

# Using Student-generated Ideas to Improve Integration of Study Abroad and Exchange Students

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Inbound Study Abroad and Exchange students are often frustrated by the difficulties they encounter in making Australian friends during their time in Australia while out-bound students are interested in communicating with people from their host country before they travel overseas. At The University of Queensland, we have been exploring and implementing new strategies to identify the issues of integrating non-award students into the wider university community and, at the same time, provide additional opportunities to engage domestic students thinking of participating in a global experience.

Since 2009, we have been running focus groups of incoming study abroad and exchange students three times per semester.. The focus groups serve as a forum for students to provide feedback on the program and for us to hear about their experiences at UQ and in Australia in general. Among other things, these sessions have generated a number of ideas about what students feel would be helpful for them in integrating into student life at UQ.

This presentation will discuss how the focus groups are run, some of the key findings from the focus groups and the strategies implemented to improve the student experience as a result of this feedback, including

- Campus tours led by outgoing exchange students at Orientation
- Social events mixing incoming and outgoing exchange students
- Involvement with clubs and societies, particularly one run by returned outgoing exchange students
- Increasing awareness amongst study abroad and exchange students of services already offered at UQ, such as mentoring programs.

One effect of the implementation of these strategies is the increased involvement of out-bound exchange students with the cohort of in-bound non-award students.

The presentation will conclude by discussing some of the barriers and limitations to what we have been able to implement, as well as additional ideas that we are considering for the future.

## **Key Words**

Study Abroad, Student Exchange, integration, orientation, student support