

## **The Changing Profile of the International Student – Understanding the student with status from previous study**

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### **Background**

This paper is based on a study conducted between 2003 and 2005. The study explored data relating to a group of international students who had articulated into business studies at the University of South Australia (UniSA). In 2003, preliminary results were discussed at the ISANA national conference in Rockhampton, Queensland. This paper presents further results and discusses the implications for support services for international students.

Articulation agreements are part of the University of South Australia's policy on recognition of prior learning, and are based on the following broad principles:

- Granting maximum credit for prior learning;
- Granting block credit or specified credit to minimise the time taken to complete a course;
- Support for articulation with TAFE and other tertiary providers;
- Public availability and scrutiny of credit transfer provisions; and
- A consistent approach to the granting of credit.

These agreements build and develop relationships and facilitate the entry of students to the University of South Australia. The intake figures over the last five years are an indication of the importance of these agreements. According to a recent University of South Australia report (Taverner and Bradley, 2005) on articulation and pathways, between 2002 and 2005, over 50% of the University's intake of new international undergraduate students was admitted with credit for previous study. These new students articulated with credit from previous study in Australia or overseas.

The growing numbers of articulating students has prompted a re-think on the content of the Firstconnection – International Student Orientation (FISO) program and resources to ensure that all international students' needs are being met.

However, the profile of the articulating student is not clear. In the development of resources for new international students, the needs of articulating students were initially assumed to be similar to all international students commencing from first year, with the exception that there may be increased pressure to complete their studies in a shorter space of time.

At the University of South Australia, Learning Connection provides a range of services and resources designed to help students succeed. Services include language and learning development, personal counselling, careers, disability and international student services. The services are available on each of the campuses.

### **Literature review**

The experiences of international students studying at a university in a foreign country have been the subject of extensive research. Much of the research has focused on the adjustment that international students have had to make to living and studying in a new culture which may be quite different from their own. Studies on the needs and academic performance of international students such as those by Ramsay, Barker & Jones (1999) and Biggs (1997) have grouped the students as a homogeneous entity to be compared with the local student population. There is also research which has looked at the experiences of specific nationalities (Chalmers & Volet 1997; Ninnes, Aitchison & Kalos 1999; Biggs 1991). Others have specifically explored the issues from a first year entry perspective (McInnis, James & McNaught 1995; Briguglio 2000; Burns 1991).

Many researchers have regarded the first year of university studies as a period of special interest. Edmond (1996), McInnis, James & McNaught (1995) have stated that in general terms, all students undergo adjustment processes during their first year at university. They face a period of transition that involves varying degrees of adjustment to university culture in general. International students, particularly those from cultural and linguistic backgrounds other than the culture of the host country, face additional challenges and adjustments, not only linguistically but also socially and educationally. They are often under intense pressure to excel in their studies but many feel vulnerable without their familiar support networks. The students may also have financial difficulties, feel anxious about immigration authorities, experience cultural and academic adjustment problems when they arrive and have anxieties about returning home at the completion of their studies. Several studies of international student experiences in higher education have emphasised the influence of cultural experiences and perceptions on students' behaviour and academic outcomes in new educational settings (Bizzell 1986; Ballard & Clanchy, 1988; Iedema 1993; Flowerdew & Miller 1995).

The literature emphasises two different time-related factors. Studies such as by Pedersen (1991) indicate that preparation prior to arrival is important for international students. Pedersen (1991) noted that the successful adjustment that international students had to make was often contingent upon whether or not they were prepared for the circumstances into which they were entering in the new university. He stated that when international students arrive at overseas universities, the circumstances suddenly and simultaneously impose a variety of competing and sometimes contradictory roles that must be learned. It was only when the requirements of those roles were realistically perceived and effectively learned that the students' experience was successful. Therefore he concluded that the better the international student's preparation prior to the commencement of university studies, the better the overall education experience.

There are also studies that clearly indicate that the adjustment process of international students takes time. Studies such as those by Angelova and Riazantseva (1999), Ramsay, Barker & Jones (1999), Grey (2002), Briguglio (2000) and Robertson, Line, Jones & Thomas (2000) have documented that international students with cultural adjustment and/or learning difficulties generally overcome these difficulties over time. Anderson (1994) agreed that a successful foreign educational experience involves successful adjustment over time. Anderson described this adjustment as a dynamic and interactive process that occurred between the person and the environment and is directed towards an achievement of a fit between the two. Anderson's staged model has adaptation as the long-term outcome of many shorter-term adjustments, within each stage, affective, cognitive and behavioural responses occur. These adjustments are made through a 'trial and error' process over time.

The first year period of university has been identified by researchers such as McInnis, James & McNaught (1995), Briguglio (2000) and Burns (1991) as an important and particularly vulnerable period for students. Researchers such as Beasley & Pearson (1999) have noted that the first semester of the first year of university studies is the particularly critical period of adjustment. Grey (2002) had also noted that first year students, at least for their first semester, are transitional students. McInnis, James & McNaught (1995) in their study noted that many students have to gain a sense of the expectations and standards of the university during the first semester, yet they are often only aware of this at the end of that first semester. The results of a study on the first year experience in Australian universities conducted by Krause, Hartley, James and McInnis (2005) indicate that international students are more likely to have difficulties with their studies and less likely to report that orientation programs are helpful in preparing them for university study.

These studies are amongst many that have informed and led to the development of a range of strategies to help students, especially first year international students, adjust to university and develop appropriate and effective language and learning skills. This is reflected in the on-arrival orientation programs at the commencement of the academic year, pre-departure information and the learning support services that have been developed for students. The development of these student support services have been described by McInnis, James & McNaught (1995) as part of a strong and growing view that initial adjustment difficulties for students will persist unless universities intervene and provide support early in the first year.

However, the international student profile increasingly includes students who enter with status from previous study. They may have studied at another institution in Australia or completed a diploma in their home

country. These first year students do not necessarily fit the profile of the first year student of the studies referred to above. These students commence their university studies at the second year or third year level of a university program. Beasley and Pearson (1999) noted that these students were without the institutional infrastructure and support normally provided for first year students. They describe these students as the 'neglected transitional group' as they are not normally provided with the same support as other first year students. Orientation programs and foundation units or introductory lectures invariably focus on first year courses.

The irony for these articulating students is that while they are experiencing their first-year at an Australian university, they are enrolled in upper year level courses. Students that enter with status from previous study are assumed to have acquired the content knowledge of pre-requisite courses and the academic skills necessary for tertiary study in the upper levels of a program. They are expected to fit in with the other students at the equivalent level of study and fulfill their academic requirements in the remaining period of time for the program of study. These students do not have the same length of time to adjust to the new tertiary and cultural environment as international students that enter at first year level. We do not know if their previous study provides adequate preparation for the circumstances they will encounter at university.

Little is known of these students' academic and social needs and whether or not they are meeting the expectations that are placed on them. Little is also known of whether the current range of support services meet the needs of these students and whether these students are in fact using the resources. There has been little research on the experiences of these students. For these students, the period of previous study is critical in preparing them for the shortened time at university. An attractive proposition for these students has been the notion that they can achieve a university degree in a shorter period of time with fewer expenses associated with fees and living costs. Therefore for these students, it is critical that they actually 'hit the ground running'. Any failures would defeat the whole purpose of the exercise, as they would have to extend their stay in Australia and the university through repeating courses. These students have high expectations of completing their university degree within the shorter time frame. They also have expectations that they will be able to make a seamless transition to tertiary studies.

Articulation agreements between the VET or Technical and Further Education (TAFE) sector and universities have allowed seamless pathways for students and there is growing acceptance of these pathways internationally (Abela, Chenoweth & Ozog 2002).

Most of the international students who articulate into the University of South Australia through these agreements are from countries culturally different from Australia. There are two groups in this cohort of students – one who remain in their home country and complete post-secondary/pre-university programs before articulating to the university and another group where the students choose to come to Australia for their pre-university study in TAFE colleges or institutes. The difference between these groups is that while both groups have to make the academic transition to studying in an Australian university, only one group has experienced Australian culture.

### **Purpose of the study**

Overall the research literature referred to in this study identified that cultural adjustment to the new country as well as academic adjustment to the teaching styles and norms of the university are significant factors in the academic performance of international students. The research also suggests that as time to adjust is a critical factor in achieving successful adjustment, then students who are here for shorter periods of time will feel under greater pressure to excel with less time to learn from trial and error. The first semester of study would therefore be a revealing window into their preparedness for university study.

It may be hypothesised that students who did their previous study in Australia would be more adapted to Australia than those who studied overseas prior to arrival. It would therefore be possible to assess the influence of cultural adjustment on academic performance by comparing the academic performance of the students by their country of previous study. It would also be possible to assess the academic preparation of the student to university studies.

Finally, the research literature has shown that successful adjustment takes place over a period of time and that this is evident by improved academic performance over time. Therefore, students with a greater unit transfer and therefore less time in university would have less time to adjust. For the students with more than a year of unit transfer, the level of preparedness is critical. By looking at the academic performance of these students, it should be possible to ascertain their preparedness. If the students perform well, it may be inferred that they have made a successful cultural and academic transition.

This study investigates whether there is a relationship between the country of the previous institution of the student, their unit transfer, Grade Point Average (GPA) at the end of the first semester of study and their program of study. By exploring the relationship between these factors, this study will identify the following:

- The effect of unit transfer on academic performance which will be gauged by the grade point average;
- The effect of prior learning and country of previous study on academic performance;
- Their social and academic needs through the issues that are raised at Learning Connection and through an online questionnaire.

## Research Method

International full-fee paying students who were enrolled in a program in the Division of Business and Enterprise for Semester 1, 2003 with the equivalent of one year of credit for previous study were selected for the purpose of this study. Once the cohort of students was identified, the students' related academic and Learning Connection data were extracted.

Data collected for each student:

- Country of institution of previous study
- Contact at Learning Connection and purpose of visit
- Grade point average (GPA) of each student for first six months of study (Semester 1, 2003)
- Unit transfer for each student
- Current status as of July 2005

The Grade Point Average (GPA) is calculated as follows:

$$\text{GPA} = \frac{\text{Sum of (grade points x course unit values)}}{\text{Sum of course unit values}}$$

**Table 1: Grade and Related Grade Point**

Grade	HD	D	C	P 1	P 2	S.P	C P	T P	F2,F1WF	F2
Grade Point	7	6	5	4.5	4	3.5	3	3	1.5	1

The data were aggregated into the country of institution of previous study, units transferred and GPA. The students were grouped into two GPA groups – those who had GPA of less than three and those who had GPA of three or more. A student with a GPA of at least three would have an average mark of 50% for their courses. A one-way and two-way analysis of variance was then performed on the aggregated data to establish whether there was a relationship between unit transfer, the country of the previous institution and the GPA.

## Results and Discussion

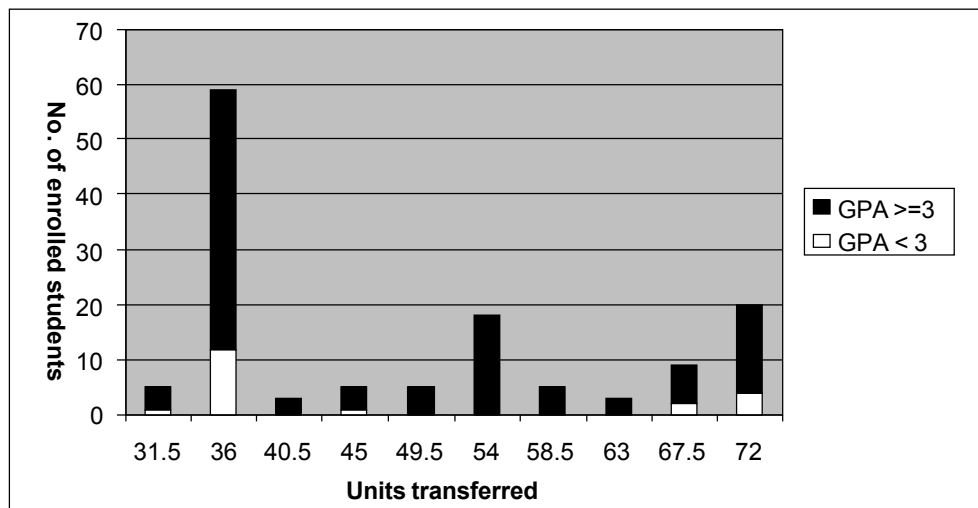
Based on the criteria (international students with one year or more of credit transfer who commenced their study at the University of South Australia in Semester 1, 2003), 132 students were selected for this study. These students had gained credit from previous study in institutions based in the countries listed in Table 2.

**Table 2: Countries of previous institution and number of enrolled students for Semester 1, 2003**

Country of previous study	No. of students
Australia	64
Malaysia	44
Singapore	13
Hong Kong	5
Other (United Kingdom, Sri Lanka, Canada, Taiwan, China)	6

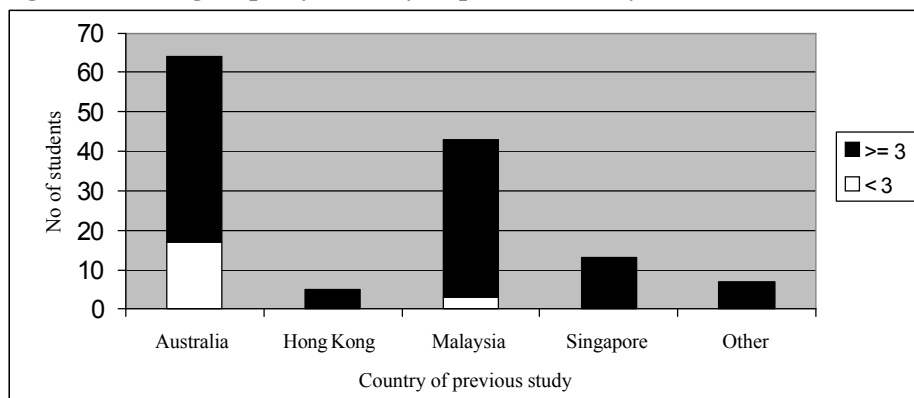
An aim of the study was to investigate if there was a relationship between the unit transfer and the student's GPA at the end of the first semester of study. It had been hypothesized that students who had less time to adjust and succeed in their studies would feel greater stress and possibly experience greater difficulties with academic adjustment. The results seen in Figure 2 indicate that students who had transferred with one year of units (36 units) experienced greater difficulties than students who transferred with more than a year's units. There were 59 students who had commenced with 36 units of credit. In this group, 12 students had a GPA of less than three. The number of students in the other groups seen in Figure 2 who had a GPA of less than three was small. There was one student who had articulated with 31.5 units, one student with 45 units, two students with 63 units and four students with 72 units.

**Figure 2: The distribution of unit transfer and grade point average**



When the GPA groupings are sorted by the students' country of previous study, the results seen in Figure 3 indicate that the twenty students who were experiencing difficulties with their study had previously studied in predominantly two countries – Australia and Malaysia. Seventeen students had studied in institutions in Australia. Three students had studied in Malaysian colleges.

**Figure 3: GPA groups by country of previous study**



**Table 4: One-way analysis of variance: effect of 'country' on GPA**

Source	DF	SS	MS	F	P
Country	4	22.999	5.750	5.76	0.000
Error	127	126.853	0.999		
Total	131	149.852			

The analysis of variance seen in Table 4 identifies the effect that the country of the students' previous institution may have on their academic performance. The small P-value ( $P = 0.000$ ) is very significant, and amounts to strong statistical evidence that the 'country' classification has a definite effect on GPA. This means that the student's academic performance for the critical first semester of university study is strongly influenced by the location of their previous institution. This result is reinforced by the graph in Figure 3.

**Table 5: General linear Model: Analysis of covariance, incorporating units of credit transfer as a covariate.**

Source	DF	Seq SS	Adj SS	Adj MS	F	P
Unit transfer	1	1.027	0.033	0.033	0.03	0.857
Country	4	22.005	22.005	5.501	5.47	0.000
Error	126	126.820	126.820	1.007		
Total	131	149.852				
Term	Coef	Std Dev	T	P		
Constant	4.4636	0.3418	13.06	0.000		
Unit transfer	0.001155	0.006392	0.18	0.857		

The analysis of variance in Table 5 identifies the effect of the number units transferred and the location of their previous institution on the student's academic performance. The 'country' classification is still significant ( $P = 0.000$ ) but the effect of 'transfer units' is not. The effect of having more transfer units on GPA is beneficial, but only to a very small degree. This can be seen from the very small coefficient 0.001155, meaning that on average, 36 extra units of credit increases the average GPA by only  $36 \times 0.001155 = 0.04$ . This means that when the three variables (country, units transferred and GPA) are put together, the effect of the location of their previous study is more significant than the number of units transferred on the student's academic performance.

The interesting result is that students who have commenced their university studies with more than one year of credit (commence at third/final year) gain a higher GPA than those who have commenced with only one year of credit (commence at second year), but only to a small degree. A possible explanation for the result may be found by a closer examination of the programs that students in this Division enrolled in. All the programs have eight common core courses in the first year of the program. These are the 36 units of transfer that the second year students have gained. In the second and third year of the program, the students study specialised courses in the respective programs. The results suggest that students who have transferred with between one and half and two years of units have had some knowledge and experience with the specialised courses. This level of academic preparation appears to be critical for these transitional students.

These results suggest that cultural adjustment does not appear to have as significant an impact on academic performance as academic preparation. The results have revealed that overall students who articulated from overseas institutions performed better than students who had studied in Australian colleges, institutes or other universities. Although the Australian-educated international students had more time to adjust to the Australian culture, language and lifestyle, it was this group that had a greater proportion of students who did not achieve a GPA of at least three. It must be noted that the results are influenced by the larger proportion of Australian-educated students in this sample.

**Table 6: Current Status of students by country of previous institution and average GPA in first semester of study**

		Country of Previous Institution					
Status	Data	Australia	Hong Kong	Malaysia	Other	Singapore	Grand Total
<b>active</b>	Average of GPA	3.30		3.50			3.32
	No of students	18.00		2.00			20.00
<b>completed with extra time</b>	Average of GPA	3.54	4.50	3.65	4.50	4.63	3.76
	No of students	10.00	1.00	10.00	1.00	2.00	24.00
<b>completed on time</b>	Average of GPA	4.43	5.56	4.56	4.41	4.87	4.60
	No of students	29.00	4.00	25.00	4.00	10.00	72.00
<b>precluded</b>	Average of GPA	1.88		5.75			3.81
	No of students	1.00		1.00			2.00
<b>withdrew</b>	Average of GPA	2.54		3.71	4.88	4.13	3.32
	No of students	6.00		6.00	1.00	1.00	14.00
<b>Total Mean of GPA</b>		3.75	5.35	4.22	4.50	4.78	4.10
<b>Total No of students</b>		64.00	5.00	44.00	6.00	13.00	132.00

Source: University of South Australia Student Record Information System, 2005.

Table 6 shows the current status of the students correlated to the average GPA for the first semester. In total 72 students successfully completed their studies within the specified period of time with the average GPA being 4.60. Significantly there were 60 students who did not have the education experience they would have expected. Twenty students are still studying in their program, twenty-four students took longer than they expected to complete their studies and sixteen students did not complete their studies, having withdrawn or been precluded. Less than fifty percent of the Australian international student intake was able to meet their expectations of completing their studies on time. All the other student cohorts had a greater than fifty percent completion rate.

The average GPA in the first semester for the students who completed within the specified time was 4.60. As this is influenced by the higher GPAs of a small number of students from Hong Kong and Singapore, a more useful comparison is the GPAs of the Australian-educated versus the Malaysian-educated students. The GPAs are comparable at 4.43 and 4.56 respectively indicating the importance of a successful first semester of study. The students who had to extend their study time in Australia to complete their degrees had lower GPAs in the first semester.

In each category, the Australian-educated international students had lower GPAs. However, the range of the GPAs (1 – 5.5) and the larger number of students in this group must be noted as they lower the final mean score. The largest number of students who have yet to complete their studies or who withdrew also had Australian diplomas and these results are worth noting as they indicate that these students have not been able to meet the expectations of completion within the specified time frame.

## Learning Connection contacts

Sixty-seven students out of 132, or approximately 50%, had made contact with Learning Connection in Semester 1, 2003. These students had come in for the reasons listed in Table 7. Of the twenty students who had not achieved a GPA of at least three, only four had come in for academic assistance. Seven of the twenty had made contact with Learning Connection for assistance with enrolment, visas and advice on deferrals. Nine of the 20 students had not contacted Learning Connection. The low number of visits from students who are not performing well is of concern. This group of 20 students may or may not be aware of the academic support available at Learning Connection. It is difficult to ascertain the reason for the lack of contact without qualitative research either by questionnaire or through a focus group. The results however are consistent with finding by McInnis, James & McNaught (1995) who noted that only 13% of their sample had used student support services at some stage and only 3% used them often. Despite personal problems and the apparently high levels of uncertainty and doubt, only small numbers of students used the support services provided by universities.

**Table 7: Number of Learning Connection contacts and purpose of visit.**

Purpose of visit	No. of students	Purpose of visit	No. of students
Work rights	24	Credit transfer issues	2
Writing and academic skills	17	Deferrals	2
Proof of student status	9	General communication	2
Enrolment assistance	7	Cultural adjustment	1
Orientation and settlement	6	Fees	1
Course choices/program choices	6	Financial management	1
Health cover	6	Health	1
Visa issues	3	Plagiarism	1
Academic appeals	2	Quality of teaching	1
Accommodation	2	Stress management	1

Source: University of South Australia: Flexible Learning Centre Mercury Database, 2003

## Transition Issues

The results from this study indicated that students who received credit for the first year of the program experienced a more difficult transition period than students who commenced later in their program. These students were asked to participate in an online questionnaire to seek information about their preparation, their expectations prior to arrival and the issues they faced in the first semester of study. The fifty-nine students who had a year of credit for their program were invited to participate in the questionnaire. Fourteen students responded to the invitation – eight with Australian qualifications, four from Malaysia and one each from Singapore and Taiwan.



**Table 8: Transition issues identified by one year credit transfer students**

Question	Answer (Number of responses)
Please describe what you thought studies at UniSA would be like	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No comment (3)</li> <li>• Tough and busy (2)</li> <li>• A lot of self study and self motivation required (3)</li> <li>• Good facilities (2)</li> <li>• Good for career path (1)</li> <li>• Study will have lots of group discussion and participation in class (1)</li> <li>• Fun (1)</li> <li>• Not bad(1)</li> </ul>
Please describe what you did to prepare yourself for study at UniSA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nothing (6)</li> <li>• Looked at website to find out about facilities (2)</li> <li>• Buy textbooks (2)</li> <li>• Improved English skills (2)</li> <li>• Get everything ready to come (2)</li> </ul>
Please state what was good about your first semester of study at UniSA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No response (5)</li> <li>• Making new friends (4)</li> <li>• Nice environment (2)</li> <li>• Teaching staff (2)</li> <li>• Ability to plan your own timetable (1)</li> </ul>
Please state what was not good about your first semester of study at UniSA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No comment (2)</li> <li>• Group assignments (1)</li> <li>• No friends and cross-cultural difficulties with local students (3)</li> <li>• Repeating a course after having received credit (1)</li> <li>• Lectures (1)</li> <li>• Unfamiliar with uni system (1)</li> <li>• Difficult to contact lecturers (1)</li> <li>• Workload (1)</li> <li>• Class times (2)</li> <li>• Not enough computers (1)</li> </ul>
How could you have better prepared yourself for studies at UniSA?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No idea (5)</li> <li>• Find out more information about UniSA (3)</li> <li>• Come earlier and attend orientation (2)</li> <li>• Communicate more with tutors (1)</li> <li>• Prepare for study (1)</li> <li>• Work harder (1)</li> <li>• Read the textbooks (1)</li> </ul>
What could the University do to make studying in the first semester a better experience for you?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nothing extra required (9)</li> <li>• Improve computer facility (1)</li> <li>• Make it easier to pass (1)</li> <li>• Give clear guides about what is required and what students should not do (1)</li> <li>• Have lecture notes given out before the lectures (1)</li> <li>• Provide workshops to students whose second language is English (1)</li> </ul>

The small feedback response may not represent the sentiments of the broader sample. However, it is important to note that academic preparation or familiarisation with the new study environment, and staff expectations of students, did not feature as an activity they undertook prior to commencement by any of the respondents. Some of the students did however, note that they needed to better prepare themselves for the change in the study environment, while the rest were unaware of what they could have done better to prepare themselves. At the same time, the students did not suggest any additional service or resources from the university. The responses from the students overall reflect a lack of awareness of the services currently available to them. This is reflected in the low attendance to seek academic assistance from Learning Connection (see table 7). Learning Connection provides information about the types of assessment and their requirements, Academic English workshops and some individual or one to one assistance with assignments.

While only a small number of the respondents cited difficulties with group assignments and cross-cultural communication in tutorials, this is an area where attention is required. For a large number of international

articulating students, their first encounter with domestic students is in tutorial assignments at the second or third year level in the program. The difficulty for the international students is breaking into social and study networks established in the first year of the program.

### **Implications for universities**

Many of the findings of this study reflect the conclusions in the research literature. Many of the transition issues faced by the international students in this study are no different than those faced by all international students. However, the results of this study have also shown differences in the degree to which these issues are faced by the articulating students, with Australian-educated articulating students experiencing greater adjustment difficulties than the overseas-educated students. This study however, represents a snapshot of one intake and the results indicate that more research needs to be done. It was clear from this small study that it is wrong to assume that articulating international students, particularly those who have studied in Australia for some time would experience less transition difficulties. The suggestion that international students who articulate from Australian institutions may require attention in the transition period is worth noting. A longitudinal study is recommended to see if a consistent pattern emerges.

Anecdotal interviews with international students during the University's academic review process have indicated that students with low GPAs for their first semester are also more likely to have credit transfer in their programs. These students have also suggested that the transition to university had been difficult. International students with Australian articulation diplomas were unprepared for the dramatic change in the teaching environment.

Marketing in many of the Australian pre-university institutions with agreements with universities emphasize the small classes, extended student contact and individual learning support. One student commented that her pre-university was 'like high school' and she had found the first semester at university 'quite a shock'. At the University of South Australia, the emphasis is on student-centred learning with assistance. The increased responsibility in learning, attendance and assessments coupled with the freedom of timetabling can represent a dramatic shift for these students. For the international students who have then to specialise in their degree program, the results of this study suggest that their self-preparation for the transition to university study at UniSA had been neglected.

The teaching and learning environment at universities with larger tutorial groups, large lecture groups, teaching staff that often do not have the time to see individual students, and the need to undertake group assignments with Australian students with whom they have had little if any experience, can be daunting. For some students, it would appear that undertaking similar courses and assessments as first year university students albeit in a different teaching environment has lulled them into a false sense of security. These students stated in the online questionnaire that they did nothing to prepare themselves for their study at the University. Orientation attendance figures over the past three years have indicated low attendances by Australian-educated articulating students.

There is the underlying assumption that as these pre-university qualifications are equal to the first year of university study, this would mean that at the end of that qualification, the articulating students are of an equal standard to non-articulating students. This is the expectation of academic staff that do not differentiate between articulating and non-articulating students at the second and third year level. Yet, the students who articulate clearly experience a different style of teaching and learning prior to their entry to university which may not have prepared them for the independent style of learning required at university.

At the University of South Australia, these results have informed the marketing and support services strategies to articulating students from the main pathway institutions. Since mid-2004, marketing staff and international student advisers jointly present information sessions to potential articulating students. The joint sessions give students information about the programs that they are interested in as well as information about orientation programs and support services. Importantly, students are advised of the importance of attending the sessions during the orientation program.

The close collaboration between the marketing and support services is also evident in the involvement of support services in the final discussions of articulation agreements with the Schools and Divisions. This ensures that specialised orientation programs can be designed for cohorts of incoming students.

Learning advisers at Learning Connection are collaborating with international student advisers and academic staff to develop resources and workshops to assist the transition process for all international students and articulating students in particular. Through service agreements, Learning Connection and the Schools and Divisions have identified areas that require attention. These include cross-cultural communication strategies for staff and students, study strategies, online resources including workshops on specific assessments as well as face to face workshops on academic writing for all students. The responses from the students also indicated that while strategies, programs and services can be developed to assist in the transition process, it is not necessarily accessed by the students in need of them. In 2005- 2006, the International Student Advisory Service is undertaking a project which aims to map out the transition period for the international students studying at UniSA. This project will identify the critical periods and issues faced by the international students. Through student focus groups, it will also identify the types of information and services required by international students at these points and their favoured means of delivery. This information will inform both marketing and support services units of the university that develop and provide much of the material.

## **Conclusion**

The results from the study suggest that some assumptions that have been held about international students, particularly those who articulate directly from overseas institutions, are unfounded. Existing research had suggested that international students with cultural and linguistic backgrounds that are different from the mainstream culture would experience adjustment difficulties. It had also been suggested that this cohort of articulating international students would not initially perform well academically as they adjust to the new culture and teaching environment. Conversely, it was often assumed that students who studied in Australia and then articulated to university would have an advantage over students who came direct from overseas as cultural adjustment would not have been as significant an issue.

This results from this study suggest that cultural adjustment do not appear to be a significant influencing factor on academic performance. The international students who had more time to adjust to Australian culture appear to have greater difficulty in adjusting to the new academic environment than the students who have just arrived. It would seem that the level of preparedness is a greater factor influencing academic performance. The responses from a group within this sample indicated that preparation for a change in the teaching and learning environment is not even considered by the students. Yet, these same students identified such knowledge as critically important for a successful transition. The results suggest that academic adjustment between Australian educational sectors should be further explored and appropriate strategies developed to assist students during this period.

The effect of unit transfer was also unexpected. It was expected that students with a greater number of transferred units would face greater pressure and difficulties both culturally and academically. Overall, this is not the case, as a greater proportion of students with one year of transferred units experienced poorer academic results. Until further research is conducted, the result suggests that the students who have had some exposure to the specialised courses are better prepared for the changed circumstances.

Overall this particular cohort of students registered a low number of requests for academic assistance from Learning Connection even though they were having difficulties with their studies and their level of self-preparation for the transition. This information will inform the development and marketing of support strategies for all international students and articulating international students in particular.

As articulation agreements are of increasing importance to Australian universities, the results of the study suggest that a review of the relationship strategies, quality assurance and communication between parties would be helpful. It is in the best interest of both the recipient as well as the feeder institution for the students do achieve their educational goals. At the same time, resources to support student learning will also need to take into consideration the diversity within the international student population, including articulating international students. A partnership between marketing, support services and the Schools will ensure that these important agreements fulfil their objectives.

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