

A Joint Project

*Student Services

*School of Business

*International Student Unit

**Title: Swinburne University of Technology
Internationalization and Integration Project**



**Helen Kalaboukas – Manager Student Services, Inner
Campuses**

Katherine Yannakis – Counsellor, Student Services

Liza Ng – International Student Counsellor, Student Services

Michele Kemm – Counsellor Student Services

Taeko Sakurai – International Student Adviser, ISU

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Abstract

Swinburne Integration and Internationalisation Program (IIP) was a joint project between Student Services, the International Student Unit and the Japanese Department. The need for greater internationalization and integration was identified by the Counselling Department and a specific program was designed to address this need. The aims of the IIP were to *decrease isolation and segregation*, *increase cultural awareness*; and *enhance intercultural interaction* amongst International students. Overall the program aimed to assist students to improve their personal, social and vocational skills.

The IIP consisted of four one-hour workshops. 70 International, exchange, local, TAFE, and Higher Ed students took part in the program. Activities included in the workshops were: *cultural awareness tasks*, *Japanese language tasks* and *social activities*.

The overwhelming responses from students were all very positive and participants expressed keen interest in taking part in programs such as this in the future.

Introduction

The IIP was developed to address a common need identified through local and international student counselling interviews at Student Services, Swinburne University of Technology. Many international students who come to counselling often speak about a strong feeling of loneliness from being away from family and friends. Loneliness is a symptom long recognized in culture shock and the process of adjustment to a new country. This feeling of loneliness is probably exacerbated by the difficulty

international students have reported, (during counselling sessions at student services, Swinburne University), in meeting and socializing with local and other students. They also often report feelings of inadequacy in social situations. The lack of culturally appropriate social and interpersonal skills in international students leads to a feeling of difference and segregation from local students. International students from Murphy-Shigematsu's (2001) study also identified a feeling of difference in relation to local students studying in Japan. One reason the IIP was developed was to give international and exchange students at Swinburne University the opportunity to meet and interact with local students. Research has shown that increased socialization between international and local students positively assists the acculturation process (Furnham & Erdman, 1995; Murali, 2004; Murphy-Shigematsu, 2001). The term 'acculturation' usually refers to the process of acquiring a second culture. Culture is made up of many components and there are different definitions of 'culture' in various disciplines. A society's culture consists of the systems of values and beliefs which are characteristic of that society. Better psychological adjustment has been found to relate to international students who have a greater understanding of their host culture (Berry & Kim, 1988). Another aim of the IIP program was to give international students a greater understanding of Australian culture and increase their opportunity for cultural interaction with the hope of assisting them with the adjustment process.

A need for increased internationalization and integration was also recognized for local students during counselling interviews at Swinburne University's Crete Study Abroad program, conducted in 2001. The program was an exchange program open to all Swinburne students (international and local students). Students who participated in the program studied at the Mediterranean Agronomic Institute of Chania in Chania, Crete, for one - three months. It was noted during counselling interviews with students taking part in the Crete program, that overall, local students had difficulty adjusting to study in a different country, environment and culture whereas the international students adjusted with greater ease. Many local students at Swinburne University lack the opportunity or have not travelled overseas and therefore may miss the advantages international students gain from overseas study. Advantages for students who study overseas can include greater understanding of different cultures, and an increase in ability to interact with people from different cultures, this can benefit students both personally and vocationally. Another advantage of studying overseas is that students seem to become better equipped to study or work overseas after completing part of their studies in a foreign country. Another aim of this study was to give local students the opportunity to learn about another culture and increase their intercultural interaction.

Student Services, the International Student Unit and the Japanese Section from the School of Business all worked together on the IIP to address the above issues. The different experiences, knowledge, skills and people from the three university departments were all able to contribute to the program.

The IIP was developed to address the above issues. The aims of the program were:

- Decreased isolation and segregation
- Increased cultural awareness; and
- Enhanced intercultural interaction

The program was designed to assist International / exchange students adjust to life in Australia via socialization with local and other international students. Furthermore, the IIP was developed to increase local student's acculturation.

Design and Delivery

Facilitators: Staff from Student Services (2), the International Student Unit (1), and the School of Business (1) delivered the four workshops.

Participants: Overall seventy students participated across the four workshops. The number of students who attended each workshop varied. The students that participated were either taking Japanese classes or were invited by the ISU. Students invited by the ISU were either Japanese exchange students or Japanese international students. Japanese exchange students were ESL students, TAFE students or undergraduate students. All international students and students enrolled in the Japanese classes were undergraduate students.

Design

Four, one hour workshops were run during scheduled Japanese study classes over second semester, 2002. The workshops were designed to increase internationalization and integration for all participants via sessions that focused on language, cultural and social activities. The content of each workshop is detailed below. Refreshments were provided during every session. Sessions were held at the main dining hall at Student Residency, Swinburne University of Technology, Hawthorn campus.

Workshop 1: Topics Covered

1. Greetings
2. Culturally Appropriate / Not Appropriate behavior
3. Language Practice

Workshop 2: Topics Covered

1. Cultural Stereotypes
2. Language Practice
3. Celebrations in Each Culture

Workshop 3: Topics Covered

1. Intercultural Networking
2. Language Practice
3. Making Sushi

Workshop 4: Topics Covered

1. Cross Cultural Interaction
2. Language Practice
3. Making Sandwiches

The participants were asked to complete feedback forms at the end of the first and third workshops. Forms were completed confidentially as students were not asked for their names or any other identifying information. Results are based on questionnaires that were handed in at the end of the first and third workshop. Thirty seven questionnaires were collated at the end of the first workshop and 32 students returned questionnaires at the end of the third workshop.

Results

Overall the feedback from participants was positive. Students were satisfied with the content of the sessions and would like to see similar workshops run in the future. The following is a summary of the feedback from the respondents for the two questionnaires. Some examples of feedback questionnaires can be found at Attachment 1.

Student Evaluation Workshop 1

The first feedback questionnaire given to participants at the end of the first session comprised of 5 content-oriented questions. A total of 37 questionnaires were returned and of these, 28 (75%) were from females and 9 (25%) were from males participants. The age range of the participants was 19 –30 years old. Most students fall in the 19 to 25 year old age group. 14 (38%) of the students identified themselves as Japanese, 19 (51%) were local Australian students and 4 (11%) others were from different countries.

The 5 content-oriented questions were:

- Q6. What were your reasons for participating in this workshop?
- Q7. List three things you liked about this workshop?
- Q8. What do you gained from this experience?
- Q9. Would you like to participate in other workshops like this?
- Q10. List any suggestions you have to improve this series of workshops?

For question 6, majority of the Australian students said that they liked the workshops because of the chance to meet Japanese students and to learn about their culture first hand, while the majority of the Japanese students mentioned that they liked the chance to meet new friends. For question 7, friendship and opportunity to learn about the two cultures from the workshops were mentioned. The provision of food and drinks was also listed. The success of the workshops is reflected by the students' responses to question 8 and 9. For question 8, the students mentioned that they gained friendship and cultural experience and for question 9, 98% of the students indicated that they would like to participate in other similar workshops. Suggestions for improvement after the first workshop included: wider range of activities, games, more food and time.

Student Evaluation Workshop 3

The second feedback questionnaire given to participants consisted of demographic questions, three likert scale questions and 2 open ended questions. Thirty two students returned feedback forms at the end of the third session. Eleven male students and 21 female students returned questionnaires. The following is an analysis of data collated from the 32 questionnaires returned by students who participated in the workshop. Fifteen of the students who returned questionnaires identified themselves as Australian, 14 as Japanese and 3 as “other” (other implied identification from a nationality or cultural group that was neither Australian nor Japanese). Japanese students were ESL students (9 students), TAFE students (3) or undergraduate students (2). All students who identified themselves as Australian or “other” (18 students) were undergraduate students enrolled in the Japanese classes.

Results from the questionnaire showed that 65.6% of students attended all three sessions, whilst 18.7% attended 2 sessions and 15.6% attended one session. Results also showed that 65.6% of students met socially outside the workshops. Of the 65.6% of students who meet up socially outside of the sessions, 37.5% were Australian, 28.6% were Japanese and 14.28% were other. Therefore 100% of student classified as “other” who returned questionnaires met with students from the program socially, 80% of Australian students and 43% of Japanese students.

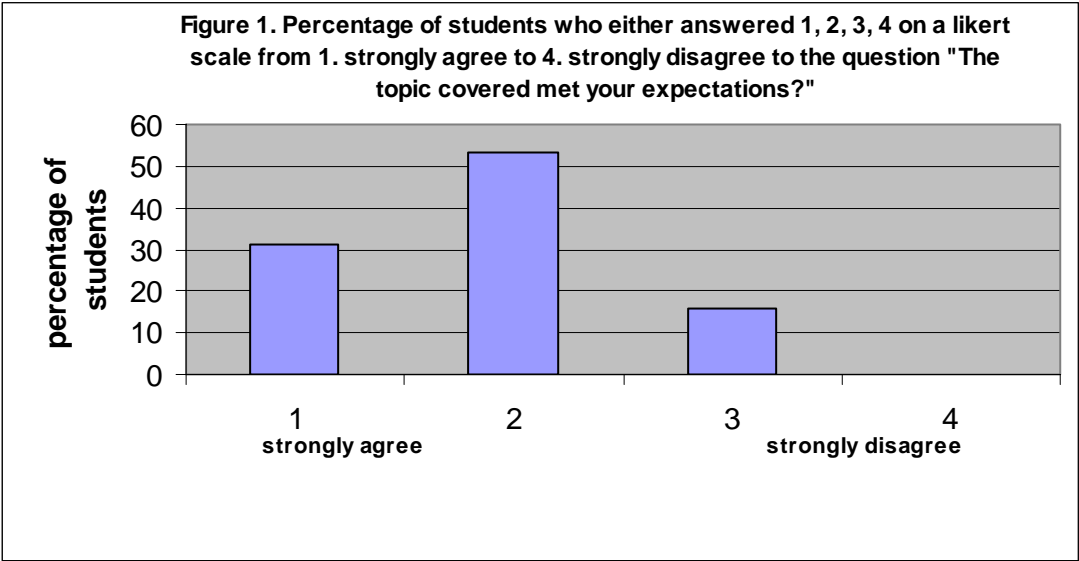


Figure 1 shows the percentage of students who either answered 1, 2, 3, or 4 on a likert scale where 1 = strongly agree and 4 = strongly disagree to the question “The topics covered met your expectations?”. The majority of students answered either agree (53.1%) or strongly agree (31.3%) while 15.63% of students answered disagree.

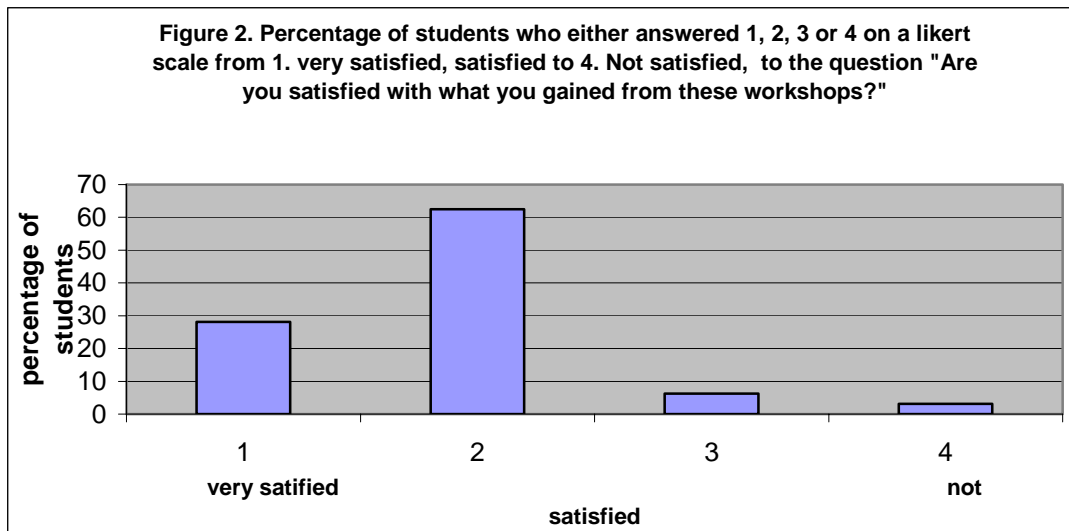


Figure 2 demonstrates the percentage of students who either answered 1, 2, 3, or 4 on a likert scale from 1 = very satisfied to 4 = not satisfied to the question “Are you satisfied with what you gained from these workshops?”. The majority of students were very satisfied and selected 2 (62.5%) or 1 (28.2%) whilst 9.4% of students were not satisfied and selected either 3 (6.3%) or 4 (3.1%).

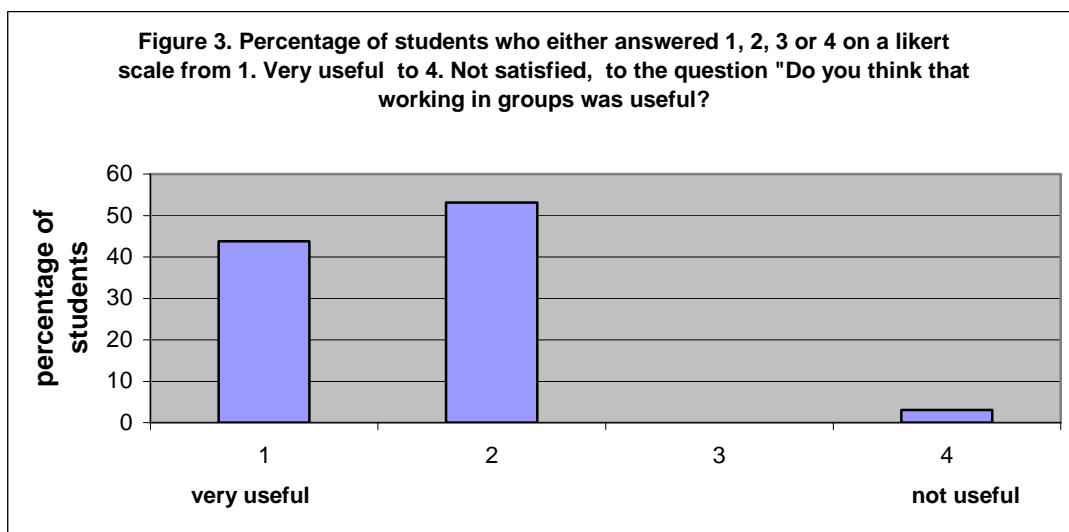


Figure 3 illustrates the percentage of students who answered 1, 2, 3 or 4 on a 4 point Likert scale where 1 = very useful and 4 = not useful to answer the question “Do you think that working in groups was useful?”. The figure shows that the majority of students found working in groups useful (53.1 %) or very useful (43.75%) whilst 3.1% of students did not find working in groups useful.

Participants were asked the following two open ended questions: “How do you think the workshop can be improved? What should change to make it more beneficial to you? and “Do you have any other comments you would like to make?”. The following is a summary of the most common responses to the three questions. 15.6% of students stated that they would like to make sessions more relevant to school work. 12.5% of students would have preferred a better venue with many sitting noise and too much activity as reasons why. 12.5% found the workshops fun and enjoyable. 12.5% of students liked the sushi activity and 12.5% found the three workshops fun. 6.3% of students thought the workshops were a good initiative and 6.3% enjoyed meeting people from different cultures and found that it helped with improving their cultural skills.

Conclusion

The IIP was developed from a need identified in Student Services’ counseling sessions for greater socialization, integration and internationalization for both local and international / exchange students. The IIP and its activities were designed to help achieve these aims. Feedback from students who participated in the program was overall very positive and encouraging. The majority of students reported that they enjoyed the workshops, would like to participate in similar workshops in the future and felt the program was a good initiative.

Feedback from students indicated that the aims of the program are also factors students feel are important for their own development. For instance, the majority of students cited meeting people and meeting people from a different cultural background and increasing understanding of Japanese or Australian culture (for local and Japanese students respectively) as aspects they wanted to gain from the program.

The results also seem to demonstrate that the aims of the program: to decrease isolation and segregation, increase cultural awareness; and enhance intercultural interaction were accomplished. For example, the majority of students reported that the workshops assisted them to improve their cultural skills and gave them an opportunity to interact with Japanese / Australian students and to generally make friends.

Additionally, a substantial proportion of students who participated in the program met outside the workshops socially. This is a good result in relation to the aims of the program. Interestingly, 100% of students who classified themselves as “other” and 80% of students who classified themselves as “local” met outside socially whilst a smaller proportion of Japanese students (43%) met outside socially. Unfortunately, the reasons why students did or did not meet socially were not explored. Further studies

and strategies to increase international student participation outside of class could be explored. Albeit, 43% is still a good proportion of international students interacting outside the scheduled workshops.

When asked to comment on suggestions for improving sessions, some responses of students included, a better venue, more time, wider range of activities, and more related to class work. These suggestions and all data from the feedback questionnaires can be used for future programs to ensure that improved workshops that are responsive to students' needs can be delivered.

The following are recommendations for future programs:

1. Invite other departments and services to participate in the program.
2. Make the program accessible to more students;
3. Arrange for a more suitable venue;
4. Continue to ask for feedback during the program and at completion of the program to ensure that the needs of students are continually met; and
5. Tailor the program to the needs of the students.
6. Research ways of increasing Japanese (or other international student) involvement outside the program.
7. To develop a student self-management team which will organize more social activities such as nights out, games, competitions, debates and so on.
8. Initiate a Certificate of Participation program for Swinburne University of Technology as a tangible incentive for students to be involved.
9. Follow-up study 3 months after the program to assess the long term effects of the program i.e., to see if students were less isolated than those who did not participate in the program.

References

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Attachment 1: Feedback Questionnaires.

