

Towards a more inclusive and integrated model – orientation for international and domestic students

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International students have responded to student surveys requesting interaction with their Australian student classmates (AUSSE Survey, 2008). Yet from the moment they arrive, international students are segregated from their Australian classmates.

Their orientation programs essentially view international students as lacking the necessary skills to study and live in a new cultural environment. This approach views all international students as lacking independent critical thinking skills, speaking poor English and unable to adjust to the new teaching and learning environment. The 'deficit model' strategy is to identify the skills and knowledge that international students 'lack' and that domestic students are presumed to have.

International students are encouraged to arrive early to undertake a separate orientation program specially designed for them. This orientation model has a fundamental problem – it begins the university experience by separating international students out and reinforcing this separation in the minds of both the new students and staff. It is based on international students as different, as opposed to highlighting the similarities of all students.

Yet the rationale for getting international students to arrive early and have sessions specifically designed for them is because they do have particular needs which universities have a responsibility to address.

The challenge for UniSA was to balance during the orientation period the integration of international student orientation into the 'main' orientation activities, whilst at the same time meeting the particular transition needs of international students.

This paper outlines the changes made to orientation at the University of South Australia. The underlying principle followed was to move towards integration to the greatest extent possible from the commencement of studies and to model the sort of interaction and engagement that should occur throughout the students' time at university.