

Project Officer's Report:

ANZSSA and ISANA Conferences 2016

From Monday, December 5 to Friday, December 9, I attended the annual Australian and New Zealand Student Services Association (ANZSSA) and International Education Services Association (ISANA) conferences, held the same week in Auckland and Wellington respectively.

This year, unfortunately, the two conferences overlapped directly; Wednesday (Dec 7) marked the final day of ANZSSA's conference and the first day of ISANA's in two quite separate locations, so I and the other NUPSA delegates were forced to miss a day of each conference due to travel. Nevertheless, we were able to attend the great majority of presentations, soundbites, refereed papers and discussion panels, and gain valuable insight into current and emerging best practice across the postgraduate education sector.

Day 1: ANZSSA Conference, Auckland (Monday, December 5th)

Having arrived in New Zealand over the weekend, we began with ANZSSA, which was held this year at the Auckland University of Technology (AUT) in Auckland.

The day opened with a 'powhiri', a traditional Maori welcome involving the meeting of two parties, guests and land owners (in this case, conference presenters and AUT/ANZSSA staff and council). In keeping with the New Zealand venue, this year's conference had strong ties to Maori culture; many of the welcome speeches and prayers were delivered in traditional dialect, and each presentation was ended with a traditional song, which all delegates were invited to sing.

Following welcomes from AUT's Vice Chancellor, Derek McCormack, and ANZSSA's President, Jordi Austin, we commenced with the first keynote, delivered by Dr Kathie Irwin. Titled, 'Maori Success in Tertiary Education: What's at the Heart of the Matter?', the presentation outlined a century of gradual gains made by indigenous New Zealanders in the tertiary education system; Dr Irwin tied this more intimately to the history of her own family, from her grandmother down to her daughter, each woman building on the academic achievements of those that came before her.

This was followed by a student panel that discussed the question, 'Are Students Customers?' The panel's convener, AUT's Liz Bashara (who, frankly, stole far too much time from the actual students with a lengthy and opinionated slideshow introduction), clearly believed they *weren't* customers, trotting out such pithy one-liners as, 'A university is not a shop, and a degree is not a product.' Then, however, she contradicted this by describing universities as 'brands', with brand loyalty rising and falling on the relative happiness of those enrolled. Satisfied customers, she said,

tell nine people on average how happy they are; dissatisfied customers tell twenty-two people about their bad experiences.

When the students were finally invited to introduce themselves and ask questions, they each gave differing suggestions as to how their student experience could be improved. Some wanted a greater push for technology, with campus information delivered through an app, while others wanted diverse avenues of communication, with a continued focus on face-to-face interaction. (Some students, they attested, don't own a smartphone at all.)

The one thing they all agreed on is that student services on campus need to be better advertised, and this is certainly an opportunity for NUPSA. We still have a list of student guides planned for our new website, directing postgrad students to the various services available to them; we should make these guides a priority early next year. The panelists also articulated a lack of ongoing feedback throughout their courses, with end-of-year surveys that are too broad and too late to effect immediate change. Next year, NUPSA can ensure that feedback surveys are given to students (and results carefully examined) after every workshop and social event (as well as available through our website at all times).

Interestingly, only one of the students on the panel was engaged in postgraduate study. Andi Deane, also representing NUPSA at the conference, commented on this to the audience, and asked the students how they believed the needs of postgrads might differ from their own. They all agreed that postgrads had very different needs, but couldn't easily identify these. It's clear that the postgraduate voice is under-presented at ANZSSA; this is something we can communicate to them in advance of next year's conference.

The middle of the day was punctuated by a series of 'soundbites', twenty-minute presentations with brief Q&As between them. Some of these were quite intriguing. Anne-Marie Singh, for example, gave a presentation on the theory of 'cognitive load', and how it could be applied to website and other information channels. Much of her advice would benefit our website, such as an increased focus on video clips and visual/audio media, rather than simply static text.

This segued perfectly into the soundbite given by Amy Cleasby of Curtin University, who spoke about the success of their Facebook Live video presentations and Q&A sessions for students during orientation. I absolutely love the idea of these as an immediate, interactive media channel that appeals equally to on-campus and satellite/online students, and I suggested to Andi and James (Pinkerton, also in attendance) that we look seriously at the logistics of implementing these after Christmas. Vlogging would give NUPSA's Executive and staff a more approachable vibe, avoid reams of written text (emails, newsletter articles, website pages), and embrace a more fun, modern technological platform that students are already well accustomed to.

The afternoon ended with a second keynote presentation from Dr Shanton Chang, who - again - spoke about technology. His presentation, 'Student Services and Information-Seeking Behaviour', was based on a study involving 6,699 Australian students, which discovered that the digital literacy of Generation Y is actually far lower than most educators presume. Most aren't

conversant in anything more complex than a Google search or posting on Facebook. He gave quite a lot of advice on how student services could tailor their social media to 'lurkers', 'likers', 'linkers' and 'leaders' (four categories the study identified), but the most astonishing information to come from his research was the staggering cultural difference between websites and social media; Chinese and Japanese websites, for example, are built on an entirely different design philosophy (even in education), which may well explain why so many international students have difficulties accessing more Westernised web content.

Dr Chang listed several universities and institutions that have tailored their online platforms well, and I will most certainly mine these for inspiration in the new year. By addressing the current limitations of our online infrastructure (website, newsletter, social media, mailing list), we could easily improve our engagement with online students in the future.

Key points for the day:

- **Too many education/student service providers have become complacent in the way they engage students, particularly online. We need to treat our websites and social media as more than a daily chore or 'side task', and start injecting our own personality and humanity into them, making them inviting and engaging student spaces.**
- **99.43% of students own at least one mobile device; 47.43% own at least three. This is where the future of student service provision lies. Building up our online presence and reaching the online student cohort should be our major priority moving forward.**

Day 2: ANZSSA Conference, Auckland (Tuesday, December 6th)

The second day of ANZSSA's conference picked up quite smoothly from the first, with a keynote presentation from Eric Stoller titled, 'Get Ready to Get Digital'. He reiterated, and then built upon, Dr Chang's message: social media for organisations should still have a face (or faces). Identify yourself as a person, not just as your office team; add your own personality, be vulnerable at times, and reveal a piece of yourself. He argued that technological competency and development should be a distinct focus for all student services seeking to improve their engagement.

He then gave a host of examples, many of which raised a few eyebrows among the audience. Snapchat and Periscope, for example, had been used by some universities to give real-time campus tours during orientation, and Yik Yak - an anonymous texting app that allows users to chat with those directly around them - had been used during counselling and sexual health workshops, allowing students to ask sensitive questions without revealing themselves.

He gave examples of important university leaders who'd used their Twitter accounts to be remarkably honest and vulnerable with their students, as well as to forge authentic dialogues and get truer feedback.

The crux of Eric's talk was the importance of adaptability. New technologies emerge every day, and educators and student service providers must always be ready to embrace them and assimilate them into their practice.

From there, the day progressed with a noticeably diverse array of soundbites and refereed papers. George Greig, an Auckland student, chronicled the remarkable success of his student-led media project against racism, 'I Too Am Auckland'. Amanda Clinton gave an abridged demonstration of a workshop she'd developed to empower female engineering students to challenge entrenched sexism in their field; I participated in several group activities (such as the 'living Likert scale' and 'social iceberg') that, I feel, could easily be adapted to many of our future counselling/student skills workshops next year. Karen Davis and Alison Dow, ANZSSA representatives, then presented a paper on their attendance at the NASPA and IASAS conferences this year (in Indianapolis and Cape Town respectively), outlining the differences and similarities in their student demographics, educational challenges and social issues raised.

The final keynote of the day was delivered by Dr Welby Ings. Quite different to anything we'd seen at the conference previously, it was an incredibly moving series of personal stories of his childhood and early life, and the astonishing teachers and educators whose humanity in teaching had helped him in times of great difficulty. These stories brought him to his central argument: that standardised tests and marking are horrendously outdated principles in the education system; that too many young students are being crushed and discarded rather than having their potential nurtured and realised; that heart - real humanity - is the one thing truly missing, and desperately needed in teaching today.

In the evening, Andi, James and I attended ANZSSA's annual dinner. The theme was 'Pacific culture'; we all had rainbow leis hung around our necks on entry. The Maori cultural theme continued throughout the evening, with an adapted islander menu of coconut-infused dishes, and a display of traditional drumming and dancing by Kuki Airani (including half-naked tribal warriors and lavishly costumed dancing girls, who all garnered rather provocative attention from the audience).

Due to our urgency in travelling to Wellington for ISANA, we were unable to stay for the third and final day of ANZSSA; the dinner was our final presence at the conference.

Key points for the day:

- **This year's conference has a theme, 'Inspire, Innovate, Include', which draws as much on personal narratives (such as those of Dr Kathie Irwin and Dr Welby Ing) as it does on evidence-based practice. The other NUPSA delegates and I debated the value of this throughout the day; personally, I find such narratives a touching reminder of what we're really trying to achieve when we engage with students each day.**
- **Technology and social media are HUGE unofficial themes this year also. The attendees I spoke to have all struggled to keep up with emerging digital platforms and trends, but this will become increasingly important moving forward.**

- **Following Eric Stoller's presentation, I examined my own phone (and its lack of social media apps) in embarrassment. Later, I downloaded Twitter, Snapchat, Yik Yak, Instagram and LinkedIn, to get a sense of how these could be best used by NUPSA; how many of these I'll effectively juggle in my own use remains to be seen.**

Day 3: Travel, Auckland to Wellington (Wednesday, December 7th)

This was simultaneously the final day of ANZSSA and the first day of ISANA, but unfortunately, we were unable to attend either. We spent most of the day in transit from Auckland to Wellington, a journey complicated by a QANTAS error in which all our remaining flights were cancelled and had to be restored.

We did, however, arrive in Wellington and get established in time to attend ISANA's annual dinner, which (like the conference itself) was hosted at the Te Papa Tongarewa Museum of New Zealand. This was an altogether friendlier and less serious affair; the theme was the film 'Night at the Museum', and guests in costume as Cleopatra, Sacagawea and other historical figures all engaged in contests of Te Papa Museum trivia and LEGO construction, told comically awful jokes and gave away a host of prizes.

Key points for the day:

- **Airport terminals are carousels of human misery.**
- **'Night at the Museum' contained an octopus, apparently.**

Day 4: ISANA Conference, Wellington (Thursday, December 8th)

The second day of the ISANA conference kicked off with a plenary session with Clive Jones, representing Education New Zealand. He outlined some impressive 2016 statistics related to New Zealand's education sector, which he attributed to the government's shift in focus from the economic benefits of international education to the human/social benefits: 125,000 international students across the country, \$4.28 billion dollars in revenue, 32,000 jobs supported, all eight universities ranked in the top 3% globally, and a student satisfaction rating of 90%.

Refreshingly, he did not rest on these laurels, but urged that further work was needed to advance this upward trend. Among the student concerns their research had identified were misinformation on the cost of living prior to arrival and poor access to relevant information; to help address these and other problems, Education New Zealand has developed a New International Education Strategy, the contents of which formed the remainder of Clive's presentation.

While this keynote offered a fascinating glimpse at the future direction of international education in New Zealand, many of its points and findings were not directly transferrable to education in Australia - or, more directly, to postgraduate students at UoN. This, I would discover throughout the remainder of the conference, was a recurring issue: an over-emphasis on New Zealand-specific challenges and successes, with not enough discussion of universal practice that could be translated in other regions.

Afterwards, we were introduced to an international education business panel, comprised of key figures in student service delivery. The question posed by the convener was, 'What challenges face us in international education?' Answers varied depending on the precise field of each panelist's organisation - traditional caps on international student numbers that choked supply, a lack of opportunities for students (particularly Chinese students) to engage with New Zealand business during study (such as internships), a lack of intercultural competency training, and an ongoing need to ensure all international students are effectively covered by travel insurance.

Then came questions from the delegates themselves. These related to notions of 'quality' international tertiary education ('How do institutions distinguish themselves globally?'), the growing prevalence of online learning ('How do we manage this, and keep the majority of learning face-to-face, as students have said they prefer?'), the student voice ('Given the shifting focus from economic to human benefit, how do we get students more involved in decision making?') and student safety ('How do we get ombudsmen more involved to prevent the kind of student exploitation that often goes unaddressed by law enforcement?').

The panelists spoke of a focus on individual student outcomes rather than a 'one-size-fits-all' mentality, a need for more frequent ongoing feedback (an argument mirrored by ANZSSA's student panel), as well as other, more direct avenues of feedback - small focus groups from different international cohorts, for example. Generally, it was acknowledged that students should be supported to become more involved, not only within their university, but within the wider community.

One student, representing CISA, asked whether a similar peak student body could be established in New Zealand. Fair question - this stirred a noticeably enthusiastic response from the audience.

Though the opening plenary session and panel were clearly intended as the focus of the day, several smaller sessions throughout the afternoon were more striking in their relevance to NUPSA. Dona Leach from the University of Tasmania outlined a number of student social/cultural programs they've run quite successfully; the biggest of these is their human library, which involves international students nominating themselves as 'human books', able to be 'borrowed' by other attendees. Through personal recollection, cultural song, costume and/or dance, they tell their stories to other people, educating them in their culture and experiences.

The program was so successful that UTASLife caught the attention of the local media, and soon expanded the human library to travel to dozens of local schools and aged care centres,

educating the public and increasing their intercultural awareness. Dona outlined the feedback they'd received from participants, which was overwhelmingly positive.

The human library is not an entirely new concept at UoN - UON Global ran it during Harmony Week this year - but it was a relatively small gathering and largely went under the radar. I believe that, either through collaboration or sole ownership, NUPSA could expand the program on campus, promoting it through our mailing list and website to all postgrads, getting more students signed up as human books and more students/staff in attendance to 'read' them. This is something I'll discuss further with the Executive in 2017.

The other presentation of particular value was delivered by Shireen Chua, founder of Third Culture Solutions. Shireen specialises in Cultural Intelligence (CQ), a formalised, recently developed system of improving one's 'capability to function effectively across various cultural contexts.' These cultural contexts might be national, ethnic, organisational or generational, and Shireen trains all manner of individuals, businesses and education providers in the use of the CQ Tool.

During her workshop, Shireen outlined the CQ Tool and its various components - CQ Drive, CQ Knowledge, CQ Strategy and CQ Action - as well as how these could be identified, quantified and enhanced. She gave out copies of the formal testing matrix; I'll upload my copy to NUPSA's Dropbox for further examination. She also listed a series of online and in-person training resources that organisations can use to build their CQ, and thus more effectively engage international students.

From what I've been shown so far, I love the system, and I think it would be an excellent idea for NUPSA's Executive and staff to undergo some form of formal CQ training next year. This, I believe, would increase intercultural understanding amongst Executive members (that might prevent conflict in leadership), and allow staff to more effectively tailor their approach when addressing student enquiries and concerns.

The day ended with another plenary presentation by Dr Wendy Larner, titled, 'Universities, Diasporic Academics and Global Knowledge Networks'. Dr Larner's essential argument is that diasporic academics - those who study in their own countries and then travel elsewhere, taking their knowledge away with them - were once seen as 'brain drain', a loss of skills and knowledge to their nation. Now, however, they are viewed as 'trans-national knowledge brokers', not just academics who've been lost to their home countries; by leveraging their feelings of connection to their homeland even when working overseas, government and industry sectors can forge strong collaborative partnerships with their countries of residence. The global mobility of researchers is increasing (with an average of 12% of foreign nationals across Commonwealth universities), so, rather than fight this trend, universities are using those alumni they've cast across the world to build webs of scientific development.

The findings of Dr Larner's research, as they might interest postgrad students at UoN, are that new premiums are being placed on academics with multiple national affiliations; in her own words, 'these *diasporic academics* are seen as having the ability to deliver on new institutional aspirations for internationalisation.'

Key points for the day:

- **An increased focus on student outcomes - that is, the human benefits of international education - has seen enormous recent success in New Zealand's education system.**
- **Programs such as the 'human library', though previously underwhelming in their execution at UoN, would be excellent candidates for a new NUPSA initiative in 2017.**
- **Cultural Intelligence (CQ) training should be seriously considered for all Executive members and staff, to enhance the services we offer to international postgraduate students.**

Day 5: ISANA Conference, Wellington (Friday, December 9th)

The final day of ISANA's conference began, once again, with a plenary session and panel. The speaker was Distinguished Professor Paul Spoonley, whose talk, 'A New Era in Global Education: Talent Shortages and Changing Demographics', was chiefly concerned with the major shifts in academic and industry supply/demand set to take place over the next ten to twenty years.

Professor Spoonley's presentation was led by some fairly startling statistics. Half of the current jobs in the world, for example, will not exist in 2026 (due to exponential acceleration of new technologies), and a structural ageing of the population in many countries, coupled with lower fertility and delayed births, will mean that immigration demands will shift in reverse of their current trends.

China is the biggest example of this. Due to its ultra-low fertility and growing median age, research indicates that by 2030, the country will be *importing* workers, not exporting them. By contrast, Australia, New Zealand and Britain will undoubtedly see their immigration numbers fall over the next year or so. Professor Spoonley also discussed recent political detonations - Brexit and Trump, chiefly - and how these will further affect immigration trends moving forward.

The panel was primarily comprised of representatives of New Zealand's Department of Education, as well as Australia's Department of Education and Training. They discussed the previously mentioned New International Education Strategy for New Zealand and its core tenets of inclusion and tolerance ('Students do not simply wish to be *tolerated* - they want to be welcomed, included.'). as well as DET's various bi-lateral partnerships with education bodies in New Zealand and elsewhere, working to improve student mobility and train them in transferrable 'micro-skills' they can apply to a diversity of career paths.

James asked a question of the panel regarding regional areas in Australia, speaking from his own experience as a New Zealand ex-pat: what are regional centres currently doing to retain international students, maintain diverse communities and survive, given their ageing populations? Professor Spoonley echoed these concerns; this is a widening problem, he argued, certainly in New

Zealand. He stated that any discussion of immigration policy should be part of a larger conversation about population and changing demographics, as the two cannot be seen in isolation to each other.

One of the panelists suggested that education institutions should favour two-way exchange of students, rather than simply importing them; this would break down cultural barriers and dispel cultural assumptions, and hopefully change engrained attitudes in rural communities ('...so that figures like Pauline Hanson are less likely to emerge.')

The middle of the day held some interesting smaller presentations, such as La Trobe University's outline of its programs for rural students (they have only eight international students across their Albury-Wodonga campus), Chris Beard's exploration of the CI Model (similar in many ways to CQ), and the discussion led by Usha Rao on how to encourage greater student engagement in attending feedback sessions. The very best, however, was Krystal Agourram's talk, 'Outside the Classroom: the Student-Led Experience'.

Krystal is the Student Support Coordinator at Deakin University, and her presentation was an absolute goldmine of superbly-received weekly/fortnightly student programs they'd started running on campus. I took comprehensive notes on all of these - their leadership and volunteer programs, their city walking tours, morning teas, cooking classes, sports carnivals, conversation clubs, professional development workshops, huge multicultural festivals, swimming lessons, first aid training, and so on. Not all of these are practical with our resources, of course, and some are already being run (wholly or partially) by other teams at UoN. But many of her suggestions would fit well, I believe, within the framework of The Space and The Network in 2017. Krystal's ultimate advice was to let students lead all these events; they know what they need.

The final session of the day - and of the conference - was the student panel. A far cry from ANZSSA's student panel, *every* panelist here was a postgraduate student, and Andi almost immediately had a question for them.

He asked, 'What do your particular universities do well or badly in responding to the student voice?' The panel responded that universities (especially those in New Zealand, in their experience) focus enormously on marketing and attracting students but, once they arrive, have no proper services in place to support them. Students are considered potential assets during recruitment, but only thought of as deficits once they've paid and are engaged in study. Universities, one student argued, do not appreciate that alumni can either be their best champions or their worst detractors; an institution's reputation is built on the student experience, so this is where they need to start directing their efforts.

Another student added that, while all students wish to have their voices heard, they differ greatly in their ability to speak up, for various reasons. Universities need to find the right student groups and individuals to listen to, and create safe spaces where all students can give feedback and engage in dialogue. There needs to be a true multiplicity of student voices.

Many other questions from the delegates concerned the student voice: 'What skills and training do you need to effectively communicate issues back to your institutions?' and 'How can

universities improve their methods of getting student feedback?', for example. A question of particular interest came from a University of Tasmania staff member, who asked what the panelists' universities had done to help them make local friends; this reminded me of sentiments previously expressed by our International Representative, Anish Saini, who described a clear divide between domestic and international students on campus.

Here, the answers varied. Some students on the panel had many local friends, others far fewer. One student was a mother, and said that between caring for her child, work and study, there was very little remaining time to foster local friendships. She also suggested that 'friendship' itself clearly had different cultural connotations; she believed that true friendship took time to develop - time spent out with each other, having a meal, talking, etcetera - while New Zealanders, she believed, were quite private, and built friendships along very different cultural lines.

Another student again mentioned that his coursework classes, once quite small and intimate, suddenly became much larger and more impersonal. He said he'd like to see a greater emphasis on small group discussion and activities in class, to help build closer friendships between students.

A Sri Lankan student (the CISA representative who spoke to the previous panel) explained that he'd chosen New Zealand to study specifically because there were few other Sri Lankan students there. He wanted to meet very different people to those he was accustomed to, but few opportunities presented themselves; he had to go out and make an effort to build friendships, and this was his advice to students in the audience - 'Don't hang out with your own community all the time. Challenge yourself. Hang out with different nationalities, different people.'

He ended the panel session with another call for the formation of a peak international student representative body in New Zealand, again welcomed enthusiastically by the audience.

Key points for the day:

- **Today's student panel, more than any other presentation at the ISANA conference (unsurprisingly), got to the heart of the student voice. Questions such as whether students see themselves as students or customers (a notable concern of ANZSSA's panel) were raised, and a diverse collection of grievances articulated. I have noted all of them (several did not fit within this report), and will present them to the Executive when they next meet.**
- **A great many student programs were outlined by both La Trobe and Deakin Universities; again, I have made note of all of them, and will assess their suitability with the Executive in 2017.**
- **Paul Spoonley's data drew a startling picture of immigration trends over the next several years. We can soon expect to see a major decline in international student numbers in Australia, as well as many other countries.**

Final remarks

This was my first conference experience, and it was an edifying one. I met several representatives from other universities (such as ANU and UNSW), and gained a much broader perspective of the tertiary education sector as a whole, far beyond the boundaries of UoN I've previously been accustomed to.

I still cannot explain the logic in directly overlapping the two conferences, and I'm disappointed to have missed several interesting talks, such as Deborah Lee's ANZSSA discussion on how best to support LGBTI students on campus. Next year, at least, ANZSSA and ISANA have partnered to run a single conference week in tandem at the Gold Coast; this will, I hope, be a more consistent event, and another opportunity to enhance my understanding of best practice.

Key recommendations for NUPSA:

1. All Executive members and staff should undergo CQ training to enhance their intercultural understanding and expertise. There are qualified trainers available in NSW, as well as written resources for testing purposes; we should source these, budget for them, and make CQ training a requirement of all future Executive members and staff (as we currently do with governance training).
2. Though our new website, mailing list and newsletter have made an excellent start, we need to expand and modernise our online and social media platforms significantly. All evidence shows that students are frequent social media users, that they find many current university websites confusing and culturally unsuitable, and that online and satellite students feel most overlooked by student support services at their institution. There are several steps we can take to start addressing this:
 - A. Our mailing list currently reaches all onshore postgraduate students, or at least the vast majority of them. We need to encourage these students to follow our Facebook page, so that multimedia channels like Facebook Live can effectively reach them. We could host a competition or prize giveaway dependent on their signing up (ie. only students that follow our page are in the running), or some other enticement, and advertise it through our mailing list to get the widest engagement. NUSA employed a similar technique this year, which saw their Facebook following increase significantly.
 - B. With our Facebook page (hopefully) connecting with more students, we should start to communicate with them through more diverse media - less text posts, more videos/photos/audio recordings. Curtin University has demonstrated that Facebook Live can be a brilliant information tool that engages hundreds or even thousands of students in real-time; we should start using tools like this with regularity to answer student questions, give

news updates on NUPSA's activities, and get feedback on what students would like us to do for them in future. This would also make the Executive a more visible face of NUPSA, something we've already been working towards.

3. We should discuss the range of programs offered by universities such as La Trobe and Deakin University, and consider their efficacy as programs here at UoN. Programs such as the human library have been run here previously, but evidence from other universities shows they have the potential to be far more successful and wide-reaching with improved promotion. UON Global ran the human library in 2016; to be quite honest, I believe we could run it more effectively, and we should discuss at least the possibility of a collaboration with them next year. We well know that there is currently a divide between domestic and international postgraduate students, and these programs could do much to increase intercultural understanding and dialogue.