International Projects
‘Enhancing the International Student Experience’

September 2012
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‘Enhancing the International Student Experience’ Program

Introduction

Universities Australia was commissioned by Australian Education International (AEI) to manage the ‘Enhancing the International Student Experience’ program. The program provides selected organisations with small grants to undertake innovative projects that have a positive impact on international students’ study and living experience in Australia. The funding for the projects is provided by the Australian Government through Australian Education International (AEI), part of the Department of Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education (www.aei.gov.au).

In October 2010, Senator Chris Evans, Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills, Science and Research, released the Council of Australian Governments’ (COAG) International Students Strategy for Australia 2010-14 that sets out the Governments’ strategic framework and action plan to support a high-quality experience for international students.

In line with a key objective of the Strategy, AEI developed the ‘Enhancing the International Student Experience’ program to support innovative projects on important aspects of international students’ experience such as:

- **Social engagement** – effective strategies for improving the level and quality of interaction between domestic and international students both on and off campus;
- **Career readiness** – models for ensuring that the employability skills of international students are developed and improved on an ongoing basis through continuous learning and integration into the total study experience; and
- **Student support services** – innovative ways to use new technologies (such as communicating through social media) to more effectively disseminate information on the nature and availability of support services for international students.

Projects had to be designed to provide a better understanding of the needs of international students and their importance to the broader community, and to highlight the contributions that universities make in regard to international students and their experience in Australia.

Selection process

Project proposals were to be submitted before 22 September and had to outline the following information:

- Proposals must outline what the project is seeking to achieve and how it will be undertaken;
- Proposals must clearly describe how the project will address one or more of the critical elements of the international student experience;
- Proposals must specify the timeline for completing the project;
- Proposals must specify the total amount of funding the applicant is seeking to support the project (maximum $60,000); and
- Proposals must not exceed 10 pages in length.

Universities Australia received a total of 76 applications, which was significantly more than expected. The high number of applications confirms that Australian organisations are keen to work on projects.
that have a positive impact on the international student experience, and that they welcome the extra funding for such projects.

Projects were assessed by a selection committee that included the following members:

- Professor William Purcell, Deputy Vice-Chancellor International at the University of Technology Sydney, and Chair of the Universities Australia Deputy Vice-Chancellor International Executive Committee
- Dr Pamela Kinnear, Deputy Chief Executive at Universities Australia
- Ms Arfa Noor, President of the Council of International Students Australia

Out of a large number of very promising looking projects, seven projects were selected and awarded with funding. The total funding for the projects was $180,000.

**Selected projects**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University</th>
<th>Project Title</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Australian Catholic University</td>
<td>‘The Student Experience through Visual Arts and Digital Media’</td>
<td>To enhance community and social engagement; to highlight and raise awareness of the contribution of international students, and of the University to the local and broader community.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Australian National University</td>
<td>‘In My Eyes: Reflections on Canberra by ANU Students’</td>
<td>To improve the quality of interaction amongst Canberra community and students at the ANU without making any distinction between international and domestic students, by overcoming assumptions and perceptions based on where they come from.</td>
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<tr>
<td>G’Day SA</td>
<td>‘Enhancing the Student Experience: Career Readiness’</td>
<td>To assist students in gaining career positions and getting ready to join the Australian workforce.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The University of Melbourne</td>
<td>‘Mapping the Social Networks of International Students: Foundations for Improving Communication’</td>
<td>To explore how international students access information that affects health and lifestyle, and study the relationship between self-perceived identity and social networks.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Griffith University</td>
<td>‘Engaging Domestic and International Students with the Australian environment: Wild Mob Wilderness conservation projects’</td>
<td>To facilitate the voluntary involvement of both domestic and international students in established and respected community organisations.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The University of Western Sydney</td>
<td>‘Social engagement and leadership Program (SELP) pilot’</td>
<td>To generate interaction between domestic and international students and help students build the soft skills highly valued by employers, like problem solving skills, communication skills and interpersonal skills.</td>
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Southern Cross University

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

To transfer vital information about student support services more effectively using an activity based approach to orientation, and to promote early interaction between domestic and international students.

Project outcomes

All projects were completed by 31 May 2012, and all projects have submitted a final report. These reports outline the aims of the project, the implementation and the final outcomes of the project. The reports also give an overview of the impact the project has had on the international student experience and make recommendations on how the project could be implemented across the sector. All projects will be presented at the ISANA Victoria branch conference in September 2012, and all project delegates are encouraged to further disseminate the findings of their project.

Based on the final reports submitted, all the projects have been a positive experience for students and staff involved, and all projects have had a positive impact on the international student experience. Some of the projects have been picked up by the community, which means more people will be able to see the outcomes of the projects and ultimately better understand international education in Australia. For the students involved this is real recognition of their involvement in the project and of their time spent studying in Australia. Some of the projects will in the future be supported by local councils or organisations. Ongoing implementation of the projects will give more students the chance to enjoy the benefits of a tried and tested project that will contribute to their positive student experience in Australia. Further research will give the sector a greater understanding of the needs of international students and how the sector can cater for this.

Universities Australia recognises the positive outcomes of the projects, and has received positive replies from all project delegates about the initiative of the ‘Enhancing the International Student Experience’ program. We initially received 72 applications which shows that education stakeholders are committed to making the international student experience into the best experience possible and that funding for projects that enhance the experience is very sought after. Universities Australia would welcome a repeat of the ‘Enhancing the International Student Experience’ program. We believe projects that are awarded under the program truly make a positive difference for international students in Australia, and the project findings will contribute to the ongoing improvement of international education in Australia.

We hope you enjoy reading the final project reports. Project delegates can be contacted directly for further information about the project.