

NZAID Prestart: A new take on international orientation tailored to a specific audience

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Abstract

Successful transition of international students requires understanding of cultural and societal differences as well as knowledge of academic expectations. Victoria University of Wellington's contract with New Zealand's International Aid & Development Agency (NZAID) requires an orientation for all new NZAID scholarship awardees. Victoria University has expanded on its usual International Orientation to create a comprehensive, two-week NZAID Prestart programme. NZAID Prestart has two sets of objectives: non-academic and academic. The non-academic sessions aim to provide clear understanding of the NZAID scholarship conditions, awareness of the students' unique financial situation, practical advice for the establishment of dependants, cultural awareness, and social opportunities. The academic sessions address students' study, writing, and research skills. Evaluation of the 2009 programme was conducted twice: evaluation at the completion of the programme, written survey and a follow-up focus group six months after the programme. Overall, NZAID PreStart has achieved its set of objectives in offering students social and cultural adjustment opportunities and preparing them for the academic expectations at Victoria University of Wellington. The programme has also enabled NZAID students to form a close-knit learning community, which helps in easing the transition into their new environment. However, evaluation of NZAID PreStart highlights the need for orientation programmes to offer coping strategies and skills training as well as information-based sessions.

Keywords

Transition, orientation, intercultural understanding, social interaction, academic expectations.

Introduction/background

Orientation programmes have long been offered to help students transition into a different educational environment. Dickson, Krause, Rudman (2002) argue that orientation programmes should offer both academic orientation and social integration opportunities, and that early interaction with others in relation to their study will create in students "a shared sense of belonging to a learning community". Guilfoyle and Thair (2006) identify nine areas of expectations that transition programmes need to address to ensure alignment with reality: 1) the nature of postgraduate study; 2) relationships with teachers and supervisors; 3) expectations over support structures; 4) cultural isolation; 5) professional opportunities; 6) expectations about living costs and other economic realities; 7) changes to personal and family life; 8) peer relationships; 9) connections to the community. Although the above nine areas are identified for international postgraduate students, most also apply to undergraduate students. NZAID Prestart is one such programme that combines academic, social and cultural orientation to address issues of expectations for a special group of international students.

NZAID students are those who have received a scholarship from the New Zealand Agency for International Development (NZAID), the New Zealand Government's development agency. They are from a diverse range of

nations, cultures, religions, and ethnicities. A number of factors make this group of students unique among the wider international student population. One major distinguishing factor is that the purpose of the scholarship, and the students' reason for being in New Zealand, is the development of their home country. Due to this, students do not have the flexibility to alter their course of study once they have been granted a scholarship. Furthermore, they are given completion dates which must be adhered to and can only be queried in exceptional circumstances. Other differentiators include the students' countries of origin: most come from countries where they have had a limited exposure to Western ways of life or modern technology, which presents unique challenges. Most NZAID students are of a mature age, and a high number have dependent families with them, which exacerbates an already tight financial situation. Lastly, all NZAID students must leave New Zealand at the end of their studies. The transition of these students to University and life in Wellington is therefore more complex than for most other international students. A smooth transition for these students will positively affect their experience of Victoria University and increase their chances of academic success.

NZAID Prestart

The 2009 NZAID Prestart was run over ten days in February for a group of forty-two recently-arrived postgraduate and undergraduate NZAID scholarship recipients. A variety of nationalities was represented: of the 34 postgraduates, five were from South America; three came from Africa; two came from Central America; six were from the Pacific; eighteen came from South-East Asia. The eight undergraduates all came from Pacific countries. The students were of varying ages and were split gender-wise into 70% female and 30% male. Almost 65% of the postgraduate students had families that had joined them in New Zealand within one to two months.

Of the postgraduates, five were commencing PhDs in Humanities, Commerce, Law, or Education. The rest were undertaking Master degrees, with the exception of one doing a Postgraduate Diploma in Public Policy. Of the Master's students, about half studied Public Policy or Management, and the rest were in Science, Law, Education, Commerce, Development Studies, or Environmental Studies. Of the eight undergraduate students, the majority were joining the Commerce faculty, while the rest studied Architecture, Public Policy or Political Science.

NZAID Prestart consisted of two parts run by different teams, reflecting the programme's two sets of objectives: social/cultural adjustment and academic preparation.

The non-academic sessions were delivered by the Victoria University of Wellington (VUW) NZAID scholarship team and took three days. The sessions were given jointly to postgraduate and undergraduate students, as the information was relevant to the entire group. Day one consisted of general introductions, a detailed overview of the NZAID contract and scholarship conditions, a barbecue lunch, followed by a visit from the NZAID Scholarships Unit with question and answer session. The following day started with a budgeting workshop – assisted by a second-year NZAID student and Student Financial Support and Advice – to increase students' awareness of their unique financial situation. The remaining sessions were presented by guest speakers from a variety of student services such as Visa, Insurance, Student Health, and the Counselling Service. Before completing day two, students with dependants received a separate information session, while the others were taken on a campus tour. The final day focused on cultural awareness and included guest presentations about Kiwi culture, adapting to a new environment, and dealing with culture shock.

The academic preparation sessions were developed by a team of advisers from Student Learning Support Services. They addressed students' study, writing, and research skills. The sessions had five objectives: 1) to help students understand the expectations of students at Victoria; 2) to help students analyse individual needs; 3) to develop students' help-seeking behaviours; 4) to refresh important study skills; 5) to develop students' networking skills. Students received twenty-seven hours of interactive sessions. Postgraduates and undergraduates were grouped together for the joint welcome; the culture, learning, and help-seeking discussion; and the lecture on NZ history. Apart from these sessions, students were divided into separate undergraduate and postgraduate groups. The sessions for both groups covered the following topics:

- academic speaking
- academic reading
- academic writing
- referencing and avoiding plagiarism
- note taking
- introduction to VUW's library
- critical thinking and active participation
- student and lecturer panel.

The academic sessions were further extended by a number of follow-up sessions in April and August. The undergraduate follow-up sessions were conducted in the form of one-to-one meetings with a learning adviser. The postgraduates were offered four further workshops.

- time management
- more on referencing
- improving English
- thesis writing

Evaluation and discussion

NZAID Prestart was designed to impart information crucial to students' success at Victoria. The main area to be investigated was how successfully the students received this information. An initial evaluation was conducted at the completion of NZAID Prestart in February. This evaluation (see Appendix 1) focused on whether or not the academic objectives of NZAID Prestart had been achieved. Students were asked to rate the usefulness of different topics covered. Thirty-eight students filled out the evaluation. A second survey was carried out in September, six months after the programme. This second survey (see Appendix 2) was designed to find out two things: 1) how frequently students engaged in the behaviours encouraged by NZAID Prestart; 2) how students viewed NZAID Prestart after having completed six months of study. A structured questionnaire was emailed to all forty-eight of the 2009 arrivals (forty postgraduates and eight undergraduates). Twenty-three students, comprising three undergraduates and twenty postgraduates, responded to the questionnaire. Two weeks after the questionnaire survey, a semi-structured focus group interview was conducted with the purpose of obtaining further clarification of the survey results (see the list of interview questions in Appendix 3). Invitations to participate in the focus group were sent to all postgraduates. A total of seven students were involved. This group represented a mix of nationalities, genders, and domestic situations (single students and students with dependants in Wellington). The undergraduate group was not included in the focus group due to external circumstances.

The sessions in NZAID Prestart programme can be grouped into three categories:

- those on the VUW expectations
- those on the academic skills required
- those on cultural and social adjustments

The sessions on expectations include those on participation in class, student panel, help seeking and time management. These sessions aimed to convey one key message: students are expected to be independent learners. Research has shown that students from different cultures will sometimes struggle in a new academic environment if the expectations of students are not clear (Berno & Ward 2003). Promoting the facilities and support services available at the early stages of study is also important for student satisfaction (Grebennikov & Skaines 2007, p.115). In the first survey, about four-fifths of the students rated the sessions on help seeking and participation in class 'very useful' or 'extremely useful'. Over half of the students rated the student panel 'very useful' or 'extremely useful'. The session on time management was not evaluated in the first survey as it was delivered at a later date (in April). Overall, the majority of the students (thirty-six out of thirty-eight) indicated that they had a better understanding of the expectations after attending NZAID Prestart. Such positive ratings can be observed in some behaviours reported in the second survey. For example, over half of the students reported that they had attended workshops, used Student Services (e.g. Student Learning Support and Student Financial Support and Advice), talked to tutors or lecturers, talked to their classmates, friends, or NZAID advisers when they encountered any difficulties or challenges. Most indicated they prepared before lectures, did extra research, and participated in study groups. These findings reveal that NZAID Prestart was successful in raising awareness of the different expectations at Victoria University and in introducing the support available to help students be independent.

Despite the fact that students had used services or 'behaved' in ways encouraged at NZAID Prestart, the second survey showed that the frequency of usage or of some behaviours was lower than expected. For example, about half of the students reported they only 'sometimes' participated in class, and rated participation and oral presentation two of the top five challenges. When encountering difficulties, friends were their preferred point of contact: two-thirds of the students reported they 'often' or 'very often' talked to their classmates or friends about assignments, while less than half reported they 'often' or 'very often' talked to lecturers or tutors about assignments. Although some students had reported experiencing issues such as difficulty in balancing life and study, stress, or depression, none had talked to a counselor. Moreover, although student services and NZAID advisers had been approached, less than a third reported they 'often' or 'very often' used those services. Lastly, despite a session on time management, students still rated it a key challenge. One might say that these results show that some students may not have needed much help; however, this is not the case, as all but two indicated they had faced challenges or difficulties. Information from the focus group interview has provided some explanations:

1. All participants said they were aware that class participation might be difficult and consequently were prepared for it. Difficulty arose from the New Zealand accent combined with the speed of talking, which made understanding class discussions difficult at times. Moreover, when surrounded by a New Zealand lecturer and domestic students, NZAID students felt somewhat intimidated and were less likely to speak up. They felt more comfortable participating when the majority of the group consisted of other international students. A further reason for lack of participation was that interrupting people during a group discussion seemed rude and inappropriate to some NZAID students.
2. Talking to classmates was considered more useful when discussing assignments because they were facing the same issues. Several people did approach their lecturers, depending on the lecturer's personality. For those who rarely did this, one particular barrier was that they felt it was a form of cheating or an unfair advantage. One person, however, got inside knowledge from a Kiwi classmate that lecturers can be incredibly useful when it comes to assignments and he now feels very comfortable asking for help.
3. On the lack of frequent use of student services, some students expressed that they viewed certain issues their own responsibility and thus did not ask for help. Several people noted that getting an appointment with Student Learning Support Service was quite difficult and that they could not get scheduled in as soon as they would have liked. Financial Support and Advice was more regularly approached, but overall students felt capable of handling their finances because they had experience of living on a limited budget at home, and they could readjust their expectations of living standards to a New Zealand environment. Several participants indicated that they preferred talking to a friend instead of a counsellor because of:
 - the language barrier – they did not feel confident expressing their feelings in English;
 - confidentiality issues;
 - lack of familiarity with counselling – non-existent in most developing countries;
 - cultural taboo or stigma (for example amongst Pacific men);
 - inner resilience – people felt they could handle their problems themselves;
 - timeliness – they wanted an instant resolution instead of having to wait for an appointment.

The second survey and focus group interview reveal that simply telling students about the help available to them may not be sufficient in helping students overcome challenges and succeed in their studies. Students' previous experience, English language ability, and their cultures and values may become barriers to their success. This, to a certain extent, agrees with Guilfoyle's (2005) findings on international postgraduate students. Guilfoyle found that although students expressed the intention to network (professionally or socially) with others, societal values of students from some cultures could interfere with social exchange. This means NZAID Prestart needs to help students overcome the barriers and give them strategies to use the services available. Barker, Troth and Mak (2002, p.7) comment that international students are often provided with information about their new environment but not the skills they need to operate effectively in this new environment. Discussion on culturally-specific behaviours, such as tone and body language, will help clarify differences in communication and consequently lead to better communication with people from different cultures (Hellsten and Prescott 2004, p.349; see also Brown & Holloway 2008). Although the 'help seeking' session of NZAID Prestart - modelled on ExcelL (Excellence in Experiential Learning and Leadership) - was useful, more cross-cultural communication skills training, such as 'expressing disagreement' or 'participating in groups', could also be incorporated. Moreover, there appears to be a need to remind students of the support services available throughout their period of study, in addition to the initial promotion of support services available.

The second category of sessions offered relates to academic skills. These sessions introduced the skills students would need, and continued on the theme of highlighting differences in the new learning environment. They were evaluated in both surveys. In the first survey, about four-fifths of the students rated the sessions on writing, reading, critical thinking and referencing 'very useful' or 'extremely useful'. Although the session on research was rated slightly less useful, the majority of the students 'strongly agreed' or 'agreed' that these sessions had given them a better understanding of the skills needed to succeed. In the second survey, students rated academic writing and critical thinking as two of the top five challenges or difficulties in their study and life. A student commented in the questionnaire that lack of familiarity with the different assignment formats had contributed to difficulties. The focus group interview also revealed that students considered their English language ability may have hindered them in dealing with such difficulties. Brown (2008) points out that anxiety over language ability can create stress for international students at the initial stages of study and it is important for institutions to help students develop linguistic confidence at that time. NZAID Prestart, at the February sessions and follow-up sessions, emphasized the importance of improving English and encouraged students to utilize self-access resources, attend grammar workshops, and practise English with native speakers. This may explain why four-fifths of the students in the second survey reported they actively improved their English via reading, grammar

workshops, self-access exercises and so on. Moreover, students in the focus group further indicated their realisation that improvement of academic writing is an ongoing process, and had shown that when faced with academic challenges they would employ strategies emphasized at NZAID Prestart, for example attending workshops or talking to a learning adviser. Overall, awareness raising at NZAID Prestart seems to have set a foundation for further more specific development of academic skills at a later time – a more ‘teachable’ moment. The sessions relating to cultural and social adjustments, for example the sessions on Kiwi culture and budgeting, were not evaluated in the first survey. Nevertheless, the second survey showed some encouraging trends. The most significant trend is the presence of an NZAID ‘community’. Four-fifths of the students indicated they ‘often’ or ‘very often’ socialised with other NZAID students. Over half reported they had participated in NZAID social functions. Tinto (2003a; 2003b), in his discussion on learning communities, states that academic and social experiences contribute to students’ integration to a new educational environment. He points out that students who learn together tend to socialise together, and thus increase their commitment to both the institution and their educational goals (2003a, p.4). The two-week NZAID Prestart, in a sense, was a learning community for the NZAID students. The different NZAID Prestart sessions required students to discuss aspects important to their future study, and such shared learning offered opportunities for them to ‘bond’: this not only helps students establish friendship but also a sense of belonging. Such friendship is important for the successful transition to a new educational environment (Guilfoyle & Thair 2006). The second trend is the initiatives students take to learn more about New Zealand society and culture. About two-thirds of the students said they ‘often’ or ‘very often’ read New Zealand newspapers, watched local television or listened to New Zealand radio. Close to half also reported they ‘often’ or ‘very often’ socialized with New Zealanders. Gu (2009), in a study of the intercultural experiences of Chinese students in the UK, concludes that interaction of international students with their living and studying environment is important to their intercultural adaptation. Throughout NZAID Prestart, the importance of understanding New Zealand culture and society was conveyed through sessions such as student panels and guest lectures. It was emphasised that a better understanding of New Zealand culture and society would not only help in their study, but also in reducing culture shock and improving English. The survey seemed to show that Prestart has gained some positive results in this respect.

However, the survey also highlighted some gaps in the social and cultural adjustment aspects of NZAID Prestart. The majority of the students reported they only ‘sometimes’ participated in external events, for example cultural or social events in Wellington city, or those organised by student organisations. Moreover, only three students indicated they had joined clubs or community groups. Information from the focus group seems to offer two possible explanations of the lack of participation. First, students were not aware how or where to find information of social events or groups. Second, balancing life and study was challenging, particularly for those with accompanying dependants, and students did not have time to participate in extra-curricular events. Relating to this were issues such as depression, fatigue, loneliness and lack of support. Brown and Holloway (2008, p.244) point out that cultural distance, language problems, academic demands, loneliness and homesickness can cause stress at the initial stage of study, easily leading to isolation. As students often cannot access their usual support networks, they need to establish a new set of networks. Guilfoyle and Thair (2006, p.85) state that support from family, lecturers/supervisors, peers, and the community can reduce isolation and lead to a more successful transition. Although NZAID Prestart covered topics such as Kiwi culture, culture shock, and living with dependants, most of these were information-oriented instead of strategy-oriented. Moreover, despite having successfully nurtured a peer network for NZAID students, NZAID Prestart also needs to emphasise the importance of establishing a multitude of networks. Perhaps NZAID Prestart could take another institutional approach, as suggested by Rosenthal, Russell and Thomson (2007), to assist establishment of networks – a mentor or buddy system in which local students can support international students.

Conclusion and recommendations

Overall, NZAID Prestart had achieved its objectives. A New Zealand Ministry of Education report, *Supporting students in tertiary study: A summary of a synthesis of research on the impact of student support services on student outcomes in undergraduate tertiary study* (Prebble et al. 2005, p.6), highlights four strategies for successful orientation programmes: 1) offering opportunities for students to establish supportive personal networks; 2) offering integrated, coordinated and holistic orientation programmes that involve a range of personnel from the institution; 3) drawing on the experiences of students who have moved beyond the first year; 4) connecting the programmes to subject learning. All four strategies were covered in NZAID Prestart. Feedback from the students who participated in the 2009 NZAID Prestart was also generally very positive. However, the programme needs to find ways to encourage more networking, more involvement in communities, and more access to support services. To address these issues in future NZAID Prestart, some suggestions are:

- Team NZAID students up with New Zealanders. A buddy programme with a domestic student during/after Prestart would help with social cultural adjustment and language improvement.

- Group NZAID students with others who will be taking the same course that year.
- Offer cultural guidelines on group dynamics and directness in New Zealand (for example, explain that speaking freely during class discussions is encouraged).
- Emphasise that asking lecturers for advice is normal practice and not in any way considered cheating.
- Educate students about planning ahead when booking appointments with Learning Support Service.
- Offer sessions, and perhaps a separate session for single students with children, about time management skills, loneliness and how to prevent/combat depression.
- Link NZAID students to the wider VUW community, such as the Students' Association.
- Send information/reading on expectations and differences before arrival. Students feel they are more focused before they arrive and have more time, so this would help with their academic preparation.
- Offer more ongoing workshops for NZAID students on top of the follow-up sessions in April and August.
- Organise more regular social events with the NZAID group and also involve domestic students and academic staff.

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Appendix 1 February survey form

NZAID Prestart Evaluation

Postgraduate

1. Which of the following topics in the programme did you find...

	Not useful	Somewhat useful	Useful	Very useful	Extremely useful
Student panel					
<i>Please explain why:</i>					
Help seeking behaviour					
<i>Please explain why:</i>					
Reading and critical thinking					
<i>Please explain why:</i>					
Active participation & academic speaking					
<i>Please explain why:</i>					

Special lectures					
<i>Please explain why:</i>					
Academic Writing					
<i>Please explain why:</i>					
Referencing					
<i>Please explain why:</i>					
Library Session					
<i>Please explain why:</i>					

2. After attending the programme, do you ...

Strongly agree ⇒ Strongly disagree

a) have better understanding of academic expectations at VUW? 5 4 3 2 1

Suggestions for improvement:
.....
.....

b) have better understanding of the skills you will need to help you succeed academically? 5 4 3 2 1

Suggestions for improvement:
.....
.....

c) have a better idea about the process of preparing and doing an assignment? 5 4 3 2 1

Suggestions for improvement:
.....
.....

3. Overall how would you rate the programme?

Strongly agree ⇒ Strongly disagree

5 4 3 2 1

Suggestions for improvement:
.....
.....

4. Is there anything else we should include in NZAID Prestart?

.....
.....
.....

5. Please add any other suggestions for future NZAID Prestart Programme:

.....
.....
.....

Thank you for taking time to give us your feedback. Your comments will help us to improve future Prestart Programmes.

Appendix 2 September survey form

NZAID Prestart 2009 Followup Survey

Dear 2009 NZAIDers,

We are currently reviewing the NZAID Prestart Programme. We'd really appreciate a few minutes of your time to fill in this questionnaire. This survey focuses on your experience of studying at Victoria University of Wellington thus far. The responses will be used for evaluating and further developing the Prestart programme. Please note that participation in this survey is not compulsory. Should you choose to participate, any information you provide will remain confidential and will not in any way be used against you. Results of the survey may be used in future publication, but we guarantee anonymity.

If you have any questions regarding this survey, please contact Inge De Leeuw (phone 463 5944 or email Inge.Deleeuw@vuw.ac.nz), Julia Nicholson (phone 463 6755 or email Julia.Nicholson@vuw.ac.nz), or Dr Xiaodan Gao (phone 463 5996 or email xiaodan.gao@vuw.ac.nz).

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Please

- answer the following questions by clicking on the appropriate box, or by typing in your answer.
- save the document
- email it as an attachment to Inge.Deleeuw@vuw.ac.nz.

Section One

- **Your age group:** 17-20 21-25 26-30 30+
- **Have you studied in countries other than NZ and your home country?**
 Yes. Where? No.
For how long?
- **What degree are you studying at VUW?**
 Bachelors Masters PhD
- **Did you attend the NZAID Prestart in February 2009?**
 Yes. No. If no, please give reasons.
- **Did you attend any follow-up Student Learning Support Service workshops in April and August 2009?**
 Yes. No.

Section Two

	Very Often ▼	Often ▼	Some- times ▼	Never ▼
1. How often do you approach university Student Support Services (Student Finance, etc)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. How often do you consult your NZAID adviser with practical, non-academic questions?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. How often do you participate in or attend Wellington events?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. How often do you socialize with other NZAID students?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. How often do you socialize with New Zealanders?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. How often do you read a New Zealand newspaper?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. How often do you watch New Zealand TV or listen to NZ radio stations?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. When you're faced with financial difficulties, do you:				
<input type="checkbox"/> review your budget?		<input type="checkbox"/> contact your NZAID adviser?		
<input type="checkbox"/> approach Student Finance Service?		<input type="checkbox"/> ask for money from family or friends?		
9. When you're struggling with cultural adjustment to life in New Zealand, do you:				
<input type="checkbox"/> talk to a friend?		<input type="checkbox"/> keep it inside?		
<input type="checkbox"/> go see a counsellor?		<input type="checkbox"/> other. <u>Please explain/describe.</u> ►		<input style="width: 50px; height: 20px;" type="text"/>
10. When you have a question about the NZAID scholarship conditions, do you:				
<input type="checkbox"/> look it up in the NZAID Student Handbook?		<input type="checkbox"/> consult your NZAID adviser?		
<input type="checkbox"/> ask a fellow NZAID student?		<input type="checkbox"/> check the NZAID website?		

Section Three

	Very Often ▼	Often ▼	Some- times ▼	Never ▼
11. How often do you ask questions or participate in discussions during class/tutorials?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. How often do you read before lectures in order to be prepared?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13. How often do you look for extra information around your course content?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14. How often do you participate in study groups outside of class, e.g. PASS, groups of friends?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15. How often do you talk to/email/phone your lecturers or tutors about:				
- course content?				
- assignments?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
- tests/exams?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

- | | Very
Often
▼ | Often
▼ | Some-
times
▼ | Never
▼ |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 16. How often do you talk with your classmates about assignments? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

17. Do you actively work on improving your English? Yes No

If yes, please specify what you do to improve your English. ►

18. What aspects of study/life do you find difficult/challenging at Victoria?

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Writing essays/reports/etc | <input type="checkbox"/> Time/stress management | <input type="checkbox"/> Reading |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Critical thinking | <input type="checkbox"/> Lectures & note-taking | <input type="checkbox"/> Oral presentation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Referencing | <input type="checkbox"/> Researching | <input type="checkbox"/> Participating in class |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Making friends | <input type="checkbox"/> Relationship with supervisors | <input type="checkbox"/> Homesickness |
| <input type="checkbox"/> English | <input type="checkbox"/> Kiwi culture | <input type="checkbox"/> Budgeting |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Balancing life and study | <input type="checkbox"/> Others. Please specify. ► | <input type="text"/> |

19. Have you tried some solutions to these difficulties/challenges? Yes No

If yes, please specify below what you have done.

- I have attended workshops. Yes No
 If yes, please choose from the list below. You may choose more than one.

<input type="checkbox"/> Essay writing skills	<input type="checkbox"/> Time management	<input type="checkbox"/> Reading skills
<input type="checkbox"/> Critical thinking	<input type="checkbox"/> Note-taking skills	<input type="checkbox"/> Oral presentation
<input type="checkbox"/> Grammar	<input type="checkbox"/> Referencing	<input type="checkbox"/> Excell
<input type="checkbox"/> PG workshops	<input type="checkbox"/> Counselling Service workshops	<input type="checkbox"/> Others

- I have talked to SLSS learning advisers. Yes No

- I have talked to advisers at other Student Services. Yes No

- I have talked with my friends/classmates/lecturers/tutors. Yes No

- I have talked to my NZAID advisers. Yes No

- I have joined student clubs/community groups. Yes No

- I have attended social functions held by the University/community. Yes No

- Others. Please specify. ►

Section Four

20. Overall, has your study experience at Victoria been as you expected before arriving here?

Yes No If no, please explain why. ►

21. Reflecting back at the NZAID Prestart programme (including the follow-up sessions), which topic(s) have you found useful or most useful?

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Session on NZAID Handbook | <input type="checkbox"/> Active participation & academic speaking |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Introduction to Student Services | <input type="checkbox"/> Lectures |

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Info session on dependants</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Culture and learning</i> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Intro to Kiwi culture</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Library session</i> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Culture and learning</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Academic writing</i> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Time Management</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Referencing</i> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Help seeking behaviour</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Improving English</i> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Reading and critical thinking</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Thesis writing</i> |

22. What other topics would you add to the programme?

Please specify. ▶

Thank you for your time!

Appendix 3 Focus group interview questions

1. The survey seems to show that non-academic student services (Counselling Service, Student Finance, etc. are not often used by a lot of NZAID students. Why is that?
2. How does this compare to the use of academic student services (mostly Student Learning Support Service)?
3. The survey shows that the majority of NZAID students only infrequently participated in class. What are the reasons? Is there something NZAID Prestart can do to help in this aspect? What?
4. The survey also shows that not many students participated in study groups. Why do you think that is the case?
5. Students seem to prefer talking to their friends or classmates about assignments instead of talking to their lecturers. What are the reasons?
6. The survey shows that writing, oral presentation, critical thinking, balancing life and study, time/stress management, and participating in class are five most challenging aspects of their study here. All these aspects were covered in Prestart. What do you think we can do more of, or do things differently to help NZAID students better handle these challenges?
7. Could the Prestart do more to familiarise students with New Zealand culture? What are some suggestions?

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