], and [the] dormitory" (p. 32). She also stated that she wanted information in "more detail" before she came "about holidays" (discussion to come) and share room options (p. 73).

There were a number of students who felt that in their experience, more information and support concerning their course of study and academic schedule would have aided them during their planning period. For example, Sheri felt that before her arrival, an "academic supervisor" would have helped her, explaining the difficulties faced by some International students. Sheri's statement follows.

> Sheri: Someone to help choose my classes before I got here. Because I didn't know any classes I was going to take before I got here and it would have helped to have that laid out. Some kids are here and they were planning on staying two semesters but they're going back because there is no classes for them next semester. They didn't necessarily know that [before they arrived]. And when I was looking at stuff, if I didn't have a plane ticket that would keep me here, I might have been more tempted to go [because] there were classes but they were not…totally along the line that I wanted…(p. 9-10)

These sentiments were supported by Brian who thought that the "whole idea of an academic advisor" would have "helped [him] a lot" in planning his classes before arrival (p. 10). He also felt that "more of a description of the core classes…would have helped [him]…a lot more" (p. 8). Anne also experienced difficulty working out her subjects and thought that talking to "a course counsellor" would have helped by giving her "an idea" of what subjects she could do (p. 19). Finally, Estelle said that she "needed to talk to someone" concerning her subjects and an "advisory" would have "definitely" helped her. She felt that she "didn't have very much advice" and was "all over the place" with her subject choices resulting in a need to change "three or four [of her original] classes" once the semester had already begun (p. 25&28).

The researcher returned to the American participants with some specific questions concerning the presence of academic advisors in the North American academic scene and found that an academic advisory figure is seen by students as a regular part of American tertiary culture. Anne stated that even if a student is undecided what they wish to study they "still have an advisor to help [choose and organize their] classes" and schedule (p. 61).

While there was no specific mention of an academic advisory figure, several of the students from Asia mentioned a need for more information on their proposed academic course. Yuna felt more information including an "ELICOS schedule…how many teachers…[and the] classroom" would have been beneficial as she was "very confused" about these things (p. 49). Him wished for more information on how she could move from the ELICOS program to a general course of study (p. 38). Yu agreed with this stating that he also wished to "study ELICOS and [move to a] general course" (p. 39).

It can be seen from this evidence and the experiences of those students interviewed, both Asian and North American, that there is a need for international students to have more information and guidance in their academic course prior to the commencement of their study. There is also a great need for North American students to have closer guidance when choosing their subjects to enable them to gain the most academically from their time of study at Rural University.

Web site

Subjects were asked if they had viewed the Rural University web page prior to attending the institution. While some students interviewed stated that they had at some stage visited the site, several found it to be confusing.

Ella found the site to be helpful yet after looking at the web page, still had a "lot of questions". However, to her knowledge it has been "upgraded" and improved since she visited it initially (p. 1). Kristen found that the site "wasn't that helpful" to her (p. 1) when she visited it and Brian thought that a "little bit more [information] on the web site…would have helped…a lot" (p. 8).

He went on to state:

> Brian: …If I was able to get a class description on the web site and when the classes were started and the times that those classes were offered, that would have been really helpful before I came here…The bad thing I found about the web site was they don't have enough information on the Aviation Department. I think if they had more information on prices and availability in a little more detail on the …classes that they offer, they probably would have more students come….It was really difficult for me to find out all that, then I had

> to come first hand to the airport and ask them how much it was every year…(p. 8).

Similarly, Yuna felt that the information on the web site was "not enough", specifically concerning the ELICOS program. Isook also went to the web site and while she agreed that there needed to be more information she stated, " There was information, but it is not enough and for us, we are not very good [at] speaking English" (p. 43). She also found that it was difficult to find the information she was looking for, as she had to click on many links (p. 60). Isook felt that if it had been written in her own language and contained more pictures it would have been "nice". Estelle also found it to be "a little complicated" due to the large number of "categories" and felt it should be simplified to allow ease in finding general information. Being unable to find the "kind of information" she was seeking, she resorted to emailing the university and requesting the information (p. 24-25). While Sheri was not looking for any "particular" information, she also felt "lost" while visiting the site (p. 8). Him visited the web site, however, did not read the information while Yu only read "a little bit" (p. 31) as he doesn't "like English web sites" (p. 59). He felt that more photographs would be useful as he "sometimes just [looked] at photographs" on English web sites, and that if the page had been in Japanese it would have been better (p. 59). Izumi and Eri both did not visit the Rural University web site prior to arrival at the institution.

Participating Asian students were less likely to go to the web site seeking information about Rural University prior to arrival at the tertiary institution to commence study. Several students from Asia who did go to the web page, either did not read the information or only read a small portion of the information. While North American students were more likely to visit the web site, they found it to be either confusing or lacking the information they were seeking.

Prior Expectations

Some students arrived at Rural University having deliberately avoided creating expectations as they did not want to be disappointed by having false expectations shattered. For example, both Kristen and Eri consciously did not make any expectations for studying at Rural University. Kristen remembered she "didn't...really make any expectations so [she] wouldn't be disappointed" if studying in Australia was not what she had expected. She feels that this "turned out [to be] the right thing" to do (p. 2). Likewise, Eri said she "didn't even really make up an image of Rural University [because she] didn't want to be disappointed". Despite this, Eri mentioned that she found Rural University to be "smaller than what [she] thought it would be" prior to her arrival (p. 31). Ella, while not mentioning any expectations for her time at Rural University that she may have had prior to her arrival, stated that she "definitely wasn't disappointed at all" with her experience, and that she "loved it all" (p. 2).

Other students arrived with certain expectations concerning what they would find upon their arrival in at Rural University. This picture had been built by interpretations of information, and sometimes assumptions, and was in most cases different to the reality that was found upon arrival. The expectation that Rural University was larger, expressed by Eri, was echoed by Yu who thought that Rural University was a "very big...university" but when he arrived he found it to be "small". He also thought that the University was "near" to Sydney (p. 32). Similarly, Izumi had "heard that [Rural University] was near Sydney" and so thought that it would be "in the city". However, after arriving at Rural University, she thought that it was "really far from Sydney" and in the "country side" (p. 31).

Izumi also thought that there would be a "shower room or sink" in each room but when she arrived she found that the "shower room was to share with everybody" (p. 32). Several other students also mentioned that they had false expectations of what their accommodation would be like. Brian was "shocked" upon arrival "that there weren't any telephones...or telephone lines...and no internet connection in the rooms" (p. 8). Sheri also found this to be a "real

downer" for her as she was expecting to use her laptop computer from in her room to "email people at home". However she "did like the fact" that she had a room in Ella Boyd Hall, the newer of the two female residential halls with single rooms and a sink in each room, rather than Andre Hall where there are shared bathrooms and a mixture of single and double rooms (p. 9). Estelle, who was given a room in Ella Boyd Hall, had expected to have a room in Andre Hall and a roommate, though she could not recall being given any information to suggest this, she "just kinda thought that" would be how things would be. While her initial reaction to this circumstance was one of disappointment, she stated that she "love[s] [being in Ella Boyd Hall] now" (p. 28).

Isook found that the picture she had of Rural University was "not really" close to what she found upon arrival. Opposite to what Estelle had expected, Isook was expecting a "room like [the rooms in] Ella Boyd", but was given a room in Andre Hall. She was also anticipating a single room, but found her room was to be a double room (p. 42). Isook also thought her classroom would be "bigger…have more books" (p. 43) and be "more formal" (p. 49). Him received some "information about Rural University" from a faculty member and in the pictures, the "university room [looked] very big" but when she arrived she found that it was smaller than she had expected (p. 31). She also thought that there would be "a lot more majors" offered at Rural University (p. 31). Yuna found the picture she had in her mind of what Rural University would be was not close to what she found "especial[ly concerning] accommodation". She felt her room was "too stinky" due to the on-campus farm and "too old". She also attributed her "back [being] a problem" to the "uncomfortable" bed (p. 42).

Anne expected the "people [to be] really friendly…classes [to be] good….the weather hot…[and] the courses a little bit harder". Still she found it "a little bit of a surprise" when she found that "the lecturers mark a lot harder" (p. 19).

Perhaps, considering the experiences of these students, a larger amount of visual information is needed in order to give future students a realistic expectation of what their period of stay at Rural University would be like.

Upon Arrival

Initial Orientation/ First Day

Of the students' interviews, most stated that from their experience, they were unsure where to go, what to do, and what was happening on their first day in Australia.

Several students found that while they did not know everything about Rural University, they had adequate knowledge to enable them to function. Sheri and Brian both felt that the orientation they had was adequate. While she "didn't know everything", Sheri was able to find her way around during her first few days on campus (p. 11). Brian agreed that it was "pretty easy to find your way around" the campus. He found that having the orientation pack (detailed discussion to come) upon arrival was "really nice" as it had all the information in it that he needed (p. 11). While Ella did feel "kind of lost" during her first few days on campus, she thought that this "wasn't a big deal" and that she would have had similar experiences "going to a school back home" (p. 4). Him felt that she "half and half" knew what to do, but remembered that during this time she had been "very nervous so everything [had seemed] very hard" (p. 34).

Some students who were interviewed struggled during their first days on campus and felt that it was not very clear to them where to go and what to do. Estelle remembers she felt "completely lost" and was "unable to find [her] classes". She resorted to "asking around" in order to find places. She "did enjoy" having the orientation day and thought that it was adequate. She appreciated that the orientation groups were "small" and she felt comfortable and "able to ask questions" (p. 26). Anne also had "no idea" what to do during her first few days on campus (p.

20). Kristen recalls a difficult experience during her first day on campus due to not knowing where to go:

> Kristen: …when I first got on campus I was by myself an I had to wander around and try and figure out where the caf[eteria] was cause nobody told me…I was hungry. I walked around for half an hour trying to figure out where it is. It would have been helpful if somebody had…showed me a layout…They sort of showed me my room and gave me a key and that was it…There was [an orientation] the next day…but not when we first got there. And like I said, I didn't know where the caf[eteria] was. I didn't know what I was doing, I didn't want to go in there and eat. (p. 3)

While Isook knew where that cafeteria was as one of her teachers had told her when she first arrived, she found that "for information [she was] just looking [at other] students" and "following" them (p. 45). Yuna agreed that she "had no idea" and "just follow[ed]" other students as she did not know what to do (p. 45). While Izumi and Eri stated "yes" they knew what to do on their first day, they, along with Him, could not recall going through any orientation to Rural University campus (p. 34).

Asian students could not remember taking part in any orientation process to Rural University. This may have been due to overload in information or an inability to understand the information being given to them. While some North American students felt unsure what they should be doing during this time, most did not see this as a great problem and found there way around. One student, however, had difficulty finding the cafeteria on her first day. Students who call recall the orientation to Rural University appreciated it and felt it was adequate.

Orientation Pack

Upon arrival, students at Rural University are presented with an orientation pack containing information concerning the orientation procedure and other aspects of life and study at Rural University. A more detailed description of the specific information contained in this orientation pack is presented in Chapter 2. Students interviewed were asked if they received this pack and found the information useful. There were two distinct groups: those who found it to be very useful, and those who thought it was not useful at all. Some student even stated that several

difficulties they had faced would have been overcome by including specific information in this pack.

Estelle stated she did find it useful and that she had "read through it" (p. 29). Similarly, Anne found "most of it" useful to her (p. 22) and Brian felt that "the only thing that wasn't useful were the travel guides" for the area surrounding the university, but he used all the other information that had been included (p. 11). Sheri agreed that it had been useful and said she still had "a lot of those papers posted up on [her] wall" as they displayed "really good" information (p. 12).

There were students who did not find the information all that useful. Yuna found that while "a little bit" was useful, such as the "detail [concerning] cost, accommodation,…[and the] meal fee" she felt that overall it was "not really" useful as there was "no ELICOS information" included in the orientation package (p. 46). Isook also read the information in the Orientation package as she "was interested at first where [she] should go but [found that] it was not useful" as the information was "not easy to understand" (p. 46).

Izumi, Eri, Him and Yu also all stated that "no" they did not find it useful. When asked if they had read the information included in the orientation packs, their responses revealed a potential source of future problems for them during their study at Rural University. Izumi found that there were "too many things inside" and she "didn't know which one to read" (p. 35). Eri also did not "know which one[s] [were] important" and she "felt [too] lazy to read them all" (p. 35). Him replied that she "couldn't read" and that there were "so many" and she was "so bored" trying to read them (p. 35) while Yu said he thought "everything, don't worry!" (p. 35).

From the participants' responses to the orientation pack, there were two distinct sub groups. North American students, for whom English is a native language, read the information and found it to be very useful. However, most Asian students, 5 of whom are at Rural University to

improve their English studying in the ELICOS program, did not find it useful at all. Four students stated that they did not even read the information because they were unable to distinguish between what was important for them to read and what was not. Two students from Asia did read the information, however, while both felt that more information was needed in order for it to be of use to them, one felt that it was not easy for her to understand. This suggests that for students who find difficulty with complex English, the mode of communicating this information needs to be reconsidered to ensure that these students at the commencement of their study are obtaining essential information. Yuna and Isook both wished more information on the ELICOS program had been included in this pack.

Several students mentioned specific additional information that would have been useful if it had been included in this orientation package. Sheri wishes that she "had known a lot sooner to get" her International Identification Card than when she did, and thought that if information had been in the orientation pack it "would have really helped" her. While she had "heard about" the importance of the International Identification Card, "nobody really gave" her any specific information concerning it (p. 13).

Anne felt that it "would have been really nice" if there had been some information included in the orientation package on "phone cards and how to use them the cheapest way" as she had "wasted $250 on phone cards because [she] didn't know how to use them properly" (p. 21). Sheri also mentioned that she wished she had known "tricks" concerning phone cards as in her experience she had also "paid extra" until she "figured out the right numbers to dial" (p. 13).

Mentor Program

The suggestion of a mentoring system to be established in order to support international students during the first few weeks of study at Rural University was raised by two faculty members.

Ms. Jones noticed that in the initial stages of each semester when new students are arriving at the dormitory, international students "seem to be a little bit lost". She expressed a desire to establish some form of "buddy system" at the beginning of the semester whereby international students would have someone "bond with them"(p. 63). Though Mr. Smith thought that mentoring may already happen "informally to some extent", he felt that some students "could [still] feel …isolated…[and] unsupported". He would like to see a "mentoring system operating…in the dormitories" whereby "local students look out for overseas students" (p. 54). He felt that this would be useful as mentors could give "moral support…friendship…advice [and] cultural advice…[and] maybe even help with assignments." Mr. Smith was unsure "how to go about" establishing such a system, but felt there was a need to "sell the idea to students" and "promote" it (p. 55).

The response from the international students interviewed towards a mentoring program was very positive, most feeling it would have helped them if it had been made available to them. Only one student, Sheri, felt that it would not be useful for her.

Estelle stated she would "definitely" have taken the opportunity to have a mentor if it had been made available to her. She felt that a mentor "would have been useful…not only because [she] might need advice…[but] a big sister type [figure] …could introduce [her] to more Australians" (p. 27). Both Yu and Izumi stated that "yes", a mentor would have been useful (p. 35&36). Eri agreed with them as when she arrived "everything was new" for her and she would have been able to go to a mentor and "just ask questions anytime" (p. 35).

When Isook first came, her friend helped her, however, this friend was "not [a] student" at Rural University and was not there in the evenings. She thought that a mentor would have helped "because she or he [would be] a student [at Rural University]" (p. 46-47). Yuna "strongly agree[d]" with Isook (p. 47). Ella thought that a mentoring system would have been helpful, stating:

> Ella: I think it would have helped because…it's someone who knows what they are doing. Especially…first years…[who] have never been to college or…never been away from home before….having someone take you to tea and have[ing] someone to sit with you…would be just really good. (p. 4)

Kristen agreed with the statement made by Ella, while Anne thought that the idea of a mentor would be "nice" as they could "show [new students] around" and take them "through all the steps" (p. 20). Brian thought that it "would have been really nice…to have somebody" as a mentor. He remembers that he made friends with the bus driver, a Rural University student, on the way to the university from the airport and "every time [he] saw him [he would] ask him questions about things that were going on". Many of his questions were answered "by just asking people around the place" (p. 12). While Sheri thought "other people would find it helpful" she felt that she would not and would be more suited to seeking help from a residential dean, as she was uncomfortable talking to "strangers about things" (p. 12).

There was overwhelming support for the introduction of a mentoring system between National and International students. Only one student felt that she would not have liked to have a mentor, though she did think that it would be useful to others.

During Semester

Friendships

While many students commented on the friendliness of Australian students, there were differing views as to the degree of ease with which friendships could be made with native Australian peers at Rural University. While some students found making friends with Australian students to be easy, others found it to be difficult.

Yu thought from his experiences that making friends was "easy" because students were "very friendly" and he had opportunity to talk with them while they ate "together" (p. 37). He found that while "everyone [was] nervous to meet [other people for the] first time" it was "not…difficult" to make new friends with Australian students (p. 37). Him also found that "every time" she spoke with an Australian student at Rural University, she found them to be "very friendly" (p. 37). Ella also found "all the Australians" to be "really friendly", however, she felt that in "some" cases it "almost seem[ed] like it [was a] superficial friendly[ness]" (p. 5).

She went on to explain further:

> Ella: …like they want to be nice and say 'Hi', but they don't seem to want to be your friend. Or they don't want to take the time to get to know you I guess [because] you're leaving…But…the more time I've spent here…it just takes longer to become friends. But it is really nice how everyone is super nice…that makes you feel more welcome here and comfortable (p. 5).

Estelle, said that while she found national students to be "incredibly nice", she also had difficulty in actually meeting and getting to know such students due to cultures not easily mixing.

> Estelle: I feel like I have a lot of American friends…I mean [Australian students] are just so friendly, but I feel like maybe we're intimidated by [them] and [they] are intimidated by us or something. We just don't seem to… come together, and that is something that I did not expect. I expected…everyone would just be friends. But I noticed….you walk into the caf[eteria] and [there's an] American table [and an] Australian table…there is mixes, but I feel like this group that came in this semester aren't…mingling [well]….that is ok, [because] I love my American friends, but I came to Australia to get the Australian culture and experience…I am meeting Australians, but I would like to be meeting more (p. 27).

Izumi thought making friends with national students was "a little difficult" (p. 36). This was also the experience of Eri who found it difficult to make friends (p. 36). Isook attributed the difficulty she experienced making friends with native English speaking students to her course (ELICOS) which she felt "isolated" her along with other students who were "not very good [at] speaking English" (p. 49).

Foreign students have found national students to be very friendly, however, several students have found difficulty in making close friendships amongst the Australian students due to either isolation in the ELICOS program, or lack in opportunity to meet them. One student felt that the friendliness of Australian students was superficial and that it takes longer in Australia to become good friends.

Culture Differences

Surprisingly, even amongst the North American students, there were differing opinions as to the cultural differences between Australian culture and the home culture of the international students. While some students stated that it was no different, apart from a few minor aspects, others found it very different and wished there had been some form of orientation to culture available to them.

Brian, Sheri, Ella and Kristen all found Australian culture to be not all that different from their home culture. Brain thought that "besides the vegemite and having cheese toast for breakfast…[and] driving on the other side of the road" the cultures were relatively the same (p. 9). Similarly, Ella did not experience "culture shock" due to the similarities between the two cultures (p. 5). While Sheri found the Australian culture to be "more laid back" she felt like she was "just staying away from home" as it had not "clicked that [she was] in that exotic of a place" because there was "nothing too shocking" (p. 9). Anne also found the culture to be "different" in superficial ways (p. 20), as did Kristen in her observations about Australian colloquialisms such as "tea" (p. 5). When requestioned concerning the differences in culture, Anne explained that it was "just the way [Australians] do things, like of course they drive on the wrong side of the road…[and] everything is more laid back…here they have a good balance [of study and fun]" (p. 61).

However, some students felt that the Australian culture differed greatly from their home culture. Estelle, though also from North America, stated that culture was a "lot different" and that even though she thought Australia would be "Americanized…the cultures are…definitely different at the same time". When these differences were later explored in a second interview, Estelle said that the dormitory rules were much less rigid and that Australians are more laid back and tend to "just go with the flow" (p. 64). She also stated that she would "definitely go to…and appreciate" an orientation to Australian culture (p. 26).

Isook also found that Australian culture was "very different" stating that her own culture is "conservative" while Australian culture is comparatively "very open". However while she recognised these differences she felt it was "not hard [to get used to]" (p. 60). On the other hand, Eri also experienced difficulty living in a country "totally different" to her own (p. 38) and Yu found the culture to be very different due to the foods, a relaxed attitude to separating recyclable garbage, and the fast speed at which Australians drive. He also commented on alcohol consumption and the "aggressive" Australian attitude to Rugby that was different to his own culture (p. 59).

While most North American students who were interviewed found the cultural differences to be relatively minor, most Asian students felt that they were larger. There was an instance where one North American student felt that the cultures were very different and cultural orientation would be beneficial. Those who felt that the differences were minor commented on how they did find the Australian lifestyle to be more laid back and relaxed. This tended also to be the most commonly mentioned difference by those who felt the cultures were very different, without regard as to their country of origin.

Communication

While studying at Rural University, difficulty with communication was raised as being an issue for several international students that were interviewed. Some students experienced inconvenience due to breakdown in communication between university departments, while others felt that they needed help in every day communication at Rural University. There were also students who thought that in their experience communication had been smooth and effective.

Estelle felt that communication had "not at all" been a problem for her. During her frequent contact with University departments due to changing many of her original classes, she thought that the departments were "very well structured…[and knew] what they were doing" (p. 28). Izumi said that communication with University departments had also not been a problem for her (p. 37). Eri agreed that communication had been "fine" and Yu felt there had been "no problem" also (p. 37).

In contrast, Anne felt that communication with departments had "been a problem" for her.

> Anne: …I will got to one office [because] I think that they are supposed to help me with that and then they will send me to another office and their not supposed to help me with that and there is not a lot of communication between each place and you don't really know where to go for certain services [until] you've been here for a while…(p. 22)

Ella also experienced problems with communication between departments and related her story:

> Ella: I needed my transcripts to be sent and there was a problem with the finance [department] and the academic office because my bill hadn't been paid in full at the end of last semester…[I told them I would] be there in a couple of days and will pay everything off when I get there…I took care of everything at finance and I went to the academic office to get my transcripts…[they] gave me this note saying that [my transcripts] can't be sent because my bill's not taken care of. So I [went] back…[they said] something about it wasn't paid for this semester as well, it was just [paid] for last semester…[I said that] I'm only having last semesters transcripts sent, so it shouldn't be a big problem…everything got taken care of and it wasn't a huge problem, but it was kind of inconvenient. I didn't really understand what was going on… (p. 5)

Sheri also experienced difficulty in communicating with the finance department. She related how she had been told that she could "pay [her] money when [she] got here", however, she felt that when she got here she was "expected…to have already paid" (p. 7). Her visa information had also been "mis-communicated" resulting in her applying for the wrong visa. While the visa she received was "okay, [she] didn't have to get that one" (p. 7).

Brian stated that the "only problem" he had experienced with communication while at Rural University, was concerning the prerequisites of one of his chosen subjects.

> Brian: …the advisor said all we needed was high school biology in order to get into ecology. But when we got into ecology, we failed our first two labs… and we failed our first test. [Our lecturer] said well you guys have done biology, you should know this stuff, and we didn't; we were told otherwise. So it was a pretty big problem there. Here we are failing our subjects right at the beginning of the semester…(p. 14).

The problems that Isook experienced with communication were slightly different to those that have been mentioned above. She stated that if there was "something we want to explain to them, they don't understand which is not very good, so we have a problem". If she has problems such as this she often needed to ask one of her friends to "translate" for her. (p. 49).

It was interesting to note that the majority of students interviewed who were non-native English speakers claimed that communication had not been a problem for them at Rural University, while most English speaking international students could relay instances when they had experienced difficulties with communication. The reason for this should perhaps be addressed in greater detail as it raised many questions. Are Asian students not utilizing the services provided by University departments due to the fear of experiencing possible humiliation through difficulties, such as those experienced by Isook, and thus not experiencing difficulty? Or do they not understand if there is a break down in communication between the university departments and passively accept the difficulty? Are they shy of admitting they have difficulty communicating in English at a university where they are required to use English on a full time

basis? Perhaps they perceive any problems experienced to have been caused by a misunderstanding on their own part rather than oversight by Rural University.

Supplementary Needs

Students expressed several needs they felt were not currently provided for. Amongst these students, predominant needs were a used textbook store and souvenirs from Rural University. Other needs were also mentioned.

Anne, Brian and Sheri all mentioned that they felt there was a need for Rural University to provide more souvenirs for International students to take home with them. Sheri thought that "while a post card is good for your scrapbook" there is also a need for other souvenirs (p. 15). Brian also identified a need for Rural University to "provide clothing, shirts, hats [and] umbrellas with the Rural University name on them" that could be purchased by international students to take as a memento to their home country (p. 15). He felt that this would be a good opportunity for the university to "make some money" (p. 15). Similarly, Anne felt that there is a need for "school souvenirs like T-shirts and sweatshirts…that have the Rural University logo on them so that [international students could] take them home" (p. 23). While these can be seen as being relatively minor issues to administration, they can be seen as major issues to those who are investing large sums of money in an overseas education at Rural University.

International students also mentioned the need for a quieter study environment. Brian stated that this was his "biggest complaint" about his time at Rural University. He went on to explain in detail:

> Brian: I think the biggest problem I find in the dorms is [the] noise. That nothing gets enforced and 10:30 is supposed to be quiet…[but] at 11 or 12 at night on weekdays people are still louder than loud…and guys have to get up at 6 and 7 in the morning to do stuff. Its just not fair. I think they should at least devise a quiet hall at least…for people who want to study…[and] don't stay up till two or three in the morning every night. (p. 16)

The need for a quiet environment for study was also mentioned by Isook who felt "some" students were "very noisy" and that "something" should be done as she found it to be "very stressful" for her (p. 50). Him also found the dormitory to be "very noisy" (p. 40) while Izumi commented that she "couldn't believe" that the library was as noisy as she found it to be (p. 40).

Izumi also felt that the ELICOS classroom situation needed to be improved as "the classroom was pretty small and there was a lot of people coming in and out disturbing [them] when [they] had class" (p. 39). Similarly, Him found the ELICOS classroom situation be an "environment not good for studying" (p. 39). While Yuna also commented that the ELICOS classroom was "very small and [the] facilities…desks or chairs… [were] not really good", even though as international students they were paying "much more money" than Australian students (p. 48).

Another need mentioned was the need for a used bookstore to buy and sell used textbooks. Anne explained the difficulties International students face through the following statement:

> Anne: …I think it would be…really awesome if there was…[a] used textbook store. For me as an international student, to sell my own textbooks at the end of the semester when I am supposed to be studying out of them for exams and I am leaving in a couple of days, its really hard…I think it will work well for all students not just International students…there will be international students coming in for the next semester…and they'll need textbooks, but I am not going to be here selling my textbooks. So there's…a gap missing there." (p. 23)

Assessment Procedures at Rural University

Several North American students commented on the assessment procedure in place at Rural University. Brian found to be given more guidance concerning what information was going to be assessed through testing and was surprised when he was told to "look at the syllabus" for this information (p. 9). He felt that international students were "at a disadvantage" because they are accustomed to receiving more information concerning testing (p. 9). He also expressed confusion concerning the grading system. His description follows.

> Brian: ... [Our lecturer] told us that it is normal for classes to have lower grade [students], middle grades and high grades, and if this class doesn't have low grades on the transcripts that he turns in, that the department will request they decrease student

> grades. We thought that was just absurd...we automatically feel like we are targeted to get bad grades...here we are 'A' students [or] 'B' students, and now were getting 'F's. It just didn't make sense. (p. 9-10)

Though she was warned that courses in Australia were "a little bit harder", Anne also "didn't realize [that] the grading system...would be different" (p. 19). An explanation concerning the grading and scaling system used by Rural University may be useful for students upon the commencement of their study, to prevent possible offence after the examination process has occurred.

Positive Reflections

Students did express an appreciation for certain services that had been provided for International students by Rural University, and looked positively upon experiences. For example, Estelle, Eri and Sheri appreciated that there had been prompt replies to their e-mails during their planning period. Sheri also appreciated the phone that they allowed her to call home on as soon as she had arrived (p. 11).

Ella expressed an appreciation for a dinner that was held for all international students when she first arrived (p. 3). Brian and Sheri also appreciated dinner invitations upon their arrival (p. 11). Though she did not attend such events, Anne also thought that it was "really nice" that faculty members had invited her to their homes when she had first arrived (p. 23).

Anne felt that the way they were settled into the dormitories with the support of the residence director and cleaning staff was "really good" and Eri was encouraged by the help which faculty members had given her (p. 23&40). North American students also expressed an appreciation for the Orientation Pack they had been given upon arrival. Ella and Kristen both felt that support services provided during the semester were "sufficient" and that there was no area that had come across which they though more support was needed (p. 4).

In summing up her experience studying at Rural University stating, Ella stated " I love it!...I don't want to leave! But that's the way it's gotta be!" (p. 5-6). Kristen also stated that she liked being at Rural University and Estelle stated she thought the campus was "beautiful" and that she was "having a blast" (p. 6&29).

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

Introduction

This chapter discusses the major findings of this study and briefly compares the experiences of Asian and North American students at Rural University. These results are discussed according to the research questions One, Two, Four and Five, while research question Three was addressed in Chapter Three. Based on these findings, recommendations have been outlined, aimed at encouraging a positive experience for future international students. It provides an overview of the limitations present in this study and outlines areas where future research is needed in order that Rural University may gain a clearer understanding of the experiences of its international students.

General Discussion of Results

Needs Prior to Arrival

International students at Rural University expressed a general desire for more information prior to their arrival. Several students expressed a desire for more information concerning their accommodation while other students had built false expectations concerning what they would find concerning their accommodation. More information is needed to ensure that students are aware of the conditions and facilities that they will find upon their arrival at Rural University to both allow them to prepare and also to prevent disappointment upon arrival. There was also a need expressed for more information concerning the course of study, particularly the ELICOS program, to reduce the amount of apprehension associated with moving to a foreign country. As the students participating in this study were part of the first intake of students for the ELICOS program, this may explain the limited information available concerning the ELICOS program.

Needs Upon Arrival

Staff suggested that in the initial stages of the semester, a peer support program be established whereby older students mentored new international students. This concept was widely supported amongst both Asian and North American students who felt that it would have helped them in their assimilation into Rural University life. Students felt that the benefits of such a program would include helping them find their way to classes, introducing them to more Australian students, and having someone to answer any questions they may have. Perceived benefits by staff included help with cultural adjustment, and provision of moral support and friendship.

Asian students participating in this study found that the Orientation pack was not useful for them (as has been discussed). An analysis of this pack counted 43.5 printed pages of information. As was expressed by the Asian students, this was difficult for them as they could not distinguish between what was essential for them to know immediately and what could be left until later, and they found it difficult to understand due to their English ability. Experiencing difficulties with language is consistent with the findings of previous research (Lacina, 2002, Mori, 2000; Myburgh et al., 2002; Jones et al., 2000). The important nature of the information included in this pack is reflected by the positive feedback concerning its usefulness that was expressed by the North American students.

Needs During Semester

There seemed to be differences in tertiary culture between North American Universities and Rural University. A feature that was prominently featured in this study is the presence of Academic Advisors within North American universities. Perhaps due to this being an assumed part of their culture, students experienced difficulties when upon arrival at Rural University they were not given a single head figure to aid in the selection of their subjects. This resulted in students swapping and changing classes after the commencement of the semester and potentially increased the stress associated with living in a new cultural environment.

International students interviewed found Australians to be very friendly. However, several students expressed difficulties making deeper friendships with native students for varying reasons. This is consistent with previous findings concerning international students forming bonds with native students (Al-Sharideh & Goe, 1998; Jones et al, 2000; Mori, 2002). One student also perceived native students superficial as was also found by Myburgh, Niehaus, and Poggenpoel (2002).

There were several retail services that students, particularly those from North America, felt were needed for international students. These included a service allowing convenient trading of used textbooks. This process had been found to be difficult for international students as they tend to be in Australia merely for the duration of their semester of study, thus finding it difficult to sell textbooks to students needing them the following semester. Another commonly mentioned need was the retailing of a more extensive range of Rural University souvenir products including T-shirts and umbrellas to take home upon the completion of their study. International students and their families invest substantial amounts of money in obtaining an overseas educational experience. Thus, souvenirs and other memorabilia from this experience becomes more meaningful to them. Planning the provision of such items could be made the responsibility of a student; the after results carrying the potential to more than pay for the required student wages.

Comparison of the two Subgroups

It became evident during the process of this study that while in certain areas students from North America and Asia had similar experiences, there were also areas where they were divided into two almost culturally specific groups based on the perceived nature of their experience.

Differences in Experiences

While North American Students felt that the orientation pack had been very useful for them, the Asian students did not. This appeared to be due to the large amount of printed information included in this pack and the English reading ability of the Asian students. These differences can be categorised according to topic in the following manner:

i) Visiting the web site prior to arrival

Students from an Asian background were found to be less likely to seek information from the Rural University prior to their arrival in Australia. While most North American students had at some stage visited the web site prior to their arrival, less that half the Asian students interviewed had accessed the site prior to their arrival on campus.

ii) Communication difficulties

North American students readily related stories of communication difficulties experienced at Rural University. These experiences involved breakdowns and miscommunication when dealing with university administration offices. However, though most Asian students did not feel that they had experienced difficulties with communication, those that did found their difficulty to be associated with language barriers rather than misunderstandings.

iii) Perceptions concerning position and size of campus

Asian students were found to have more unrealistic pictures as to the positioning of the Rural University campus. Students thought that it was much bigger and closer to the city, rather than in the country. Being "near Sydney" could perhaps be a relative descriptor. Australians who are perhaps accustomed to travelling large distances regularly may regard a particular place as being "near", which to Asian students not accustomed to spacious living, may appear much farther.

iv) Assessment procedure at Rural University

Several North American students mentioned confusion with the assessment procedure in place at Rural University. However, no Asian students commented or appeared concerned with the issue of assessment. This could be a reflection of the course of study at Rural University. While all American students were enrolled in regular classes, all but one Asian student interviewed was enrolled in the ELICOS program that is perhaps subject to a different assessment protocol to regular degree courses.

Similarities in Experiences

Both groups of participants expressed a desire for more information concerning both their proposed course of study and their accommodation. There was also support across the two cultural groups for the establishment of a mentoring program and a common experience concerning the friendly nature of the Australian students.

i) Culture differences

Contrary to what may have been expected, there were cases of North American students, along with the Asian participants, feeling that the Australian culture differed greatly to their own culture. The commonly mentioned main difference seen by these students was the relaxed and laid back attitude of Australians. This took precedence over differences in foods and specific cultural practices. North American students who felt that it was not all that different to their own culture similarly commented on the relaxed nature of the Australian lifestyle. This suggests that while all students were aware that Australia was more relaxed than their own culture, perhaps the degree to which it impacted their life at Rural University differed from participant to participant. Perhaps the excessive noise mentioned in the dormitories could even be a part of the "laid back" attitude of both students and dorm authorities.

ii) Support for a Mentoring program

Both North American and Asian students supported the implementation of a mentoring/ peer-support program. Students from both cultural backgrounds thought they would have been aided by having a mentor in their initial stages of study at Rural University and mentioned benefits of such a system. An example of a peer support program currently in use within an Australian tertiary setting is the SIGN program at Australian National University. The details of this program can be found in Appendix 5.

iii) Perception of Australian Students

Both North American and Asian students interviewed found Australian students at Rural University to be friendly. While there was some concerns as to the ease and depth of friendships formed with Australia students, there was a general consensus concerning the friendly nature of Australian students at Rural University.

Recommendations for Rural University

From this exploration and analysis of the experiences of twelve first year Asian and North American international students at Rural University, recommendations can be suggested in order to create a more positive experience for future international students. In the light of the findings of this research and the resulting discussion, it is recommended that:

1. More visual information be given to students concerning accommodation prior to arrival.
2. More information concerning the ELICOS program be made available to future students wishing to join the programme.
3. There be a single academic advisory authority provided for international students both prior to and after commencement of study at Rural University.

4. Rural University establish a peer support/mentoring program available between international and national students during the initial stages of their stay.
5. The orientation pack given to non-native English speaking students be revised and simplified to ensure essential information is being understood.
6. More information of a practical nature be included in the Orientation pack, such as phone card information.
7. The Rural University Bookshop open a used textbook branch to aid both international and national students in buying and selling their old textbooks.
8. Rural University produce a more extensive range of souvenir products, made available through the University Bookshop.
9. Rural University establish or enforce regulations in the dormitories concerning noise level.

Limitations of the Study

Throughout the period of this study, several limitations came to the attention of the researcher. While this research consisted of 17 participants (including the two pilot interviewees), it was a relatively small sample group. Females were found to be more willing to accept the invitation to participate resulting in an unequal proportion of male and female student participants, which can be seen as a further limitation. While Rural University accommodates students from a range of twenty-three foreign countries, this study merely represents the experiences and views of students from four ethnic backgrounds, Korea, Japan, Canada and the United States of America. Though effort was made to alleviate language barriers as much as possible in communicating the interview questions, communication with students from a non-English speaking background can also be seen as a limitation as students struggle to discern questions and express their experiences in a foreign language. This study could also have investigated dormitory life a little more thoroughly.

Recommendations for Future Research

During the course of this research project and upon its completion, areas where future research is necessary became evident. Such research would allow Rural University to have a greater understanding of the experiences and needs of international students studying on their campus. These areas included the following:

1. A comparison of the needs and experiences of international students and those of national students.
2. A closer examination of what services are provided for international and national students and to what extent the various cultural groups are utilizing such services.
3. An exploration of the attitudes of national students and faculty members to the increasing international population.

Conclusions

This chapter compared the experiences of Asian and North American students at Rural University and provided a discussion of the major findings of this study. It presented the resulting recommendations for Rural University. A brief outline of perceived limitations and a list of recommendations for future research were also included.

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* Rural University has been code named. If you require further details please contact the researcher at heidiauzzie@hotmail.com

APPENDICES

Appendix 1

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- What communication did you have with Rural University before you came to Australia? Eg. Email, telephone calls etc.
- Was it enough communication?
- What was the most helpful communication?
- Did you access the Rural University web site?
- Did you read the information provided on the web site?
- What were you expecting to find here when you arrived? What were you told things would be like?
- What information/ help would you have liked before you came in addition to this?
- Were you met at the airport?
- Were those picking you up easy to identify?
- Did you know what to do on your first day in Australia?
- Did you receive any orientation to life in Australia?
- Would a mentor have helped you?
- Is there anything that would have made your arrival and first few days at Rural University easier?
- Has communication with Rural University ever been a problem for you?
- Were there any things that were offered that you did not get?
- Do you feel that more support services are needed for international students?
- If so, what would you like to see?

Appendix 2

INFORMATION LETTER

[Name]
Student, Rural University

Monday, April 14, 2003

Information Regarding Honours Research, 2003

Dear [Name],
I am conducting research as part of my honours degree in Education. The subject of my research is the needs of international students and their perception of support as they study in a culture that varies from their own.

I am inviting you to participate in this study. Your views are important to my understanding of this subject area.

Participants in this study will take part in a group interview/ discussion, lasting approximately 40 mins, to share their experiences prior to arrival, upon arrival and during you study at Rural University with regard to cultural transition and support. This will be followed by a personalized interview at a later date to clarify responses, lasting approximately 15 mins. Interviews will be audio taped. All information and comments will be treated with the strictest confidentiality and code names used to ensure your anonymity.

Participation in this study is purely voluntary and this letter places you under no obligation whatsoever. Furthermore, you are free to withdraw at any time should you so desire.

This research project has been approved by the Rural University Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). Rural University requires that all participants are informed that if they have any complaint concerning the manner in which a research project is conducted, it may be given to the researcher, or if an independent person is preferred, to the University's HREC Secretary, Rural University, [Address and phone contact provided].

If you have any questions concerning this study, please do not hesitate to contact my supervisor, Cedric Greive, or myself.

Yours sincerely,

Heidi Randall
Honours Researcher

Cedric Greive
Honours Research Supervisor

Appendix 3

INFORMATION LETTER

[Name]
Faculty Member, Rural University

Monday, April 14, 2003

Information Regarding Honours Research, 2003

Dear [Name],
I am conducting research as part of my honours degree in Education. The subject of my research is the needs of international students and their perception of support as they study in a culture that varies from their own.

I am inviting you to participate in this study. Your views are important to my understanding of this subject area.

Participants in this study will take part in an informal interview lasting approx 10 mins, in which they will be asked to answer general questions regarding support services currently provided by Rural University for international students. Interviews will be audio taped. All information and comments will be treated with the strictest confidentiality and code names used to ensure your anonymity.

Participation in this study is purely voluntary and this letter places you under no obligation whatsoever. Furthermore, you are free to withdraw at any time should you so desire.

> This research project has been approved by the Rural University Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). Rural University requires that all participants are informed that if they have any complaint concerning the manner in which a research project is conducted, it may be given to the researcher, or if an independent person is preferred, to the University's HREC Secretary, Rural University, [Address and phone contact provided].

If you have any questions concerning this study, please do not hesitate to contact my supervisor, Cedric Greive, or myself.

Yours sincerely,

Heidi Randall
Honours Researcher

Cedric Greive
Honours Research Supervisor

Appendix 4

TRANSCRIPT LETTER

[Name]
Rural University

Wednesday, October 1, 2003

Information Regarding Honours Research, 2003

Dear [Name],

Firstly, thank you for your participation in my research concerning the needs of international students and their perception of support as they study in a culture that varies from their own. Your views have been important to my understanding of this subject area.

Enclosed is a copy of the transcript from the interview in which you participated, your code name is [Code Name]. If there are any changes you wish to make to your statements, please feel free to do so and return the transcript to me by placing it in the envelope provided and posting it in the postal box at the university post office by **Tuesday, October 14**. If unreturned it will be assumed that you are satisfied with the content. I assure you that all information and comments made have been treated with the strictest confidentiality and code names used to ensure your anonymity.

> This research project has been approved by the Rural University Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). Rural University requires that all participants are informed that if they have any complaint concerning the manner in which a research project is conducted, it may be given to the researcher, or if an independent person is preferred, to the University's HREC Secretary, Rural University, [Address and phone contact provided].

Thank you once again for your participation in this study. If you have any further questions concerning this study, please do not hesitate to contact my supervisor, Cedric Greive, or myself.

Yours sincerely,

Heidi Randall
Honours Researcher

Cedric Greive
Honours Research Supervisor

Appendix 5

Student Information & Guidance Network

It is a way of setting up a small group of new students like yourself with senior students who can help you settle in and generally get on with being a student. It sounds corny - but other universities have tried it and it works.

By joining up you'll have **someone to guide you** through the first weeks of semester and get to know a small group of people who are doing the same study program. You can also share your experiences of a brave new world with your fellow adventurers.

It costs nothing and it won't take much time out of your schedule - its just meeting up with some people every now and then.

Getting down to the
nitty gritty

So what does this program involve?

1. Sign up for SIGN and you'll be allocated a mentor along with several other students. The plan is for you all to be from the same course area so you will get a chance to chat with others about course work, lecturers, brick readings and all the other paraphernalia of Academia.
2. About a week after you've signed up you will be contacted by your mentor and a time and place to meet will be arranged.
3. Your mentor group - which is you, your mentor, and a few other new students - will have a chance to talk about Uni life, share information about the campus, your academic program and your experiences.
4. You can meet your mentor as often as you need to, and talk to them by telephone and e-mail.

Top

What can my mentor do for me?

- Help you find places - that's a big thing. There is about 8000 students on campus and a lot of buildings - so having someone to point you in the right direction is a must.
- They'll also help you sign up for things - like tutorials - and help you access facilities and services on campus - like the student email, library, gym and clubs & societies.
- Your mentor will share the same field of study as you - so they can tell you what they found later the courses to be like, and where to access course specific things - like picking up reading bricks, finding the departmental libraries and so on.

Top

The program runs for the first term of semester. It's up to you and your mentor group to decide how often, when and where you want to meet up — so there's a lot of flexibility for you to fit all this around your timetable. **We also have a noticeboard of SIGN and ANU events around campus** - check out our noticeboard to keep up-to-date with what's going on across campus.

Top

Things you need to keep in mind

The mentors are volunteers. They have had training and they're all good folk - but they are Uni students too, just like you, and they are doing this because they think it's a great idea.

You can always ask for help beyond your mentor and if you are having problems with your mentor you can always chat to the Program Coordinator Leanne Paonne, leanne.paonne@anu.edu.au, ph (02) 6125 0057.

There is also a list of resources on the web that might help you find what you are looking for.

While your mentor has been given guidelines and all sort of ideas about how to be a mentor **it is up to you to get the most out of this program**. One thing you could do is articulate clearly to your mentor what you want out of Uni — is it a degree in record time? great marks? a hectic social life?

Some guidelines for you to keep in mind are:

- *Your mentor is not a psychic!* You need to let your peer mentor know what you want and what you expect them to do for you.

- Take some *responsibility and initiative* in contacting your mentor. Keep them up to date with how you are doing, use them as a way to debrief your experiences here.

- Have *reasonable expectations* of your mentor. They are students too and they will have other demands on their time.

- *Acknowledge their achievements* — positive encouragement is the best way to get someone else on board and it's nice to watch someone else look happily surprised!

- *Make sure your mentor has your contact details*

- *Provide feedback* to your mentor. This will help you both create a successful and rewarding relationship.

Finally **you can drop out of the program at any stage**. Just let your mentor know that you are doing so. Otherwise you may be rung up by your mentor to see if everything is going OK.

top

Want to know what mentors get told?

You can check out the mentor page. For the curious, it also includes the handbook we gave out to mentors in their training sessions.

Top

Signing up

This program is **free** and its available to any first year starting in Semester who wants to do it. You can sign up in several ways:

1. There are sign up sheets at the SIGN booth at First Year Enrolment Day at Melville Hall.

2. You can fill out an on-line sign up sheet.

3. Otherwise email leanne.paonne@anu.edu.auor call (02) 61250057 with your name, contact details and your course details (your degree and possible major).

top

Back to SIGN Homepage or check out the New Students FAQ

Centre for Education Development & Academic Methods. (2002). *Student Information & Guidance Network.* Last retrieved October 24, 2003, from http://www.anu.edu.au/cedam/ilearn/sign/newbies.html

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