

ABSTRACT

“The changing face of Student Services at UNSW@ADFA – Breaking down the Barriers”

UNSW@ADFA is currently undergoing tremendous change both in terms of its civilian student population and its student service delivery. This paper will begin with a brief history of UNSW’s unique role in the provision of educational services for the military and more recently the rapidly growing body of postgraduate International students. In response to these changing demographics, a new position of International Liaison Officer was created. This position has sought to address the broad range of issues which inevitably emerge as a consequence of large scale Internationalisation within a higher education context. The importance of successful cultural transition and social integration, seen as fundamental to social and academic success has underscored the creation of all programs and services developed at UNSW@ADFA.

In fact, the importance of social networking is increasingly seen as a key factor in ensuring a successful transition to University for local as well as International students. Modelled on the many excellent services available at the Kensington campus of UNSW, a comprehensive orientation program spanning over 5-6 weeks has now been created at ADFA; a formalised Peer Mentoring program for postgraduate students on campus has also been established in collaboration with the Counselling unit and Student Development International in Kensington. Also set in motion is the establishment of a peer mentoring program for students studying by distance mode. Further, in recognition of the fact that “the demands of cultural adjustments experienced by International students frequently place them at greater psychological risks than local students”, (Sawir, Marginsin, Deumert, Nyland & Ramia, 2008, p 142) an on-campus counselling service is in the process of being established. Finally, in an attempt to further address the social isolation experienced by many of our students, a sub branch of Arc is being set up to commence in 2011.

The second part of this paper will detail the outcomes of focus groups and surveys and outline the process by which the above programs and services were established. Briefly, the most urgent deficits as experienced by both the local and international postgraduate students at UNSW@ADFA was their sense of isolation from their peers and their perception of an invisible barrier between the International students and the local cohort including the military and civilian ‘divide’. The general sentiment expressed by all groups was a wish to have more opportunities for cross cultural communication and socialisation both within and beyond UNSW@ADFA. The above programs and services all aim to facilitate such opportunities.

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