

Shaping the student experience

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The contemporary Australian higher education challenge

Our (shared) goal is to offer:

- really excellent educational outcomes
- outstanding longer-term outcomes for life, career and society
- a great student experience

The contemporary Australian challenge:

- more students
- declining per student Commonwealth support
- students with more diverse backgrounds and needs
- a world of new challenges and opportunities
- a more competitive and dynamic labour market
- changing expectations from government, employers
- technological change in higher education
- 'single market' risk

So, what is the student experience?



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The student experience is ...

unique for every student

a bundle of interactions a student has with people and 'things', filtered through an interpretive lens

inclusive of everything a student does as a student

Path dependent – early experiences provide an interpretive lens for later ones

loosely structured by academic time (but only loosely)

subject to the influence of external events

impacted by almost every member of the University community

both complicated and complex

The student experience

LEARNING

- Curriculum and courses
- Educational experience
- Projects/placements
- Learning engagement
- Educational support
- Mobility
- Disability support
- Self-directed learning

BELONGING

- Academic links with peers and teachers
- Social connection
- University connection

PARTICIPATING

- Co-curriculum
- Student representation
- Clubs and societies
- Residential communities
- Sport
- Entrepreneurship

KEEPING CONNECTED

- Alumni relations
- Mentoring
- Lifelong learning

Relational core

SELECTING

- Future student information
- Outreach
- Recruitment
- Scholarships

JOINING

- Pre-arrival and arrival
- Preparing academically
- Connecting academically
- Connecting socially

NAVIGATING

- Academic advising
- Career and life aspirations
- Finding support and connection

ACCESSING

- Liaison support at times of intense challenge

FINISHING

- Understanding capabilities
- Career transition
- Further study transition
- Graduation

Transition and navigation

LIVING

- Accommodation, transport
- Financial resources/work
- Health
- Wellbeing and safety
- Family
- Addressing barriers

TRANSACTING

- Enrolment management
- Learning management
- Assessment management
- Fee management
- Placement and project management
- ...

ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

- Organisational
- Physical
- Virtual
- Social, cultural, policy

Essential supports

Five perspectives on the student experience



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1. John Williams, *Stoner* 1965

Sloane's eyes came back to William Stoner, and he said dryly, 'Mr Shakespeare speaks to you across three hundred years, Mr Stoner; do you hear him?'

William Stoner realised that for several moments he had been holding his breath.
(p.11)

And then (several years) later:

'But don't you know, Mr Stoner?' Sloane asked. 'Don't you understand about yourself yet? You're going to be a teacher.'

Suddenly Sloane seemed very distant, and the walls of the office receded. Stoner felt himself suspended in the wide air, and he heard his voice ask, "Are you sure?"

'I'm sure,' Sloane said softly.

'How can you tell? How can you be sure?'

'It's love, Mr Stoner,' Sloane said cheerfully. 'You are in love. It's as simple as that.' (p.19)

2. Daniel Chambliss, Christopher Takacs, *How College Works* 2014

College works when it provides a thick environment of constant feedback, driven by the establishment and maintenance of social relationships (p.132)

The good news ... is that even a tiny bit of high quality human contact, applied at the right moment in a student's career, can noticeably raise motivation. A helpful resident advisor in the first few weeks, an engaging teacher in a single introductory class, a writing instructor who sits with a student one-on-one to go over a paper, one field trip with a congenial group – with a regular smattering of such lucky breaks, a willing student can have a very satisfying and educationally productive college career. (pp.173-174)

3. Student Experience Survey 2017-18: % positive responses, universities nationally, UG and PG

Scale	UG 2017	UG 2018	PG 2017	PG 2018
Skills development	81	81	80	81
Learner Engagement	60	60	52	53
Teaching Quality	80	81	80	81
Student Support	73	73	73	73
Learning Resources	83	84	82	83
Overall Satisfaction	79	79	76	76

Most positive SES items 2018, universities nationally

Item	UG	PG
Quality of library resources and facilities	87	86
Quality of teaching spaces	86	84
Quality of online learning materials	85	86
Quality of laboratory and studio equipment	83	79
Quality of computing/IT resources	82	82
Quality of teaching	80	77
Quality of student spaces and common areas	79	78
Quality of assigned books, notes and resources	79	82
Quality of entire educational experience	78	76
Developed knowledge of field studying	78	79
Teachers set assessment tasks that challenge you to learn	77	77

Least positive SES items 2018, universities nationally

Item	UG	PG
Interacted with students outside study requirements	43	38
Received appropriate English language skill support	45	51
Careers advisors: available	50	49
Offered support relevant to circumstances	51	53
Careers advisors: helpful	52	49
Interacted with students very different from you	52	46
Had a sense of belonging to your University	53	51
Teachers commented on your work in ways that helped you learn	54	62
Support services: available	55	55
Support services: helpful	56	56
Developed spoken communication skills	56	54
Been given opportunities to interact with local students	57	38
Received support from University to settle into study	57	58

Potential aspects of most concern

- Meaningful interactions with peers, relational engagement with teachers?
- Transition to University, transition to career?
- Access to support
- Core skills: problem solving, communication, preparation for next steps?
- Administration?

But which of these matter most to students?

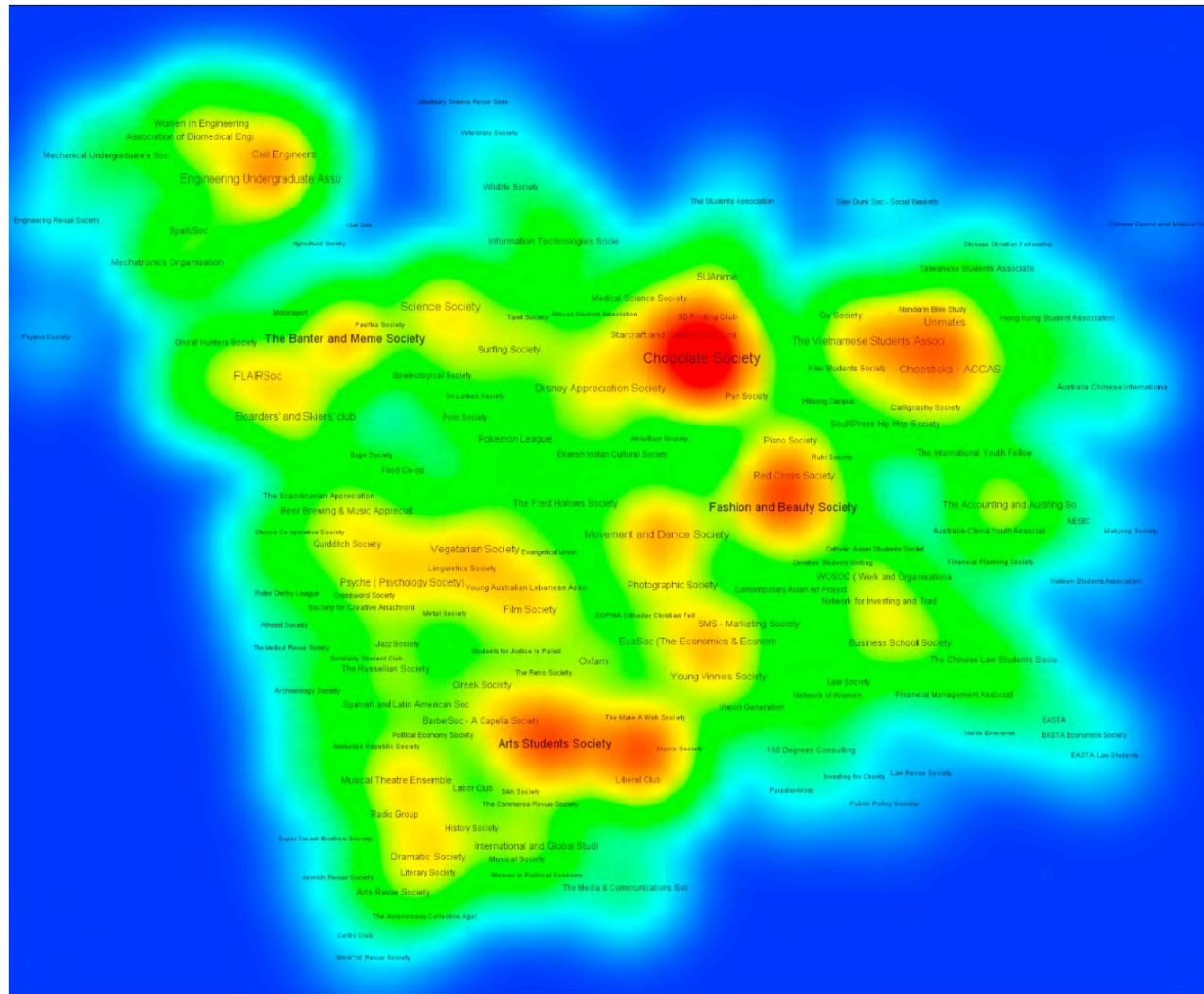
Using the SES to predict quality of the overall educational experience (University of Sydney)

Perceived quality of the overall educational experience is related to perceived quality of:

- Quality of teaching (strongly)
- The transition experience
- Learning resources
- Social interaction
- Perception of skill development
- Administrative and advising support (weakly)

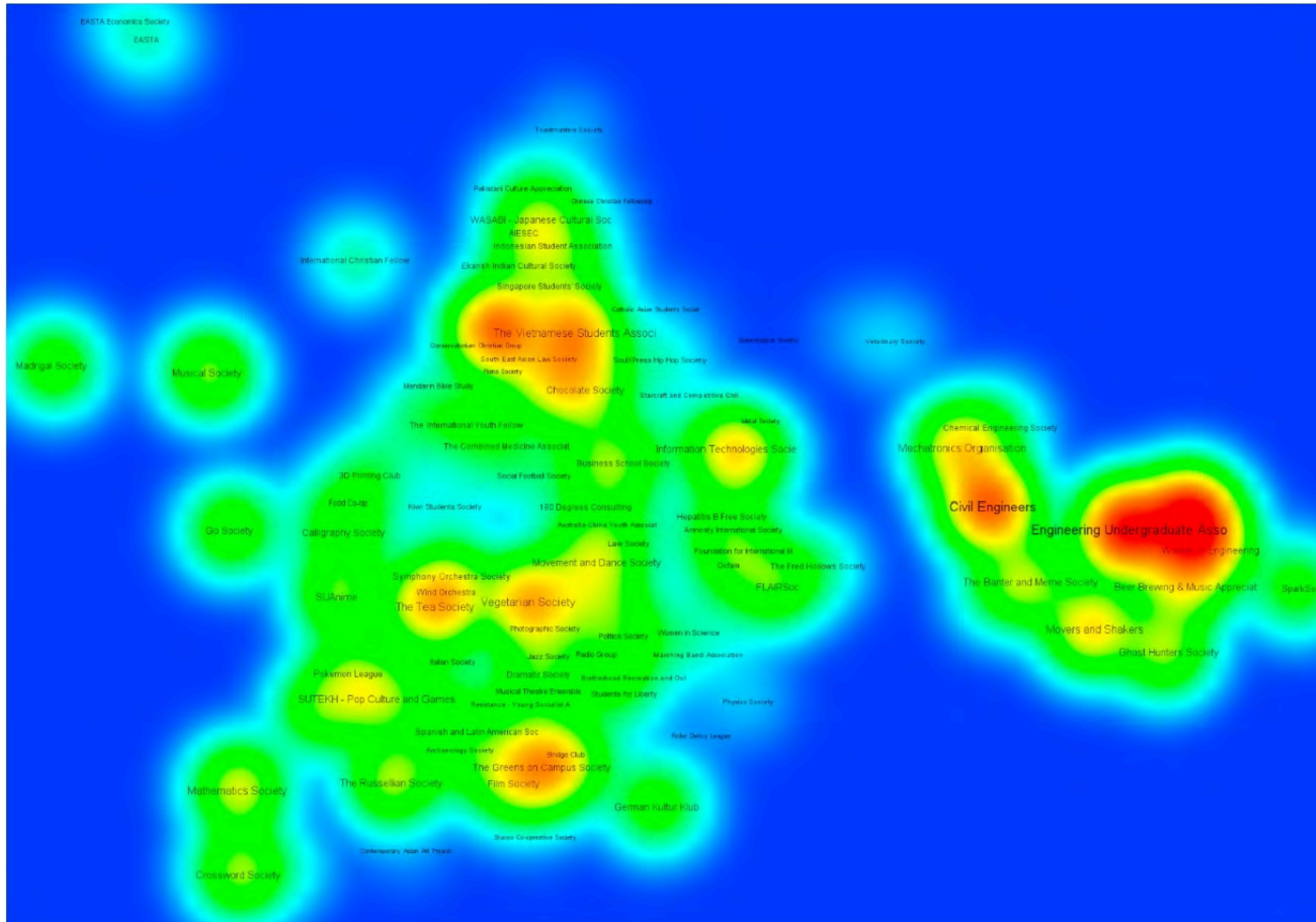
4. Understanding participation in student life:

a. Students' co-membership in student clubs and societies

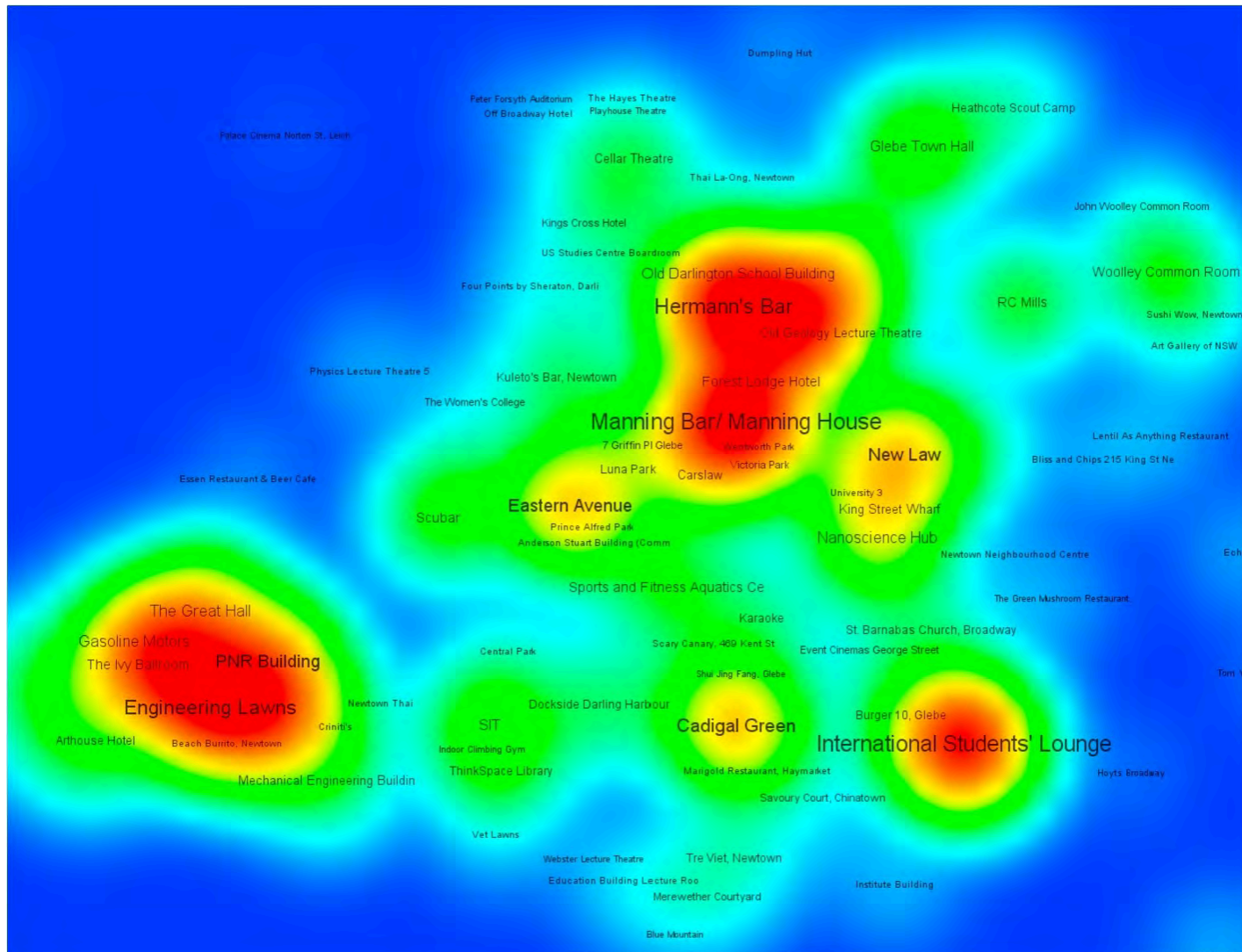


4. Understanding participation in student life:

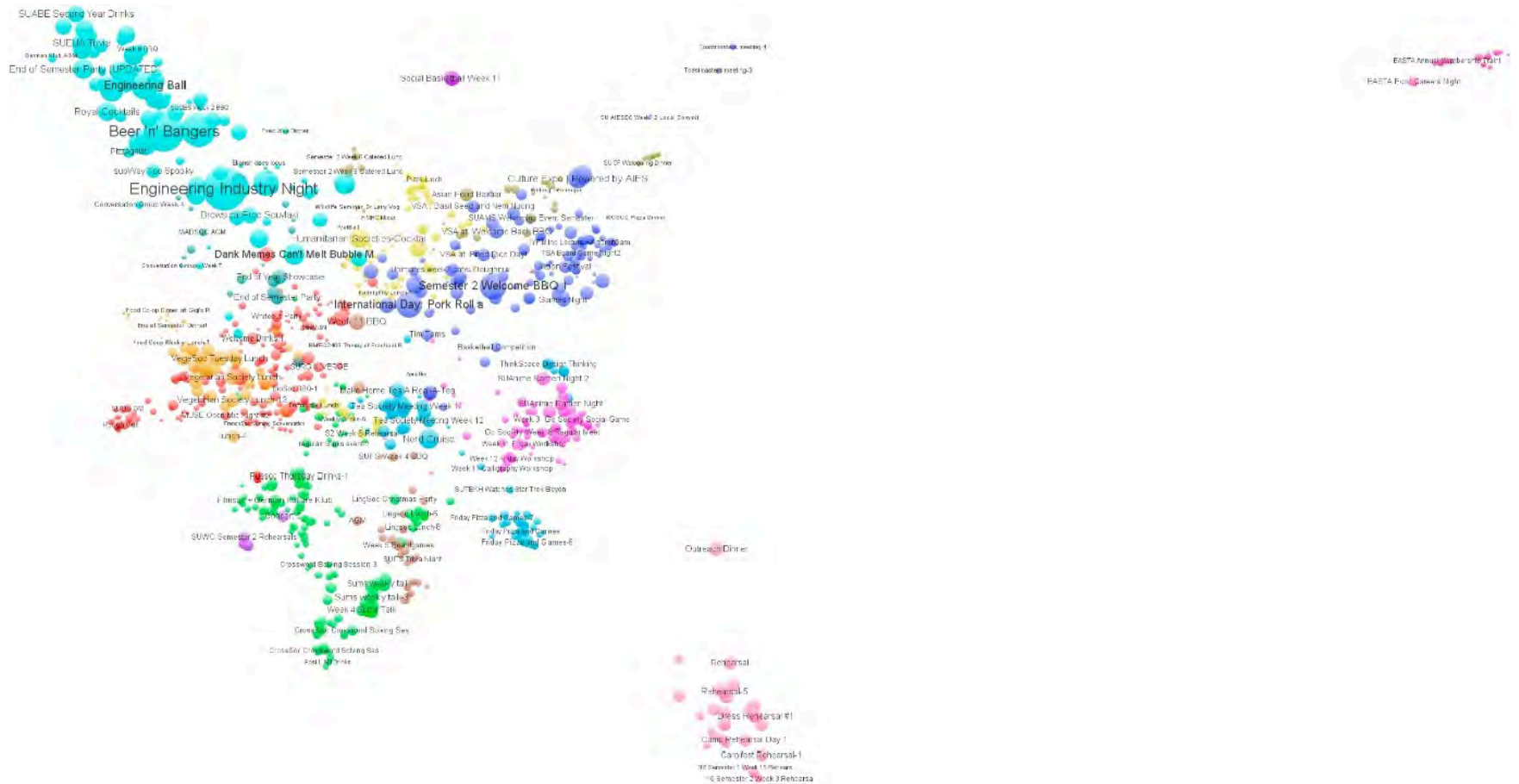
b. Co-attendance at student clubs' and societies' events



c. Patterns of co-attendance by location



d. Co-attendance at events



5. Online forum on the student experience (May 2018)

- A large moderated online discussion group (University of Sydney)
 - Random sample of 5909 students invited to participate
 - 750 signed up (13%)
- The forum was open for a week in May and discussion was seeded with four conversations:
 - Social life at the university
 - Experience of university administration
 - Experience with teaching
 - Student support



Self-nominated mood and inferred sentiment across the four conversation threads

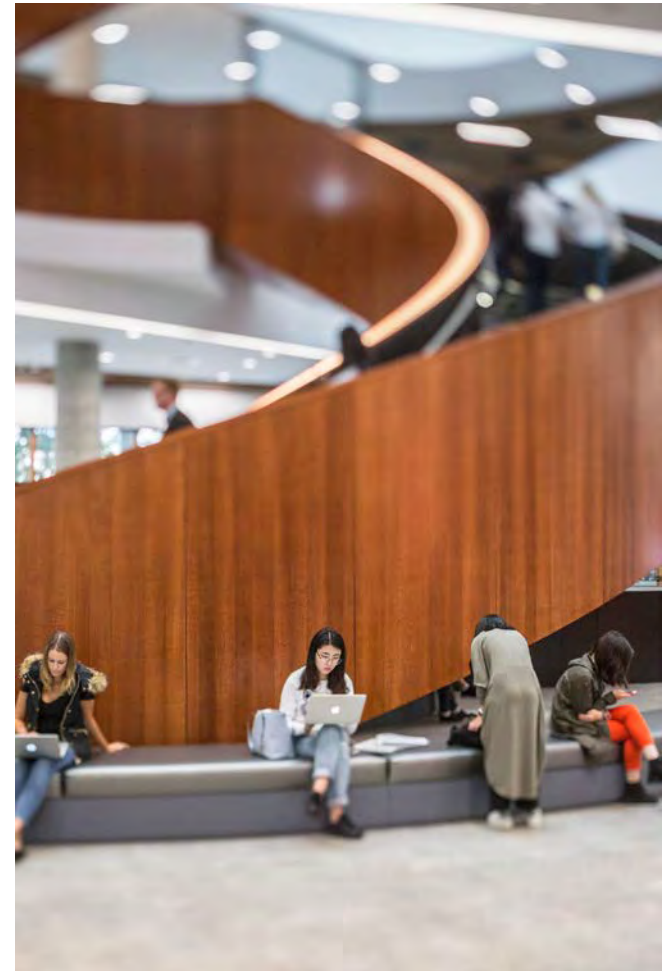
Conversation	Mood - average	Mood - std dev	Sentiment - average	Sentiment - std dev
Social life	0.35	0.51	0.28	0.43
Adminstration	-0.22	0.58	-0.01	0.46
Teaching	0.16	0.59	0.31	0.43
Support services	0.10	0.52	0.04	0.45

For many, the experience is very positive

- **One of the best lecturers** I've ever had ... put all of his lecture material (notes, exercises, etc) online at the beginning of the semester and required us to have made our own notes prior to attending the lecture. His lecture then involved expanding upon this information by discussing use-cases, answering questions, and generally providing insight that otherwise couldn't be obtained through reading notes [Domestic UG]
- I really enjoy the way my course is being taught. I am **enjoying the mixed methods** of the teaching presented with some lecturers setting pre-reading then a workshop, others a recorded lecture with readings and workshops, and others very engaging in learning by practising/role playing skills [Domestic PG]
- The social connection with the University is **second to none**. There are many social activities that students like me can participate in, especially the clubs and societies. ... **GOOD JOB and KEEP IT UP! :)** [International PG]

But students also noted a lack of social connection

- The student body ...is more of an "**ocean of wandering individuals**" than a "big family". [Domestic UG]
- I... have found it extremely hard to meet and make friends, despite being an extroverted person. The clubs and societies...seem like a close-knit circle for friends which makes it **extremely difficult and intimidating** to engage. [Domestic UG]
- I have found making friends at uni to be **consistently difficult** over the past two years. ... Though everyone is all-smiles, the smiles aren't those of intimacy, but rather a formality much like a handshake or a nod. [Domestic UG]



Some express a desire to see more community

- I would suggest having more events on daily or weekly, where people can **join spontaneously** regardless of their personal interests. ... Sydney needs a culture which promotes people staying on-campus. [Domestic UG]
- I do see people being left out, and eventually stop attending society events... Something could definitely be done to **involve international students**, especially those in the minority. [International UG]

Poor teaching doesn't go unnoticed!

- People learn when they discuss, demonstrate, practice and explain. ... The worst thing, which is the most common one I've experienced, is the tutor has a **monologue for one hour** and simply drops down solutions on the chalkboard. [International UG]
- I just feel that the teacher **barely has time** for me [Domestic UG]
- I've had some great lecturers and tutors so far, who have been supportive and helpful. ...It's the few that you encounter that **cause troubles.** [Domestic UG]



Students want engagement in class

– I think what makes a good uni experience is being able to engage in discussions that are intellectually rewarding... university should be a place where we learn to articulate our ideas and this can only happen with opportunities to have **dialogue with our peers**... we can't be afraid of academic debate because this is how we learn. I think it's up to tutors to come up with stimulating discussions based on the course content.... this as opposed to "So what did y'all think of the reading for this week?" [Domestic UG]

– Peer to peer engagement in-class room is desperately lacking. I personally feel I am **missing out an important part** of University experience. [International PG]



Students also understand why social connection matters

*“Am I shy? I don’t know. Am I open-minded? I don’t know. Am I resilient? I don’t know, and I **won’t know** unless there is a reference to measure it with. ... Something should be done to **initiate AND fortify** socialising in every aspect of our time at university, which as I’ve heard from graduates is the time you make the most lasting friendships. Maybe it’s a matter of scale. Maybe it’s a matter of numbers. Either way, it matters.” [Domestic UG]*



What did we conclude really matters to the student experience?

Relational core

- Relationships with teachers
- Peer interactions and peer relationships

Transition and navigation

- The moment of transition is a unique opportunity
- Systematic opportunities to discuss aspirations for life and career

Essential supports

- Understanding the distinctive needs and trajectories of all students
- Providing equitable access

Design

- Student-centred, ideally personalised access to information, resources, advice and services
- Timely feedback for quality improvement

What else matters? Learning and outcomes for life, society



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Graduate qualities: foundations for future leadership

Graduate qualities

Depth of disciplinary expertise

Broader skills

- Critical thinking and problem solving
- Communication (oral and written)
- Information/digital literacy
- Inventiveness

Cultural competence

Interdisciplinary effectiveness

An integrated professional, ethical and personal identity*

Influence

*Based on Thompson, R, J. Jr (2014). *Beyond reason and tolerance: The purpose and practice of higher education*. Oxford University Press

A renewed curriculum framework



Academic rigour

- Depth of expertise in primary field
- Learning from world-leading experts in the field
- Increasing challenge



Global perspectives

- Cultural competence
- 50% mobility target
- Language and culture learning options



Cross-disciplinary learning

- Expertise in a second field (combined degrees, shared pool)
- Open Learning Environment
- Interdisciplinary experience



Real-world projects

- Authentic and challenging industry, community, research and/or entrepreneurship projects
- Placements and internships options

Some industry and community project units 2019

Partner	Project
MS Research	Personalised healthy living strategies for those living with MS
AGL	Creating a renewable energy future
NSW Office of Environment & Heritage	Saving NSW's koala population
Randstad	Ethical use of AI and machine learning in recruitment
Adobe	Education and the skills gap
PwC	Sydney's innovation precincts
Data61	Future of milk

So, what to do?



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Our student experience strategy: 8 design challenges

Relational core	<i>Relational aspects of learning</i> design for deeper learning through the adoption of more interactive and collaborative pedagogies	<i>Social connection</i> structuring opportunity for social interaction, inside and outside the curriculum
Navigation	<i>Transition</i> a scaffolded academic and social transition into the University community	<i>Reflection and advice</i> creating opportunities for structured reflection and advice on articulating and achieving aspirations for learning, life and career
Essential supports	<i>Student-centric support</i> integrated, accessible support to address barriers to student participation and success	<i>Affording opportunity</i> support processes that seek to understand barriers and afford equitable opportunity for success
Design	<i>Student-centric system and processes</i> a seamless, student-centric experience, supported by personalised and timely access to information, resources and systems, and an integrated relationship management system	<i>Data-informed quality improvement</i> timely and effective feedback on all aspects of the student experience and data-informed quality improvement processes

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Design considerations

- A shared design framework, for equality of opportunity
- Evidence-informed, where possible, for impact
- Open to local innovation, for agency, uptake and impact
- Effective coordination, for sharing of good practice
- Co-designed/co-tested with students, for rapid acceptance, effectiveness
- Supported by ‘thick feedback’, for institutional learning and improvement
- Respectful of student choice, for acceptance and impact
- Technologically supported, for scale and impact
- Integrated across University and non-University providers, for accessibility

Some options

- Continued focus on interactive and collaborative pedagogies, broader use of tools such as *Student Relationship Engagement System (SRES)*
- School-based near-curricular social and academic activities
- Systematic transition in a core first-semester UG unit
- Curricular anchoring of reflection on aspirations for life and career
- A new, integrated student support service model, including liaison support
- Systematic data-rich approach to identifying barriers to student success
- Integrated digital tools and platforms, including a student relationship management system
- Re-designed feedback system, including an open, monitored two-way channel (*not USyd Rants*)

Other options

- Formal advisor/personal tutor models
- Virtual colleges, social networking platforms
- Intensive transition program
- Recruitment agency/career placement
- Free gym membership
- ...

What does success look like?

“When thinking people meet each other and engage, they become energised to do more thinking, with more people. It takes a little initial effort to get them together, but once they do the process creates more energy.” (p. 174)

Chambliss and Takacs, 2014

Thank you



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