

Report for NUPSA Inc. Executive Committee on ANZSSA Conference

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This year I had the pleasure of attending my first ANZSSA Conference, along with the NUPSA President and the Project Officer. This primary focus of this conference is to educate university service providers about novel techniques for engaging students and the developing better understanding of student needs in order to deliver the best student experience for students in the Australasian region. To this point, NUPSA believes that attendance of NUPSA delegates at these conferences are critical in order to best develop our own skills to deliver the best experience to postgraduate students at the University of Newcastle (UoN).

ANZSSA is primarily run by student support staff across the university sector. Therefore, we believe that conferences of this nature are extremely helpful and beneficial for NUPSA staff to attend to further their career development. Secondly, it is important to have a greater student presence at these conferences in order to give relevant feedback to university support staff and universities as a whole so that they ensure that they can deliver the best student experience that is relevant for students.

The 2016 ANZSSA Conference was held at the AUT in Auckland, New Zealand. The theme of the 2016 conference was Inspire, Innovate and Involve; Insights into New Horizons for Student Experience and Engagement. There were a significant number of attendees from across the Australian and New Zealand region, as well as across the world. It was noted by a few conference attendees that a few attendees were missing due to the location and timing of the meeting. Also to note, the ANZSSA Conference ran concurrently with the ISANA Conference and as such our delegation had to miss the final day of this conference and the initial day of the ISANA conference. Further to note to this, the NUPSA International Officer was to attend these conferences but was unable to organise a VISA in time to travel due to issues with processing Indian VISAs in New Zealand. It will be important for Executive to consider this in the future when organising international travel for our representatives.

I will briefly summarise the major conference events and workshops that I attended.

Day 1

The plenary session of the morning was delivered by Dr. Kathie Irwin from Hope Brokers Inc. entitled "What's at the heart of the matter?". The focus of this talk gave an indigenous, Maori perspective to success for Maori in the university sector in New Zealand. This talk examined the difficulties Maori students faced and are currently facing in the New Zealand tertiary sector. From an Australian perspective, this showed that New Zealand has put a significant emphasis into 'closing the gap' on indigenous students in the tertiary sector. A minor criticism I have to this talk is that there was no focus on what could be done for indigenous students across Australia.

Following the plenary session, a student panel which was facilitated by Liz Bashara from AUT, was delving into the question “Are students customers?”. This panel began with a lengthy talk from Liz Bashara about the changing nature of the student relationship. This talk briefly summarised the need to create a culture of student entitlement, which is all about value adding and the need to generate a positive student experience as this differentiates each university from its competitors, with the main goal being to put students at the centre of student experience. This was quite ironic as this panel was led by a university staff member who led the discussion and did not give much time for the student panel to speak.

From the perspective of the student panel, engagement and advertising of services were crucial such as disability services. They also said that multiple engagements across many forms of media were essential, yet and most critically, it is essential for a university service to maintain a friendly face to face service. From a personal perspective it was heartening to see a student panel at a university conference, however in the future from NUPSAs perspective it would be beneficial to have postgraduate representatives to get the ‘whole’ university voice.

The next session attended during the morning was a workshop session entitled “Redefining Postgraduate Education” by Mark Young from LaTrobe University. This session highlighted some of the key issues affecting postgraduate students at LaTrobe and across the university sector such as the demand of better services due to increased competition, service expectations being higher due to more immediate career goal conversion from study and also likely due to having to cater for a more diverse student populace. Some of the changes put in place at LaTrobe included a 24 hour face to face contact service in the city and the implementation of a business like attire for all staff. This also coincided with the development of a NPS for all staff to achieve targets for student experience. NUPSA currently doesn’t have the ability to provide a 24 face to face service, we have 2 full time employees for the 2017 so will be able to ensure we are consistently open during office hours. The implementation of an NPS may be useful for student engagement and could be implemented into surveys for all workshops quite effectively.

Following the workshop next session attended was a plenary talk by A/Prof. Shanton Chang from the University of Melbourne entitled “Student Services and Information Seeking Behaviour”. This talk was extremely illuminating and began with the question to the audience as to where you gather your information from? The example being that as the conference was now in New Zealand, do we now expect all members of the audience to derive their news feeds from New Zealand only services? The answer primarily being NO, the question was asked again as to why we expect international students to do the same in a new environment? The talk primarily focused on the social networks that students develop themselves will help determine where and how they get their information. In the context of international students the social networks they develop, based on survey data show that 30% of international students interact only with students from their own countries, 20% interact with different international students and 30% have a mixed social cluster of domestic and international student friends. Developing networks that are helpful for these students to use will help get them most engaged in university life. A common suggestion was to develop language specific tools for international students to access for example developing a Chinese language site for Chinese students, if possible. This also meant targeting students with appropriate app platforms and website development which are culturally relevant, realising that there is significant cultural diversity in the online space such as in the physical space. Lastly, advice was given to target the

unengaged student and the suggestion was to try to engage as early as possible and develop your engagement tools to be informative and also 'basic' in that they will reach all possible audiences.

Day 2

The morning plenary session was delivered by Eric Stoller from the US entitled "Get ready to get digital". The focus of this session was about the change towards a more interactive environment with the emphasis on remaining human when interacting with students. This key message being to show a more personal side to your digital engagement as students are less likely to interact if they believe they are interacting with a 'machine'. Some other relevant suggestions for digital engagement included the use of live facebook streams for the development of QA sessions. We will investigate the development of live facebook streams for 2017 for relevant workshop series.

Following this session a student led session entitled "I, too am Auckland" was delivered which talked about the importance of student led activism to represent student best interests. This group in particular was set up by a number of media savvy students at the University of Auckland to advocate and represent the broader Auckland student community. This involved the development of a number of advertisements using Auckland students to advocate for student interests. They found that using this method was the best way to effectively communicate an idea. They had some poor translation of message using school children to discuss tertiary student issues in an advertisement and thus changed their advocacy strategy. They also highlighted the importance of nuance and to avoid the use of binaries to facilitate discussion and deconstruction of complex issues.

The next workshop session given by Amanda Clinton of the University of Auckland entitled "Empowering diverse students to question, challenge and change institutional culture". This tool involved the use of safe workshop spaces to ask complex questions and the use of Likert Scales in workshops. It may be useful to implement in some workshops for 2017.

The next session was a refereed paper given by Karen Davis of Victoria University and Alison Dow of Unitec entitled "Common issues, new connections: Learnings from 2016 Global Summit on Student Affairs and NASPA". A key finding from this study was the importance of data collection for student advocacy. It is becoming increasingly relevant as a measurement for student satisfaction surveys and we must ensure that we implement our own data collection strategies for 2017. They mentioned the importance of student led movements such as the global fees must fall movement which is something our global postgraduate body, CAPA could investigate.

The last session attended was by Dr. Welby Ings of the University of Auckland entitled "Who influences change? Transformation, organisations and the place of the human heart". This talk primarily focused on the value of education and the need to engage all people. It also focused on the development of the intellectual student that is not necessarily based on 'grading'.