

Shaping our vision through international student voices: what do they really need?

Dr Patricia Dooley

Humanities Learning & Teaching, Curtin University

What's your research question?	How can universities ensure that they meet the needs of students from expanding international markets by providing quality educational outcomes?
Main point of your idea...	In a market-driven field, and with ever-tightening purse strings, Australian universities are under increased pressure to recruit students, particularly international full fee-paying students. The most lucrative of these are postgraduates. We are happy (and need) to take international students' money, but how do we ensure that we provide a quality education, and deliver what we promise in our marketing strategies?
Importance of your idea...	In the quest to be inclusive and broad-reaching in their marketing approach, universities are having to be more business-like in their operations. This means that students are becoming potential 'customers', paying hefty fees for 'services'. So there is a moral and financial obligation to provide a quality product in a fiercely competitive marketplace.
What is the context?	<p>The state government has identified a relative drop in the popularity of WA as a destination for international students, and has recently pledged \$2m over 5 years to launch a strategic plan to attract more overseas students and boost international education (Government of Western Australia, 2018). At a time when local universities will be jostling for student places, they will be willing to be as flexible as possible with entry criteria in order to attract more students from more markets. If this means dropping English language entry scores, we may be setting students up to fail.</p> <p>In the case of P/G students, it is assumed that they are well-prepared by virtue of having completed a degree program previously. However, this may have been in a very different academic environment, where conventions and attitudes towards the work of others is viewed from a very different perspective. Time is money, and most students are keen to complete their degree program in the shortest possible time. However, students may have used a range of diverse routes to get into their chosen program of study. So while we expect them to be able to 'hit the ground running' many are 'first years' in many respects, and prior knowledge in certain areas is not a given. So we cannot afford to leave some students 'high and dry'.</p>
Does it require a methodology? If yes, what is it?	Yes; interviews with students who are offered intervention (those who do and who don't take it up) could provide rich data to reveal the perceived effectiveness of student support.
What (if any) are the meta issues?	<p>Can we actually deliver what we promise? Do we have to take shortcuts along the way? Alter our curriculum? Our assessments?</p> <p>Students expectations – are they realistic? What about our expectations? Are we setting them up to fail? (ABC, 2018).</p> <p>How do we ensure the integrity of our courses, and ultimately maintain the university's reputation?</p> <p>Are we forcing them into finding creative ways of 'succeeding' in their degree programs? Is the destination more important than the journey?</p> <p>In other words, are our students intent on getting their degree <i>at all costs</i>, thus missing out on the student experience and necessary skills development along the way?</p>

	In a market that is becoming more consumer-oriented, students have paid substantial tuition fees up front (paying for goods/services), for their degree and may struggle to achieve this goal.
What are the implications for SoTL?	English/academic language screening and support. How effective is this? Tracer studies could reveal any correlation between students who are proactive in attending support/interventions and ultimate academic success. However, this does not automatically indicate a causal relationship. Anecdotally, the students who most need support are often those who are least likely to come forward and access it. Therefore, it would be beneficial to explore students' perceptions of the kinds of support they actually need. This could inform future models for ensuring the best outcomes.
Is there a professional practice outcome and is it applicable across disciplines?	Yes, in order to identify early in their program, which students may be at risk of failure due to levels of English/academic language issues, Curtin has mandatory Post Entry Language Assessments (PELAs) and intervention for all commencing students at undergraduate level, but implementing this system across the board at p/g level has proven to be a much more complex matter. There is naturally a pushback to such a system from some areas. If students have already met minimum language entry requirements, why would we want to test/screen them again? Intervention naturally follows the PELA, and it should be targeted, timely, and shaped to suit the needs of the students
What is your key question to or insight sought from the 'critical friends'?	How do we meet the needs of students from expanding diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds without putting the extra burden on teaching staff? Does the shift towards a more consumer-based approach have an effect on academic performance?

References

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