Enhancing the International Student Experience Project

Final Report

An interactive game playing approach for Orientation to effectively disseminate information on the nature and availability of support services to international students to enhance the first year experience

**Southern Cross University
International Office**

Acknowledgement

Contents

Introduction

This report provides detailed information about Southern Cross University's project to enhance the international student experience by implementing an interactive game playing approach for Orientation to effectively disseminate information on the nature and availability of support services to international students to enhance the first year experience. The report will first outline the overall aims of the project, and then explain how these aims were achieved through the incorporation and/or implementation of six components which include various resources and activities. Because this project was divided into various components, the report will discuss the status of implementation, final key findings and outcomes, and comparison of project aims and outcomes separately for each of the six project components. The report will then discuss how the project has influenced the international student experience and provide recommendations for future projects and possible cross-sector implementation. Following this, the status of expenditure will be provided for the overall project.

Overall project aim

The aim of this project is to transfer vital information about student support services more effectively using an activity based approach and by utilising new and existing technology for the purpose of empowering students and enhancing their student experience, while simultaneously fostering social engagement. A series of YouTube style videos will be developed to present a documentary style case study scenario of student friends (domestic and international) in their first year of study. A game style format will be developed that challenges students in much the same way as the popular TV series, *The Amazing Race*. Online quizzes, surveys, wikis, blogs, discussion forums and virtual classrooms (i.e. Elluminate Live!) via the university's Blackboard Site will be incorporated into the game so that students become familiar with this technology. Social networking between domestic and international students, university staff and other stakeholders in the broader community will also be a major feature of the game, with the aim of enhancing social engagement. The game will also provide an informal assessment platform to gauge students' understanding of how and when to utilise student support services to meet their individual needs.

Discussion of individual project components designed to achieve this aim

Vital information about student support services will be transferred more effectively by:

1. incorporating *videos* at the beginning of information sessions that tell real student stories about issues and challenges that students faced at university and how they dealt with these.
2. making information sessions more interactive by incorporating *case study scenarios* at the end of information sessions for students to discuss in small groups/pairs/whole group and decide on a suitable solution or course of action to overcome the particular issues or challenges presented in the scenario.
3. implementing a Pathfinder *Boarding Pass Challenge* that requires students to engage with the university's support services and online facilities in practical and meaningful ways, while also providing opportunities to connect with other students, staff and community group members in order to complete a series of challenges.
4. incorporating Blackboard *online learning facilities*, including *Wikis, Blogs, Camtasia Videos, Elluminate Live!* and *Online Quizzes & Surveys* in the Boarding Pass Challenges and elsewhere in Orientation Week activities in an attempt to familiarise students with these functions and build their confidence in using them before commencing their studies.
5. initiating *social activities* that connect students with domestic students support staff, and community group members and incorporating these into the Boarding Pass Challenge as an incentive. Activities include informal *Eat, Meet and Greet* events where students have an opportunity to chat to various local community group members in a casual and non-threatening

manner; *Aussie Sunday Lunches* where students are invited to have lunch with a local Australian family; and a variety of Student Association initiated social events.

6. incorporating a *Pathway to Success board game* into the Boarding Pass Challenge, to be played as one of the final challenges and which is designed to reinforce vital information in a fun and entertaining manner, while also giving students the opportunity to socialise with domestic students and staff.

Videos

Status of implementation

A series of 10 short videos have been produced and uploaded to the International Office Blackboard Site for easy access by students and staff. Each video runs for approximately 3-5 minutes and focuses on student stories about each of the following topics:

1. Studying at SCU
2. Settling in
3. Safety & security
4. Health & OSHC
5. Student support services
6. Visa regulations
7. Enrolment
8. Computing & IT essentials
9. Academic skills development
10. Library services

We had originally planned on using only two student actors (one international and one domestic student); however it became apparent during filming that more students needed to be involved in order to cover a variety of issues deemed to be important and to ensure student stories were as real and honest as possible. For example, it was not appropriate for the domestic student to appear in the visa regulations video and moreover, it was necessary to have more than one international student talk about visa issues because the issues are so varied depending on individual circumstances. Therefore, in order to keep the stories honest, it was necessary to draw on more student stories so that a variety of real issues could be addressed. However, we did aim to have two main student actors appear in most of the videos.

At the request of International Office staff members, an additional video – *Studying at SCU* – has been created for the purpose of introducing Orientation Week to new students. This video has 3 first year students talk about what they like about living in Australia and studying at SCU and why they believe Orientation is important. These students also talk about some key staff (without naming people specifically) who have helped make their transition into university life easy. This video is upbeat and is designed to send out positive messages to new students about the value of Orientation Week and the opportunities it provides to connect with other students, staff and people in the local community.

Final key findings and outcomes

The videos were used during Orientation Week at the beginning of their corresponding information sessions and feedback from students at the three campuses, which came from an *Orientation Week Student Feedback Survey* (see Appendix 1a & 1b), indicates that the majority of students found the videos to be useful and interesting (on a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being very interesting and useful and 5 being not interesting or useful at all, 51 of 70 students responded with 1 or 2). Several students also commented in the survey that it was beneficial and/or interesting to hear real stories from students because it made them aware of situations that they might find themselves in.

However, some students commented in the surveys that it was difficult to understand some of the information in the videos and several students suggested the use of subtitles. This was addressed by editing out parts of the videos that were deemed to be unclear and by incorporating 'call outs', captions and graphics when key information was being given by students in the videos, as this was considered to be more effective than using subtitles.

Staff feedback showed that students engaged with the student stories and the videos also acted as an effective tool to ease restlessness at the beginning of sessions with the larger groups. However, there was a sense that the more videos students watched, the less effective they became as a learning tool, especially when they all followed a similar theme in the way they were presented, giving them a sense of 'sameness'. Therefore, further editing of the videos was undertaken to vary the presentation of information and to give each video a more individual appeal by incorporating different music in each of the videos, adding graphics and cutting down the length of the videos so that only the most relevant stories are presented.

One problem encountered since the videos were first produced was the name change of two of the university departments, as well as some changes in services provided by different departments. This is an important issue to be aware of when producing videos and is a problem that cannot be avoided with any video production that aims to promote or advertise university support services, but they are nevertheless important issues that deserve careful consideration in the production phase. To address this problem in the short term, an agreement was made with the university's Flexible Learning Development Services unit (FLDS)who produced the videos, to include some further editing of videos in the total cost of the video production. Three small video cameras have also been purchased, one for each campus, so that student stories can be updated or added to (with the help of FLDS) when deemed necessary in the future.

Comparison of project aims and project outcomes

The videos have achieved their purpose of transferring vital information about student support services more effectively, as they not only provide real student stories about experiences, issues and challenges that these students faced at university, but the students also explain what they did to overcome or deal with these issues and challenges. Therefore, new students are given the opportunity to learn some effective strategies to deal with common issues and challenges from their peers, which is a powerful supplement to the information sessions.

Case study scenarios

Status of implementation

A set of case study scenarios have been produced for the purpose of group discussions at the end of Orientation Week information sessions. These have been produced as a set of cards that can be handed out in information sessions, and also as a set of slides that have been uploaded to the International Office Blackboard site for easy access by staff and students (see Appendix 2 for an example). These scenarios correspond with each of the video topics and are designed to encourage group discussion on issues related to that topic. After reading the scenario, groups of students are encouraged to collectively decide on a suitable course of action/solution/answer to the situation presented. These scenario cards are used towards the end of information sessions so that students have the opportunity to problem solve real life situations using the knowledge they have gained from the respective sessions. It is important to point out that while the scenarios include at least one issue with some degree of complexity that requires group discussion, there are also some simple questions on the card that require quick recall of information that was given in the information sessions. This is a deliberate manoeuvre to ensure that all students, especially those who may be feeling a little overwhelmed in this new and unfamiliar environment, can be drawn into group discussions through less complex questions.

Final key findings and outcomes

The case study scenarios were used in the Orientation Week information sessions. The delivery of the scenarios varied between campuses due to differences in intake numbers and differences in classroom layout at the different campuses, and so group sizes for this activity ranged from pair work to three or four students to whole group discussions. Feedback from the *Orientation Week Student Feedback Survey*, indicates that most students enjoyed the opportunity to problem solve and check their knowledge (on a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being very useful and 5 being not useful at all, 54 of 70 students responded with 1 or 2, only one student responded with a 4 and no students responded with a 5). In the feedback comments, some students found the scenarios to be a good ice breaker and others commented that it was a good way to check if they missed something in the session. Other students commented that some of the answers were easy/obvious, but a few went on to say that this was not such a bad thing because it helped to reinforce important information.

According to staff feedback, students appeared to enjoy the opportunity to engage in group discussions and some groups were quite competitive with offering answers to the questions posed in the scenarios. Most staff agreed that it was beneficial to award small novelty prizes to groups who came up with a suitable solution or answer to the scenario questions/problems as this encouraged friendly competition and greater engagement with the activity.

One of the key findings from the staff feedback was that it was sometimes difficult to allocate enough time in the information sessions to initiate suitable group discussion due to time constraints. Furthermore, some classroom configurations are not conducive for group discussions which made it difficult to implement this effectively – especially with the larger groups. These two issues can impact significantly on the success of this activity and so they must be given careful consideration in the Orientation Week planning stage so that suitable time and space is factored in. As this was the first time the case study scenarios were delivered, it was difficult to ascertain exactly how much time would be required to allow for suitable discussion of the scenarios and it is anticipated that more realistic timeframes can now be set for future information sessions.

As an alternative, or supplement, to the scenarios, the project team has since created a *'Frequently Asked Questions'* (FAQ) Wiki on the Blackboard site. The idea of this being that if staff do not have time for group discussions, they can use the questions from the FAQ as a quick quiz to check understanding of key information. Students will also be able to access the FAQ Wiki at any time throughout their studies (to accommodate the 'just in time' theory). The Wiki also allows students the opportunity to ask questions in a comment box at the bottom of the page, which can be monitored by staff and therefore ensure that the Wiki is meeting students' needs on an ongoing basis.

Comparison of project aims and project outcomes

The case study scenarios provide an excellent opportunity for students to get to know other students because they are encouraged to work together to find solutions to common questions/problems and the novelty prizes add a competitive edge that helps to create a fun and motivating atmosphere. This activity based approach is also a powerful way to transfer vital information about support services and check comprehension, as it requires students to draw on the knowledge they have gained from the information sessions in order to make informative decisions and receive immediate feedback.

Pathfinder Boarding Pass Challenge

Status of implementation

All three campuses have incorporated the Pathfinder Boarding Pass Challenge into the Orientation Week program. The boarding passes have been designed to look somewhat like an actual boarding pass and they have eight clearly defined challenge sections that need to be stamped once a challenge has been completed (see Appendix 3). The instructions for each challenge are written on the back of the boarding pass so that students can refer to these whenever necessary. Students are encouraged to work together with others as a team or in pairs; however this is not mandatory. The challenges have been designed to encourage social engagement with domestic students and support staff and to help students adjust to their new environment, prepare them for classes and check that they can access required online learning facilities and understand the purpose of support services prior to the commencement of their studies. The tasks students must undertake for each challenge vary slightly from campus to campus due to variations in campus services and facilities; however the skills that students acquire and the student support services they are required to interact with are consistent across the three campuses and include:

Challenge 1: Social Networks
get to know your fellow students and staff and connect with some locals!
- Attend at least one of the following social events in O Week:
  -CoastRs BBQ or Eat
  -Meet & Greet With Community Groups
  -CoastRs Open Mic Night
  -Sunday Family Lunch
- Ask a staff member at the event to stamp your Boarding Pass

Challenge 2: Student Support & Student Association
find out what all the student support services can do for you!
- Browse the Student Support Services meet & greet stalls & get to know the support staff
- Visit the CoastRs stall & complete a student survey
- Ask a CoastRs staff member to stamp your Boarding Pass.

Challenge 3: Money Matters
get help with managing your finances in Australia!
- Attend the Money Matters workshop & complete the activity which requires you to:
  - consider possible expenses in Australia & budget for these
- Ask an International Office staff member to stamp your Boarding Pass.

Challenge 4: Computing & IT Essentials
update your contact details so that you comply with your visa regulations & check that all your login details are working at the same time!
- Attend the Computing & IT Essentials workshop & complete the activity which requires you to:
  -log on to a university computer > MySCU > My Enrolment > Contact Details – check that all your login details are working!
  -update your contact details in My Enrolment (this is a visa requirement!)
- Ask an International Office staff member to stamp your Boarding Pass.

Challenge 5: Library Services
learn some useful tips to fast track your searches!
- Attend the Library workshop & complete the Library Challenge which requires you to:
  -navigate the library search facilities to locate resources
- Ask a Library staff member to stamp your Boarding Pass.

Challenge 6: Academic Skills Development
get a head start with assignment preparation
- Attend the ASD workshop and complete the activity which requires you to:
  -understand your UIG & use a Session Planner for assignments
- Ask the ASD staff member to stamp your Boarding Pass.

Challenge 7: Pathways board game
have fun reinforcing all you have learnt during O Week
- Play the *Pathway to Success* board game
- Ask an International Office staff member to stamp your Boarding Pass on the day.

Challenge 8: Visa Quiz & O Week Survey
make sure you know your visa conditions….then tell us what you think about O Week!
- Complete the online Visa Quiz & Student Survey. To access this:
  -log in to *MySCU > International Office Student Centre Tweed information site > Orientation 2012 > Visa Quiz & O Week Survey*
- Take your Boarding Pass to the International Office to receive the final stamp and go in to the draw to WIN some fabulous PRIZES!!!

Final key findings and outcomes

The original Boarding Pass Challenge was incorporated into Orientation Week and this was well received by students. Feedback from the *Orientation Week Student Feedback Survey*, indicates that the majority of students who completed the challenge found this activity to be not only very interesting and useful, but an enjoyable means of getting to know other students and staff (on a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being all challenges useful and 5 being no challenges useful at all, 60 of 70 students responded with 1 or 2 and the lowest rating was a 3). Many students commented on how the challenge helped them to navigate their way around their campus and helped them to find out what services were available to them. Other students commented on how the challenges helped them to use Blackboard and other online facilities. General comments included 'lots of fun', 'a great way to get to know the campus & other students', 'helpful and motivating with prizes', 'scavenger hunt was a great idea'. However, some students commented that a few of the challenges were difficult and a so they gave up.

Staff from all three campuses commented that most students were enthusiastic about the challenges and some groups of students were extremely competitive throughout, enjoying the challenge and the opportunity to participate in something they considered to be valuable. Staff also found that students utilised the International Student Guide more than in the past because many of the challenges required students to refer to the guide and so they saw the guide as a valuable information source. However, all staff agreed that two of the original challenges which utilised the online facilities were too difficult and time consuming and as a result some students felt a little overwhelmed with these tasks to the point of giving up. Therefore, these challenges have been modified so that the tasks are less arduous for students. Additionally, while a number of students enjoyed doing the challenges as a team, it appeared others became frustrated if their partner did not have the same level of commitment, and so it was agreed by all staff to no longer make it mandatory to work with a partner or group; however staff will continue to encourage students to do the challenges in a group or with a partner in future sessions.

Some campuses allowed students to complete their challenges after the end of Orientation Week while other campuses insisted that students hand in their boarding pass on the final day of Orientation Week. The latter option is deemed to be most effective because some of the students who were not required to hand their boarding pass in at the end of Orientation Week became consumed with their studies and either forgot about the boarding pass or lost contact with their team mates. For this reason also, the presentation of prizes for the Boarding Pass Challenge winners will be held at the end of Orientation Week on all three campuses.

Prizes for the winning teams is certainly a powerful motivation for students to complete all the challenges and this is something the International Office will endeavour to continue using as a motivational measure in the future. The project team has purchased Co-Op bookshop vouchers with a portion of the project funding to be used for Boarding Pass Challenge prizes, but there is also a need to request prizes from other sources and the response from several different organisations has been positive. For example, the university's Student Associations and the UniLife – Sporting and Cultural Activities team have offered items such as hoodies, backpacks and drink bottles, as well as a variety of free memberships and vouchers such as gym memberships and meal vouchers at local restaurants.

Comparison of project aims and project outcomes

The boarding pass challenge has achieved the overall aim of this project as it has proven to have transferred vital information about student support services more effectively using an activity based approach. It has also required students to utilise new and existing technology, such as various online Blackboard learning facilities and the student portals which has empowered students and enhanced their student experience. Moreover, the challenges have fostered social engagement with other students,

support staff and community members because of the active nature of the challenge tasks and the inclusion of social events that form part of the boarding pass challenge.

Online learning facilities

Status of implementation

Various Blackboard online learning facilities have been incorporated into the Boarding Pass Challenge and elsewhere in Orientation Week activities in an attempt to familiarise students with these functions and build their confidence in using them before commencing their studies. These include the following:

1. **FAQs Wiki:** This is available to students on the Blackboard site and contains the most frequently asked questions by students about the topics covered in Orientation Week, including settling in; safety & security; health & OSHC; visa conditions; enrolment; student support services; computing & IT; academic skills development and library services.

2. **Camtasia Video:** A *'How to enrol in units – a step by step guide'* camtasia video has been produced whereby students can watch a student actually enrolling /changing /withdrawing from units online via video screenshot captures.

3. *Elluminate Live!* **Information Sessions:** A series of recorded information sessions that correspond with the live sessions are in the process of being created for students who miss any of these sessions in Orientation Week, or for anyone who wishes to review the sessions. Powerpoint slides are utilised with a presenter delivering the information.

4. **Online Quiz:** An online visa regulation quiz has been set up on the Blackboard site for students to do a self-check of their knowledge of student visa conditions and possible breaches of these conditions. This is part of the Boarding Pass Challenge.

5. **Online Survey:** An online O Week student survey has been set up for students to rate the various elements of orientation so that the International Office can endeavour to improve the activities and events on a continual basis. This is a short and simple survey and is also a part of the Boarding Pass Challenge.

6. **Discussion Board Forum & Blog**: A discussion board forum will be set up for the duration of every Orientation Week for students to communicate with others or to ask questions during the settling in phase. A Blog is also available to students where they can introduce themselves to other students and post profile information for others to read. Both the Discussion Board and Blog require monitoring by an International Office staff member.

Final key findings and outcomes

Students were eager to utilise the online learning facilities, but comments from the student surveys and feedback from the staff about the Boarding Pass Challenges indicated that in Orientation Week it is critical that the complexity of tasks that require students to utilise these facilities are kept to a minimum and some of the tasks should be undertaken in computer labs with staff support so that students can be guided through the tasks in order to complete them successfully. A number of students who did not complete the Boarding Pass Challenge informed project staff that they gave up because they experienced problems with the online tasks and so decided not to continue.

This was a significant key finding from the student feedback and so the online tasks were critically evaluated for their complexity and altered accordingly. Additionally, students will be guided as much as possible by staff as they navigate their way around the Blackboard learning facilities and student portals.

The online quiz and survey and the Blog have not yet been implemented and so there is no feedback from students as yet. However, the quiz and survey were tested by 5 existing students and any minor glitches with the quiz and survey have been amended. As an added precaution, hard copy versions of the

quiz and survey have been produced to serve as a backup in the unlikely event that students or staff encounter problems with the online versions. The quiz and survey can be easily amended if future feedback indicates that further changes need to be made. The online versions are the preferred option because data from all three campuses can be collated efficiently and the information gathered will help the International Office to improve their service to international students in future study sessions.

Comparison of project aims and project outcomes

This project has attempted to use new and existing technology for the purpose of empowering students and enhancing their student experience in a variety of ways and for a variety of purposes. After our initial attempts to utilise the facilities that are available to students (and which they are likely to be expected to use at some point in their studies), it was evident that our expectations of the students' capacity to utilise these learning tools was too complex to be of any real benefit to students when they are trying to settle in to their new environment. Now that the online facilities are being utilised in less complex and more practical ways, they will more likely help to empower students and enhance their student experience.

Social activities

Status of implementation

All three campuses have worked closely with their respective Student Associations to establish more social activities that are in line with the international students' needs and interests and which aim to bring international and domestic students together on a more regular basis. Data from the Student Association surveys each session (which is part of the Boarding Pass Challenge) will help to ensure that the events and activities organised by the Student Association enhance social engagement between international and domestic students and cater for the current needs and interests of the student body.

Discussions with the Student Support Services team have resulted in the Gold Coast campus initiating a 'Student Support Services Meet and Greet Stalls' session in place of information sessions in the next Orientation Week program as an alternative means of introducing students to these services. The idea will be for international and domestic students to have the opportunity to roam the different stalls together at their own pace and get to know the staff on a more personal level, rather than being overloaded with information from speakers standing before a large group to disseminate important information.

Members of the project team are also working closely with the university's Equity and Diversity office to organise social events that promote social engagement between domestic and international students. One such event is the 'Fusion Festival', which is a celebration of cultural diversity at the university and in the community (the name 'Fusion' was chosen by a small group of international students who felt this name was appropriate for the festival because it promotes a fusion of cultures). The Equity and Diversity office have formed a Fusion Committee, of which some of the project team are members, and data from the Boarding Pass student surveys is now being used to feed information back to the committee to ensure Fusion activities are in line with students' needs and desires. The project team is also negotiating with the Fusion Committee to hold more Fusion events throughout the year, starting with a smaller 'Fusion Food Festival' to be held during Orientation Week or Week 1 of the study session so that domestic and international students have the opportunity to come together and experience the cuisine from different cultures.

The Gold Coast campus has also incorporated an *'Eat, Meet and Greet'* social event during Orientation Week. Representatives from numerous community groups, including a local Cultural and Community Centre, the PCYC, the Department of Fair Trading, local gymnasiums and registered surf schools and the SCU chaplain are invited to meet and chat with students in an informal setting with the Red Frogs

Australia Chaplaincy Network providing pancakes for all students and guests. The International Office briefly introduces each guest and provides a short overview of their service/facility, but then allows the guests to mingle with the students and chat to individuals or groups informally.

An *'Aussie Sunday Lunch'* is also organised by the university chaplain for interested students on the three campuses whereby students have the opportunity to spend the afternoon with an Aussie family in their home. This is scheduled on the Sunday after Orientation week and transport to and from the homes is organised by the chaplain.

The Lismore campus has incorporated a *'Lunch with the Mayor'* during Orientation Week which has been well received by students, as many of the local community organisations are introduced and endorsed by the Mayor. Similarly, the Coffs Harbour campus has incorporated an *'Afternoon Tea with Community Groups'* into the Orientation program as well as numerous social events with the Student Association.

The events that were incorporated into the last Orientation Week program on the Gold Coast campus have now triggered further social networking opportunities with the assistance of the university's Office of Community Engagement. For example, after the last Eat, Meet and Greet event the office has put the project team in contact with the Kirra Hill Cultural and Community Centre who have offered us the opportunity to hold our next Eat, Meet and Greet session at the centre, where students can browse through the centre's facilities which include an art gallery for local artists, as well as a heritage room and workshop rooms for yoga, music and art classes which are held there on a regular basis.

In addition to this, the manager of the Tweed Heads Police Citizens Youth Club (PCYC) has offered to take students for a tour of the PCYC to show their facilities and they have offered special student discounts for various activities at the centre – this is extremely beneficial to Gold Coast students as there are no sporting facilities on campus at present. Another local not-for-profit organisation, Surf World, which is a surfing and beach culture museum, has also offered to hold social events at their premises and will supply voluntary tour guides, light refreshments and photo opportunities for students at minimal cost to the International Office. They are also keen to invite other community groups to join in on the day. Lismore and Coffs Harbour campuses are likewise making further connections with local community groups for the upcoming Orientation Week and Lismore students will participate in the Surf World social activity with the Gold Coast students.

Final key findings and outcomes
The responses from the *Orientation Week Feedback Survey* were overwhelmingly positive (on a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being fun and useful and 5 being not fun or useful, 60 of 70 students responded with 1 or 2 and all other responses were a 3 and two no responses from students who did not attend). This reveals just how important these social networking opportunities are for new students. Many comments on the student surveys included positive remarks such as 'nice to meet new people', 'nice to meet locals/people from the community', 'I love having the community involved', 'awesome', 'lots of fun', 'don't change a thing'. However, there were also a few negative comments which were mainly about the food, such as 'please, not so many sausages!', 'some families seemed unprepared', and also some requests to meet more indigenous community members.

The Student Association on the Gold Coast campus has identified a significant increase in the number of international students attending social activities hosted by the association than in previous study sessions. This has also triggered an increase in the number of social activities organised by the Student Association, especially on the Gold Coast campus. Similarly, activities for the upcoming Fusion Festival are being organised and promoted on a larger scale on all three campuses and more committee meetings are

being scheduled, where the possibility of other events that bring domestic and international students together, such as Fusion food festivals, will be discussed.

Feedback regarding social events that involve community groups was also very positive. Feedback from students, staff and community members on the Gold Coast indicate that a number of students actively sought out representatives of organisations they wished to learn more about and chatted freely with them at the Eat, Meet and Greet events. Furthermore, the representative from the PCYC informed the project team that a group of international students from the university have formed a basketball team that play in the local competition; the Red Frogs team made connections with a group of students and plans were made to visit a local tourist destination together on the following weekend; and several students sought out the Fair Trading representative to discuss some issues they had encountered with their accommodation. Likewise, the Lunch with the Mayor was well received by students.

As mentioned above, these social events have led to further discussions with the university's Office of Community Engagement, who has put us in contact with more local organisations, and they are eager to help develop relationships further by connecting us with more and more community groups. The International Office is also developing stronger relationships with the Student Associations and other university departments and there is a growing awareness and appreciation of the benefits of creating more opportunities, both in and out of the classroom, for social engagement between not only international and domestic students, but between students and the broader community.

Comparison of project aims and project outcomes

The feedback from students highlights the importance of providing as many opportunities as possible for students to connect with other international and domestic students and with people in their local community and it is evident that students appreciate and value these opportunities. More importantly though, it is apparent that once local community groups are embraced by the university community, more and more opportunities arise that allow students to become socially engaged in the wider community.

Pathway to Success Board Game

Status of implementation

The *Pathway to Success* board game is designed as a social activity that encourages social networking between international and domestic students and staff, while also providing an informal platform to check students' understanding of key information that has been delivered throughout Orientation Week. The production of the board game is now complete with fifty sets of game boards, question cards, playing pieces, dice, rule sheets and boxes having been produced, so that students can play the game in groups of 4-6 at each campus (see Appendix 4). The International Student Guide has been significantly updated and formatted in a way that it can be utilised as a quick reference source for players. The game requires students to move around a playing board from a start point to a finish point, with various points along the way where players might be required to miss a turn, move back or move forward for reasons pertaining to their studies (e.g. You follow the suggested study timetable in the Unit Information Guide, move forward 2 places; You do not check your Blackboard Sites regularly, move back one space). To play the game, students take turns to answer questions related to studying at SCU (i.e. questions about enrolment; visa regulations; support services; IT & computing; Library services, settling in; academic skills development etc.) and they must choose an answer from a set of multiple choice answers – this ensures that there is only one correct answer provided. If a player answers correctly, they then roll a dice and move the designated number of spaces on the board. The anticipated timeframe for six players to play the game from start to finish is 40-45 minutes.

The question cards needed to be designed in a way that catered for both international and domestic students. Therefore, questions that only apply to international students (e.g. visa regulations, health cover etc.) have been clearly marked, i.e. any questions that relate only to international students have 'International students only' written at the top of the question card, while questions that relate to both domestic and international students have 'All students' written at the top of the card. The cards are double sided with either 'International students only' on one side and 'All students' on the other, or 'All students' on both sides, so that every question card can be used by mixed groups of domestic and international students.

The project team decided to wait until after the game was played in the last Orientation Week session before producing the final version of the question cards, in anticipation that some questions would need to be revised/amended/removed/added after delivering the game for the first time to students. The question cards were printed out on paper for the initial delivery of the game which was played during the last Orientation Week and staff that assisted on the day were encouraged to give feedback or make notes about any questions that students had problems with so changes could be made before sending the questions off to the printing company for printing. The questions have since been revised and changes made before the final set was produced.

In order to promote the game as a social event, the game is supplemented with snacks, music and prizes for the winners which is extremely beneficial because it adds a festive atmosphere to the occasion. The game is played as a finale to Orientation Week, with domestic students, student ambassadors, student mentors and Student Association members and staff encouraged to join in and it is therefore a fun and empowering activity to draw the sessions to a close.

Final key findings and outcomes

This is the most successful element of the Boarding Pass Challenge and for achieving the overall aim of the project. The game was designed as one of the final challenges on the boarding pass and it was intended to promote social interactions with domestic students and support staff, while reinforcing information that had been disseminated throughout the week (along with other information considered beneficial for new students to know) in a fun and non-threatening manner. The responses from the *Orientation Week Feedback Survey* were very positive (on a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being fun and useful and 5 being not fun or useful at all, 54 of 70 students responded with 1 or 2 and apart from two responses being a 4 and one response being a 5, all other responses were a 3). Students on all three campuses commented that this was a clever, fun and/or interesting way to recall or learn information related to their studies and many also commented that they liked the novelty prizes that were offered to players. However, some students commented that some of the questions were too difficult and others commented that the game ran for too long.

In order to address the issue of some questions being too difficult, staff collated any questions that were deemed to be too difficult and these were either reworded or removed from the game. It was also decided that the original 100 questions that were produced would be reduced to 80 questions, as no group of players used all the question cards. This way we were able to remove any questions that were seen to be less beneficial than others. To speed the game up, it was decided that students would be allowed to roll two die if the game was moving along too slowly; however, only a small proportion of students found the game went on for too long, so the staff at each campus will need to gauge this in the future.

Feedback from staff at all three campuses suggests that students and staff enjoyed playing the game immensely and it provided the ideal platform for social interaction between students, mentors, staff and student ambassadors. Education students in particular commented on the game being a useful learning

tool. An unexpected positive outcome of the game on the Gold Coast campus was to see a few students who had been somewhat isolated and detached from other students at the beginning of Orientation Week bonding with the students at their table, and one of these students went on to socialise with other students at a Student Association function afterwards which developed into an ongoing friendship.

Now that the questions have been refined and culled and students have the option of rolling one dice or two, it is anticipated that the game will move along a lot faster and flow more smoothly. All staff agree that it is critical that each group of players has at least one staff member or a student ambassador participating in the game, either as a player, or as a host who asks the questions, or even just as a support person to guide players throughout the game.

It has also been pointed out by staff that the game acts as an excellent precursor to other social events that may be held on the day and so it is beneficial to schedule the game just prior to any other social events that are taking place on campus so that students can continue to socialise after the game if they wish. For example, the Gold Coast campus ran the board game in the afternoon as a precursor to the Student Association's first Orientation social event, an Open Mic Night and as a result, many of the students stayed on to participate in that event with domestic students as they were already in a festive frame of mind.

Comparison of project aims and project outcomes

This activity based resource helps to reinforce vital information that students need to know in order to function effectively at university and make informed decisions when necessary. Therefore, the game should effectively help to empower students and enhance their student experience, while simultaneously fostering social engagement.

Discussion – how the project has influenced the international student experience

This project has positively influenced the international student experience at Southern Cross University in a variety of ways. Overall, the project has initiated a greater number of social connections between international and domestic students, along with greater interaction with staff and the wider community than in previous study sessions. For example, a group of international students from culturally diverse backgrounds from the Gold Coast campus developed a close bond as a result of the interactive Orientation Week activities and have since formed a social club with domestic students through the Student Association (two of these students talk about this in the *Studying at SCU* video and in fact, they insisted on discussing this in the video because they wanted other students to benefit from their own experience).

Staff from various Student Support services has also seen an increase in the number of international students utilising their services. The Library staff has commented on the fact that new students feel more comfortable approaching them when they need assistance. The Student Association has also seen a sharp rise in international student memberships and attendance at social events. Computing & IT support staff on the Gold Coast campus reported having less calls from new students regarding issues with logging in to student portals and printer issues. This indicates that more interactive methods of disseminating information and providing greater opportunities for social interactions during Orientation Week help to enhance the international student experience.

The student videos and the case study scenarios provide a meaningful avenue to transfer important information about student support services and is a welcome addition to the traditional 'Talking Heads' approach to Orientation information sessions. Furthermore, the scenarios allow students to actively

engage with the information they are being given in information sessions and encourage them to work together with other students to achieve a common goal.

The utilisation of online learning facilities will undoubtedly enhance the student experience as the activities have been designed to help students familiarise themselves with the tools and gain confidence with using them before commencing their studies. However, some of these tools have not been trialled with new students and so the outcomes of using the new facilities, such as the wiki, quiz and survey, will need to be monitored in the next Orientation session so that modifications can be made if necessary.

The Boarding Pass Challenge and the social activities that have been incorporated within the challenge have also enhanced the international student experience because the challenge pushes students to become more actively involved in their learning, and the social events give students the opportunity to engage with others in informal social settings and offer greater opportunities for social networking with domestic students, staff and community members.

Recommendations for future projects and for possible cross-sector implementation

This project has highlighted the fact that the student experience can be enhanced for ALL students, not just international students, by implementing a more interactive approach to activities during Orientation Week. This became evident in the very early stages of this project, and so the project team has given careful consideration to the development of resources, such as the *Pathway to Success* board game, to allow for easy cross-sector implementation.

The Boarding Pass Challenge has been designed in a way that allows for easy cross-sector implementation and can be easily transferred across to the Orientation Week program for domestic students. The boarding pass concept is already being utilised on one of our campuses for domestic students, but it does not require a great deal of interaction with the support services or with other students as it only focuses on students locating facilities. However, we are confident that the concept we have implemented can be transferred across to the domestic program so that all students can participate in the challenges together and again provide greater opportunities for social engagement between domestic and international students. The Boarding Pass Challenge could also be implemented into pre-departure programs for international students before they leave their country to come and study in Australia. Similarly, it could be implemented into tertiary preparation courses for domestic students and EAP courses for international students prior to starting their university course.

Our recommendation for a future project with relation to 'Enhancing the international student experience' is to design a set of online scenario games that comprise situations that requires students to choose a course of action from several options, and then a series of events that follows on from this depending on which course of action the student chooses to take. For example one scenario might be a student experiencing problems with writing an assignment task, and the possible course of action might include 1) seeking assistance from the Academic Skills Adviser and the series of actions/consequences that flow on from this course of action, or 2) asking another student if they can help you to write the assignment and further actions/consequences that flow on from that course of action. This type of learning tool would be powerful for students and would allow them to trace the consequences of good and bad decision making. The tool could be used individually or as a whole group during information sessions and would help to reinforce vital information to help students make careful and informed decisions while studying at university and to highlight the consequences of making bad decisions.

Another recommendation the project team believes would be beneficial to many stakeholders in the education sector is a project that focuses on promoting successful academic adjustment of international

students to Australian academic learning environments. This could involve exploring or demystifying the problems faced by those students who find themselves in unfamiliar learning contexts and implementing strategies to expedite adjustment and improve the learning experience.

Conclusion

Overall, the new Orientation resources and activities have been well-received by both students and staff, and other university departments have embraced this activity based approach to disseminate vital information about student support services. Student feedback indicates that students found the resources to be fun, interesting, relevant and useful. Integrating the use of online facilities offers excellent opportunities for students to familiarise themselves with these tools prior to commencing their studies and helps to empower students as they acquire foundational skills. There is also clear evidence that students feel their experience at university is enhanced when they are given the opportunity to interact with domestic students, staff and members of the wider community in informal social settings. To sum up, the implementation of the resources and activities from this project has not only enhanced the international student experience, but it has also paved the way for greater community engagement opportunities and offers many possibilities for cross-sector implementation that can benefit the entire student body at this university.

Appendix 1a: Survey for the purpose of improving project resources

Southern Cross University

Orientation Week Feedback Survey

Please help us to improve our Orientation Week activities by completing this survey. The survey requests feedback & suggestions for improvement for some new resources & activities that were introduced this year as part of a project funded by the Department of Education, Employment & Workplace Relations.

Feedback for project resources & activities

Resource/Activity	Rating Circle or highlight one number on each line that reflects your view				
Videos of student stories	*1= very interesting & useful* ⇨ *5 = not interesting or useful at all*				
	1	2	3	4	5
Comments &/or suggestions for improvement:					
Q&A Scenarios for discussion	*1= very useful* ⇨ *5 = not useful at all*				
	1	2	3	4	5
Comments &/or suggestions for improvement:					
Boarding Pass Challenge	*1= all challenges useful* ⇨ *5 = no challenges useful at all*				
	1	2	3	4	5
Comments &/or suggestions for improvement:					
Pathway to Success Board Game	*1= fun & useful* ⇨ *5 = not fun or useful at all*				
	1	2	3	4	5
Comments &/or suggestions for improvement:					
Social Activities (e.g. Eat Meet & Greet)	*1= fun & useful* ⇨ *5 = not fun or useful at all*				
	1	2	3	4	5
Comments &/or suggestions for improvement:					

Appendix 1b: Results of survey for the purpose of improving project resources

Southern Cross
University

Orientation Week Feedback Survey – Results

Please help us to improve our Orientation Week activities by completing this survey. The survey requests feedback & suggestions for improvement for some new resources & activities that were introduced this year as part of a project funded by the Department of Education, Employment & Workplace Relations.

Feedback for project resources & activities

Resource/Activity	Rating Circle or highlight one number on each line that reflects your view				
Videos of **student stories**	**1**= very interesting & useful ⇨ **5** = not interesting or useful				
	1	2	3	4	5
Student Responses	23	28	17	2	-
Q&A Scenarios **for discussion**	**1**= very useful ⇨ **5** = not useful				
	1	2	3	4	5
Student Responses	25	29	15	1	-
Boarding Pass **Challenge**	**1**= all challenges useful ⇨ **5** = no challenges useful				
	1	2	3	4	5
Student Responses	37	23	10	-	-
Pathway to Success **Board Game**	**1**= fun & useful ⇨ **5** = not fun or useful				
	1	2	3	4	5
Student Responses	37	17	13	2	1
Social Activities **(e.g. Eat Meet & Greet)**	**1**= fun & useful ⇨ **5** = not fun or useful				
	1	2	3	4	5
Student Responses	42	18	8	-	-

Appendix 2: Scenario for group discussion on visa regulations

Appendix 3: Boarding Pass Challenge

Front   Back

SCU Boarding Pass
++++ *instructions* ++++

Challenge 1: Social Networks
get to know your fellow students and connect with some locals!
- Attend at least one of the following social events in O Week:
  -CoastRs BBQ or Eat, Meet & Greet With Community Groups or CoastRs Open Mic Night or Sunday Family Lunch
- Ask a staff member at the event to stamp your Boarding Pass

Challenge 2: Student Association
find out what CoastRs can do for you!
- Visit the CoastRs office & complete a student survey
- Ask a CoastRs staff member to stamp your Boarding Pass.

Challenge 3: Money Matters
get help with managing your finances in Australia!
- Attend the Money Matters workshop & complete the activity which requires you to:
  - consider possible expenses in Australia & budget for these
- Ask an International Office staff member to stamp your Boarding Pass.

Challenge 4: Computing & IT Essentials
update your contact details so that you comply with your visa regulations & check your login details are working at the same time!
- Attend the Computing & IT Essentials workshop & complete the activity which requires you to:
  -log on to a university computer > MySCU > My Enrolment > Contact Details – check that all your login details are working
  -update your contact details in My Enrolment
- Ask an International Office staff member to stamp your Boarding Pass.

Challenge 5: Library Services
learn some useful tips to fast track your searches!
- Attend the Library workshop & complete the Library Challenge which requires you to:
  -navigate the library search facilities to locate resources
- Ask a Library staff member to stamp your Boarding Pass.

Challenge 6: Academic Skills Development
get a head start with assignment preparation
- Attend the ASD workshop and complete the activity which requires you to:
  -understand your UIG & use a Session Planner for assignments
- Ask the ASD staff member to stamp your Boarding Pass.

Challenge 7: Pathways board game
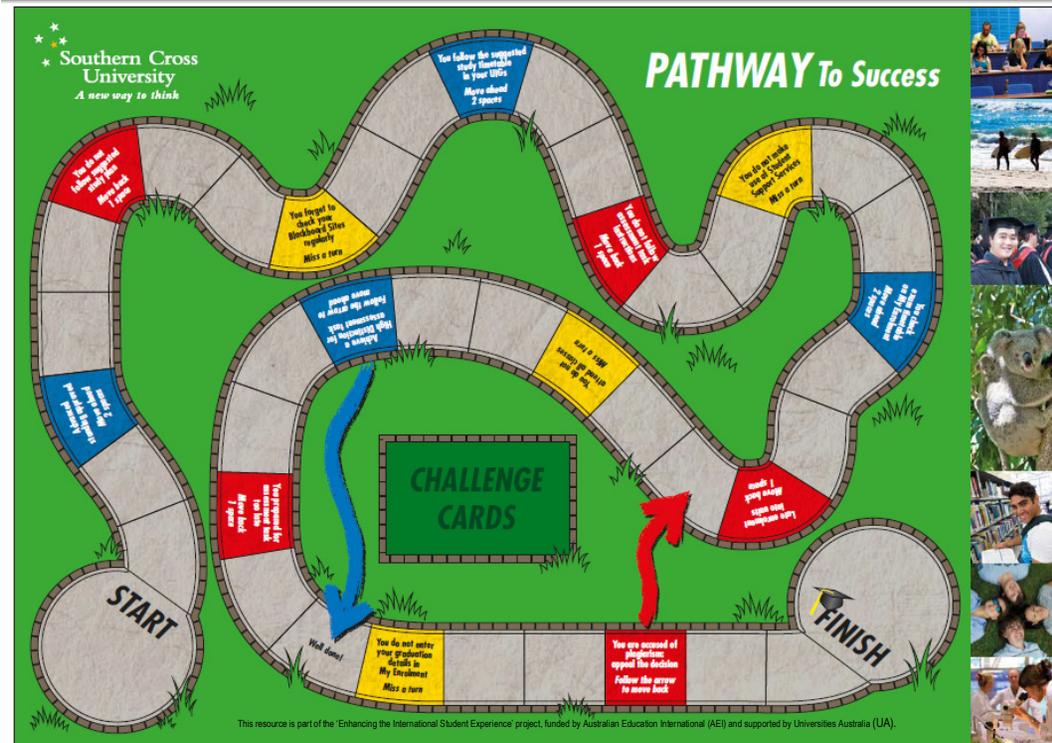*have fun reinforcing all you have learnt during O Week*
- Play the Pathway to Success board game
- Ask an International Office staff member to stamp your Boarding Pass on the day.

Challenge 8: Visa Quiz & O Week Survey
- Complete the online Visa Quiz & Student Survey. To access this:
  -log in to MySCU > International Office Student Centre Tweed Information site > Orientation 2012 > Visa Quiz & O Week Survey
- Take your Boarding Pass to the International Office to receive the final stamp and go in to the draw to WIN some fabulous PRIZES!!!

Appendix 4: *Pathway to Success* board game

game board design

question cards