

## **What Oasis offers (one student) that the broader university community does not.**

I have recently finished four years as a full-time undergraduate student at Flinders University. Much of this time was spent feeling energized by the opportunity for higher education, yet also disconnected from the general student population and the messages of what a 'student experience' should be. Rather, I found the University's social culture somewhat exclusionary in its persistence of deferring to those who have time, money and inclination to socialise through (a culture of) 'partying'. Determinants such as single-parent student, mature-age student, working-class student, and low-income student easily pigeonhole someone who does not fit comfortably with this kind of socialisation. Yet, my 'culture' and therefore my preferences for socialisation are more than those parts and neither is it defined through gender, religion, sexuality or ethnicity. I was not looking for social opportunities (such as pub-crawls or association memberships with dinners etc.) but rather socialisation within and connected to my learning experience. Attempts of socialisation with my student cohort, in my first years, often had me going home to have a more insightful and meaningful conversation about my learning with my 12-13 year old. I did find a few similar souls (similar in enjoying conversant socialisation – but diverse in everything else), yet space conducive to our socialisation and circumstances was lacking (see story paragraph below\*).

I 'found' Oasis in my fourth year of undergraduate study. Unfortunately, for three years I misconstrued Oasis as a place for respectful *practicing* (as in a prayer and devotion) of multiple yet unambiguous faiths, and as I do not identify with a defined faith; I did not venture the threshold. Instead, it was not until I attended Oasis, to volunteer with the English conversation class, that I realised that this space offered everything I needed for my preferred culture of socialisation. More so, Oasis attracted many other students who although diverse (gender, religion, sexuality or ethnicity), socialise similarly to me. To me then Oasis is not defined by participants' religion or participants' nationality (as commonly misconstrued in the broader university community as a 'religious space' or the 'international space'), but rather like-minded persons who prefer a type of conversant socialisation to 'partying'. I was able to engage (and just as importantly dis-engage) when I needed. I was able to discuss study achievements and difficulties, family and student life. I was able to talk, listen or sometimes just completely 'switch off' and have a cup of coffee. The staff, volunteers and visitors to Oasis are *available*. Lisa Chandler particularly has dispelled my somewhat cynical view that receptionists are generally ignorant of the term 'reception' – by welcoming everyone with warmth and providing assistance (empathic or practical as needed). The Oasis space currently offers quiet space, communal space, amenities, activities, availability and proximity to other 'social' outlets.

## **Designing and planning for Oasis in the new Student Hub.**

It is essential that Oasis is not made to defer to a popular conception of 'a typical university student experience'. It is essential that the university offer spaces for student cultural and social diversities (as separate to gender, religion, sexuality or ethnicity), and that designing and planning for the new Hub does not homogenise the 'student experience'. The Oasis space must feel like visiting a friend's home and retain its current character.

### **Design and planning strategy that would improve on the current Oasis space:**

- An approach that is inviting and connective to other social spaces (OASIS to be connective *but not* subsumed)
- Sound sensitive design/placement of rooms so many groups can meet and other outlets sound-systems/activities do not detract from the ambience.
- A bigger and more communal kitchen – conducive to small gatherings, celebrations, shared meals and cultural festivities (adjacent to an outdoor area and/or a common room) with a dishwasher, oven and stovetop.
- Continued booking availability outside of business hours (A lot of us prefer 'shared meal' type socialisation, yet lack the personal accommodation space for this).
- A garden with seating – native in keeping with Flinders' unique natural ambience (preferably one where students with children may meet also)
- A natural outlook and natural light
- Such a space would warrant at least a chaplain coordinator, a centre coordinator (for bookings, setting up spaces, activities etc) as well as administration roles, keeping in mind that *current roles* also provide
  - extremely valuable informal and intercultural sensitive counselling and,
  - activities centred on informal hospitality (catering type duties).

### **\*Walk in an undergraduate (low-income) student's shoes to find a comfortable and quiet lunchtime spot with amenities:**

Start at either Education or Engineering, walk each side of the lake, past each faculty, with a microwaveable lunch and a cup with a teabag and seek where an *undergraduate* student has access to a clean microwave, kitchen sink and hot water. You will finally find the two dirty old (second-hand provided) microwaves behind the Blue-Duck Café, with a sink and ZIP hot-water tap, or a microwave, sink and fridge in the women's room (if that does not exclude either yourself or your friends). I approached FUSA and the caterers every semester of my undergrad years to have the microwave area in the Union cafeteria (and inside the microwaves) cleaned daily to no avail – often to be told students should keep it clean themselves – which I would have done (as I do at Oasis) if detergent, scourers, paper towels, bin etc. were available. Now consider those two available old microwaves (essentially in the 'toilet corridor') and the quality of those amenities within the numbers (and student amenities fees) of the student undergraduate population – keeping in mind that the lowest income students will gain no benefit from the offered but inaccessible 10% discount for bought campus meals.