

Connecting the campus

A collaboration between student counselling, the international office and students to promote social inclusion and develop support networks.

Maria Valastro: International Student Advisor
Lou Tod: Student Counsellor



ACU Banyo campus...



- Broader environment of campus
- Banyo campus



Context of the project....

- ▶ International office and counselling staff working together to support international students
- ▶ Maria undertaking final social work placement – in second semester, 2010 with the Counselling Service
- ▶ Wanting to address issues of isolation and exclusion
- ▶ Preliminary consultations with international students via word of mouth and other connections to set up a student driven process to establish a group



Process informed by research...

- ▶ **Key papers** delivered at the 2010 International Student Advisers Network Australia and New Zealand (ISANA) Conference and evidence-based research support a community development approach
- ▶ **International Student Roundtable** in Canberra on 23 August, 2011 stated that students would prefer universities offered more student-led community events and activities.
- ▶ **Social work** knowledge and skills around community development and inclusion and group work



Getting started...

- ▶ Small group work structure
- ▶ Commenced in mid-September and ran for eight weeks concluding formally in early November
- ▶ Between 8-12 students attending each week
- ▶ Late afternoons for 2 hours, included supper
- ▶ Held in student association space
- ▶ Facilitated by Maria & Lou
- ▶ Supplies funded by International Office
- ▶ Staffed via Counselling, International & external supervision funds



Group work processes we used...

Aim was to create connections between students to break down isolation and facilitate connections

Early weeks: Building trust and social connections; getting to know each other activities; getting to know the problems/issues/needs; setting up group rules/guidelines; icebreakers; small and large group process; off-campus activity

Middle weeks: Forming into a club; naming the club; mid-group evaluation

Later weeks: Choosing executive members; developing a logo; closure exercise; planning for 2011; final evaluation



Strong connections formed...

“We have a small treasure here, we all should appreciate that”

“It is a precious moment, not speaking in my language but we still understand each other which is a really cool thing”

“I felt lonely but ever since I came to this group, now I have found another community”

“It’s an experience in my life that I’ll never forget. Even though we’ve only run for a month, it feels like a family”



Comments from evaluations...



“I like it when we all get together and enjoy each others experiences”

“I like contributing in any way possible to make things happen”

“I’ve enjoyed to see our members and have good connections”

“My ideas are really respected”


“Everyone loves to share our feelings and experiences. It really helped me to have fun in the group”

“It was a great opportunity to listen to other international students and I was happy to find that everyone has the same feelings!!”

The group...



BBQ at South Bank...



An official 'Campus Club' is born...

- ▶ Students worked with staff from Campus Life to set up the 'McAuley United Club', flat structure
- ▶ The stated purpose of the Club -:
 - *The McAuley United Club is open to all students and staff from every country including Australia. This Club is about creating a positive and safe space where people can share their culture with others and create friendships and support each other throughout their time studying together at ACU.*



Club Plans/Goals

- ▶ Assist with welcoming new students at Orientation
- ▶ Assist with coordination of annual ACU Cultural Fiesta
- ▶ Connect ACU students with cultural events in the city of Brisbane
- ▶ Organise group social trips to places of interest in South East QLD
- ▶ Create a calendar of social events that all students can take part in.
- ▶ Create merchandise for members
- ▶ Connecting ACU with other external communities that encourage cross cultural exchange



The Club gathered momentum...

By the end of 2010 had

- ▶ set up a Facebook page with 50 members
- ▶ Developed a logo
- ▶ Contributed to video interviews for an online psychosocial resource
- ▶ Created a calendar of events for 2011
- ▶ Consulted with the Campus Life Coordinator on orientation activities, executive meetings and further leadership development



Achievements one year on...

- ▶ Part-time paid position for an Executive Member (Ricky) to run events (funded by clubs/societies)
- ▶ Club events & merchandise subsidized by International Education
- ▶ Merchandise created – t-shirts, bookmarks
- ▶ 130 Facebook members; 65 paid members
- ▶ Leadership development workshops for Exec.
- ▶ Fundraising for Japan, orientation stall/volunteers
- ▶ Calendar of Events inc. 'gatherings', sporting, Ekka, Riverfire, day trips, weekend trips



Recent survey of paid members of MUC...

- ▶ 60% of students had daily or weekly contact with people they met through the club
- ▶ Most students believed that organizers helped them to feel included in activities
- ▶ “The friendships developed between members– the enthusiasm of the leadership team”
- ▶ “Building up a good friendship in a comfortable environment, meet friends from different culture and background. I guess it’s a close connection to MUC”

Reflection & challenges for the future...

- ▶ Before group limited opportunities available – now formal club
- ▶ Success of ground up approach versus prescriptive staff driven model
- ▶ Contribution to ACU campus life – building social capital/ students resourcing each other
- ▶ Facilitating entry of Aussie students into the Club (east/west split)
- ▶ Future depends on leadership and capacity of Club members e.g. safety & trust

Promo video from ricky

