

International Student Services: Our Business or Everyone's Business?

Bryan Burke
The University of New South
Wales

I feel honoured to be asked to present a keynote address to this the Eighth Annual Conference of ISANA. At the same time it makes me feel rather old - almost a sign of having reached my dotage - since the organisers have asked me to talk about the past history and development of international student advising and ISANA, to reflect on where we are now and then give you my thoughts on likely future developments.

At the outset I need to admit that I am talking from a particular perspective which is that of the university sector. My views are derived from my extended experience in, and knowledge of universities. I am aware that like the Liberal Party, ISANA is now a 'broad church' which has opened up to all those who provide support services to international students in a range of settings including TAFE, ESL and Private colleges as well as the universities. Since I have no real knowledge of these areas, what I am going to say today may be only partially relevant to them, although the broad issues I believe apply to us all.

Apart from the fact that few of us can develop expertise across all areas, my primary involvement has been with umbrella student services groups. This was first as President of the Australian and New Zealand Student Services Association [ANZSSA] for six years and now as President of the Asia Pacific Student Services Association [APSSA]. So apart from assisting in the birth of OSAN, the original incarnation of ISANA, I have only had a peripheral involvement with the development of the organisation.

I have taken as the title of my address '**International Student Services: Our business or everyone's business?**' as this neatly summarises the main points I want to make to you today. My basic theme is that although we started as specialist services, it is now time for everyone in our institutions to see supporting international students as their business. It seems to me that we have now reached the stage where our institutions can no longer treat students just as learners, largely responsible for their own learning. Instead institutions have to become 'client oriented', treating students (both domestic and international) as clients as well as learners. So in this presentation I will talk about 'Where we've been', offer my thoughts on 'Where we're going' and then move on to discuss the implicit question 'Whose business is it anyway?'

DEVELOPING OUR BUSINESS - WHERE WE'VE BEEN The Colombo Plan, the ODA agency and the first advisers

Australia has always had students from overseas in our universities, but it was the Colombo Plan established in the early 1950s which provided a focus. Under this program

the Australian Government provided university scholarships to aid the development of countries in South and South East Asia.

Apart from the significant contribution that the Overseas Development Aid program made to the 'manpower' needs of developing countries in our region, the agency also made a major contribution to the development of our profession. From the beginning the agency had an enlightened view, accepting that if their students were to be successful, they would require social and educational support while they were studying in Australia.

Jan Hastings was the first social worker to be appointed to the Australian Development Aid Agency. She ensured that the agency and its successors' had a strong commitment to the provision of comprehensive social work support services for students sponsored by the Australian Government.

The main driving force in further promoting the high standard and professionalism of this service was Audrey Horridge who was the National Director of the AIDAB Social Work Service for many years. She was certainly one of my early mentors and inspired a generation of workers in the field, leading to AIDAB being the main support for students from other cultures and principal repository of cross cultural counselling expertise. Although the agency endured almost annual reviews for more than ten years, it was only with the dawn of the economic rationalist era and the resultant contracting out of student support to the institutions that the AusAID Social Work Service finally imploded this year.

In the late 50s and early 60s Overseas Student Counsellors were also appointed at the University of Newcastle, The University of New South Wales and the University of Western Australia. The people in these jobs were generally Student Counsellors who had a special interest in and developed expertise working with people from other cultures. Then in the early 70s these workers burnt out through over commitment and lack of support, which provides a strong message for ISANA members. The positions subsequently disappeared and overseas students in the universities were 'main-streamed'- that is overseas students were expected to access standard counselling services and other student support services in the same way that domestic students did.

The Eighties and the UNSW Survey

The mid 80s represented a turning point for international students in Australia. Under the subsidised student program, anyone wanting to study in Australia had to gain a place in the country quota allocated by Foreign Affairs. They were then required to pay a proportion of the cost of tuition to the Australian government as a 'visa fee'. This charge was increased arbitrarily and without warning over a number of years from \$1,500 to over \$3,500 which made it very difficult for students and their parents to make sensible financial plans. To make it worse, the money went straight to the government, and universities received no additional funds for taking international students, so that there was no incentive for providing extra services.

There was also a fierce debate in the community focusing on Asian migration. This debate was often referred to as the 'Blainey debate' after the Melbourne Professor of the same name who claimed that disproportionate numbers of Asian migrants were being allowed to settle in Australia. Apart from vigorous debate in the media and rowdy public meetings, the right wing white supremacist group National Action was quite active. At UNSW there was a proliferation of racist graffiti and several ugly incidents on campus.

As if this was not enough to make students anxious, the Federal Government set up Committees of Review to examine and make recommendations on the overseas student program (the Goldring committee)⁷ and the foreign aid program (the Jackson committee)³. Both reports were tabled in 1984.

In many ways there are disturbing resemblances to our present situation with the Hanson phenomenon, however, the current situation seems much worse. The Blainey situation did not lead to the establishment of a political party. Perhaps more importantly government prevarication did not make race relations a major issue as it has become as a result of the Mabo and Wik decisions and the attitude of the Howard government towards Hanson and Aboriginal Reconciliation.

UNSW survey

Back in 1984 I was working as a Counsellor in the Student Counselling Unit at UNSW and I was made painfully aware of the stress being experienced by international students. Usage of the Counselling Service by international students increased dramatically during 1984 and I had to arrange three or four psychiatric referrals and a repatriation for international students that I encountered in Counselling

. That year I attended an AIDAB sponsored workshop led by Paul Pedersen, a well known and widely respected authority in cross cultural communication and counselling. As a result of this workshop I realised that this was the area I wanted to work in since my professional interests and skills were now in synergy with my own personal commitment to a long term cross-cultural relationship. So I decided to undertake a comprehensive survey of the experiences and needs of undergraduate students at UNSW. This proposal gained the strong support of our Vice Chancellor who saw that it would provide the data needed to guide the University's response to the social and political forces at play.

In fact this 1984 UNSW survey was the first survey of overseas students that had been conducted in Australia for over 10 years⁵. It was a comprehensive postal survey of almost 1800 undergraduates and achieved a response rate of 75 percent. Preliminary results of the survey were presented in 1985 using ANZSSA as a platform to publicise the acute financial difficulties of many students.

Appointment of the first Overseas Student Adviser

Before publishing the full report in 1986⁸ I spent four months travelling in South America with my partner who is from Chile. On the way I travelled to the United States and took the opportunity to see what was being done in the provision of services to foreign students at the University of Hawaii, UCLA and the University of Southern California in Los Angeles⁶. Discussions with these colleagues proved to be quite inspirational and gave me ideas on what needed to be done at UNSW.

The main findings of the UNSW survey were:

- money difficulties and problems with housing affected the majority of students
- students were reluctant to use mainstream services like counselling - it was a foreign concept and students preferred to rely on their personal networks or overcome their difficulties on their own
- in spite of the migration debate, students reported low levels of personal discrimination on campus, although they experienced some racial harassment of an impersonal and anonymous kind off-campus.

The report also contained a series of recommendations to UNSW which argued that to ignore the differences between overseas and local students in effect discriminates against

them. The University accepted these recommendations and in 1987 we appointed Betty Chow as the first Overseas Student Adviser in an Australian university.

The Westwood Workshop and the genesis of OSAN

Feeling the need for further training and development we organised a workshop at the end of 1988 with Marvin Westwood, an authority in cross-cultural counselling. This workshop was jointly sponsored by UNSW and ANZSSA and attracted over 30 participants from a wide range of settings - universities, AIDAB, TAFE, migrant education etc. At the conclusion of the workshop we all decided we wanted to keep in contact to share experiences, provide support to each other and collaborate on developing programs.

During 1989 there were a number of major developments. At UNSW we received a grant to establish an International Student Centre and I was transferred to direct the new centre.

Then in May 1989 we organised a conference at UNSW for members of the Westwood workshop and others interested in international students. After an interesting array of papers and workshops, the participants at this meeting then voted to constitute themselves as the Overseas Student Adviser's Network (OSAN) with Ann Skea as the founding President. As a fledgling organisation it was agreed to establish OSAN as a special interest group under the general umbrella of ANZSSA to provide a stronger national voice and forum for international student issues.

Introduction of the full-fee regime

A much more significant development in 1989 which had far reaching consequences was the introduction of the full-fee regime. The Australian Government abolished the subsidised student program and required all new international students commencing in 1990, to pay the full-cost of their education. Government funds previously spent on the subsidised program were transferred to a new scholarship scheme with countries targeted according to Foreign Affairs priorities. The award covered tuition fees and a generous living allowance with some awarded on merit and others on equity grounds to women and individuals from disadvantaged groups in the community. This policy change involved a move away from an aid emphasis in our international student program, to a trade emphasis or as the title of a conference I attended that year put it 'The Commodification of Education'.

Of course the positive side of the introduction of fee-paying students was that it put international student issues on to the agenda and encouraged institutions to service their needs. It was now possible to argue that providing appropriate services made good business sense, since student services assist in the retention of students and satisfied students are important for ongoing 'word of mouth recruitment'.

At this time the AVCC adopted its first Code of Ethics covering the provision of educational services to International Students⁷. The Code committed universities to provide amongst other things, support services to the international students they enrolled. Although there are no real mechanisms to ensure compliance, the Code has provided a helpful yardstick for institutions and for those using or purchasing the services provided: In fact AusAID has relied heavily on the Code in developing its new contract with universities accepting its students. AusAID insisted that the Code requires institutions to provide a full range of support services to all international students and that their own Social Work Service only duplicated these services.

Involvement of other related organizations

Throughout this period another organisation that had a strong and growing influence was IDP - or the International Development Program of Australian Universities and Colleges to give its original title⁸ in full. As the name suggests, IDP was a group set up initially by the universities to undertake educational aid programs overseas, mainly by bringing university administrators and academics to Australia to upgrade their qualifications or sending Australian 'experts' to work in local institutions, especially in Indonesia. With the advent of the full-fee regime, IDP became the shop front for promoting Australian institutions offshore, setting up a network of Australian Education Centres throughout the region to recruit students.

The Annual IDP Conference became the main meeting place for those interested in international students. Initially the programming included student support, but increasingly the interests of the marketeers and recruiters came to predominate. With the establishment of OSAN and the move of the IDP Conference from a modest but high powered meeting at ANLI to five-star hotels around the country the number of ISAs attending decreased rapidly.

Attempts to establish a comprehensive Australian organisation for international educators, bringing together people in all aspects of international education-recruitment, admissions, support, community groups, ESL etc - have not been really successful to date. IDP has seen its conferences as the local equivalent of NAFSA Conferences, but this claim is only partially true and it is by default rather than design.

In the early 90s a group started to organise the Australian Association of International Educators (AAIE) with active encouragement from DEET, including seed money to undertake the development work. This Association was seen as becoming the Australian equivalent of NAFSA or the European Association for International Educators (EAIE). Unfortunately this promising initiative ran into the sand with the early death of the main driving force, Dr Elizabeth Dines from the University of Adelaide and no one has had the energy or vision to take up the task since.

Development of ISANA

With the adoption of the term 'international' student to replace the parochial term 'overseas' student OSAN became ISANA in 1993. Under both acronyms the group has continued to develop in both numerical strength and professionalism. This has been the work of the founding President Dr Ann Skea and subsequent Presidents - Dr Ross Lehman, Dianne Gabb and Patrick Willix - who have contributed to the development and evolution of ISANA to make it the professional organisation that it is today. It is by far the largest Special Interest Group in ANZSSA and as we can see from this meeting, ISANA holds highly professional annual conferences featuring a comprehensive program of presentations and skills development workshops.

For me moving from Counselling to International Student Advising has invoked a strong feeling of 'here we go again'. When I first entered Student Counselling we spent a lot of time pondering our role and trying to establish our identity and it seems that ISAs are experiencing a similar identity crisis.

There is no consensus on what the role involves and little consistency between organisations in the status or remuneration of ISAs. In the various settings in which they work, ISAs may be solely concerned with student support or may combine this with housing, language support, administration or recruitment activities. If there is no agreed role definition, there is

even less agreement on the type of training appropriate to the job. From my observations, ISAs tend to come either from the School of Experience and are characterised by a heartfelt commitment and volunteer experience, or from the School of Professional Helpers who generally have a background in Psychology, Social Work, Counselling or Community Development.

Over the years, surveys have been conducted to describe what ISAs do, various training workshops have been organised and some efforts have been made to provide more systematic training.

In many ways the benchmark against which we compare ourselves is NAFSA, and I know that they have been down the same road we are travelling. Advisers in the US first achieved some clarification of their role then focused on professional development. An integral part of annual NAFSA conferences now are the training workshops for new and not so new ISAs which enables them to get credit towards a certificate. A similar program has been developed by Marvin Westwood and his colleagues in Canada working with the Canadian Bureau of International Education (CBIE).

Now the Canadian program is being offered in Australia through a collaboration between the University of British Columbia (UBC) and the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT). A two day workshop was offered at the recent IDP Conference, with participants gaining credits towards the UBC-RMIT Certificate in Intercultural Studies. To qualify for the certificate, people must complete five modules including two core electives, one skills elective and two field electives. Each module consists of a two day workshop followed by a distance learning component by Email which is equivalent to 30 contact hours. It is envisaged that people will complete the certificate over a number of years. Another program of possible interest to ISAs is the Post Graduate Diploma in Professional Development in International Education which is being developed by Deakin and Monash Universities and will be offered by distance learning methods.

Other important recent developments in ISANA include the building of close links with the NLC - the main international student association in Australia- with the Head of each organisation being invited to present a keynote address at the other's annual conference. ISANA has also been able to take a great leap forward in achieving its networking goals through the development of ISANA-Net which facilitates easy and rapid distribution of information and sharing between members.

Of course in addition to these various activities, successive ISANA Executive Committees have made submissions and lobbied government on issues affecting international students and attempted to build effective formal links with government departments.

WHERE ARE WE GOING?

In the first part of this paper I have given a brief account of 'Where we've been'- at least that is the way I have seen the development of our profession. Now I would like to consider the questions 'Where are we going'. What are some of the challenges and opportunities that we will face in the coming years? I will try and briefly sketch each of these, knowing that if necessary I may be able to elaborate in the question time following this presentation.

Funding uncertainties and the push to privatization

Governments of all political persuasions, both in Australia and overseas are having difficulty balancing budgets and meeting all the demands put on them. As a result, funding to the universities has been progressively reduced with a corresponding move to user pays and increasing privatisation. We are all aware of the dependence of many of our institutions on international fee income - a dependence which is a little frightening given the effects of the Hanson debate, the currency crisis and downturn in the economies of the Asian Tigers our traditional source countries for students.

In addition, universities are becoming more entrepreneurial forming alliances with one another and with business interests to establish educational and research ventures domestically and offshore. Universities are now actively seeking funding from alumni and the corporate sector. Again to use my university as an example; UNSW now earns almost half of its recurrent budget from its own efforts and plans on taking that to more than 60 percent. This certainly places a very different interpretation on the term 'public universities', especially with the University of Queensland attempting to buy Bond University and Melbourne University setting up a parallel private university.

In our various institutions we have all become very conscious of the injunction 'more for less' – our limited staff and workloads are ample evidence of the success of this. The other injunction 'work smarter, not harder' presumably by taking advantage of the modern technologies has very limited relevance in student support which is of necessity people intensive. What it no doubt means is that we will have to pass on to our students the cost of some of our activities, especially the noncore activities, say in the social-recreational area.

Another coping strategy is to make increasing use of volunteers. In this we can learn a great deal from our North American colleagues who use student volunteers extensively and provide them with training, social activities, certificates or other non-financial rewards. They also make use of community volunteers in providing many of their non-core activities. Unfortunately I am not that hopeful of being able to emulate their approach, as Canada and the US have a very strong volunteer ethic and a tradition of philanthropy. It seems to me that we in Australia are much 'tighter' with ourselves and our money and there is a low level of identification with our universities.

Rhetoric Vs Resources and Re-Engineering

Another challenge we have to deal with is the all too frequent conflict between the rhetoric of government and universities and the resource allocations that are made. This cognitive dissonance is very demoralising and can be quite stressful when we are being called on to provide more services to a larger number of students with reduced funding. We have to resist the temptation to keep on doing what we are doing and take on added functions. In order to survive we need to 'ReEngineer' our services and programs from time to time. We must re-examine what we are doing, identify core functions and look at alternate ways in which we might be able to deliver our services more efficiently and effectively.

Information technology and the world wide web may provide solutions to some of these questions. For example I have found that some students feel more comfortable using Email to 'discuss' issues and to obtain advice, others find it is just easier and more convenient than dropping into the office. Rather than continuing to use printed materials, interactive CDs or a well designed web page may provide improved access to information, or provide answers to standard questions in ways that are more efficient and less costly. However, in the final

analysis, most of our functions are people based and do not lend themselves easily to technological solutions. All too often in our larger universities, contact with the ISA and other student services may be the main personal contact the student has with the institution. In those instances where we conclude after careful analysis that we are unable to respond to the rhetoric or new demands, we need to make it clear to our institutions which services can be provided with current staffing and budget allocation and those services which have to be discontinued. It is just not possible to keep on stretching ourselves to provide enhanced services without appropriate resources.

Service provision by need or fashion

In managing services to international students there are a number of models we can follow in determining which services we provide. Firstly, there is the 'I know what's needed' model which is usually based on direct contacts with students hopefully informed by some theory of adjustment and intercultural relations. Second, there is the 'Students say they want this' model which utilises various mechanisms such as formal consultations, surveys, focus groups etc to gauge student needs. Thirdly there is the 'This would look good and appeal to prospective students and their parents' model.

In reality we all use a combination of these models, however I am not convinced of the validity of the last approach which is much more market driven: A current example which seems to be exercising our minds at the moment is the provision of a 24 hour contact number. I agree that this sounds good but I question whether it is really necessary. Tens of thousands of international students have completed degrees at UNSW and other universities, without this sort of backup. The issue here is whether you are providing a service which has market appeal, but which is incompatible with your basic model of student development.

In providing services to students, I have an underlying model that as far as possible I want to help students develop as independent and autonomous adults. Consequently my interventions are aimed at providing them with an understanding of themselves and the situation, then acquiring skills which will enable them to cope now and in similar situations in the future.

In this process, they need to know that we are there for further discussion and assistance if needed, but that it is their life and that they have to make their own choices and look after themselves. This model is generally referred to in Counselling Psychology as the psycho-educational model and is designed to minimise dependence and to empower the individual.

Advisers who lack professional training in the helping professions often fall into the trap of wanting to do everything for their students. While this is usually done out of genuine concern and desire to help, it tends to encourage reliance on the adviser and if taken to extremes, contributes to 'burnout'. Of course the situation is made more difficult by the fact that most of our students come from cultures which have an expectation of advice being prescriptive and given in specific terms. When many international students consult an Adviser, they usually expect that he or she will take action rather than putting it back onto them to follow through, to make a decision and then act on it. Even if you subscribe to the 'surrogate parent' model, this can only work when you have small numbers of students. Obviously in larger institutions this becomes impossible, so that other strategies have to be developed to provide support.

We all have to find our own compromises to this inherent tension between our own service philosophy and expectations of our role and those of our students. To me it involves finding a compromise between giving students support that functions as a safety net rather than a hammock, to paraphrase an old political slogan.

Of course sometimes, market realities will force us to provide services in ways that we may not immediately be comfortable with. An example of this would be in providing support services to Study Abroad students. Typically these students are on campus for one semester and mainly come from the US. This is a distinct 'market niche' since they are senior students, who are dropped into a different educational system in a foreign country for a short period. They also come from institutions with a broader range of well developed student services and they are not only here to get a degree but to see the country and have fun. In this case it is probably appropriate to provide a different level and range of services to that provided to degree seeking international students. Another level of service may be provided to exchange students, who in many ways are similar to study abroad students but who are here as the name implies to 'exchange' - to experience Australian student life.

Ultimately, if market research indicates that parents feel more comfortable knowing that their sons and daughters are able to contact someone for assistance at all times then it may be appropriate to provide a 24 hour contact line. Obviously if this is done then the purpose and scope of the service needs to be clearly defined and publicised and appropriate provision made for additional payment and legal protection of staff required to operate after hours services.

Centralised vs Decentralised services

An ongoing issue confronting support services on many campuses is whether such services are best organised on a centralised or decentralised basis. Examples of decentralised provision of service would be the ISA that is located in a specific faculty or who is responsible for supporting students in a faculty cluster.

In this discussion I have to admit to being a committed centralist. My reasons for this are numerous and I believe persuasive. Firstly, ISAs need to be independent and to be seen to be independent. When they are attached to a Faculty or Department they inevitably lose some of their independence, in the eyes of both students and academics - 'If we're paying your salary, we have the right to tell you what to do'. As an 'outworker' ISAs lack professional support and direction with less opportunity for case discussion or skills development. Another issue of broader concern, is that support services across the institution are likely to vary markedly in their scope and effectiveness.

Of course the advocates of decentralised services will argue that they are in closer contact with academics and their client group of students and can therefore tailor their services to the needs of their students. They would claim that contact with staff means they are more likely to have an early warning and referral system as they work co-operatively with staff and respond to issues they identify.

In my experience the organisational structures and decision making styles developed in institutions, reflect the history of the institution and current personalities rather than a rational logical analysis. Unfortunately in Australian universities there is a long history of decisions about student services being made in an arbitrary fashion without consulting those delivering the services or those receiving them.

In fact this trend seems to be growing with a number of universities combining Student Administration and Student Services while others are combining Student and Staff Services. Obviously a critical element in the success of such 'integrations' is the quality of the

managers implementing the changes and the depth of their understanding of all of the areas involved.

Managing cultural diversity

A characteristic of almost all Australian universities nowadays is the increased diversity on campus. This comes from growing numbers of international students, drawn mainly from our neighbours in South East Asia, although coming increasingly from North Asia, the Sub-Continent and the Middle East. Then there are our many local students, both Australian born and Permanent Resident, from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds. For some of us, cultural diversity is the norm on campus - UNSW has 15 percent international students with 32 percent of its local students drawn from a nonEnglish speaking background. In other words two out of every five UNS W students speak a language other than English at home.

While this has been the case at UNSW for many years, in other institutions where this is a new reality it can produce dynamics on campus that require careful management, especially where the institution is located in a community not used to people who are different. As cultural diversity increases on our campuses, there is a growing need for us to develop new strategies and programs which encourage cultural understanding and promote harmony between different cultural groups on campus

The need to promote greater interaction on campus is a theme that I have long pondered, but am still struggling with. It is relatively easy to suggest what should be done, since there is considerable literature available and many of our colleagues in the US have been working on these issues for many years. Frequently we attempt to promote understanding by organising cultural festivals and food fairs, however, this rarely leads to much more than entertainment or superficial understanding.

What is needed is for students to be thrown together and forced to collaborate together to achieve a shared goal. This can be achieved in a residential setting, a sporting team or more commonly in the class room. In all of these situations the structure, either implicit or explicit provides the way for people to mix. Since all students presumably spend time in classes, it follows that the best place to promote mixing is in the class room. An effective way of doing this is through the use of small group teaching methods, syndicate groups and group projects involving a deliberate strategy to create mixed groups. Students from all groups may feel uncomfortable and resist mixing in the first few sessions, however, by using appropriate strategies this can be worked through: As students work on a task they get to know each other at a personal level, then natural opportunities are created for social mixing in other settings which allow friendships to develop in normal ways. We continually hear from employers that university graduates generally lack communication skills and are not able to work effectively in a team. Obviously the group teaching and syndicate group approach can help to develop these essential skills in our students.

The main impediment to implementing such a strategy seems to be a lack of commitment from the institution and the value system which guides the recruitment and promotion of academic staff.

The fact remains that despite the efforts of our universities, research is still valued over teaching and academics see that the rewards are not there for developing their teaching or adopting alternative methods which promote mixing. This situation is currently being exacerbated by the increasing pressures on academics in terms of job security and budget cutbacks.

Quality control - performance review

The Universities both of their own accord and with strong encouragement by DEETYA are putting increasing emphasis on quality control in the provision of services, including performance review and use of student feedback in managing services. This is all part of a new focus on customer service in universities, but I will return to this theme later in this presentation.

As part of this quality control process, greater attention is being paid to 'benchmarking', in fact apart from being the mot du jour it also runs the risk of being turned into an 'industry'. In their ! bench marking efforts, some institutions have entered into formal assessments managed by the Standards Institute of Australia, using procedures developed for other service settings. I understand that several universities have been following this approach. If successful this would allow them to use the statement 'Meets ISO Standard 9000-1-2' in their recruitment materials. Retention of the ISO rating is dependent on a quarterly audit to ensure the organisation's procedures and methods are constantly updated and meet the standard.

This approach seems extremely onerous and it is not immediately obvious that it is really appropriate for student services, hence it has little appeal to me. My preference is for the more comparative process of 'best practice' which essentially involves identifying another service or services that constitute the benchmark against which we can measure our services. This is what I have done and continue to do in developing our services at UNSW. In the main I have taken Canadian institutions as my benchmark, especially the University of Alberta and the University of Toronto^{1°}, as the Canadian experience and environment seems much closer to the Australian than does that of US institutions.

A third approach which is followed by our NAFSA colleagues in the US is to engage an external review team. This approach involves the appointment of professional colleagues from other institutions who come in and assess institutional services against clearly expressed criteria and norms. Although this is the ideal, it seems that we are a long way from being able to do this in Australia. There seem to be very few people with the breadth of professional experience and academic background in student affairs or international students required to establish a panel of peer reviewers.

While our professional association is growing and maturing, we lack the organisational infrastructure that NAFSA has to support this sort of activity. My experience in professional organisations makes me realise that you can survive for a several years with a few willing volunteers trying to service the needs and aspirations of the members. What the ordinary member frequently does not realise is that when they say 'ISANA should do such and such' this really means that X or Y on the Executive Committee should do it. With the increasing demands of our regular jobs and budget cutbacks, it is no longer possible for many of us to give the sort of commitment in time and resources that is necessary to manage a dynamic professional association. At a certain point, a paid secretariat becomes essential in order to develop the services and programs needed for the professional development of the members. To do this requires a significant increase in membership or subscriptions or both. It was for this reason that we established the Special Interest Group structure within ANZSSA, in order to increase numbers and by combining our resources we were then able to provide central administrative support to the membership and the SIGs.

WHOSE BUSINESS IS IT ANYWAY?

Now let me turn to the main theme of this paper - that while ISAs have an important role to play in supporting international students, it is not our exclusive business. All staff in our institutions - academic, administrative and support staff- need to accept that it is also their business to provide quality service to international students (indeed to all students). This point has been brought out in several focus group studies conducted at UNSW. Both international and local students indicated that their assessment of the University was based on the overall quality and consistency of service delivery across the institution. The arbitrary divisions that we make between administrative, academic and support staff are totally irrelevant to students when forming judgments about their university experience.

A number of universities are trying to develop a client focus amongst their administrative and support staff, however, it is essential that teaching staff also develop this attitude. Of course it will be difficult to achieve this value shift in our universities which have long been used to selecting rather than attracting students, and with teaching staff recruited and promoted on the basis of their research prowess rather than their abilities as an effective and interesting teacher. While Best Teacher Awards are an important move in this direction, a more fundamental shift in attitudes is required. In this context, it is interesting to see the current review of higher education undertaken by West Committee advocating equal emphasis on teaching and research for university staff and funding

I firmly believe, that in order to be world-class institutions with quality education programs our universities need to be much more student focused. This inevitably involves offering a seamless network of educational and support services backed up by appropriate administrative processes. All services provided to students by the institution should be delivered in ways that are sensitive, effective and efficient. This involves a greater awareness of the needs of the student-client. To do this, all staff in the institution need to have cross-cultural communication skills not just those working with international students.

While most universities provide basic services for international students there is great variability in the scope and quality of services provided to both international and local students across the university, whether this be administrative, teaching or support services. One of the most obvious indicators of the importance of student services in the organisation is where they are located and who they report to. All too often student services are located in temporary buildings and have no direct representation in the key decision making bodies, especially those involved in making budget decisions.

Unlike universities in the US, Australian universities still have to *effectively* acknowledge students as clients. American universities put great emphasis on student satisfaction and student evaluations are an important part of tenure and promotion decisions. They also have a comprehensive 'student life' program and a Dean of Students as a senior member of the executive. This not only connects student services to the power centres of the university, it also sends a strong signal to all parties about the importance put on students by the institution. As far as I am aware, there is no Australian university where there is a position at a comparable level and issues affecting students are rarely directly represented in the top decision making groups. A 1993 review of student services¹² in Australia indicated that decisions about the organisation and structure of services were taken in an ad hoc and arbitrary fashion without consultation with the providers of the services. From my understanding of the situation, very little has changed since that report.

It is obvious to me that the expectations of international students have changed since the days when they were receiving a subsidised education. When you are receiving something for nothing or paying very little, it is difficult to be very critical or demanding. Now that students are paying considerable sums for their education, they expect much higher levels of service and value for their money. Students are increasingly looking at the knowledge and training they receive in terms of its usefulness, whether the degree is professionally recognised and enhances the student's job prospects. This also applies to local students who are now paying increased amounts under the revamped HECS scheme, and to post graduates enrolled in fee-paying Masters programs. With the introduction of fee paying undergraduate programs on major campuses this will lead to higher expectations and the inevitability of disgruntled students taking a university to the consumer affairs tribunal.

We should also see the growing diversity on our campus as an asset we can use to prepare our students for the new millennium. Internationalisation is now highlighted in the Strategic Plans of most universities reflecting the current political realities and economic imperatives. Modern communication technology, transport and mass media have shrunk our world making overseas virtually the same as next door. In order to survive in this interdependent world, Australia must be internationally competitive, which means that our graduates need to be globally minded and able to function effectively in other cultural contexts. All graduates will have to work with a multicultural workforce and most will have to deal with overseas placements, so they need to be adept at cross cultural communication.

We are not yet taking full advantage of the rich cultural resources at our disposal. Our campuses maybe multicultural, but they are not yet 'international' in the full sense of that word. To use an analogy, you only have a fruit cake after you have mixed the ingredients in the bowl and applied some heat. Our campuses are still at the stage of the cake mix -we have the ingredients but we have to stir and engineer some real interaction before we have a truly 'international' campus. To achieve this, staff in support services need to work together with teaching staff and develop a range of activities which promote interaction between students of different backgrounds. The growing opportunities for our students to take part of their degree on an exchange program at an overseas university is another strategy for developing this international understanding.

At the same time that we are encouraging our universities to develop a student focus, being responsive to student needs and evaluations, workers in international student services must ensure that we lead by example. This means regularly seeking feedback from our students and identifying their needs, reviewing our programs and services using student evaluations and criteria of 'best practice'. It also means working collaboratively with colleagues in other support services on campus as well as those in administrative and teaching roles to achieve our shared goals.

¹ First known as Australian Development Assistance Agency (ADAA), then Australian Development Assistance Bureau (ADAB), then Australian International Development Assistance Bureau (AIDAB) and now AusAID (Australia Agency for International Development)

² Goldring, J. (1984) MUTUAL ADVANTAGE? Report of the Committee of Review of Private Overseas Student Policy, Canberra, Australian Government Publishing Service

³ Jackson, R.G., (1984) Report of the Committee of Review of the Overseas Aid Program, Canberra, Australian Government Publishing Service

⁴ The Goldring Committee commissioned a wide ranging survey of international students in all sectors across Australia at about the same time.

⁵ (1996) Experiences of overseas undergraduate students at UNSW Research Report, Student Counselling & Research Unit

⁶ In particular June Naughton at U Hawaii, Carol Salzman at UCLA and Dixon Johnson at USC became mentors and friends.

⁷ The Code was inspired by similar codes being developed in the United States and Britain, and involved extensive input from the industry, especially AIDAB and others involved in providing services to international students. AusAID argues quite correctly that the new service contract helps to 'empower' support services within the institution.

⁸ Now known as IDP Education Australia.

⁹ Thanks to Patrick Willix for providing me with information on recent developments in ISANA and issues he and his committee have been focusing on.

¹⁰ An ongoing collaboration with Wilf Allen and his group at the University of Alberta and Elizabeth Paterson at the University of Toronto.

n

(1997) West, R, Review of Higher Education Financing and Policy - Discussion Paper, Canberra, Australian Government Publishing Service

¹² DEET (1993) Student Support Services Management delivery and effectiveness Student Services Australia report for the Higher Education Division. Evaluations and Investigations Program Canberra