



The international student experience in Australian higher education: emerging issues

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UECA PD Fest
29 July 2017

Three questions

1. What are the issues and challenges – old and new – facing international students entering contemporary Australian universities?
2. What are the implications for educators?
3. What can be done to better support international students?



The contemporary student experience

**LIFE PATTERNS:
COMPARING THE GENERATIONS**
Jessica Crofts, Heriberto Cuervo, Juliana Wyn, Dan Woodman,
Josie Rando, Helen Cahill & Andy Furlong

**THE FIRST YEAR EXPERIENCE IN AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITIES:
FINDINGS FROM TWO DECADES, 1994-2014**
Chi Baik, Ryan Naylor and Sophie Arkoudis

UNIVERSITIES AUSTRALIA
ANALYSIS OF THE AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITY STUDENT EXPERIENCE

University student finances in 2012
A study of the financial circumstances of domestic and international students in Australia's universities
July 2013
Emmaline Bexley, Suzanne Daroesman, Sophie Arkoudis and Richard James

Many are thriving at university, however for a significant proportion :

- Increasing social isolation
- Financial strain
- Uncertainty about employment outcomes



The first year experience

**THE FIRST YEAR EXPERIENCE IN AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITIES:
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Chi Baik, Ryan Naylor and Sophie Arkoudis



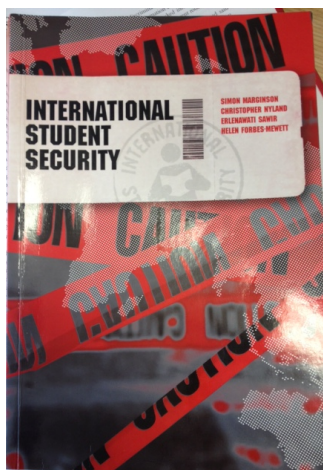
Table 7.14 Notable differences in the experience of international and domestic students

	International	Domestic
I find it quite difficult to comprehend a lot of the material I am supposed to study	39**	20
Overall, I am very satisfied with my university experience so far	66**	76

Asterisks denote a significant difference between the indicated subgroups (** = significant at 0.01)



The international student experience



(Marginson et. al., 2012)

Barriers in communicating in English

Outsiders, non-citizens => more marginal and lonelier

~ 50% reported experiencing cultural hostility or prejudice (more so for women than men)

Forming friendships with locals was harder than expected



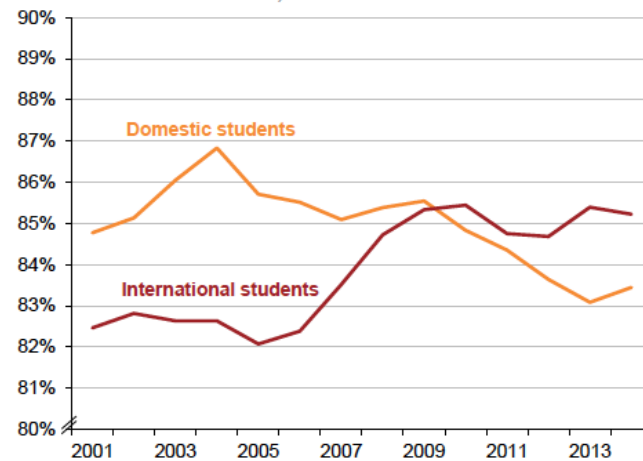
'Old' (and continuing) challenges

- English language proficiency
- Cultural transition/adaptation
- Mismatch between expectations and early experiences
- Financial hardship
- Employability (in Australia)
- Lack of interaction with domestic students



Academic performance 2001-2014

Figure 34: Subject pass rates for commencing bachelor domestic and international students, 2001–2014

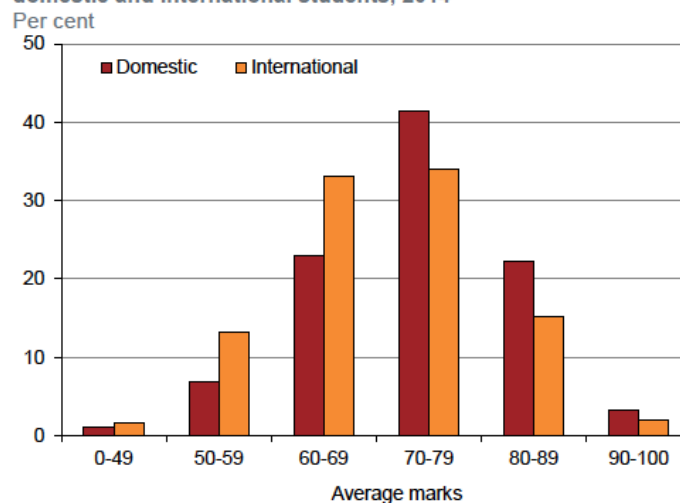


From: Norton (2016) *Mapping Australian Higher Education*, Grattan Institute



Academic performance 2014

Figure 35: Average self-reported marks, bachelor degree domestic and international students, 2014



From: Norton (2016) *Mapping Australian Higher Education*, Grattan Institute



Emerging ('new') challenges



Generally keep to myself **44% (up from 28%)**

Sense of belonging **47%**

Never work with classmates outside class **26%**

(Baik et al., 2015)

Some signs of increasing social isolation

The international student experience

(N=375)

	Disagree	neutral	Agree
I have made Australian friends at University	56	22	22
I feel a part of the University community	30	25	35
I am treated equally to other students on campus	19	27	44

"...in terms of living, I didn't feel welcomed in the city and campus. Maybe because I am Asian."

"There is generally a negative perception towards international students though, especially if you can't speak English well."





THE WICKED PROBLEM OF UNIVERSITY STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH
 Benjamin G. Venema
 Report to the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust
 January 2016, Sydney, Australia

Drygen
 The National Centre of Excellence
 in Youth Mental Health

Under the radar
 The mental health of Australian university students

University students are a ‘high risk’ population for mental health difficulties

Prevalence of psychological distress

N=5061

Overall DASS: Highest level across all 3 scales:	Percentage for 'highest DASS symptom level across all 3 scales'						
	Combined	Biomed	Science	Eng	Law	Vet	BA
Normal or mild	52.4%	56.2%	55.7%	59.8%	51.2%	45.3%	45.0%
Moderate	21.8%	22.5%	21.6%	17.4%	21.5%	23.5%	23.2%
Severe+	25.8%	21.4%	22.7%	22.9%	27.4%	31.2%	31.8%

Larcombe et. al.(2014)



THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION



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Universities need to do more to protect students' mental health. But how?

A new report explores the wide variety of approaches in the sector - and offers examples of good practice to follow



Investment in counselling services needs to be increased in many universities, according to Hefi's new report.

Photograph: Getty Images

An Epidemic of Anguish

Overwhelmed by demand for mental health care, colleges face conflicts in choosing how to respond

CAROL KEMPTON, co-director of Macquarie University's Centre for Mental Health, says she has seen too many students who have killed themselves while attending prestigious universities. In each case, the students were in the campus counselling centre before taking their own lives. But that's where the story ends. When her younger brother, Ian, had a con-

dition at the College of William & Mary that he was feeling suicidal, says Ms. Kempton, the response was quick and decisive. An administrator called their parents that day and forced her brother to leave and seek professional help. After five days in a mental hospital and a couple of weeks on academic leave, he returned to the campus and tried to catch up on his work. He did not. He died. Emily, and men-

whom, his older sister. Just a few days later, in April 2010, his brother died in his parked car in the California landscape of the where his car was found was a sign to his sister that her life was very different. After the news of a student's death is a constant question whether he had the "will to go on" the researcher said from the student's view with

cshe

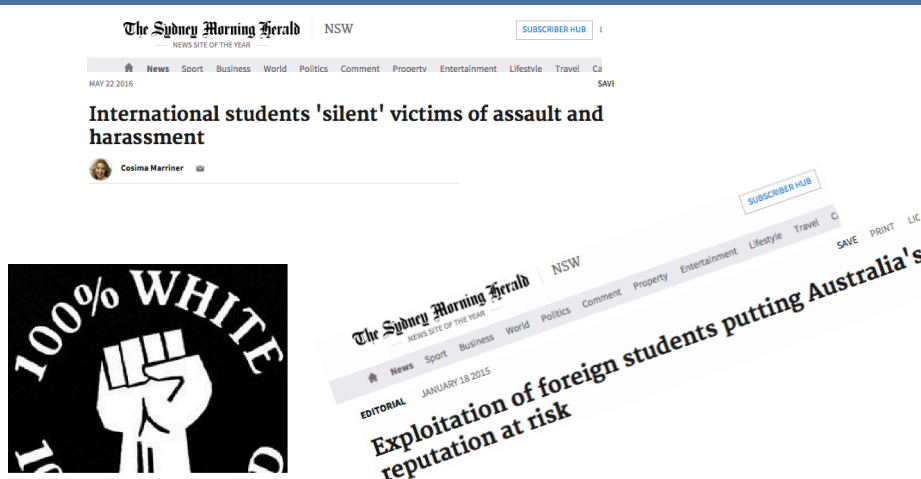
Risk factors for mental ill-health

- Academic pressures
- Financial pressures
- Relocation to participate in higher education:
*international students – language barriers, displacement and disconnection from family, religion and culture
- Transitional stress between levels of education
- Other factors:
 - Drug and alcohol use
 - Poor diet (often linked to financial difficulties)
 - Lack of sleep

Orgyen report, 2017, p.13



Emerging issues



- Exploitation by employers
- Racism, assault and harassment – on campus and in communities

Lessons to be learnt from the US?



Growing issues

From PhD student's (Samantha Marangell's) literature review:

Resentment among domestic students:

- quality of education is lowered
- grades negatively affected in group work
- entry requirements are lower

} Feelings of unfairness

Active avoidance

"Potential for resentment may increase when the proportion of international students reaches a critical mass"

Top 10 international student sources, 2001/2014

	2001		2014
Singapore	18,277	China	99,341
Malaysia	16,344	Singapore	34,325
Hong Kong	15,719	Malaysia	29,051
Indonesia	9,619	India	25,386
China	8,018	Vietnam	18,989
India	5,485	Hong Kong	13,568
United States	3,548	Indonesia	11,381
Thailand	3,259	Nepal	8,912
Taiwan	2,687	United States	6,666
Norway	2,527	Pakistan	6,284

Sources: Department of Education and Training (2015m) and predecessor publication.

From: Norton (2016) *Mapping Australian Higher Education*, Grattan Institute



No simple solutions

More work is needed to develop:

- Ongoing and imaginative strategies to foster social interaction between diverse students and enhance international students' 'sense of belonging' to the university community.
- Partnerships between universities and local communities (and employers) to create a 'host culture' and foster social integration.
- Increased emphasis on "Internationalisation at Home" and improving cross-cultural awareness
- Careful consideration and planning around cultural mix of cohort



What can be done to improve student wellbeing?

What students say...

(n= 2525 students across 6 programs)

Academic teachers and teaching practice 37.2%

Student services and support 27.3%

Course design (including assessment) 25.6%

Environment, culture and communication 24.7%

Program administration 10.1%

Student activities 9.3%



If teachers would make things simpler to understand in class, and make it interesting & engaging (Sci)

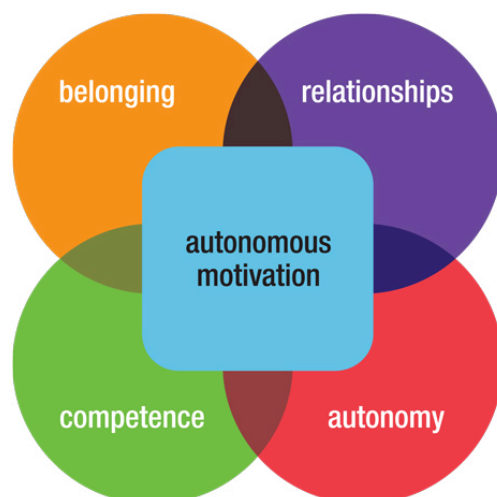
Teachers can sometimes seem a bit dismissive or even condescending when providing 'help' ... and this can sometimes be a little off-putting for students' (Sci)

It would be good if teachers offered students feedback earlier in the semester (Law)

I would feel more valued at University if I had a more personal connection with my teachers and the other students in my subjects (Biomed)



Course designed to enhance autonomous motivation (and wellbeing)



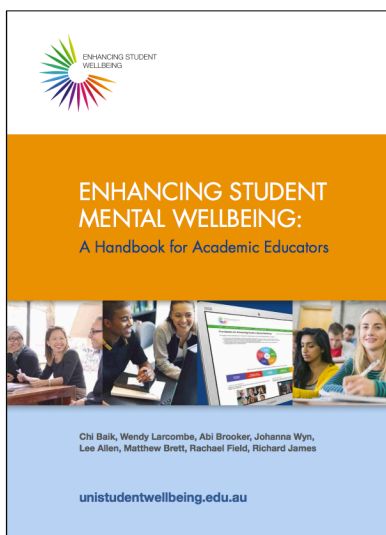
(See Baik, Larcombe et al., 2017)

To conclude...

What can pre-university educators do to better support international students' entering contemporary higher education?

- Emphasise the development of English language skills for peer engagement and social interaction **in addition to** formal academic tasks
- Prepare students for the broader social environment – (including responding to situations involving culturally insensitive peers and teachers)
- Foster development of skills in self-regulation
- Open up conversations about mental health issues and de-stigmatize the issue

For more on student wellbeing...



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Thank you

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