

## Information sheet for QUT Staff: Successful Cross-Cultural Communication

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**In 2008, the mix of international students at QUT may be noticeably different** with more students coming from Saudi Arabia, India, Germany, and China and fewer from Japan, Singapore and Norway. At the same time the diversity of our local students continues to grow.

Communicating across cultures can be both a challenging and enriching experience. Cross-cultural misunderstandings can be minimised with an understanding of the role of culture when communicating, and with an awareness of potential issues.

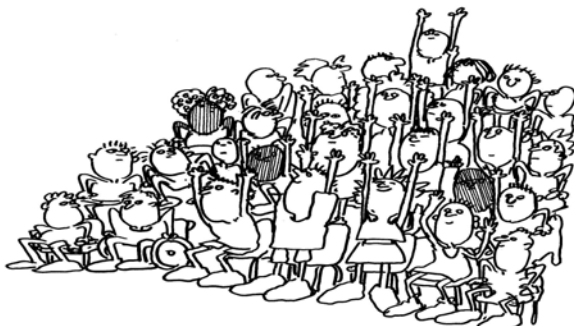
This information sheet is designed to assist staff to be aware of issues that may arise, and to provide practical suggestions to manage them appropriately. As well, the University is taking steps to ensure pre-departure briefings provide better information to the students, helping them manage their own expectations.

### General Issues

We need to be aware that many people experience a sense of alienation<sup>1</sup> when they first arrive in Australia. This feeling can last a long time for some, and can be exacerbated by their experiences when trying to adjust to a new environment. For more information visit [www.issupport.qut.edu.au/orientation/predeparture/adjustinglifetobrisbane.jsp](http://www.issupport.qut.edu.au/orientation/predeparture/adjustinglifetobrisbane.jsp)

Many international students find the first three months the hardest, with little connection to Australia other than the airport and the campus. Poor social interaction can have an impact on the learning environment and academic achievement. It is important therefore to ensure that communication between the university and international students is positive and productive.

### DIVERSITY



### Cross-cultural issues

It is easy for misunderstandings to arise simply because the people involved are not aware of some strong cultural traits in cultures other than their own.

For example, many students will come from cultural backgrounds where:

- the community concerns override the individual's, causing them to adhere to peer group norms rather than those of the new culture;
- respect is shown to elders regardless of personal values or ideas, not allowing students expression of independent thought; or
- there is a strong hierarchy in place so a statement from counter staff, for example, is not considered to be the final word but just a step on the ladder of decision making.

The giving and losing of 'face' is often very important; that is ensuring as far as possible neither party is publicly humiliated and one can 'withdraw' from a situation gracefully and without embarrassment. Giving face is often characterised by appearing to agree with what is said regardless of whether one understands or truly agrees; providing praise; and giving people special attention. The aim is to maintain 'face' for all concerned.

In many instances students may:

- appear to agree with staff about a procedure or action the students need to undertake but then do not follow through;
- persist in making similar requests, despite receiving a negative response;
- require a lot of assistance with administrative tasks and not understand the need to be self-managing;
- prefer to be accompanied by friends when seeking assistance or dealing with conflict;
- speak in their first language amongst each other in front of you;
- inquire about services 'for a friend'; or
- give precedence to their relationship with the 'in-group' (their peers or family) over abstract rules and generic values.

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<sup>1</sup> "Strine sense of alienation by Brendan O'Keefe": The Australian, 28 June 2006 re University of Wollongong researchers Peter Kell and Gillian Vogl

## Strategies for staff

Some strategies that can assist in preventing misunderstandings include:

- being clear and consistent about University expectations, policies and procedures;
- being clear and consistent about instructions while using reflective/active listening techniques to ensure there is a shared understanding of what is being discussed;
- remaining patient, calm and courteous;
- being aware of speech intonation or inflection<sup>2</sup>, professional jargon and idioms such as “just a tick”, “hang on”, or “s/he’s tied up”;
- not shouting, imitating accents or using over-simplified English;
- consider writing down key dates, times and contact names as well as giving oral advice;
- give instructions about tasks in the order required to avoid confusion;
- allowing students time to think through and formulate their queries or responses during discussions or debates (particularly in lectures or tutorials), to build confidence in participation; and
- recognising our own bias, fears and frustrations and how that may impact on our interactions.

For more information visit:  
[www.equity.qut.edu.au/publications/publications/equity\\_publications/Working\\_with\\_Diversity\\_2006.pdf](http://www.equity.qut.edu.au/publications/publications/equity_publications/Working_with_Diversity_2006.pdf)

## Contacts for advice

If staff feel they cannot continue their interaction effectively, they should seek help from a supervisor and/or the following support services.

### International Student Services

Gardens Point (07) 3138 2019  
Kelvin Grove (07) 3138 3846  
Carseldine (07) 3138 4539  
Email - [issadvice@qut.edu.au](mailto:issadvice@qut.edu.au)  
Web - [www.issupport.qut.edu.au/](http://www.issupport.qut.edu.au/)

### Teaching & Learning Support Services

Kelvin Grove (07) 3138 9647  
Email - [talssinfo@qut.edu.au](mailto:talssinfo@qut.edu.au)  
Web - [www.talss.qut.edu.au/](http://www.talss.qut.edu.au/)

### Counselling

Kelvin Grove (07) 3138 3488  
Gardens Point (07) 3138 2383  
Carseldine (07) 3138 4539  
Web - [www.counselling.qut.edu.au/](http://www.counselling.qut.edu.au/)

## Equity Section

Gardens Point (07) 3138 2699  
Kelvin Grove (07) 3138 5601  
Email - [equityeng@qut.edu.au](mailto:equityeng@qut.edu.au)  
Web - [www.equity.qut.edu.au/](http://www.equity.qut.edu.au/)

## Useful Resources

- International Student Advisers and Language and Learning Advisers for students: [www.issupport.qut.edu.au](http://www.issupport.qut.edu.au)
- Counselling Services information sheet on helping troubled students: [www.counselling.qut.edu.au/selfhelp/staff/helping.jsp](http://www.counselling.qut.edu.au/selfhelp/staff/helping.jsp)
- Celebrating Diversity and Cultural Diversity Calendar: [www.equity.qut.edu.au/publications/resources/inclusiveevents.jsp](http://www.equity.qut.edu.au/publications/resources/inclusiveevents.jsp)
- Cultural Diversity at QUT: [www.equity.qut.edu.au/publications/publications/equity\\_publications/Cultural\\_Diversity\\_web.pdf](http://www.equity.qut.edu.au/publications/publications/equity_publications/Cultural_Diversity_web.pdf)
- Cyber-Racism: racial hatred on the internet [www.hreoc.gov.au/racial\\_discrimination/cyber racism/index.html](http://www.hreoc.gov.au/racial_discrimination/cyber racism/index.html)
- Erace: a web forum on race discrimination issues [www.hreoc.gov.au/racial\\_discrimination/Erace/index.html](http://www.hreoc.gov.au/racial_discrimination/Erace/index.html)
- Australian Cultural Network: [www.acn.net.au](http://www.acn.net.au)
- Centre for Workplace Communication & Culture: [www.edoz.com.au/cwcc/index.html](http://www.edoz.com.au/cwcc/index.html)
- Multicultural Affairs Queensland [www.premiers.qld.gov.au/getinvolved.asp](http://www.premiers.qld.gov.au/getinvolved.asp)
- Department of Immigration, Indigenous and Multicultural Affairs [www.dimia.gov.au](http://www.dimia.gov.au)

### Diversity is...

The quality of being different and unique at an individual or group level

### Valuing diversity is...

Recognising and respecting the value of human differences

### Managing diversity is...

Creating and sustaining an environment where everyone can achieve his or her full potential

This leaflet is available in alternative formats on request

Division of Administrative Services  
Queensland University of Technology  
7 March 2008  
CRICOS No 00213J

<sup>2</sup> Which accounts for 55% of the transmission of oral communication