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Commonwealth of Australia, *Senate Enquiry Welfare of International Students*, [http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/committee/eet\\_ctte/international\\_students/report/report.pdf](http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/committee/eet_ctte/international_students/report/report.pdf), 2009, chapter3.1

## *The Australian Culture Awareness Course*

### *Cultural Preparation for Australian Education*

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#### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Australian Culture Awareness course held in a TAFE college in Melbourne CBD, had two components - an adjustment survey and the Australian Cultural Awareness training. The training was provided to 50 international students, the majority of Indian origin while the survey on 'Adjustment in Australia' was answered by 38 students. For two thirds of the Indian students the three main concerns were - missing home/feeling homesick, unable to practice their religion and concern for academic achievement, whereas financial difficulties, difficulties with written or spoken English were more of a concern for other International students.

'Mental tension' and a 'lower level of happiness' than before arrival was detected in approximately 18% and 11% of students respectively. Counselling in situations of "homesickness" is not the optimal solution. Australia India society of Victoria (AISV), conceptualised The Australian Cultural Awareness Course, funded by Victorian Multicultural Commission and intended for international students of Indian origin and elsewhere. The aim of this course was to help students learn and navigate the Australian systems, take individual responsibility, sexual boundaries, to feel connected and minimise social isolation and home sickness. Research elsewhere has shown that cultural connectivity and inclusiveness improves student security.

Sport is an integral part of Australian culture and societal fabric; sporting clubs by partnering with educational institutions could provide quick lessons in Australian culture and enhance connectivity.

We at AISV believe that that if the students felt good about their time and study in Australia, they would carry a sense of goodwill and warmth that will remain with them for life whether here as Australian citizens or back home in their country of origin. This course that was designed for such a purpose achieved its aim as per the evaluation on the day by the students themselves.

Governments at all levels can play an important regulatory role by making such a course compulsory for all international students, who appear to have differing needs depending on their country of origin.

Further new migrants, professional migrants could also benefit by such inclusiveness enhancing courses.

## **Introduction**

The number of foreign students studying in Australia has risen since the government deregulated the tertiary education sector in 1986 (DEEWR, 2010).

In 2008, the international education sector was worth \$15.5 billion, up 23.4% from 2007. It remains the third largest export behind coal (\$46.4 billion) and iron ore (\$30.2 billion), (Australian Education International, 2009).

In Australia in the period 2008-09 there were more than 500,000 enrolments of international students (ABS, 2007). In Victoria, in 2007, 266,842 students enrolled in all educational sectors including Vocational and Postgraduate. Of these 179,946 were domestic (67%) and 86,896 were international (33%), (ABS, 2007).

In 2008 students contributed \$4.8 billion to the Victorian economy (Australia Education International, 2009). The Senate Enquiry into International Students Welfare in 2010 expects the international education sector is going to remain economically significant despite some current difficulties (Commonwealth of Australia, 2010).

Students have also contributed to the Victorian economy by working in skill shortage areas such as taxi driving, hospitality, cleaning and retail services (such as petrol stations and convenience stores etc). Indian Students, who numbered around 27,000 in both 2007 and

2008, were particularly visible due to their distinctive appearance (Das, 2008). Due to a complexity of reasons, Indian students became the target of a series of vicious attacks, including some as serious as murder. The lack of visible response and denial of the seriousness of these attacks in 2007-8 by the Victorian government was highly vocalised by the Indian media (The Times of India, 2009).

In the past five years, Indian international students studying in Victoria have brought to the attention of peak Indian community organizations an escalating number of problems (AISV). In response to this, the Australia India Society of Victoria (AISV) commissioned a study on the problems faced by Indian students. The study was conducted via focus groups of 40 students. In conjunction with the Federation of Indian International Students (FISA), AISV produced a report for submission to the Victorian and Federal Governments which foreshadowed the majority of the problems that were to unfold in the ensuing years - racial discrimination, harassment, criminal assaults, settlement issues including housing, isolation, loneliness, depression, and poor quality of education (AISV & FISA, 2006). The students held governments - at all levels - responsible, attacking the educational authorities and describing with dismay the lack of respect demonstrated by the host society. Echoing the thoughts of the students and AISV, Westrip and Holroyd in their book titled 'Colonial Cousins' (2010,) stated:

The intake of fee paying students has almost invariably spelled out as beneficial in economic terms. Little thought has been given to more subtle benefits that will accrue eventually as those students mature and often secure powerful and influential positions on return to their countries. If they feel good about their time in Australia that sense of rapport will remain for life (p. 403).

Marginson, Nyland Erlenwati and Forbes-Hewitt (2010) in their book titled "International Student Security" weave a complex tapestry of causes and effects into violence against international students in Australia. Their thesis holds, among other things, that basic cultural differences are important underlying contributors to a number of problems such as physical security, freedom to live optimally, inadequate communication with teachers, housing shortages, financial difficulties and lack of job opportunities. Cultural differences create a

lack of inclusion by the host society and a loss of sense of harmony by Indian students with their host environment. This results in loneliness, lack of support and mental health issues such as depression and high suicide rates. Silverman, Meyer, Sloane, Raffel and Pratt (1997) reported the international student suicide rate as 21.8/100,000 compared to 7.5/100,000 in mid-western USA university students. However, as pointed out by Marginson et al. (2010), this may partially reflect the rates of their countries of origin, i.e. China and India, where the suicide rates are very high, particularly female rates.

It, therefore, becomes all the more important that international students, especially from India, China and related Asian Cultures who are here, without social support networks and more vulnerable, are supported in culturally meaningful ways. Social isolation can also lead to neglect and inadequate treatment of one's physical illness. All of the above make for a negative experience in the new culture, detracting from effective learning.

The problem during 2007-2010 became more acute with daily reports of student problems, educational issues and security problems in the media. The result was that students started to recognise their place in the Australian community as "cash cows" whose tuition fees at commercial rates were propping up the Australian economy. The educational institutions which minimised educational costs were maximising revenues while students themselves were left feeling used, unsupported, vulnerable, isolated, alone and disenfranchised (Marginson et al, 2010). Little attention was given to their pastoral needs.

The Senate hearing held in 2009 on the International Students Issue published a report in 2010 that stated:

The committee recognises the particular difficulties encountered by overseas students as they prepare to live in another country, by themselves, where the culture as well as the language may be very different. On arrival in this country, students face the tasks of securing suitable accommodation and finding employment. They are in need of help and advice, even in doing simple, daily chores. The committee is concerned to ensure that credible information and appropriate support services are available to assist students in their studies and in everyday life in a foreign culture. (Commonwealth of Australia, 2010, chapter3.1).

If handled properly Australia stands to gain financially from ongoing demands for education while strategically the very same students in India and other Asian nations would improve future Australian relations and image.

Culturally, and from a human rights viewpoint, inclusion, respect and dignity is due to all students, including students who arrive from Asia, traditionally seen as inferior by Anglo-Australians who in the past have identified with their white colonisers (Marginson et al., 2010).

A large body of research suggests that acculturative stress is correlated with anxiety and depression, especially in the early months of arrival, and more so if prejudice and discrimination is common place (Leung, 2001).

Leung (2001) researched 382 Melbourne students, comparing Anglo-Australians and Asians in the light of various individual variables including social self-efficacy, locus of control, loneliness, age, sex, and acculturating group membership. Leung found ethnic differences in loneliness, social self-efficacy, locus of control, and academic satisfaction. For non-migrant students, a sense of control was important to their psychological and academic adaptation whereas for migrant/overseas students, supportive social relationships were important for their psychological and academic adaptation.

In view of the above, to assist in reducing cultural shock and disenfranchisement of Victorian Indian International students, AISV, the Centre for International Mental Health (School of Population Health, University of Melbourne), and the Culture Training Company JM Associates, devised and conducted a pilot training course for 50 students.

The course titled "Australian Culture Awareness Course" was held on the 6th October 2010 in Melbourne CBD. Following, the aims of the course, its evaluation and the findings from a survey are reported.

## Aims

The course had a number of aims including:

- ◆ to help international Indian students better connect with the Australian society and with local Indian migrants, to form social networks and feel supported and included rather than excluded;
- ◆ to understand the use of Australian colloquial language and other cultural nuances so as to reduce misunderstandings;
- ◆ to provide information on local health services, police, crisis agencies, Immigration Department and other agencies;
- ◆ To voice some of their concerns and needs.

## Participants and Location

Throughout the day, more than 50 students took part in the training. Students were recruited with the help of a Vocational Training College in the CBD of Melbourne (KAPS Management College). Although initially developed for Indian students, students from other nationality were also invited to participate in the training.

## Training Structure

- ▶ 10 30 am - Morning tea and Registration
- ▶ 11 -11 30 am- Ian Geddes, Acting Superintendent Police Services. *"Latest Information on Safety and Crime"*
- ▶ 11 30- 12 noon - Mr Peter Van Den Burk Assistant Manager, Melbourne Service Centre, Department of Immigration and Citizenship *"Latest on immigration rules re students and residency visa"*
- ▶ 12 - 12 15pm. Liz Thompson, International Student Care Service. *"What they can do for you "*
- ▶ 12 15 - 1 pm - LUNCH (provided)
- ▶ 1 pm - 3 pm- Australian Cultural awareness and training in small groups
- ▶ 3 pm --Tea Break (*with a samosa!*)
- ▶ 3 - 4 pm - Plenary session, feedback , future directions and exploring Buddy system formation

The format of the training consisted of plenary sessions in which cultural information was shared by the local migrant Indians who had professional work and lived experience of Australia as well as deep cultural understanding of Indian culture. Their experience and understanding of important as well as trivial cultural differences, by which they were struck or impressed when they arrived as new migrants, and what they saw as important for survival in Australia and coping with daily simple chores and complex situations, was shared with the students. Other plenary sessions were offered by the Melbourne Police Service Centre, which gave some tips on safety and crime, the Department of Immigration and Citizenship who provided news on rules regarding students and residency visa and an overview of services offered by the International Student Care Service (Victoria Multicultural Commission).

The plenary sessions were followed by group discussions. The training company JM Associates was asked to devise case studies for students to discuss (see box below).

The case studies were based on material obtained in focus groups run by the AISV with Indian students and led by Australian Indian Migrants. In the afternoon, a workshop component looking at how culture impacts on communication and exploring key cultural differences was conducted by Judith Miralles & Associates. The workshop encouraged students to look at the hidden cultural values in daily communication which have the potential to lead to misunderstanding. A number of case studies developed by Judith Miralles & Associates were used by the students to identify the cultural values implicit in the behaviour and strategies to overcome these and ensure effective cross cultural communication. (see box below).

Discussion within the student groups on issues such as gender etiquette, sexual boundary, individual responsibility, honesty, local expectations on hygiene, drinking and self control, use of colloquial language, slang, pub behaviour, driving behaviours, how to use sport as means of belonging was designed to enhance their understanding of Australian culture.

### Case study 1

A young newly arrived international student is enrolled in a business course. The assessment involves a group project where each student is responsible for a component of the project. There have been complaints from students that some students are not 'pulling their weight. One complaint is particularly serious and concerns a student plagiarising another student's work and presenting it as his own. The lecturer in charge organises a meeting to discuss ways of improving student involvement. All students are asked to send in a paragraph or two with their suggestions about how to improve participation a week before a full course meeting. The meeting is held after comments have been received. The international student comes quietly into the meeting, takes a chair and moves it to the back of the room, near the door. She listens and takes notes but does not participate.

### Case study 2

A young international student enrolls in a course in a regional country town. He seems to have settled in very well. It is a small campus and staff and students are very friendly. He and his lecturer share a passion for cricket. He receives an invitation from his lecturer to attend a cricket match at his home and stay for a BBQ. Because he has a few glasses of wine, the lecturer's daughter offers to drive him home and he gladly accepts. They have a very lively discussion during the drive to his place; they are very relaxed and she places her hands on his shoulder and his thigh whilst talking. When they get to his house, she gets out of her car and kisses him good bye and states she has had a great time. She then drives away. A few days later he runs into her on his way home and she offers him a lift again. When they arrive at his home, he invites her in. She accepts. Once inside he pounces on her and begins to kiss her full on the mouth whilst groping at her breasts and buttocks. She breaks away and kicks him in the groin. As she runs screaming out the door he wonders what he has done wrong.

### Case study 3

A young international student has found accommodation in a shared house with another male and female student – both Australian. The international student wanted to find out about Australian life and decided to move in with Australian students rather than students from his own cultural background. He thinks every thing is going along fine. The female student is a great cook. The other male student has a great CD and DVD collection. He is enjoying the relaxed Australian way of life, lots of parties, drink, available young women. Imagine his shock when his housemates ask him to come to a house meeting and tell him they want him to leave. When he asks why, they recite a long list of complaints: he never cleans the bathroom after himself; he never helps with cooking or washing up; he never replaces food he eats; he is sleazy around their female friends.

## Data Collection

A revised version of the "Living in Australia - Adjustment Survey" was distributed to participants at the beginning of the training to examine their educational, physical and mental health needs, their perceived social network support and integration in the Australian culture as well as which kinds of problems and difficulties they might be experiencing. They were also asked to name the physical activities and sports they would choose to watch live and to actively participate in (as a potential strategy to help them feel included).

At conclusion of the training, participants were asked to fill an evaluation survey, which inquired about the overall usefulness of the training and of each session. Feedback and comments useful for future training were also collected.

Participants were informed that the surveys were to be filled on a volunteer basis and that no personal information would have been disclosed in the report.

## Results

This section will present the findings from the two surveys described above. The surveys, with the specific questions participants were asked to fill in, can be found in the Appendix.

### Living in Australia- Adjustment Survey

A total number of 39 students returned completed surveys. As shown in Figure 1, 42% of the students were Indian and the remaining 58% were students of other nationality. These were mainly students from Columbia (19%), followed by students from Turkey and Thailand (12% each group).

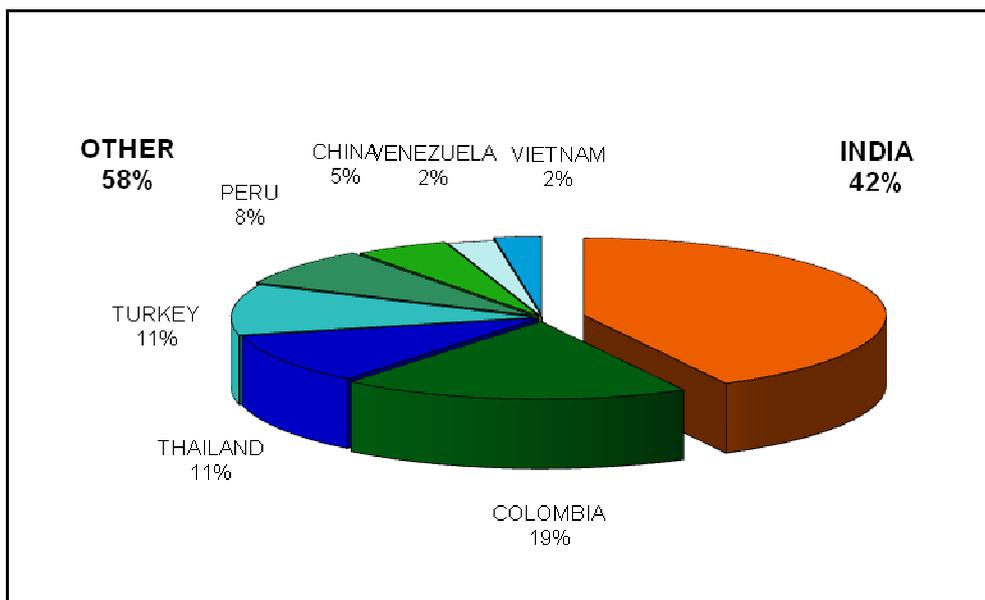


Figure 1 Nationality

The majority of the students who filled in the survey was in the age bracket 20-25 years old (47%), followed by the 26-30 years old (39%). The average age was 26 years.

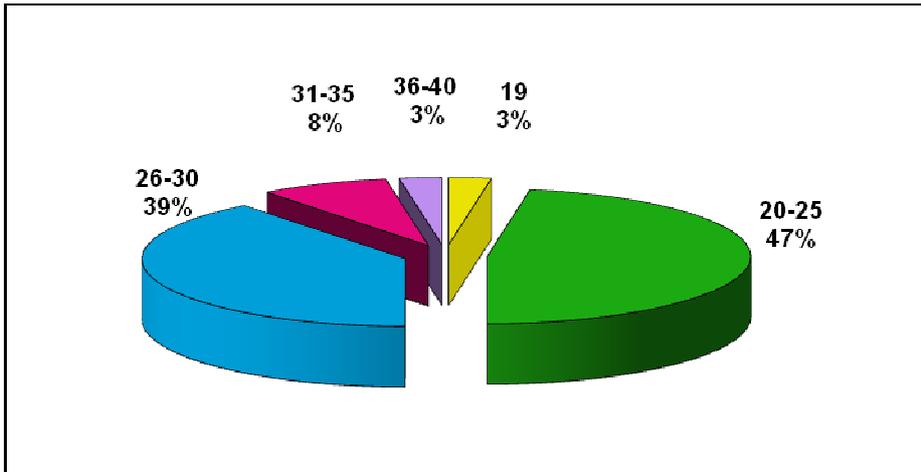


Figure 2 Age distribution

Other personal information collected included their gender, which indicated that the sample was quite fairly distributed between males (58%) and females (42%), and their marital status, where the majority of participants reported being single (see figure below).

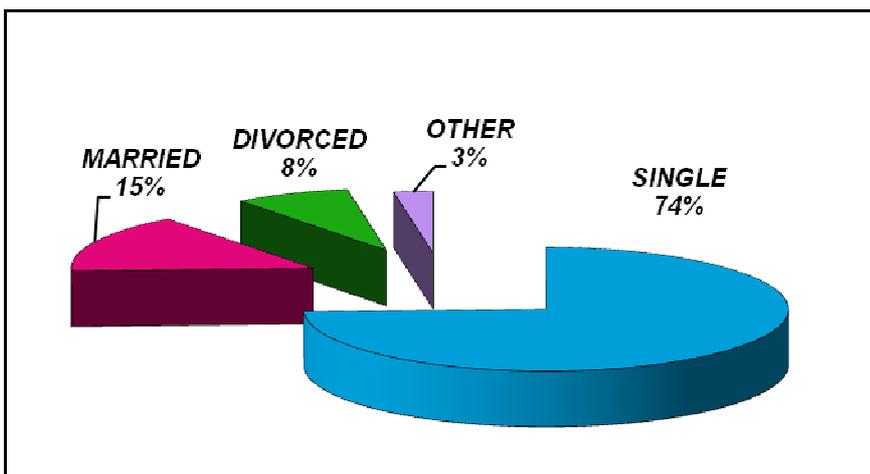


Figure 3 Marital status

In average, students had been living in Australia for 1.6 years. When asked the main reason why they came to Australia, 82% of participants reported this to be to study and, more specifically, 47% indicated that they came in Australia to do an English course, 17% to study hospitality management, 11% to study automotive management, and 25% for another course (e.g. accounting, hairdressing and cookery). 26% of participants reported that they changed their course after their arrival in Australia and 5% that they interrupted their studies. All students except one were full fee paying students.

A section of the survey contained common student problems and difficulties. Participants were asked to rate on a scale from 0 to 3 (where 0 was “not at all” and 3 was “very much”) how much of a problem or source of worry each of the issues listed were for them. Table 1 shows the average scores for the Indian and non-Indian sub-samples as well as overall. As can be observed in the table, overall the three main reported concerns (which have been highlighted in bold) were, in order, financial difficulties, the structure/organization of the course and their academic achievement. However, the comparison between the two sub-samples showed some differences. More specifically, for Indian students the three main concerns were their academic achievement, missing home/feeling homesick and being able to practice their religion in two thirds of the students, whereas financial difficulties, difficulties with written or spoken English as a second language and academic achievement were the three main concerns of the non-Indian students. This finding might indicate that different issues concern students from different nationalities.

**Table 1 Common students' problems and difficulties**

	India	Other	Total
1. not understanding university procedures and university culture	.80	.77	.78
2. the quality of the course I chose to study (e.g. content, teacher's preparation)	.71	1.23	1.03
3. the structure/organization of the course	.71	<b>1.41</b>	<b>1.22</b>
4. your academic achievement	<b>1.20</b>	1.14	<b>1.16</b>
5. financial difficulties	.93	<b>1.77</b>	<b>1.43</b>
6. problems with developing close friendships at university	.50	.77	.66
7. difficulties with written or spoken English as a second language	.13	<b>1.43</b>	.89
8. problems due to cross-cultural misunderstandings	.27	1.00	.70
9. problems with accommodation	.33	.81	.61
10. fear of physical aggression/safety	.80	.95	.89
11. being able to practice your religion	<b>1.00</b>	.45	.68
12. visa/migration issues	.60	.91	.78
13. access to health services	.31	.71	.56
14. access to legal and social services (e.g. Centrelink, tribunals, crime	.50	.59	.56
15. missing home, feeling homesick	<b>1.13</b>	1.05	1.08
16. feeling stressed by academic pressures and tasks	.73	.80	.77
17. concerns about love, marriage or other personal problems	.73	.45	.57
18. feeling distanced or alienated by other students	.13	.14	.14
19. facing discrimination and prejudice	.40	.68	.57
20. feeling isolated or lonely	.87	.82	.84

Students were also invited to describe, in a few words, any other problem or source of concerns that was not indicated in the list (Indian students were offered the possibility to write in Hindi if they preferred). The issues suggested that were not already included in the list were high education costs versus low education quality, abuses of employers towards overseas students, unfair public transport fines and presence of rude behaviour among young people using public transports.

Students' perception of their health, both physical and psychological, since their arrival in Australia, compared to how this was before their arrival, was also investigated. When asked to rate their overall physical health, 46% of the total students reported that this remained the same since arrival, 48% that it had improved and 6% that it had worsened. However, here also some differences were evident between samples. Indian students reported a greater improvement in their general health than a lack of change whereas more non-Indian students reported that their physical health had stayed the same than an improvement.

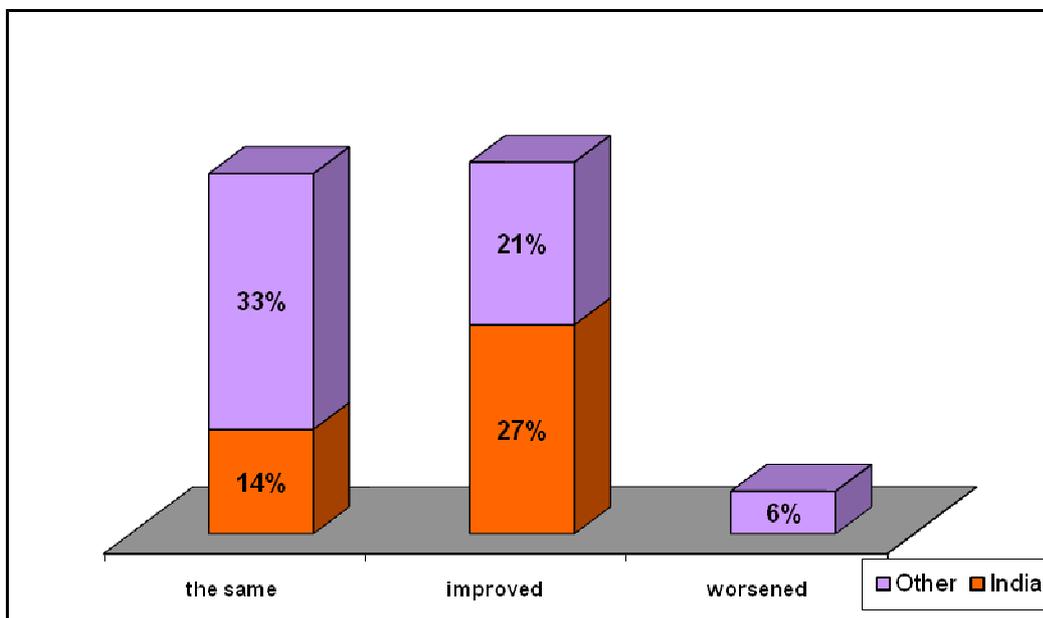


Figure 4 Physical health

When asked about their overall level of tension since arrival in Australia, 58% of the students reported that this was the same as the time before they moved to Australia, whereas 24% reported that this had improved and 18% that this had worsened. This pattern of response was the same in Indian and non-Indian students.

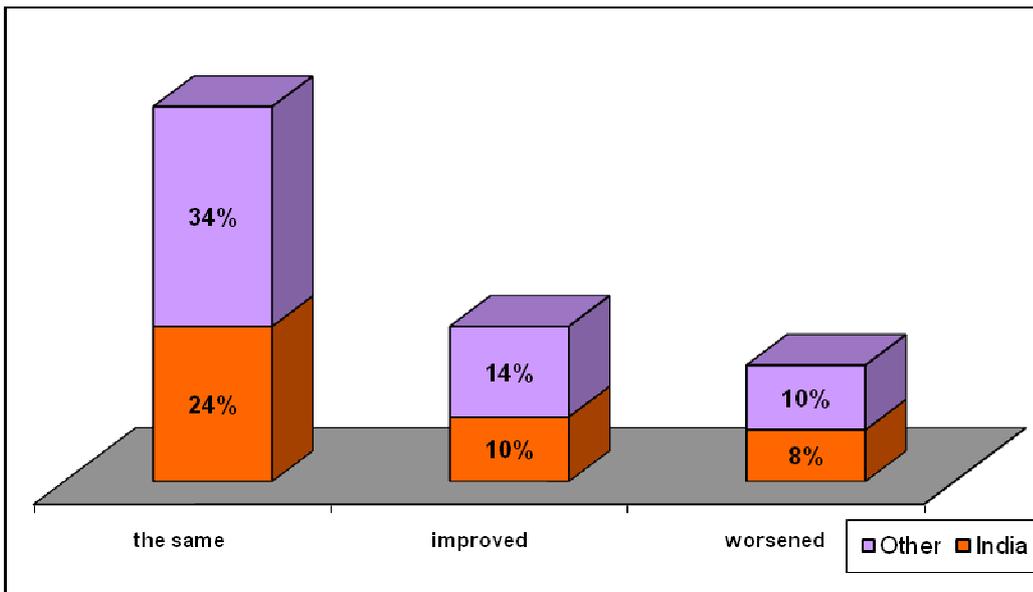


Figure 5 Level of tension

Also the level of happiness was mainly reported as improved (47%) or unchanged (42%) by students although 11% of them reported that this had worsened since arrival. Slightly more often non-Indian students reported an improvement compared to a lack of change.

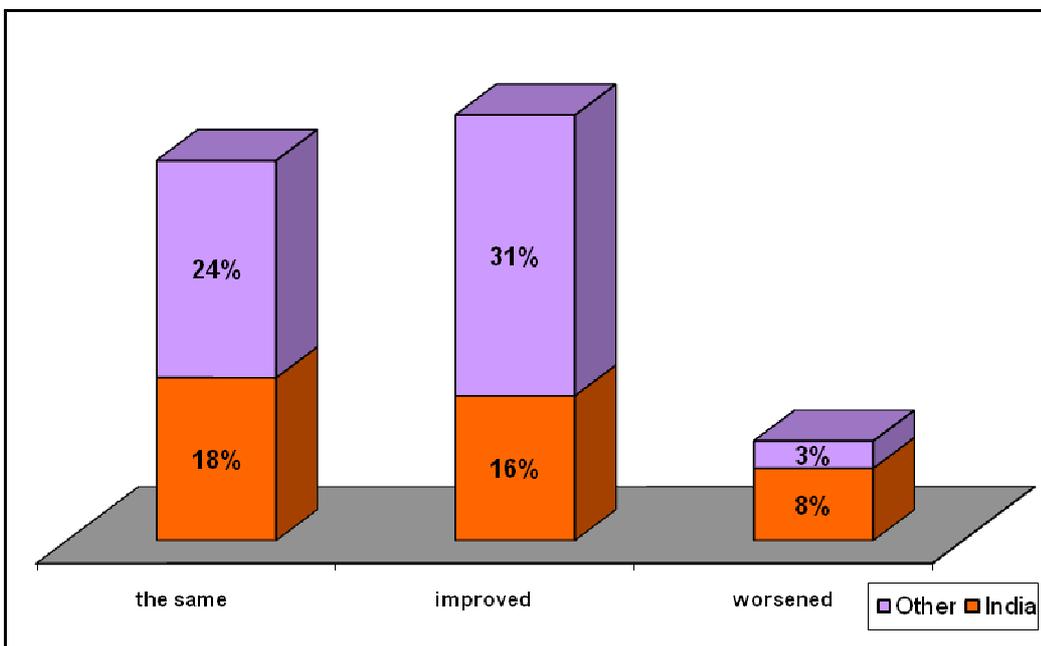


Figure 6 Level of happiness

As discussed in the introduction, international students are at risk of experiencing social isolation thus participants were asked to think of their current relationships (e.g. with their friends, family members, co-workers, community members) and indicate the support they

received on a scale from 0 to 3 (where 0 represented strong disagreement with the item and 3 strong agreement). As can be observed in the table below, both Indian and non-Indian students seemed to have a decent level of perceived support and for none of the statements students expressed a very low or very high level of agreement. Similar findings were found when students were asked a specific question on their level of satisfaction with the level of support when needed since their arrival in Australia. On a scale from 0 to 3 where the lowest score indicated complete lack of satisfaction and the highest score a complete satisfaction, students overall (mean=1.82) as well specifically Indian (2.00) and non-Indian students (1.71) reported a decent level of satisfaction.

	India	Other	Total
<b>1. There are people I can depend on to help me if I really need it.</b>	1.81	1.90	1.86
<b>2. There are people who enjoy the same social activities as I do.</b>	2.19	2.10	2.14
<b>3. I feel part of a group of people who share my attitudes and beliefs.</b>	1.81	2.15	2.00
<b>4. I have close relationships that provide me with a sense of emotional security and well being.</b>	1.94	1.52	1.70
<b>5. There is someone I could talk to about important decisions in my life.</b>	2.06	2.10	2.08

A few other questions investigated students' level of acculturation with Australian culture on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 4 (very much). The scores below show that, on average, students identified a fair amount with the Australian culture and way of living while also continuing their connection with their family's culture.

	India	Other	Total
<b>1. To what extent have you adopted Australian ways of doing things?</b>	2.73	2.37	2.53
<b>2. To what extent have you maintained the traditions of your parents' culture?</b>	3.19	2.63	2.89
<b>3. How "Australian" do you feel yourself to be?</b>	3.03	2.26	2.61
<b>4. How much do you feel yourself to be of "your parents' culture"?</b>	2.94	2.83	2.88

A last section investigated students' preferences for sports and physical activities, either to watch or to participate. Overall, their first five preferences of physical activities to watch - and also to participate in - were dance, soccer, swimming, tennis and cricket.

There were differences between males and females in both questions, which are illustrated in the figures below.

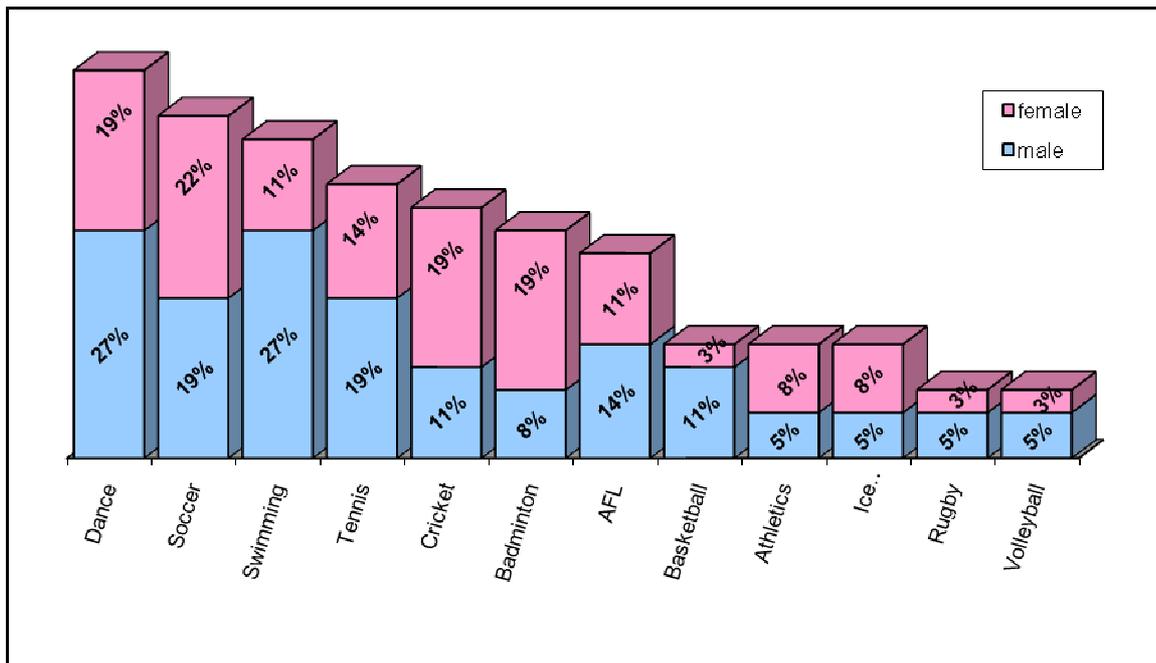


Figure 7 Physical activities to watch

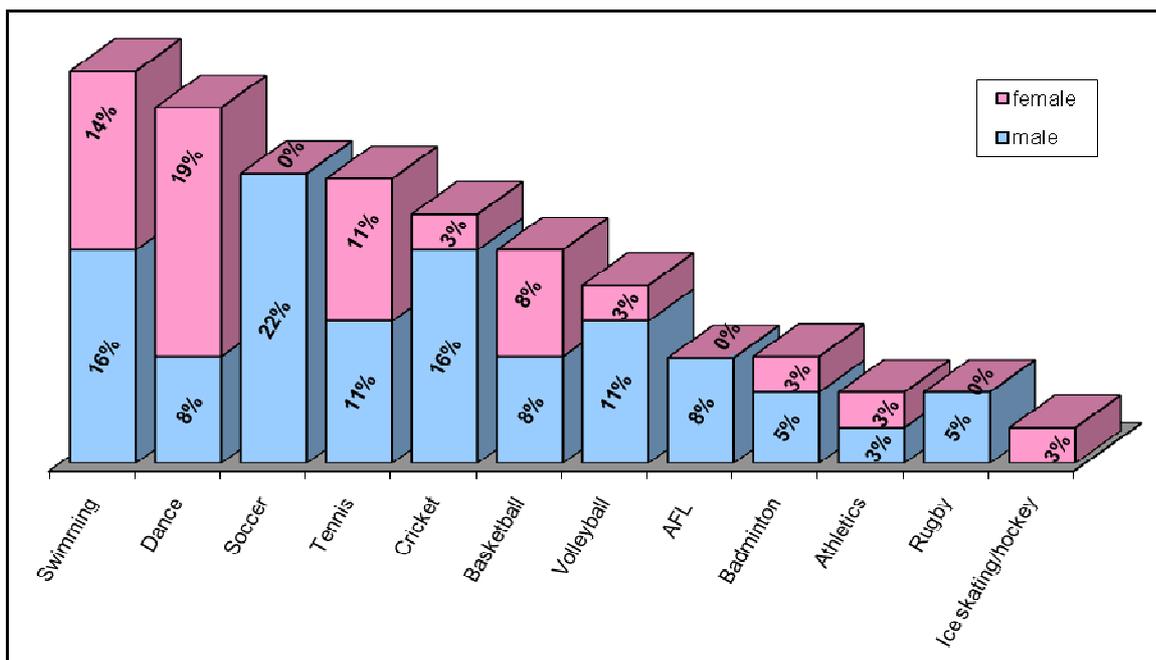


Figure 8 Physical activities to participate in

Participants were also offered the possibility of indicating other activities that were not included in the list and a few of them suggested activities such as Formula 1, surfing, billiard, gymnastics and baseball.

The next section will present the findings from the brief evaluation of the training program.

### Evaluation survey

At the end of the training, participants who had participated for the whole day were invited to evaluate the pilot training “Australian culture awareness course” they received. On a scale from 0 (i.e. useless) to 3 (highly useful) students were asked to indicate how useful, in their opinion, was the course overall and each specific sessions. The figure below shows that the reported level of usefulness was very high overall and for each session.

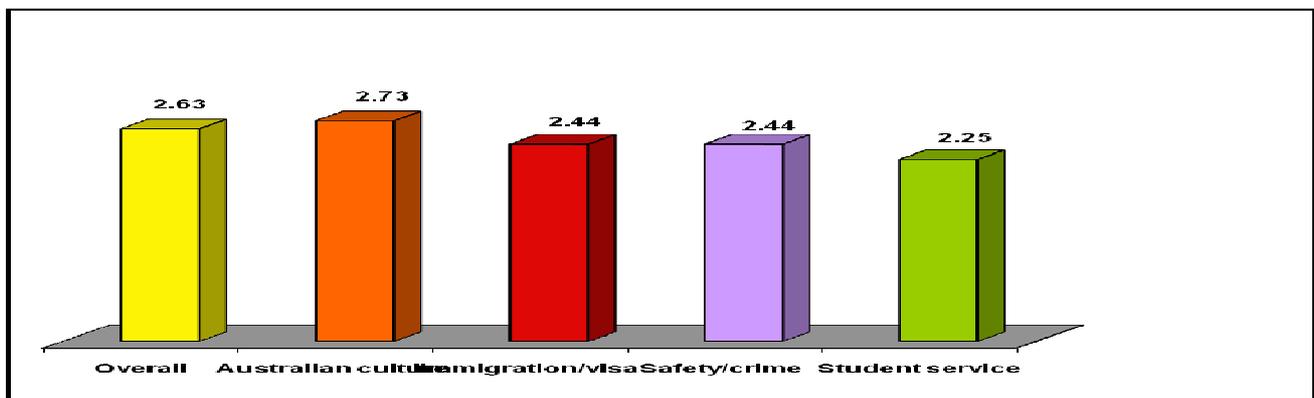


Figure 9 Usefulness of training

When asked if there were other issues/topics not discussed during the training that they thought should be included in the course, 87.5% of participants answered no. Those few participants who answered positively to this question unfortunately did not use the space dedicated to this question to indicate issues/topics that in their opinion should have been included.

One of the best signs to indicate the positiveness of an experience is if participants recommend the training program to other international students. All students with just one exception answered positively.

To conclude the evaluation, students were asked to imagine what would they say when they walked out of the venue. In other words, they were asked to indicate the 'gem' they were taking away from the course.

Three themes emerged - knowledge (i.e. knowledge of aspects of Australian life, deep knowledge), usefulness of the course and participation.

## **Conclusions**

Through the "Living in Australia" survey we intended to provide an opportunity to International students to relate their concerns and difficulties with studies and their life in Australia in general.

Participants reported concerns with academic matters, financial issues as well missing their homeland, inability to practice their religion. Also, a few participants experienced a worsening of their physical health, a decrease in their level of happiness as well as an increase in the level of tension.

These findings confirm the need for universities to generate initiatives for international students to increase the sense of familiarity with their new (temporary or permanent) home, before arrival or immediately after, to provide them with knowledge that will help to navigate the new system while creating opportunities for networking and socializing. While our survey did not enquire into the security issue directly, some student spontaneously expressed harassment on public transport system. Marginson et al ,2010 (pp 440) summarise the student security issue as flagging an urgent need for improved cross cultural relations , improved communication and inclusiveness between the international students and the host society .

Information generated through this survey could be used to alert universities, services and government on significant issues of relevance to young students and migrants in order that they provide a better overall service to them.

As Australians are a sport loving people, Sporting Clubs , such as AFL or cricket clubs may provide a short cut for student engagement with the social fabric of the community. Physical sport, apart from being a social connector, is good exercise and a physical health improver, as

well as lowering mental tension. International students who did not exercise were found in one German study, to have higher stress levels - unlike local students (Kramer 2004, cited in Marginson 2010).

This cultural competence training program, piloted with 50 international students, was well accepted and evaluated positively by attendees. More resources are now needed to prepare a training package for this at risk population , to be offered during the orientation week by all institutions.

### **Summary**

In summary, the Australian Culture Awareness course had two components - an adjustment survey and, secondly, the Australian Cultural Awareness training. The training was provided to 50 international students, the majority of Indian origin while the survey on Adjustment in Australia was answered by 38 students. For Indian students the three main concerns were - missing home/feeling homesick , unable to practice their religion and concern for academic achievement, whereas financial difficulties, difficulties with written or spoken English were more of a concern for other International students.

'Mental tension' and a 'lower level of happiness' than before arrival was detected in approximately 18% and 11% of students respectively. These students are possibly more at risk of mental disorders and in greater need of social supports and access to resources.

A few participants also reported harassment on public transport and employer exploitation.

This course by giving students information on skills for navigating through the Australian culture and societal systems, arguably better prepares the students to protect themselves physically and emotionally.

This Australian Culture Awareness Course aimed to minimise social isolation, loneliness and cultural shock by improving cultural knowledge, access to information on health, safety and other resources, and by increasing social connectedness and participation in Australian cultural life. Inclusiveness eventually can only lead to better security protection for international students.

The course was rated highly by students who welcomed 'deep knowledge of Australian culture and life' and a chance to participate.

Students with homesickness/loneliness (18% in this sample) do not need counselling services (Marginson et al 2010), which may worsen the cultural gap by highlighting cultural differences as problems; instead perhaps activities aimed to improve cultural connectedness may be the answer.

Research shows that preparation for life in Australia with the help of such a course has its maximum impact immediately after arrival, as the level of migration stress and anxiety is at its highest in the first few months (Schwietzer1996, cited in Marginson et al 2010). This course could be conducted by individual colleges. Sport is an integral part of Australian culture and societal fabric; sporting clubs could partner with educational institutions in providing easy access to Australian culture. Other group activities, such as events, outdoor activities and arts, can also provide avenues to reduce social isolation and improve cultural understanding.

Australia India society of Victoria (AISV), mindful of its role as a bridge between the two cultures, conceptualised this cultural awareness course, in full knowledge of the fact that if the students feel good about their time and study in Australia, they will carry a sense of goodwill and warmth that will remain with them for life. As stated by Westrip and Holroyd (2010) the benefits of a positive rapport are not just superficial/ economic but more subtle, cultural, strategic. They will accrue as students return back to take up influential positions in their own countries as well as remain in those students who will then become Australian citizen. The opposite is not worth imagining.

Governments at all levels can play an important regulatory role by making such a course compulsory for all international students, who all have differing needs depending on their country of origin. Further, new migrants, including skilled migrants and professionals such as doctors and nurses, stand to gain much by such a cultural awareness course, at both personal and professional levels.

## Acknowledgments

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