ANZSSA ISANA CONFERENCE, 6-8 DEC 2017, GOLD COAST

Wed 6 Dec

The Coursework Rep and I were up bright and early to attend the opening of Day 1. The morning began with a beautiful Welcome to Country by Emerald Brewer, a traditional custodian of the Gold Coast. She spoke of the connection between the land, the people and their stories, grounding the conference with a real sense of place and noting that as visitors, we are welcome here. She signed off in the traditional language of her country: *Until we meet again, we wish our friends all the best.*


Official delegates!

Keynote 1: Engaging students for success: Integrating pedagogical approaches, student experiences and desired outcomes
Professor Lily Kong, Provost and Chair Professor of Social Sciences, Singapore Management University (SMU)
The opening key note speech was delivered by Professor Lily Kong, Provost of Singapore Management University. She spoke to the theme of the conference, *Widening perspectives of*

student success, noting that at SMU they have modified their graduate learning outcomes to redefine what success as a student means. Most universities agree that activities outside the classroom can contribute to graduate learning outcomes. SMU's strategy takes this idea one step further by not just offering these activities and events to students, but by integrating student services into their course offerings i.e. the co-curriculum has been integrated into the core curriculum.
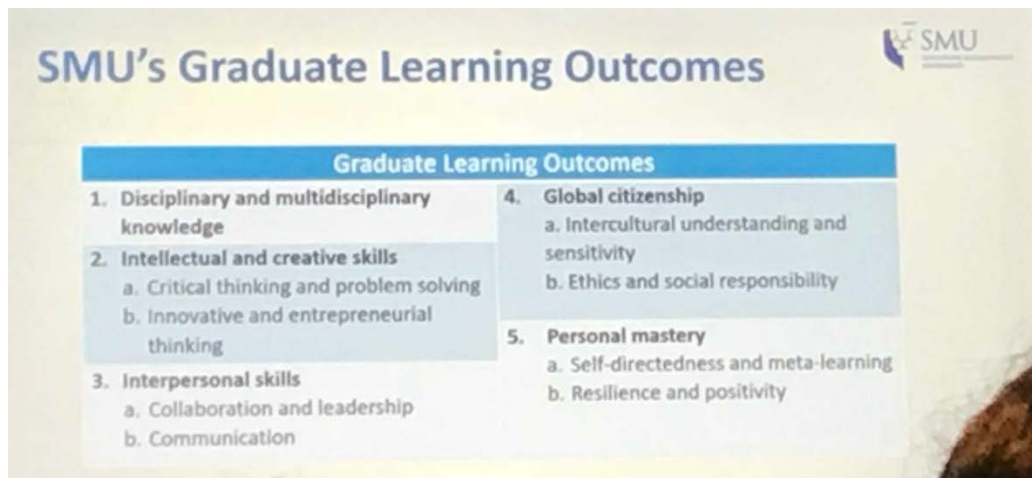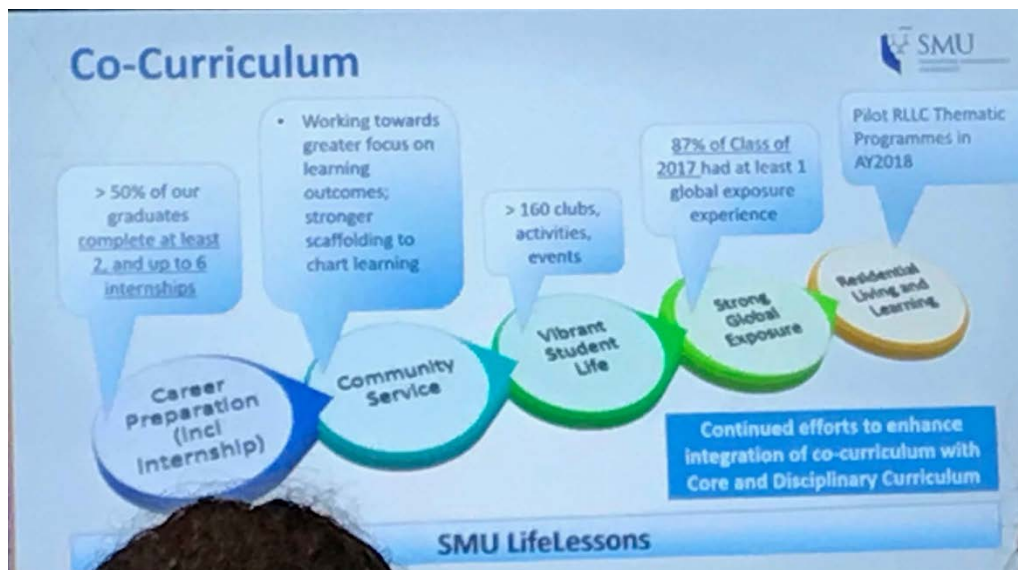

Singapore Management University's Graduate Learning Outcomes

SMU believe that attending university is about more than employability, it's about achieving holistic success and lifelong learning outcomes. In 2020, workplace skills will have evolved beyond vocational capabilities, workers will also need to be innovative problem solvers, and have a solid understanding of intercultural communication. Individuals will need to define their own personal philosophies - citizens inspired by their passions are more powerful than marketable skills! This kind of holistic learning is not just the purview of academics, it is also the responsibility of admin staff to act as co-educators.

Prof. Kong encouraged a whole institute approach to teaching and learning, using community asset mapping to identify strengths and weaknesses. Students are involved at individual, peer/social and community/citizen levels, with academics being fully supportive of the co-curricular activities. Prof. Kong noted that the more integral nonacademic services are, the lesser the chances of de-prioritization i.e. budget cuts. She noted that the professional development of admin staff was key to their growth as co-educators. From an evaluation point of view there was more work to be down to measure the success of SMU's co-curricular

programs, but anecdotally the feedback has been very positive and SMU has one of the highest rates of graduate employment.

Singapore Management University's Co-Curriculum Activities

Overall the session was inspiring, from a staff and student perspective. The value of co-curricular activities may seem obvious to many providers however, my question would be how do we get students into this mindset too? NUPSA run a host of soft skills workshops and social events, but continue to struggle with wider student engagement. Currently, it seems students are more likely to attend if they can see a direct correlation between the activity and their employability. I believe there needs to be a culture shift within universities to encourage students to become more involved in student life. Furthermore, this involvement should be formally recognized and considered as co-curricular, rather than extra-curricular.

TL; DR: 21st century workplaces will require skills beyond just ticking the academic boxes; we need to do more to show students the value of activities outside of their coursework/research.

Student Panel
Reps from Griffith University, Auckland University Students' Association, UNSW and Victoria University of Wellington
The students on the panel represented domestic and international students, and although they were all undergrads they still had plenty of relevant information to share. A top priority for all the students was opportunities to connect at university, whether through volunteering, living on

campus or getting involved with clubs and societies. Safe spaces for particular cohorts was also noted as important e.g. a dedicated Indigenous space, queer space, women's space, trans-friendly bathrooms etc. I would extend this concept as justification for dedicated postgrad spaces, as they are a distinct cohort with their own needs. The panel participants all agreed that students tend to listen to other students more than messaging from their universities so peer-to-peer programs are effective.

For EALD international students, language barriers can initially be challenging but all of the above engagement opportunities help build communication skills. Other challenges to student success that were mentioned were the work/life balance, financial pressures, and employment opportunities. One solution would be better promotion of grants and scholarships – support is out there, students just need to be aware of it. When asked about their own definition of student success, the panel had answers involving working in the advocacy space, creating success/equity for all students, making friends, volunteering and connecting.

All of the students communicated their sense of survey fatigue; universities needs to do more research/innovation in their evaluation strategies. One of the students raised the idea that universities shouldn't just tell students what the data will be used for, but create a feedback loop and let them know what actions are actually being implemented based on the survey findings.

When asked what areas universities could improve on the students suggested transition courses into the workplace, and shifting the focus of mental health support from students having seeking it out, to staff being more aware and setting up referrals. Despite the undergrad/on-campus focus, the panel also noted that final year/postgrad/online students were somewhat isolated from campus life, so the support and engagement offered doesn't necessarily meet their needs.

TL; DR: A sense of place, belonging and connection are key to student success; everyone is sick of surveys.

Teaching mindfulness to students online

Mr. Geoff Simmons, Charles Sturt University

Counsellors at CSU received SSAF funding to roll out a program researching methods of teaching online mindfulness training. Given that NUPSA had trialed something similar earlier in the year, I was keen to find out more.

Based on the research gathered, CSU then separately funded a four week online course with the option of self-guided training or real-time sessions (delivered via Blackboard and Adobe Connect respectively). The focus was to encourage student to maintain their well-being, rather than act as a crisis management tool. The counselling team found that even a brief program was still effective, but the timing of the program was important. Running it early in semester allows students to be equipped with the necessary skills around exam/assignment time.

Applied mindfulness proved difficult in the online space; this could be combatted through running less content per week, but in more depth. Older students proved to be more guided by intrinsic motivations, which resulted in more robust engagement and greater resilience. Some other feedback was that troubleshooting information would be helpful e.g. what do with boredom and restlessness during meditation, how to deal with unpleasant thoughts. The program also promoted the importance of regular practice, and encouraged students to continue mindfulness meditation after the course had finished.

TL; DR: Online mindfulness programs can be effective, given the right structure and timing.

Enabling students in a multi-cultural institute

Manukau Institute of Technology

Manukau Institute of Technology is a NZ polytechnic and operates more like TAFE than a university. They have put a lot of time and resources into their student teams to support students from diverse backgrounds, who are predominantly from Maori and Pacifika cultures.

The key was understanding the student context (individual>family>sub tribe>tribe>world) and the students' connections to school, youth services, corrections, work and income. Their staff are all trained in cultural competency and many have social work backgrounds. They work to identify, assist, triage, minimize, and enable, as needed. They have developed strong

relationships with community providers for when an issue goes beyond scope of the school and external referrals are needed.

TL; DR: NZ does cultural competency better than Australia.

**L1 scaffolding for international students learning L2**
Mr. Titus Ng, Monash College

At the heart of international student difficulties is language competency and comprehension. Mr. Ng noted that if you can't even formulate or ask a question in class, learning doesn't happen. The research has found international students have issues with memorizing content rather than learning it, plagiarism, outsourcing assignments, and engaging private tutors. EALD students at Monash were surveyed and they indicated that top strategies they preferred were to try relating examples to their home country/culture and using their first language in individual consultations. The students had mixed responses to using their first language in the classroom, with both pros and cons reported.

Ready, set, go! The lifecycle of successful student transition
Ms. Cheryl Burgess and Ms. Karen Newsom, UON

Super undergrad focused, but went along to support our UON colleagues!
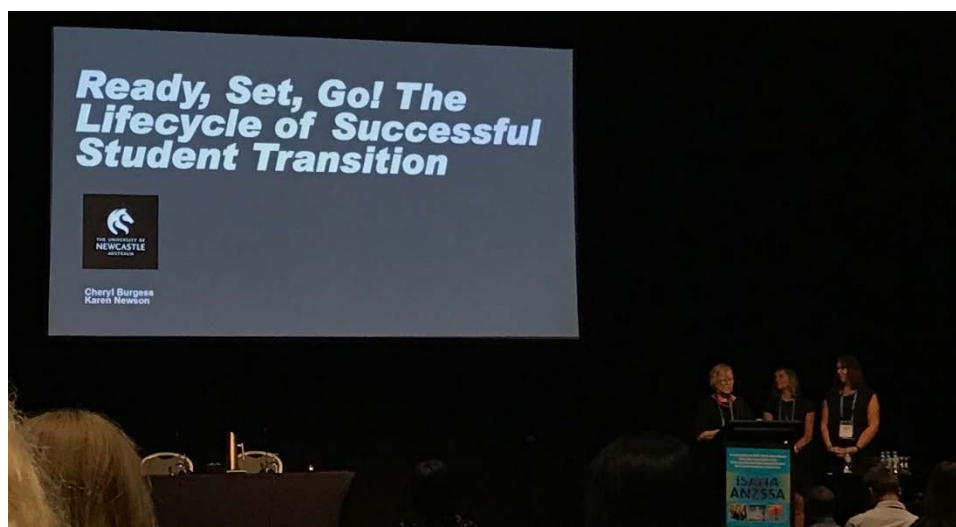
UON represent!

Under the radar: A report on the mental health of Australian university students
Ms. Vivienne Brown, The National Centre of Excellence in Youth Mental Health/RMIT

This report was conducted to help understanding the prevalence and experience of mental ill health in university students; the data is patchy but it appears that students do have higher rates of psychological distress.

Findings from the Orygen report

Policy makers and national leadership team must provide direction to universities. Solving this issue will require dual portfolio/sector commitment; the Department of Health and Department of Education must work alongside each other, especially as there is a high cost/benefit social return.

Keynote 2: Empowering First Nations as co-producers of learning, not mere recipients of teaching
Mr. Tony Dreise, Indigenous Scholar, ANU

Dreise has been working towards connecting research, policy and communities of practice. First Nations peoples are having to navigate, think and act in an increasingly globalized and complex world, a reality that brings both threats and opportunities. Dreise recognizes that learning should be lifelong and life-wide, that is, learning isn't always institutionalized. He is pushing for a model that promotes education for, about, with and by, Indigenous peoples.

The Australian Early Learning Years Framework models a child's need for being > belonging > becoming, however there is no reason that this process is any less important for learners of all ages. Charles Fadel, founder of the Centre for Curriculum Redesign, identifies four C's that are needed to drive education in the 21st Century – Critical thinking, Creativity, Communication, and Collaboration. From a First Nations perspective though, perhaps these could be complemented by four more – Cultural bridging, Caring for Country, and building inner Confidence and Character. In combination, these eight skills and attributes are more likely to empower learners in their quest for meaning, stronger intracultural and intercultural relationships, environmental sustainably, career success, and enterprise development. Universities of course must offer teaching, learning, and research but they are also have a moral imperative to support community engagement.

TL; DR: First Nations people have a lot to offer to the teaching and learning sphere; universities should aim to produce well-rounded citizens.

Forum: Student Advisory Services
This was a more informal group session, where we broke off into smaller teams to discuss the successes and challenges of our own institutions. I sat with the 'transition' sub-group, as it was the closest area related to postgraduate studies i.e. transitioning from undergrad studies or work, into postgrad. I actually found that I contributed to the group more than I had expected, which I think is a great reflection on the good work NUPSA and UON have done this year to support postgrads. Some of the concrete engagement strategies I could offer were our monthly postgrad orientations, and our push for a dedicated postgraduate space. The group elected a note taker, so the full discussion and participant contacts will be available to view when that gets sent through.

<u>Thurs 7 Dec</u>

**Keynote 3: Contextual and situational influences on student success**
Professor Karen Nelson, Pro-Vice Chancellor (Students), USC
The keynote's opening descriptor pretty well sums up the theme of the conference: *The notion of student success is multifaceted, variously interpreted, quantifiable as well as nebulous, both collective and individual, and often transient in nature.*

Prof. Nelson presented data on completion and attrition rates at all major Australian universities. Again, there was a heavy Bachelor focus but my takeaway was the lesson that raw data isn't always representative of what is actually happening. Student success can be measured in so many different ways, and the context of the individual, and the institution, need to be taken into account. This was supported by a lot of data, and a lot of graphs, which don't bear repeating here, but can be viewed when ANZSSA release the presenters slides online.

A professional development course for student services staff – growing our own
Dr. Joanna Peters (Griffith University) and Mr. Brendan Mosely (University of Auckland)
The title of this session was perhaps a little misleading as it turned out to be a workshop to *develop* a course for student services staff, rather than a session on actually providing professional development. Nonetheless, it was interesting and informative. I was quite taken with the idea of the professionalization of student services, as it lends credence and credibility to all the work we do as admin staff. Griffith University are in the process of producing a Grad Cert in Professional Learning, with one elective specifically focusing on student services.
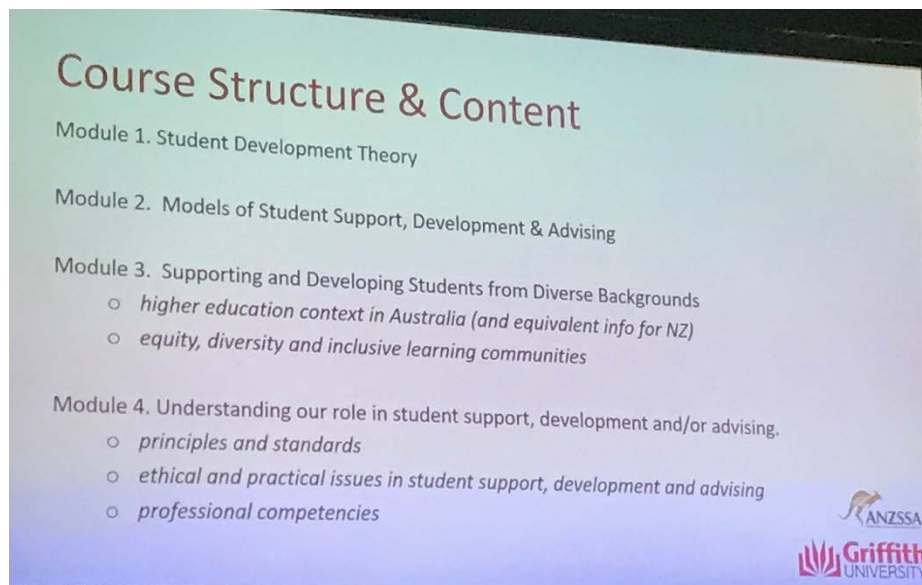

Proposed course outline for Grad Cert in Professional Learning

After taking us through the basic structure and idea behind the course, we broke off into groups to generate some feedback. It was heartening to hear that despite the many differences in governance and structure, all the other student services staff at universities seem to experience the same successes and challenges.

Peer advice, support and communication: Using students to inform students

Mrs. Usha Rao, La Trobe University

What makes some peer to peer initiatives work where others fail? What is the formula for success? La Trobe Melbourne runs a peer-to-peer program for advice, collaboration and support. They have identified two types of students: givers (who like to be in control), and receivers (often unpredictable). The key to peer-to-peer success if providing the right kind of support and training to these two groups.
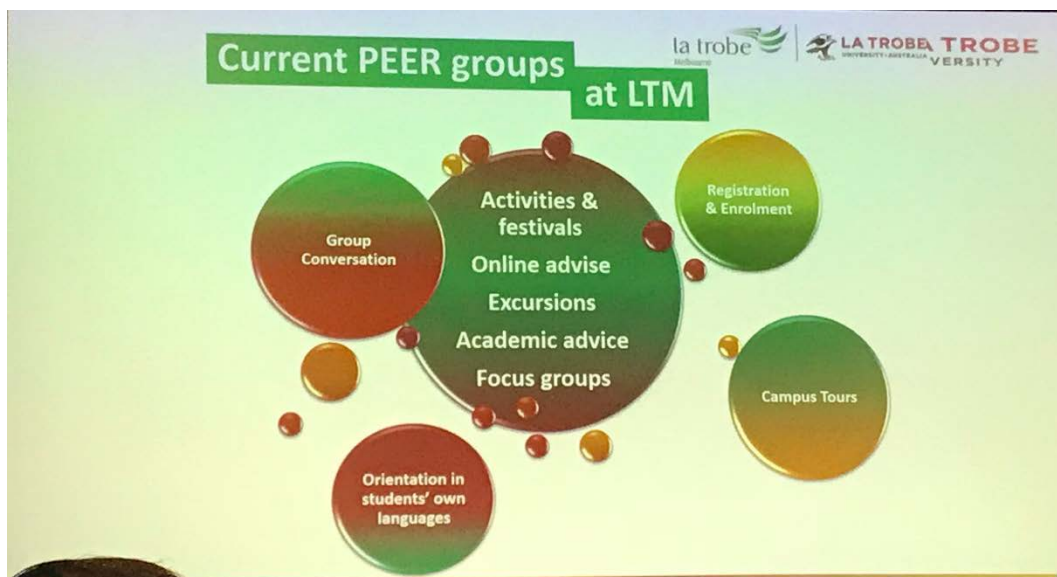
Some examples of peer-led activities at La Trobe

Connectivity through sharing of cultural: The Global Communicators Program

Ms. Sharon Twyford, University of Wollongong

UOW have had great success with their intercultural dialogue program which was initially designed to allow EALD students an opportunity to practice their English, but has grown to incorporate many different activities. I was staggered to hear they run up to 19 x 1 hour sessions each week! The program has been running since 2012, so the elements of consistency and longevity play a factor in their success. They also pay their facilitators, so that incentives more domestic students to get involved.

Further reading: Developing and Supporting Student Leadership (DaSSL)
http://www.dassl.edu.au/

International Student and Alumni Satisfaction Survey 2017: Results and Key Findings for Australian and NZ Universities
Mr., Shane Dillon, International Alumni Job Network
IAJN assists in finding work for students that have returned to Asia. Their survey asked whether alumni would recommend their university and their country of education, to other international students.

NavigateMe: A gateway to students' greatest potential
Student Life, UNSW
The Student Life team at UNSW were tasked with engaging students in the online space by developing a tool to help students find services. The development team worked closely with staff to ensure information is accurate and worked equally closely with students to ensure the tool is actually useful. The tool is designed to be personalized, and encourage self-management. Unfortunately the demo wasn't working, but there is an intro video on their website here: https://navigateme.unsw.edu.au/login

You did what?!! The benefits of collaborating with students on risk behaviours outside the classroom
Mr. Jane Gunn-lewis (Arcadia University) and Ms. Louisa Samson (Otago University)
Arcadia University has worked closely with their students to understand how and why students take risks during their studies. They had a particular focus on US study abroad students, but the results could be applied to any context. Students were surveyed about their use of drugs and alcohol, their sexual health, their attitudes towards driving, and other risky behaviors such as hitchhiking. Nearly half the surveyed students indicated that they undertook risky behaviour, predominantly in the form of hiking, sky diving and other extreme sports. Interestingly the majority of students said they felt as safe, if not safer, in the NZ compared to their home country. These results then suggest that *because* the students felt safe, they therefore took bigger risks.

Improving student success through engagement opportunities at Massey University Student Association (MUSA)
NZ experienced a similar wane in student association engagement after their version of VSU in 2012. This reduced engagement led to the restructure of operations and governance at MUSA, where they have no implemented stronger succession planning and related policies, as well as

a smarter approach to funding. They have introduced a volunteer system, allowing them to provide more, and higher impact events. Part of their success also came down to collaborating with academic departments, and speaking with faculties and schools that still had a functioning class representative system. They've increased voting participation from 280 votes for President in 2015, to 450 votes in 2017. I had a good chat with MUSA's current Operations Manager and have his contact details for future reference.

Forum: Language and Learning

The second forum of the conference was a smaller group, where we discussed language support strategies for international students. The main points brought up were: academics setting expectations for their students early on; using exemplars; using cultural diverse examples and analogies; using diverse pedagogies; explicit teaching of literacy; giving early feedback; asset mapping of university communities; and running an audit of other university and community resources. Full notes of the session will be available via ANZSSA shortly.

I mentioned the specific difficulties research students face if their supervisor is not as supportive or engaged as they could be. The facilitator encouraged NUPSA to work with CAPA to lobby for better supervisor training.

Gala Dinner Gals

<u>Fri 8 Dec</u>

Plenary session: Broadening perspective for student success – where to from here for stakeholders
Government, Industry and Student Reps
Students were asked to highlight what they see as the major issues, or barriers to success, for students. They mentioned workplace exploitation, accommodation, study load, and travel as key concerns, particularly the lack of travel concessions for international students. They noted that to create a culture of success, institutions had to put students at the center. Students are seeking communication, collaboration and innovation, and want institutions to support student-led initiatives, start-ups, entrepreneurship, and the use of new technologies.

The panelists agreed that there was a need to share information more widely and collaboratively and join up data from different government departments. Strategies suggested were to continue special interest forums and discussions outside the conference; be champions of our sector, use the data to sell the message; speak with a collective voice; include international students in governance and decision making; regulate of education agents; move from anecdote to evidence and turn talk into action. The industry member of the panel suggested delegates start with something small and achievable.

There was a question from the floor about leadership training in CISA, to promote and support student engagement. CISA's rep responded that with an unbalanced work/study load, extra engagement is difficult for international students, not to mention mental health issues, financial pressure, cultural pressures. The facilitator noted that student leadership training, for both domestic, international and equity groups, is not the domain of any one department or institution. Many student leadership terms only last one year, so it can be hard to get settled and enact any real change; better/longer handovers are needed. An interesting point to finish on was that student engagement is not the same thing as being student-led. Students need to be guided and scaffolded to leadership, they don't always know what they don't know.

Becoming a competitive academic candidate: A workshop for doctoral candidates and early career researchers

Dry Catherine Gomes (RMIT) and A/Prof Shanton Chang (University of Melbourne)

This a small session, with a mix of current research students and support services staff. It was really more of an informal chat with the two facilitators, who had both completed their PhDs and had acted as supervisors.
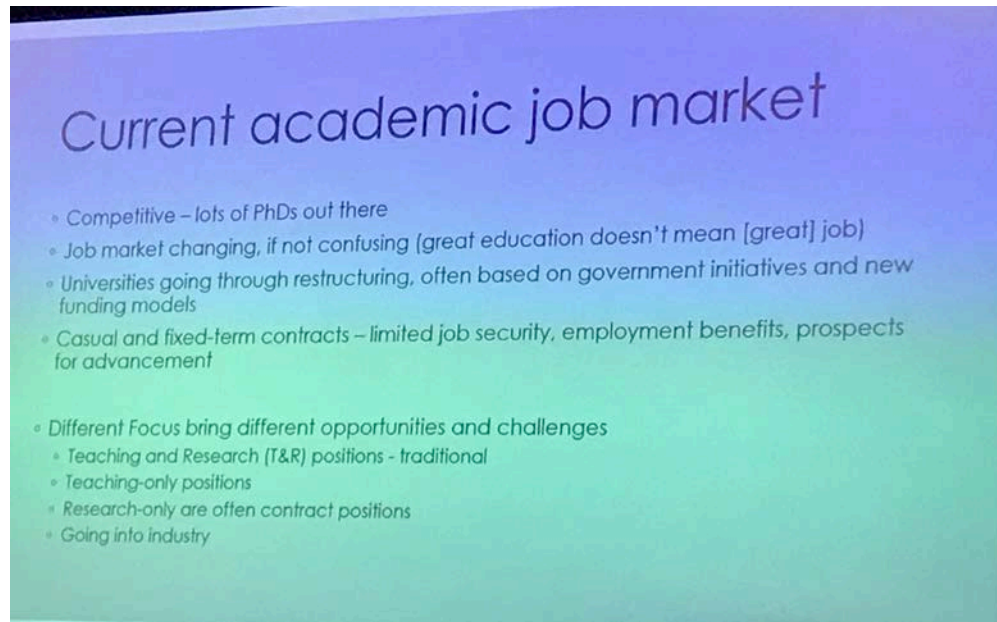
PhD: Please hire, Desperate

When asked why they chose to start a PhD, the current students in the room mentioned things like wanting to change the world, and contribute to the field of research. Prof. Chang noted that it's important not to put the cart before the horse - get your qualification and then think ahead. A PhD is a passport to a new country but it's not the whole experience, it's just the start of the journey. He cautioned to be wary of having too wide a scope. A PhD candidate's career will probably divert many times from their original area of research. Focus on significance (contribution to theory) and importance (practical implications - this is where the money is! Who will care about your research, how does it impact practice, the 'so what?'). They mentioned that the research methods themselves can become a career path. For example, one of their colleagues travels to conferences to talk about a methodologies she pioneered, visual ethnography. How do you maximize opportunities? Be an active member of the PhD community; network; attend conferences; continue relationships through social media or joint

projects. They also noted that you don't just have to work with those from the same discipline; working with colleagues from diverse areas can lead to the cross pollination of ideas.

One of the major challenges for PhD candidates is being able to link their research with their community. Academic language is useful for thinking a concept through, and making links, but it is often too dense to be easily comprehended by the general public. Think about the translation of your research, distil it down to three points (3MT is a useful program to train students to communicate their research succinctly).

Work on your resilience to be able to cope with rejection; get feedback, develop rigor; know your audience/publisher; improve the clarity of your work; refine your argument. It's important that PhD students know they can nominate who they *don't* want to review their work.

The notion of 'publish or perish' is not as important as it has been previously; focus on producing high impact publications. There is debate as to whether candidates should aim for A star journals only, or start low and work their way up; everyone will have their own strategy. It's important to claim the space of your research and build your reputation. Enhance your career opportunities by engaging in good teaching. Of course there are publication and grant opportunities for research, but they also exist within teaching. Students and early career researchers should also have good engagement with industry and community. After such a narrow focus of research during candidature it's important to expand this further into the community. By publishing and collaborating with international colleagues your reach is much, much further.

TL; DR: The PhD journey is never straightforward; connect with your colleagues and community; know your audience and learn to communicate your research accordingly.
Follow up idea: Grant writing workshops, introduction to ARC.

Challenges and enablers for study success for students over the age of 25 living in regional Victoria
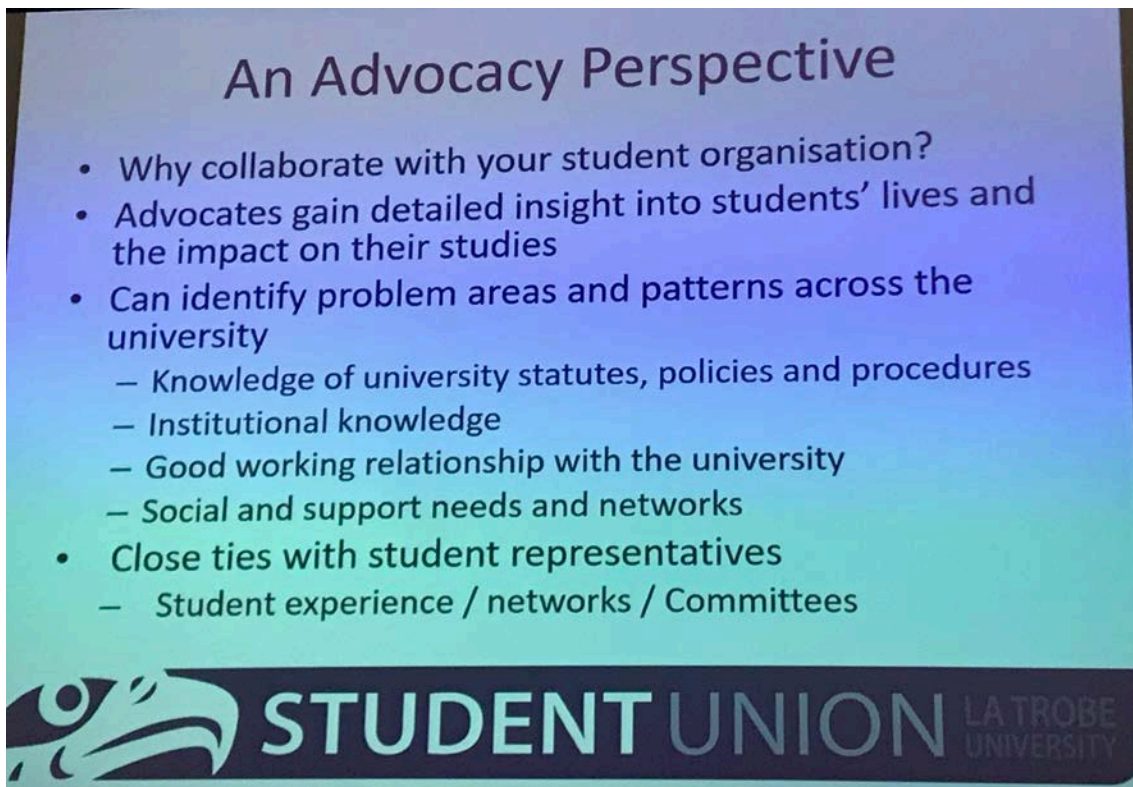**Mr Jim Young and Ms Shannon Kerrigan, La Trobe University (Bendigo)**
La Trobe's study found that their mature age students are at risk of early withdrawal, failure or poor performance. This has a direct impact on university's finances, and of course also on the student and their goals. My takeaway strategies to help retention for mature students would be

to send out communication and event schedules as early as possible, so that students can plan their lives e.g. child care, work commitments etc. I also wonder whether we should/could include a campus tour as part of our monthly orientations.

Understanding wellbeing and mental health amongst higher degree research students – a framework for change
Dr Heidi Ellemore, La Trobe University Student Union
Although this presentation didn't necessarily provide the solution to the issue of mental ill health in research students, it was validating to know that other student organizations are also recognizing the particular needs of postgraduates. Dr Ellemore outlined that the research student context is the perfect storm for mental ill health. Research degrees attract high achievers who may struggle with perfectionism; it's an intense and isolating journey; there is often a competitive culture within academic departments; and PhD candidates are often acting as both a student and a staff member. La Trobe have only just started their research in this area, but agree that there should be a broader focus on well-being, as well as crisis management i.e. prevention is better than a cure.