

**Murdoch University International Student Engagement & Retention
A Case Study for using Sports & Culture to enhance
Intercultural Engagement, Interaction & Integration
in the wider Community.**

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Abstract

The focus of International Education in Australia has changed in recent times. Student Experience is now at the forefront of conversation and interest! Now more than ever, Intercultural engagement, Interaction & Integration in the wider Community are vital for the growth and sustainability of international education.

Murdoch International Student Support has long had a strong service culture which has been a vehicle for its student satisfaction ratings. The current trend in the industry has provided us with more incentives to improve and increase our connection with our various student cohorts. This paper will examine some of Murdoch's programs and strategies it has enacted, demonstrating how the International Student Support Team is engaging with students in these changing times and taking advantage of the recent restructure of the University, to position itself as providing a benchmark in the international education setting in terms of Intercultural Engagement and Interaction within the community.

Although there are many successful models at various institutions; the paper focuses on the strategies implemented at Murdoch University to empower the students to enhance their own experience. This is done through various mediums such as Leadership Skills Development, Sports & Culture. We also strongly believe in the importance of active International Student Groups, which will strategically help in reinforcing informal networks and assisting in retention. Our International Student Groups have increased over the last 12 months. We now have 8 very strong and active groups on campus, for an International Student population of approximately 2200. This is a great achievement from our perspective.

We will use our student cohort from Reunion Island as a case study to demonstrate how our strategies have influenced their Australian and Murdoch University experience.

Key Words

Student Groups, Culture, Sports, Community, Interaction, Engagement

Disclaimer

This paper is not intended as an academic piece. It was written for the purpose of providing an insight into some of the work and strategies currently being done at Murdoch University to support its international student cohort. Information was gathered from the author's day-to-day experience dealing with the students of all nationalities. We hope it can help our fellow peers in similar positions across the industry in developing their own strategies to enhance their cohorts' study experience in Australia.

Acknowledgements

We take immense pleasure in thanking the past and current staff of the International Student Liaison & Recruitment Team, for their invaluable support, commitment, motivation and enthusiasm in providing services to our international student cohort.

It is also worth mentioning the camaraderie and support within the team, which helps each and every one to carry out their duties.

Introduction

Murdoch is the only university in Australia to achieve a Five Star rating for Graduate Satisfaction, for an extraordinary 13 times in 15 years, and was singled out for praise by the Good Universities Guide (an independent national publication) for its consistent performance in this field.

Murdoch's strong service culture has also been a key vehicle for its student satisfaction ratings.

Background

Murdoch University is host to approximately 2,200 onshore international students from most continents and over 100 countries. Its student profile is very different from most Australian Universities with two northern hemisphere countries figuring in the top five source countries, its diversification of international student body is one of its strongest assets. The Office of International Student Liaison and Recruitment (ISLR) takes the lead role in developing strategies, programs and activities to identify and meet the needs of this diverse cohort.

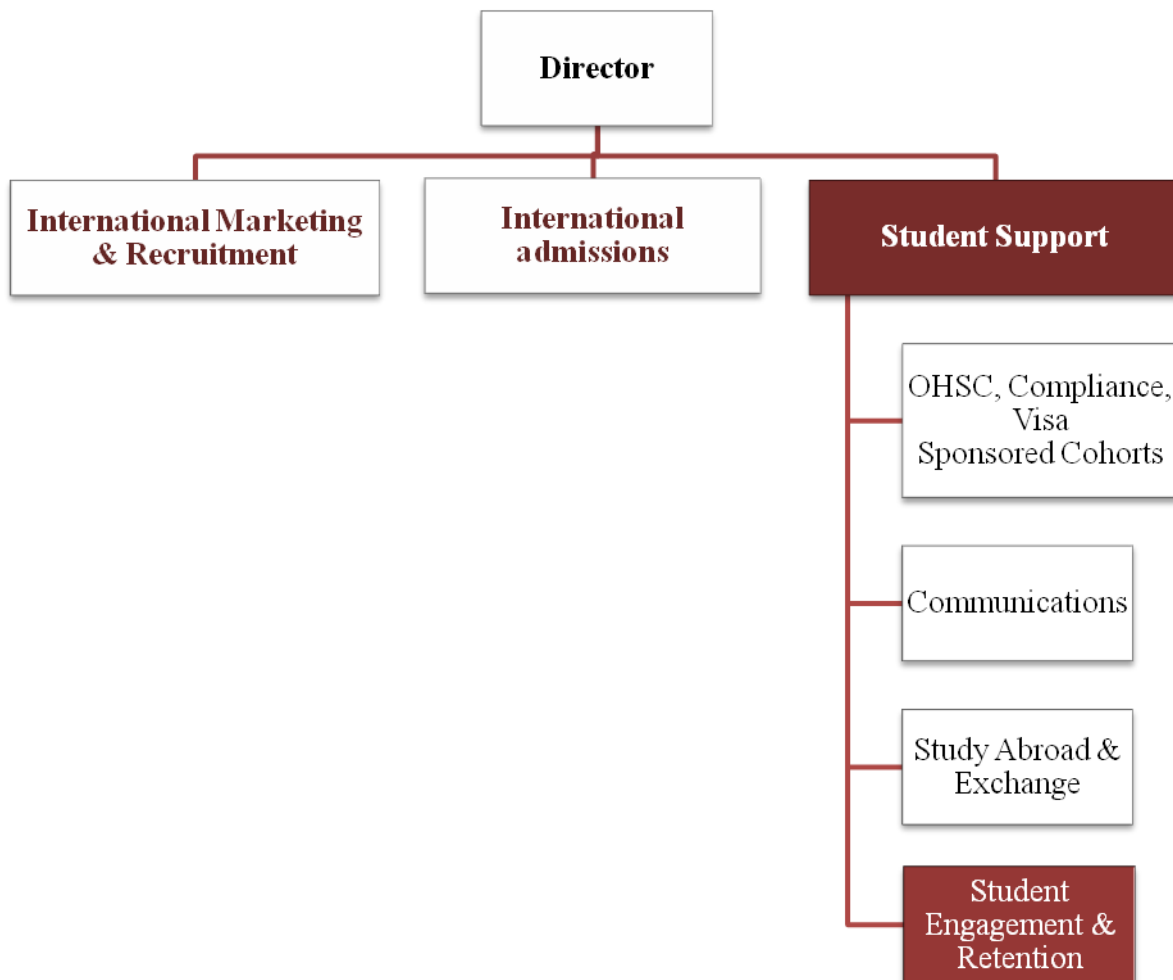
Restructuring and finding new ways of servicing students is not uncommon in the Australian higher education sector and like many institutions across the country, Murdoch University underwent a major re-think of its services to students under the banner of "Murdoch 2010". The process itself was long and drawn out with the rulebook being thrown out the window and a complete overhaul of servicing undertaken. The result is a very different way of servicing students through a student centre for all students.

Prior to "Murdoch 2010" the traditional model of a standalone international office was employed at the University. Post "Murdoch 2010" a combined office of Student Liaison and Recruitment was formed. Since then, separate "Domestic Student Liaison and Recruitment" and "International Student Liaison and Recruitment" (ISLR) focuses have been re-established while maintaining a common interface through the student centre.

Specifically for the International Student Support team, ramifications were dramatic. Prior, the team existed as a small, international-focused group that had little personal day-to-day interaction with colleagues from across the University. Students could drop into the international office and "catch up" with a case officer or make an appointment if they were busy. There was one receptionist and it was a small family atmosphere.

The shift to a larger student centre model brought many early frustrations and challenges. Students had to take a ticket, which was allotted by cohort, for the triaging of, enquires across student cohorts at Murdoch. Students could no longer drop by the office and catch up informally. It was a massive cultural shift for staff and students alike. The shift, however, made the International Student Support team re-think their approach as much of the informal support opportunity that previously existed was now eliminated. This made the team work harder and more focused.

The vision and strategic planning of ISLR's management team has been the foundation of its success. From the hiring of key staff and the strong support to initiatives and projects, the newly established International Student Liaison team set goals early on to establish itself amongst the best in the industry.



As part of the ISLR Team’s Strategic Plan for 2010 and beyond, we have highlighted some areas of priority:

1. Develop relationships with student cohorts including regular interactions.
2. Increase support to student groups and foster creation of new ones.
3. Identifying at-risk students and involving them into sports.
4. Creating Opportunities for Leadership in the Student Community & Develop Student Forums
5. Further develop the Volunteer Program
6. Provide students with opportunities to develop leadership skills

Although the above strategies have been applied to our various groups, for the purpose of this paper, we will demonstrate how the above points have benefited our current cohort from Reunion Island. Some of these strategies have been in place since early 2008.

Reunion Island cohort Background:

Number of Enrolments (08-current)	: 56
Male to Female Ratio	: 25 - 31
Number of graduands (up to S110)	: 19
Number of Voluntary withdrawals (up to S110)	: 15
Number of discontinued (up to S110)	: 5

Programs and Strategies:

1. Broad Strategy: Developing relationship with student cohorts including regular interactions

The Reunionese Perspective: Language

The World English Dictionary describes the term 'Relationship' as the state of being connected or related. It can also be described as the mutual dealings, connections or feelings that exist between two parties, countries, people etc.

At the ISLR Office, we believe this term is extremely important to maintain a high level of service to our international cohort. "In addition to having to adjust to a new social, academic and cultural environment, many international students find that previously successful methods of communication and problem-solving skills are no longer effective in their new context" (Borland & Pearce, 2002). "This will impact significantly on a student's engagement with an Australian teaching and learning environment. For instance, many international students come from a culture that reinforces respect for authority. Such students can find it difficult to adjust to an educational system that encourages questioning of and debate with lecturers. Further, many will find it difficult to seek help from authority figures, preferring instead to resolve difficulties within their family unit" (Colvin & Jaffar, 2007). We want the students to feel at ease approaching us regarding any matter. To establish this relationship, we use various strategies, depending on which group background we deal with.

2008 marked the start of a rather large intake of students from the small French Department of Reunion Island. This group of students offered our advisors a brand new challenge as they are from a very unique culture, which we hadn't really been exposed to before. It was thus decided that the International Student Liaison Officer – Student Engagement & Retention (ISLO) would provide the link between the Student Support Team and the cohort. An added bonus was the ISLO being of Mauritian origin - which neighbours Reunion Island – being able to speak the student's native French language.

The strategy began with working very closely with our Reunionese representative, who would personally be present onshore close to the orientation period. The representative would keep in touch regularly with the students during their initial few weeks and conduct a tour of the campus, where the ISLO would be introduced to the new students. As they enrol during Orientation Week, the ISLO would provide them with the possibility of attending an information session in French, which was hoped would facilitate their integration to the University.

This proved to be very successful as at every Orientation from Semester 1, 2008, we had over 90% of the new students attend French information sessions for extra help on matters they pick up on the first time round at from Orientation Week. In the weeks following Orientation Week, we also noticed an increase in appointments as the students regularly came to the office for support while settling into their first semester. A relationship had been established. It was interesting to note how offering translation services not only increased their interaction with the staff, but surpassed all expectations.

Three years on, we can proudly say that this specific cohort is no longer shy. We regularly receive visits from Reunionese students seeking help on different matters. They also access our services through other mediums newly introduced, such as Facebook, Online Chat, Email, Telephone and Online Queries.

2. Broad Strategy: Increase support to student groups and foster creation of new ones.

The Reunionese Perspective: Establishing Murdoch University Reunionese & French Association (MURFA)

ISLR Office is committed to supporting cultural diversity as it is an important aspect of the acculturation process to be included within its campuses, programs and events. By fostering the creation and nurturing the development of various student groups on campus, we strongly believe it will help enhance the experience of our students and their understanding, tolerance and acceptance of cultural diversity.

Supporting multiculturalism through student groups provides an avenue to better integrate our international cohort into the local community. Integration would generally involve respecting values and drawing on the ethnic, religious and cultural diversity of the population, without detaching the traditions, cultures and attitudes.

In other words, when international students are overwhelmed by the cultural difference between their own and the local culture, the cultural group is used as a vehicle to provide a bridge between both worlds, helping individuals integrate into the new environment more smoothly.

Another benefit that we find invaluable is the student groups' ability to engage with its members, an ability that most of the time, advisors and support staff will struggle to gain. The student groups can thus offer this invaluable link and insight within the student population. The onus is then on the institution staff to maintain a healthy relationship with its various student groups in order to maintain effective communication.

In 2009, we were approached by 2 Reunionese students, who wanted to find out what was required to establish an association to represent their culture. Normally, in this situation, we would refer the students to the Guild/Student Union, under which all student groups/associations are typically affiliated.

Since we had plans to increase the number of student associations on campus, we jumped on the opportunity to provide direct help in fostering this new association. The ISLO acted as mentor to the group, helping the founding members, structure and set up the association. The group was officially affiliated to the Guild and also managed to obtain sponsorship from the Alliance Française of Perth, which provided extra motivation to its members. The Alliance Française aims not only to disseminate the French language and culture in Australia but also to exchange ideas and nurture a bond of friendship with the Australian population.

ISLR offered some funding and help to organise their first event. 'The Grand Carri' welcomed guests to the sound and taste of traditional exotic Reunionese music and food, while being entertained with traditional games, including a quiz which served as a way to teach guests about their culture.

The evening was a great success with over 60 local and international students attending. MURFA is now at its 6th event and boasts over 100 guests from all demographics attending their events.

At ISLR's suggestion of a short documentary on Reunionese culture, enthusiastic MURFA members took on the idea and recently completed their production, which Murdoch provided the audiovisual equipment. The students proudly presented to their sponsors, friends and family back in their home country. The video is a great tool MURFA uses to proudly showcase their culture, traditions and music.

MURFA now not only organises cultural events, but also actively participates in Orientation Week and other activities organised by the University. The committee members are often approached by their peers on various matters including homesickness, academic difficulties to only name a couple. Most of the time, at-risk students will be referred to an advisor to receive further support.

3. Broad Strategy: Identifying at risk students

The Reunionese Perspective: Volley-Ball Clinics

"Participating in sport can improve the quality of life of individuals and communities, promote social inclusion, improve health, counter anti-social behaviour, raise individual self-esteem and confidence, and widen horizons." (sportsotland, 2003, p.7)

While much research relates to the health benefits of *physical activity*, rather than sport per se, it illustrates the following:

- Participation in a one-off bout of physical activity can result in a reduction in anxiety levels and self-reported feelings of increased well-being. Such improvements have been reported to last for up to three hours after the activity session (Raglin, 1990; Steptoe, 1992).
- Improved self-esteem, self-efficacy and perceived competence result from long-term participation in an exercise programme (King et al, 1989).
- Roberts and Brodie (1992) found that minor increases in sporting activity can lead to increases in positive self-assessments.
- Different types of physical activity may be effective in relation to particular conditions. Furthermore, different psychological conditions respond differently to differing exercise regimes; for example, non-aerobic, aerobic, anaerobic, and short, medium or long-term duration, all have differing impacts (Scully et al, 1998; Fox.1999).

Through individual consultations with some of the Reunionese students, it was identified that they were experiencing similar issues such as stress, anxiety, homesickness, loneliness and isolation. Some of them seemed to find it difficult to bridge those issues and create strong relationships with their peers. The group of students was thus gathered and offered to join Volleyball training sessions twice a week, run by the ISLO.

We created a Facebook Group which provided the students with a platform where they could find information on different training techniques, possibilities to discuss various volleyball/training related topics and a way for the group to communicate with the other group members from the comfort of their home.

Using specific drills, the participants unsuspectingly were taught various concepts, including but not limited to:

- Team Spirit
- Communication
- Fair Play
- Tolerance
- Respect

Furthermore, the Volley Ball clinics were a fun way to promote healthy living: balancing studies, work and social activities. Once a month, we also organised a BBQ after the session, where the students would bring and share food/drinks. We also celebrated birthdays with cake.

Towards the end of the first semester, we noted the following:

- A real bond had been created amongst the participants
- The group had grown from an initial 4 to 16
- Participants were now from various demographics, including Reunion Island, Germany, US, Australia, Mauritius and India. We also noted that random students would join in on a casual basis, depending on their availability.
- The core and regular group started meeting outside of training hours to socialise.

It was further noticed that the closer we got to ‘peak’ periods such as mid semester exams, presentations/assignments due dates and final exams, the more keen the students were to participate in the trainings. The ISLO initially predicted a drop in participation towards those periods, but the core group was always there, although most of the time late, in pure islander style.

The training sessions have now been running for 3 semesters. While some of the group only see the trainings as a way to socialise and combat their stress levels, others take it very seriously. In semester 2, 2010, one of the group members was selected in the Murdoch University Volley Ball Team to participate in the University Games held in Perth over a week long of competition.

Feedback from the group includes:

“The Uni Games have probably been the best experience I’ve had so far in Australia!” *Olivier De Froberville, Mauritius.*

4. Broad Strategy: Creating Opportunities for Leadership in the Student Community & Develop Student Forums

The Reunionese Perspective: Outside the classroom participation in wider policy development

Following our strategic planning and extensive investigations with the student community, ISLR established regular Student Groups Forum, which takes place every semester.

This forum gathers Leaders of the various international student groups on campus and International Student Liaison Officers from ISLR. The meetings provide student leaders with an opportunity to contribute to ISLR’s strategic planning for international activities, such as Orientation Week.

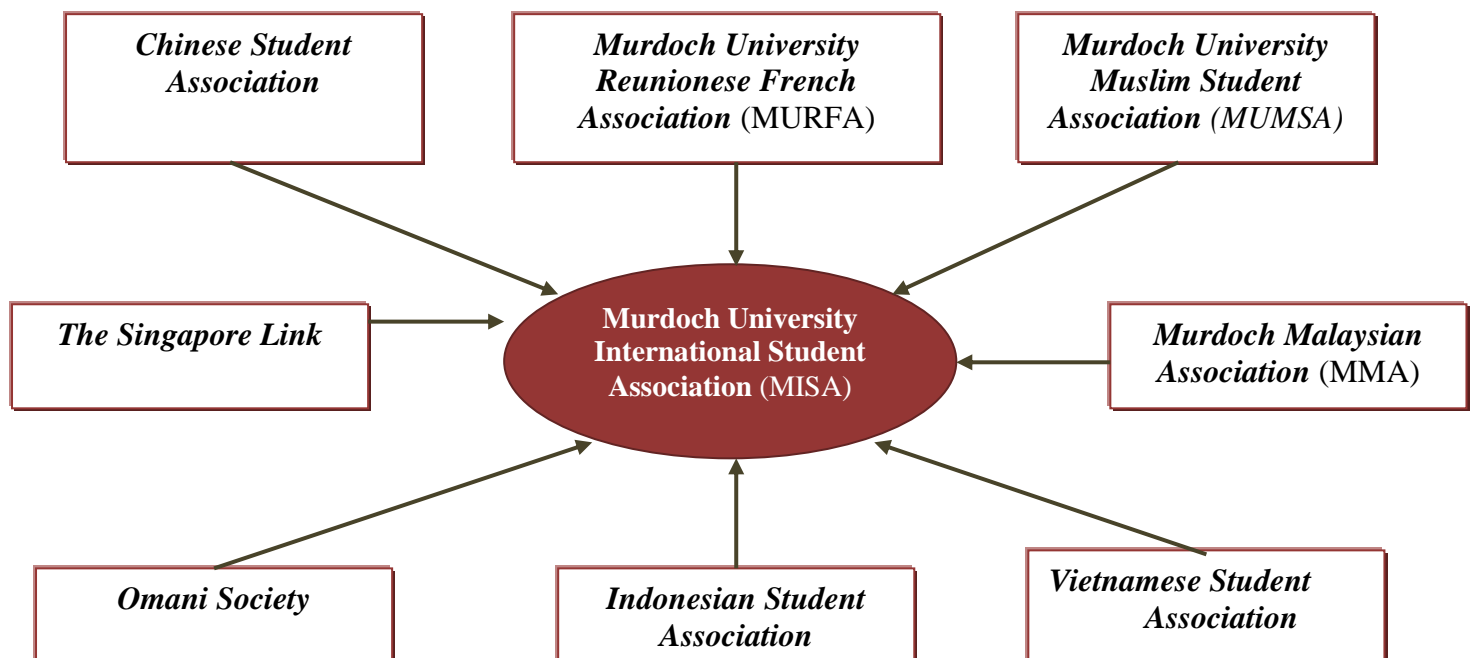
It also provides ISLR an opportunity to obtain a direct link and a valuable insight of current trends and various activities happening within its international student population. Furthermore, the meetings provide an opportunity to identify common issues faced across the different cultural groups. ISLR is then able to be proactive, target those areas and provide solutions.

From the feedback sessions, ISLR has reviewed and implemented new formats for the following:

- Orientation Week Information Sessions
- Reviewing publications and the way in which the Office communicates with the student population.
- Orientation Week activities
- Promotion of events and activities within the wider community, e.g. local councils, family events, concerts, sporting events and more.
- Establishment of Multicultural Day on a semester basis.

Further, ISLR has recently suggested to the student group leaders that the establishment of this Forum be under the official banner of Murdoch University International Student Association (MISA). Until 2007, MISA was the main representative body on campus for International Students. Unfortunately, in the last 4 years, this entity has been inactive due to a lack of interest from the students themselves to form part of the committee. Perhaps one of the contributing factors has been the emergence of the numerous niche student groups.

The proposal is currently under review and awaiting the Murdoch Guild’s approval. If approved, the new structure will be as follows:



5. Broad Strategy: Further develop the Volunteer Program

The Reunionese Perspective: Integrating and contributing to the Wider Community

Service-learning is a teaching method where classroom learning is deepened and extended through service to others. Specifically, service-learning is undertaken by students in the context of meaningful school-community partnerships, to provide experiential learning opportunities within a curriculum, which are a benefit to the community (Gilding & Wallace, 2003).

Service Learning experiences can provide a vehicle for students’ active citizenship, participation in the community and civic responsibility (Gilding & Wallace, 2003).

Following feedback received from consultations with our various student groups, our Volunteer Program was established as an integral part of our Orientation program. We currently manage a group of over 50 volunteers who devote their time for 2 weeks every semester, helping new students settle into University.

The volunteers are divided into 3 teams:

- Enrolment Team: This team is based in computer labs specially allocated for new students to do their enrolment via our online system. Our trained volunteers are there to help with website navigation and understanding the enrolment process. The volunteers are not allowed to provide advice on units' enrolment. This is done through the Academic Chairs who are best placed to provide this sort of advice.
- Student Centre & Welcome Team: The team is based at the entrance of the Student Centre. Their sole purpose is to provide a warm welcome and general guidance. It is also the 'hub' where all Orientation Packs, Student Cards and other material can be obtained. The team also acts as a filter to reduce traffic within the Student Centre.
- Roaming Team: The roaming team basically spreads around the campus, library, computer labs and other high traffic areas. Its purpose is to find and provide general guidance and direction to the lost students.

Each team also nominates members who act as the O Week activities organisers. Our volunteers take an active part in the organisation of these activities, such as Discover Your Campus Race (The Amazing Race, Murdoch Style), Wildlife Park visit & BBQ Lunch, Welcome Dinner and Perth/Fremantle Tour, where they take the new students on a guided tour.

Although the Volunteer Program has been running very successfully for a number of years, as part of our 2010 plan, we have decided to develop it further to benefit the international students on various other aspects.

Coincidentally, we were approached by Ms Nathalie Vauthier, an MBA student from Reunion Island, in early 2010. As she was applying for numerous job positions in the Non-For Profit sector, she was surprised by the lack of opportunities offered to international students on the job market. She wanted to find ways in which international students would be able to find relevant work experience to add value to their courses of study. The timing was perfect as the ISLO – Student Engagement & Retention was working on establishing relationships with local Non-For-Profit / Non-Governmental-Organisations to offer international students volunteering opportunities.

The ISLO and Ms Vauthier have agreed to develop a program which would be submitted to the University for approval and implementation.

The Program aims to:

- Develop a culture and ethos of service towards the community, within the international student population
- Provide selected students opportunities to exercise responsibility and develop leadership skills
- Provide selected students opportunities to learn through helping others
- Provide an avenue to increase interaction between international students cohort and the community
- Foster international students' integration within the community
- Provide local organisations with a pool of skilled and enthusiastic volunteers
- Provide local organisations with an opportunity to develop projects without heavy funding in staffing

Students Benefits

Students accepted in this Program will benefit in various ways:

- Official recognition in their Developmental Transcripts
- Résumé building opportunities
- Personal & Professional Development
- Contributing to the local community
- Placement related to their field of study (if applicable and available)

Local Organisations' Benefits

- Pool of volunteers already mobilised, screened and interviewed
- Increased outreach opportunities and boost organisation's profile on campus
- Pool of skilled individuals at no cost (unless remuneration is provided by the organisation)

This Program is currently under development and subject to approval is anticipated to commence early 2011.

6. Broad Strategy: Identifying Leadership Skills within student cohort

The Reunionese Perspective: Realising Dreams

Activities and programs are mainly offered to the wider student population rather than at an individual level. Most institutions, unfortunately do not have the necessary resources, and are not in a position to develop programs for individuals. Through ISLR's close engagement with this cohort, we were able to identify the students with particular abilities and those who demonstrated leadership potential. One can refer to them as 'unpolished diamonds!' We decided to take the initiative to offer those students with very specific opportunities to further develop those skills, hoping that with positive results, their integration, personal and professional development would be facilitated. Furthermore, those same individuals can help to identify other students with potential within their own communities and providing them with opportunities also, thus creating a ripple effect.

Ms Carole Rakotonirina

Carole initially enrolled in a Bachelor of Arts. When she arrived in Australia in 2006, her plan was to study Banking/Politics for 3 years and eventually transfer to an Administration Institute in France to complete a Master's degree. She changed her majors in her 2nd year and opted for a double major in Public Policy and Accounting which she believed was more marketable and offering more career prospects.

Although her 1st semester was enjoyable, the main difficulty she faced was being far from home during a period where her family needed her presence. At University, the main issue was the language barrier and the inability to communicate as accurately as she would have in her mother tongue. It also took her a while to understand the expectations of the education system in Australia but once she did, she became far more efficient in her studies. The following years proved to be much more productive and enriching. The highlight of her degree, as she states, is probably her internship at the Western Australian Parliament, which was organised through Murdoch University.

"This was a very unique learning experience, both academically and socially. I was interacting with quality students and I had the chance to meet very influential politicians and public officers who were very inspiring and engaging. Additionally, I decided to get more involved in the student community and develop my network, seizing any opportunity that I could to enhance my life experience in Australia."

She thus started volunteering for Murdoch International's Orientation Week. She was an integral part of the volunteers' team til Semester 2, 2009. During her time as a volunteer, she was identified as a potential leader and thus given the responsibilities of "Volunteer Leader". Furthermore, witnessing the increasing number of Reunionese students on campus, she approached ISLR for support in co-founding and establishing MURFA due to the growing need to support students from French backgrounds. With the help of ISLR, MURFA was established in Semester 2, 2009 under and ran their first events.

"ISLR has very much influenced my path. After I graduated, I was offered a work experience at ISLR for two months and things went very well and I got very lucky - I now have full-time position with the same office. When I was volunteering for Orientation, I gradually got more interested in international students matters. I worked closely with my student adviser, Nicolas Castagnette, who assisted me with developing my ideas of a Reunionese French association and implementing my plans. I'm very thankful for the guidance and the support I received from ISLR. It definitely made a big difference in my experience as they encouraged me to make things happen."

Carole now handles the outbound Study Abroad & Exchange portfolio, facilitating the exchange experience of Murdoch students.

Mr. Gael Salezy

Gael enrolled in Bachelor of Commerce, majoring in Banking and Finance, in Semester 1, 2008. He was introduced to us by a student volunteer.

His original goal was to discover new cultures and make new experiences for his personal development. He hoped that mastering the English language and developing personally and professionally would land him a fruitful career in a French speaking country as a bilingual.

After one semester, Gael was tempted to head back as he faced numerous difficulties integrating the Australian culture. He received support from his friends, family and the ISLR office, which helped him overcome his difficulties.

In Semester 1, 2010, after a few individual consultations, it was identified that Gael had a lot of potential. He showed signs of leadership skills but didn't act on it due to a lack of opportunities. The ISLO offered him an opportunity to attend a Community Consultation run by the Office of Multicultural Interest. The workshop covered the issues faced by the Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CaLD) population of Perth, in finding employment. Gael surpassed all expectations by being very active, providing much insight on the issues faced by individuals within his community.

He seemed so enthusiastic that he was encouraged to apply for a vacancy position on the Ethnic Youth Advocate (EYA) group. The Ethnic Youth Advocate (EYAWA) was established in 2004 as an advisory group to the Ethnic Youth at Risk Working Group which comprised the Office of Multicultural Interests (OMI) and the Office of Children and Youth. The Working Group was established to explore and address the needs of ethnic youth in Western Australia. Gael is now an active member.

Gael went on to also become the President of MURFA, where he established a new vision and strategic plan for the long term sustainability of the Association. Gael plans for MURFA to become a state-wide association that will also welcome Reunionese and French individuals outside of Murdoch University.

His enthusiasm and willingness lead Murdoch University to appoint him as a delegate at the recent APAIE Conference on the Gold Coast where he participated in the IRU Round Table.

*"The ISLR Officer helped me realise that I had the potential to do something significant while I was studying for my career. The world market is nowadays highly competitive and degrees do not have enough weight to get you the best jobs. Extra scholar activities become more and more a better assessment of people skills. Many students realise this at the end of their degree, when it is too late. *

Consequently, talking to my advisor made me realise it early enough to build up my CV. Through different meetings and discussions, my advisor gave me opportunities to be involved in different conferences and forums, become a member of advocacy groups such as EYA and supported me with the organisation of events with MURFA.

All of this helped me to enhance my self-confidence and showed me how to apply what is taught in classes: If a skilled enough person put the right amount of effort in a job, it can only lead to success. Like a fire needs a spark to start lighting, a student needs to find the trigger to his/her pathway towards his/her goal. For me the ISLR Office was that trigger."

Mr. Michel Marondé

Michel was initially introduced to us by Gael as they are both from the same country. Michel arrived in Australia with the firm intention of realising his dreams and studying journalism. He was looking for a chance to prove himself and was highly motivated. As he faced some issues settling into his course, he quickly realised though that Journalism was not the suitable course for him. He approached ISLR for guidance and help to find his way. Through debriefs and brain storming with his advisors, he decided to turn to studies in Screen and Sound.

“The ISLR Office staff has always been here to guide me through these changes of orientation. I was often dubious about my future and my real potential and my advisor helped me gain self-confidence and motivation.”

Michel’s motivation, participation and productivity increased overnight. He had suddenly found his field. He produced a short film for the purpose of an assignment and posted it on his Facebook page. It received so much acclaim from his peers that it confirmed the change of orientation was a positive one.

Being a “Facebook Friend” of the ISLR Team, Michel shared his video with us online. We were very impressed by this talented young man and decided to offer him some more opportunities to develop his skills. At that time, as we were helping the MURFA to establish itself, we offered Michel the opportunity to provide the Association with some well needed advertising material. We thus provided the young ‘Director’ with the appropriate media equipment and offered him the opportunity to produce a video showcasing the Reunionese Culture present at Murdoch University.

The intention in producing the video was to:

- Provide MURFA with promotional material
- Provide Michel with some ‘work experience’ and develop a portfolio
- Provide MURFA and its members to proudly represent their culture

“My plans for the future are now clear: I want to be a director and I will do anything to gain experience and increase my knowledge in the theoretical, practical and technical fields of Screen and Sound.”

At the time of this writing, Michel has informed us that he has been offered the opportunity to work with one of his lecturers in developing a documentary for a National Television Channel.

Bringing it all together: Multicultural Day

Multiculturalism stresses the importance of recognising cultural diversity within the same political framework as well as equal chances and opportunities (Fowers & Richardson, 1996; Kymlicka, 1995; Parekh, 2000).

What is Multicultural Day about?

Multicultural Day is about recognising and celebrating the cultural and ethnic diversity of the Murdoch University International Students’ Population. During this event, student groups display, promote and share different aspects of their own culture to the wider community, including traditions, food and values. It is a great opportunity for the Murdoch students, staff and the wider student community to learn about the various countries represented on campus. It also offers the students a way to proudly represent their culture/country.

From a yearly event, Multicultural Day is now organised every semester. This successful event is growing in popularity with more staff and students sharing and learning about the many cultures on campus. The Day is launched with a warm greeting to campus from the Director of the Murdoch University Kulbardi Aboriginal Centre. This was followed by many highlights of the day including cultural performances, delicious foods, activities, art and photography displays and more. Students showed great initiative with the stalls, such as students from Pakistan who raised funds for the Pakistan Flood relief.

Multicultural Day is regarded as the main event on the student groups’ calendar.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we believe that it is vital:

1. To not only provide programs for the mass, but that it is as important to facilitate students to take ownership, identify and develop their own sets of skills.
2. To provide the tools to connect people to what is familiar (their compatriots) while validating where they've come from.
3. To prepare graduates for lifelong skills through integration within the academic and broader social community.

It is important to note that success in developing international student support plans and strategies require solutions to common issues that may need to be different to achieve similar outcomes. This paper uses one such specific example, the French-Reunionese society perspective at Murdoch.

While this is one perspective it creates a framework through which we can view sport and culture to as vehicles to engage international students. Different cohorts may require different tactics however the overall strategy remains the same – sport and culture.

Throughout this experience it has confirmed the basis of the overall study, that no matter what nationally or cultural background we need to find ways in which to reach out and engage with international students in terms which are familiar. This provides the pathway to encourage the attributes of confidence, self-assurance and the end result of belonging to a community, which was once so unfamiliar.

Last but not least, ISLR believes investing in Student Groups is a pillar of success, but not the only one. Colvin & Jaffar (2007) observed that student groups alone are not an adequate support strategy. They need to be supplemented by specialist staff, which underlies the significance and importance of ISLR.

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