Engaging with international students
With particular reference to media usage

Report from ISANA International Education Association
Hobart, 2011
ISANA International Education Association

• Network of International Student Advisors in Australia and New Zealand
• Annual conferences encourage research in the field
• Generic resources, on-going networking
• Local professional development days
• Dr Shanton Chang, Univ of Melbourne – useful research in this field
Outline

1. Profiling international students: what characterizes an international student?
2. Off to a good start – resilience for retention
3. International student use of social media. What is social media and what is the research saying about international student use?
4. Some tips for using social/digital media
Profiling international students
Diversity

- Cultural background
- Nationality
- Language
- Expectations and needs
- Social background and status
- Approaches to learning and to help-seeking
- Social behaviour
- Use of media
Key cohorts at VUW

• Undergraduate students from China, Malaysia and Vietnam (approx 1260 - 44% of total IS in 2011)

• US Study Abroad students (approx 400 pa – 14%)

• Students with families

• NZ Aid programme students
“Culture shock is about how we relate to each other, not just about how to catch the bus”
You don’t make a friend in a day

• Constraints at orientation
  – Jet lag, fatigue, new environment
  – Second language use is exhausting
  – Information overload
  – Want to connect with locals

Therefore:

• Engagement and retention strategies need to be appealing and uni-wide
Engagement and resilience building

M-Power (Monash) group quiz activity
some questions about coping

Student Relationship Coordinators impart resilience info

ExcelL intercultural skills during prestart programme

Amazing Race – visit services venues on campus and city

BRITA Futures programme: Building Resilience in Trans-cultural Australians

Photo competition: ‘This is what health and wellbeing mean to me’
"Now, this is just a simulation of what the blocks will look like once they're assembled."
The scene

- Web 2.0 & rise of internet-mediated participatory cultures
- Proliferation of user-generated content (FB, YouTube, Twitter, Flickr, etc)
- Mobile devices estimated to outstrip computers in 2011, gap will continue to grow
- Word of mouth now instantaneous
- ‘Digital native’ generation?
Student behaviour

• Students have lots of choice – will look for info via a range of channels; categorise information
• Uneven levels of access, uptake, and digital proficiency persist
• Email – preferred, most check, but not into text heavy emails
• Facebook – common, but not available in China
• Online games – opportunity to connect with friends @ home
• Complex relationship between online and offline sociality
Example: TAFE SA International

• Facebook, link to YouTube channel
  – Before arrival to engage students during application process and for general inquiries
• Student Ambassadors
  – Running online and face-to-face side by side
  – Moving virtual to real, and back again with post-event photos, blogs
• Community Engagement
  – Links (virtual and real) to ‘Love Adelaide’, ‘MySA’, (City council, Volunteer centre) etc
Tips for using social/digital media
Be wary of ‘moving with the times’

• Consider fit for purpose, alignment
• Distinguish broadcast from interaction - Web 2.0 can be both static and interactive
• Subscription is an option, with accompanying e-newsletter
• Diversity is the key
Practical considerations

• Info must be easy to find, labelled and cross-referenced - brings people to your site

• Sharing is the key to interest & community building – use share and embed functions

• Constant updating keeps the audience

• Use links – share the link-love!
Facebook guidelines

- Be clear about your purpose
- Research your audience
- Plan timing of release and posts
- Moderate with ‘light-handed’ skill
- Search keywords in your own site
Conclusion

• Diversity of students
• Diversity of media
• Could be confusing

BUT

• Regular research & checking with audience
• Strategic thinking – fit to purpose

RESULT

• Engaged interactive student communities
References

• www.proceedings.com.au/isana
• ‘Towards a critical pedagogy of digital and social media literacy’ Dr. Dean Chan (UoW)
• “‘We’re moving with the times”… Unpacking university responses to students’ use of new technologies’ Assoc Prof Gregor Kennedy (Director of eLearning, University of Melbourne)
• ‘Supporting & engaging International students via FB, student Blogs & student ambassadors ‘ Was Amir (TAFE)
• ‘Wazzup? The impact of trying to communicate effectively with US study abroad students in NZ’ Jane Gunn-Lewis and Chandra Leenher
• ‘Supporting student transition through social media’ Catherine Meredith
• ‘Engaging international students through new media’ Karen Poh
• ‘Facebook and the international office : should we or shouldn't we?’ Dr Shanton Chang
• Impressions of China – Mary Ann Seow
Questions

1. What is happening throughout VUW to address the connection needs of new international students, and how might we fill the gaps?

2. How is VUW currently making use of social/digital media to engage all students?

3. Suggestions for how to better engage with our students. How can we ensure the content of communications serves the diverse range of students?