Social Adjustment and Transition to University for Mature-Age, Undergraduate Students

Dr. Merryn Dawborn-Gundlach

Associate Professor Kay Margetts

Melbourne Graduate School of Education
The University of Melbourne
Australia

Abstract

This study sought to understand the impact of social transition on university adjustment for mature-age students enrolled in their first undergraduate course at an Australian university. Although there has been extensive research surrounding university transition, few studies have specifically investigated the transition of mature-age students. The collection of survey and interview data at four stages of their first year of university provided details of the experiences and reflections of transition over time. Results show that despite initial concerns about the academic demands of tertiary study, the challenges facing mature-age students are in their social transition, including issues of acceptance and interaction, loneliness and isolation and campus friendships. Implications from this research include the provision of interactive and social experiences by universities to enhance opportunities for mature-age students to meet and form contacts and friendships with others on campus.

Keywords: transition, adjustment, mature-age students, friendship, loneliness, isolation

1. Introduction

Students' early experiences of university can significantly affect their attitudes and self-confidence in their ability to continue their courses (McInnis & James, 1995; Kasworm, 2009; Robinson, Ballard, De Silva, Hendrick, MacGibbon, Mehta, & Rouf, 2010) and are critical in setting the tone for the remainder of their undergraduate programs (Tinto, 1995). The responsibility of ensuring a smooth transition for newly enrolled students is ultimately the role of the institution (Peel, 1999; Kantanis, 2001; Meuleman, Garrett, Wrench & King, 2015; Fragoso, Goncalves, Miguel Ribeiro, Monteiro, Quintas, Bago, Fonseca & Santos, 2016). Universities need to understand the diversity of their students and the particular issues that impact their transition and adjustment both academically and socially. When orientation and transition programs identify and support the needs of different groups of students, the transition experience and subsequent adjustment and retention of first year students is enhanced (Cushman, 2004). This paper focuses on one of these groups; mature-age students.

Typically, mature-age, undergraduate students have had a break from study before commencing university. However, the definition of 'mature-age student' varies between institutions, especially with respect to the age at which the classification takes effect. To be eligible for the non-school leaver pathway for enrolment in undergraduate courses at the University of Melbourne for example, applicants are required to be at least 23 years of age and have no qualifications in the previous seven years that could be used as a basis for admission to university (The University of Melbourne, 2010, 2015).

Mature-age students are more likely than school-leaver students to have a partner, dependent children and/or aging parents, financial responsibilities and work commitments. These competing demands can affect students' time for study and their available time on campus, which may negatively impact their sense of belonging to the university (Kantanis, 2002; Cushman, 2004; Parks, Evans & Getch, 2013; Callcott, Knaus, Warren, Wenban, 2014; Mallman & Lee, 2016).

1.1 Social Adjustment

Social adjustment is an important component of overall adjustment to university.

It involves feeling included in the university social culture and being satisfied with university social life, meeting and making friends and forming connections with other students, feeling at ease with others at university, and feeling part of the first-year cohort (Baker & Siryk, 1999; Kantanis, 2002; DeSilva, Robinson & Watts, 2011; Rahat & Ilhan, 2016).

The formation of social connections hasbeen linked to student perseverance and retention at university (Tinto, 1997; Wilcox, Winn & Fyvie-Gauld, 2005) and positive academic performance (Huon & Sankey, 2000). Students with a high level of companionship, whether school leaver, mature-age, local or international, have higher levels of adjustment to university than students who are without a social group (Ramsay, Jones & Barker, 2007; Sevinc & Gizir, 2014).Without social connections, feelings of loneliness and social dislocation put students 'at a higher risk of attrition because they do not have social support in the university environment' (Ayres & Guilfoyle, 2009, p.9; Mallman & Lee, 2016).

Mature-age students can take longer to form social networks and friendships than younger students (Ayres & Guilfoyle, 2009), due to their infrequent hours on campus, the limited time between classes (De Silva, Robinson & Watts, 2011) and the relatively small number of mature-age students enrolled in first year university courses. The age range for older students is much wider than for school leavers and may span a period of 50 years. Finding common ground, apart from their return to study, can be more difficult for this group of students without a uniformity of age or shared interests.

While school-leaver students can feel lonely and isolated in their first weeks at university (Buote, Pancer, Pratt, Adams, Birnie-Lefcovitch, Polivy & Wintre, 2007), students in minority groups, such as mature-age students, also experience a sense of being isolated and alone, especially when the majority of students in their courses are much younger and have different attitudes, cultural background, interests and responsibilities (Kantanis, 1998; Mallman & Lee, 2016).

Despite wide research on the transition of school-leaver students entering first year university courses in Australia and overseas (Huon & Sankey, 2000; Kantanis, 2000; McInnis, James & Hartley, 2000, Kantanis, 2002; Cushman, 2004; Krause, Hartley, James & McInnis, 2005; Ayres & Guilfoyle, 2009; Howard & Davies, 2013; Callcott, Knaus, Warren & Wenban, 2014; Rahat & Ilhan, 2016), little is known about the actual experiences and the factors that affect a positive transition of mature-age students to university.

This paper reports the results from a larger study investigating the transition of mature-age students to university. Its purpose is to report the experiences of transition to the social culture of university for a group of mature-age students, in the first year of their first undergraduate degree course.

2. The Study

A mixed-methods approach (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2007) was used to measure the adjustment to university of 56 mature-age, undergraduate students, and to determine the factors that support a positive adjustment. The rationale for incorporating focus group discussions and interviews in conjunction with a survey questionnaire enabled a deeper understanding of student responses to the survey questionnaire and to identify emerging trends in the data. Analysis of student response data from the modified Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (Baker & Siryk, 1989, 1999) supported the determination of a measure of social adjustment of the group of participants, while focus group discussions and individual interviews provided a detailed understanding of their experiences of transition.

The study consisted of a sequence of four stages: Stage 1: Focus group discussions to provide initial impressions of university transition and which formed part of the instrument development of later stages of the study, refining the focus of each subsequent research instrument; Stage 2: Completion of a survey questionnaire by students to measure adjustment to university; Stage 3: Individual interviews to investigate the 'lived' transition experiences of students, and; Stage 4: Follow-up survey at the end of Semester 1 and Semester 2 respectively, to examine the experiences and reflections of transition later in the first year of mature-age students' first year of university.

In particular, the individual, semi-structured interviews conducted in Stage 3 sought to investigate students' 'lived' experiences of transition and adjustment to university. The same questions were asked in all 24 interviews and were based on issues and concerns that had been identified in previous stages of the study.

Commencing the interviews with open-ended questions such as 'describe your first week at university', established a pattern of talking (participant) and listening (researcher), which was correspondingly adopted for each interview. This paper reports student' perspectives of their transition and adjustment to the social culture of the university.

2.1 Participants

Although the classification 'mature-age students' typically includes older students studying a second degree or postgraduate course, the participants in this study were restricted to students enrolled in their first undergraduate university degree course. Fifty-six students participated in the larger study, of which 40 completed the Stage 2 Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ) (Baker and Siryk, 1989, 1999). Of those who completed the questionnaire, 24 students (16 female; 8 male) indicated they were interested in participating in Stage 3 interviews. The participant demographic profile and number of participants in each of the four stages of the larger study are presented in Appendices 1 and 2.

3. Results

Issues relating to social adjustment emerged as a key feature of students' overall adjustment to university throughout the duration of the study. Responses to the survey questionnaire (Appendix 3) and thematic analyses of interview data and open-ended survey questions revealed emerging themes related to: sense of participation in the social culture and social life of the university; friendships and connections with others; loneliness and social dislocation and age-related issues.

Students in focus group discussions in Stage 1 were aware they did not have the same social networks and connections as younger students; however, concerns about friendship, loneliness and social dislocation were not identified until later in the year,when there was a change in the emphasis from an initial acceptance of isolation and loneliness to wanting to be part of the university social culture. One student noted:

There were some disconcerting parts to the first weeks of university in that you didn't know anybody; there were no school friends that type of thing. It probably wasn't until mid-semester that you started to feel a bit isolated, once the three or four weeks of 'Wow, I'm here' and 'I don't know the lingo' had passed. Making friends, although I'm a fairly friendly person, and just trying to find other like-minded people was a bit difficult (Interview participant 9).

3.1 Sense of being part of the university social culture and satisfaction with social life

Questionnaire responses in Stage 2 indicated that while 85 percent of students agreed / strongly agreed that they were satisfied with their decision to attend university and 92.5 percent preferred to be at university than at home, only half of the students agreed / strongly agreed they were fitting in to the university environment. This was despite the 80 percent agreement / strong agreement that they had sufficient social skills to get along at university. Low levels of agreement relating to their involvement in social activities, ties at university, participation in social activities and university social life, revealed student dissatisfaction with their inclusion in the social culture of the university.

Interviews with students revealed a sense of not being part of the university social culture, not making the most of their university experience, and their subsequent dissatisfaction with their social life on campus. For example:

I see lunch meetings of large groups of students and people organising things for out of hours. It is happening all the time around me. I feel that I am far from getting the full university experience (Interview participant 12).

... I'm aware so much of being an older student and obviously you feel that there are a lot of social areas where it's really not worth your time trying to fit in because it's just not there for you (Interview participant 2).

It would be nice to have somewhere social to go to eat lunch with a group of people. As a mature-age student you are really different socially. I saw that there is an Arts Ball and I thought; 'That would be nice to go to,' except the only person I would know would be my husband who I bought a ticket for so it wouldn't actually be very much fun (Interview participant 22).

3.2 Satisfaction with university social life

Only 25 percent of the students who responded to the survey questionnaire agreed or strongly agreed that they were satisfied with the university social life. Similarly, 25 percent were in agreement about the extent of their own participation in social activities at the university.

Students interviewed expressed reservations about the lack of specific activities for mature-age students, believing that events open to all undergraduate students lacked relevance for older students. The lack of social activities during Orientation Week, specifically for mature-age students, was an observation that was made several times during the focus group discussions and individual interviews throughout the year.

In first semester, I was worried about getting from Point A to Point B and getting my assignments in. It wasn't until second semester that I started socialising and going 'there's not a lot on for mature-age students' (Interview participant 9).

I've not been involved in the social stuff. First of all, I didn't have time because I was working almost full-time, and studying full-time so I felt like I didn't have the time. The other thing was I didn't have the interest in doing a lot of things, which were the social activities, like binge drinking and all that. They are all school-leavers, 18 year olds and I just really felt like 'that's just not my scene anymore'. It wasn't attractive to me partying with 18 year olds and that's the main social side that I see (Interview participant 5).

My drinking days are over. I've been through it. I did it when I was 18 or 19 so I don't necessarily feel that I am missing out from that perspective (Interview participant 6).

Some mature-age students tried to 'fit in' and efforts were made to join special interest groups to defray the loneliness of being a mature-age student on campus. In particular, a student who was not an international student joined the International Student Club, another student joined three separate student clubs on the one day to meet people and a third participant joined the Queer Collective; *because they are flamboyant and willing to talk (Focus Group 1 participant).*

Another student explained how she met her daughter and her daughter's friends for her social interaction with other students, especially in Orientation Week:

There is some crossover. My daughter was the first in our family to attend university and I am the second, one year later. My daughter and her friends provide the support and friendship that I need. My daughter invites me out with her and her friends for coffee, lunch and friendship between lectures (Focus Group 1 participant).

3.3 Friendships and connections with other people

Responses to survey questionnaire items relating to relationships with other people showed relatively low agreement about friendships with other students on campus. The exception was the over 50 percent agreement that students were making friends with other mature-age students. However, the percentage of students who agreed / strongly agreed they were making friends with school-leaver students was considerably lower (30%).

Survey questionnaire responses concerning meeting and making new friends and having good friends at university revealed overwhelming dissatisfaction (Appendix 3). Of the 24 students interviewed in Stage 3, responses to questions about friendships revealed that two students had made friends with school-leavers, while nine students had not made any school-leaver friends. In relation to her friendship with a younger classmate, a student commented:

There was one girl who was quite young, 18 or 19. She was also doing History and we ended up occasionally having History classes together and she would ask me opinions about different things, so I would say we had a campus friendship (Interview participant 12).

Most of the friendships described by students in the individual interviews in Stage 3 appeared to be with other mature-age students rather than with younger students.

I've made one friend that is mature-age and we talk about travel. It is more casual kind of relaxed stuff, but never anything too personal (Interview participant 5).

I've made a couple of friends and they're both mature-age (Interview participant 14).

Although several students indicated they had not come to university with the purpose of making friends, their lack of friends on campus was a concern:

I thought that I would know people more in class than I do. I'm not at university to build a friendship group but I don't really have anyone that I could say, 'Hey, did you go to the lecture today, because I missed it? (Interview participant 22).

I have a really great circle of friends outside uni but it would have been nice to make a few more friends (Interview participant 14).

I wouldn't say that I have made many friends at all (Interview participant 17).

3.4 Loneliness and social dislocation

For some students, the lack of campus friendships was seen as '*unfortunate rather than distressing*' and may not have affected the quality of their transition. The confidence they felt in their off-campus friendships freed them from anxiety about their difficulties in meeting other students and making friends on campus, accepting it as part of their university transition and adjustment. For others, the lack of friends and loneliness on campus was identified and lamented in terms of having no-one with whom to share ideas and work with on assignments and other tasks.

I am very lonely. I don't mind being on my own but I would like to have people to talk to and discuss essay topics with, unpacking questions, finding references (Interview participant 23).

I'm not really interested in going and doing stuff on weekends with people from uni, but it would be nice if there were a couple of people that I felt that I could talk to about my studies, that weren't 18 (Interview participant 16).

Students interviewed in Stage 3 expressed concerns about their dislocation and lack of assimilation into the university social culture, often with great poignancy as illustrated by the following comments:

I was going there (to university) to get my degree and it was just further education as far as I was concerned. I never thought there would be this big hollow kind of feeling, the social isolation (Interview participant 3).

When you enjoy something, you want to share it with other people and discuss it. I have no one to share it with; most of the other students are the same age or younger than my children (Interview participant 9).

3.5 Age differences

The age difference between school-leaver and mature-age students was identified as a possible reason for not making social connections and forming friendships on campus. Establishing connections and developing relationships with their younger classmates was seen as problematic:

It has been difficult interacting with a cohort of students who are teenagers or in their twenties or, to put it more accurately, they have difficulty interacting with older people who are not their parents, aren't their teachers and aren't telling them what to do. This leads to social isolation on campus where I do not speak to a fellow student. I found this hard to deal with at first but you can get used to just about anything and I seldom think about it now. For the first couple of months I struggled with the lack of social interaction, as the majority of students in my course seemed to be school-leavers. I felt some subtle and not so subtle discrimination from other students, due to my being obviously older (Survey questionnaire participant 10).

Apart from their differences in age, students in courses with large numbers such as Arts also had difficulties meeting and making friends. Responses from the survey questionnaire indicated that students enrolled in an undergraduate Arts course had lower measures of social adjustment than those enrolled in other courses. While they appreciated that involvement in the social culture was a personal choice, students believed that the university should provide some framework for initiating social introductions between students, particularly in courses with high enrolments, flexible subject choice and seemingly, relatively few mature-age students.

In an Arts degree, every subject you are in a completely new group. There's less opportunity for me to meet people in a meaningful way that perhaps would enable friendships to develop (Interview participant 1).

I think it would be good if there were some way that the different faculties could link and get their mature-aged students to make connections with each other. A faculty like Arts is big, but they could make it easier for people to connect. At the same time, it comes down to the people wanting to do that as well (Interview participant 11).

The Stage 4 survey at the end of the first year of university provided an opportunity for students to reflect on their transition and identify the time they had taken to move through their transition period. Of the 28 students who completed the survey, 18 students considered their transition had been affected by their social adjustment to university. Fourteen of the 28 students surveyed considered they were still in transition at the end of the year, and six students believed their transition had taken them most of their first year of university.

4. Discussion

Social adjustment is an issue confronting all students new to university. School-leaver students often have social networks that continue from school, sport, clubs or social media. At the very least, they have the common understanding of a recent secondary school experience. The large numbers of school-leaver students on campus improves the possibility of finding others with common interests to create social ties and form networks.

This study revealed the difficulties mature-age students experienced in their transition to university with students expressing concerns about their social adjustment in all four stages of the study. Although students 'initial anxieties were related to meeting the academic and personal demands of tertiary study, the current study reveals that while students were aware of their loneliness, social dislocation and lack of friends on campus early in the year, these concerns were more significant later in their first year at university.

An important contributor to student adjustment to the first year of university is feeling part of the social culture of university, meeting and making friends and forming connections with other students (Baker & Siryk, 1999; Kantanis, 2002; DeSilva, Robinson & Watts, 2011; Rahat & Ilhan, 2016). The experiences of mature age students in this study suggest that this was a key difficulty for them. The friendships observed between school-leaver students and their inclusion in social activities heightened the awareness of mature age students of their own difficulties in accessing and participating in the university social culture as an older student. Although they wanted to make social connections and form friendships, mature-age students were less able to do so than school-leaver students. The '*vast numbers of younger students*' and the '*sea of youth*' were considered both 'confronting' and 'isolating' as summarised by one mature-age student. The small number of mature-age students in lectures and tutorials and the lack of opportunities to meet and interact with other mature-age students in a social setting exacerbated feelings of loneliness. The need was identified for activities more suited to thelife-stage and interests of these older students.

While forming friendships with younger school-leaver students was difficult due to different interests and life experiences, it was not a major priority. However, mature-age students recognised that interacting and communicating with younger students was a necessary part of the academic side of being a student coupled with expectations requiring students to undertake group assignments. Here again, difficulties were experienced due to differences in age, priorities and time-management. While personal, family and financial responsibilities have been noted to limit the time and availability of mature age students (Kantanis, 2002; Cushman, 2004; Parks, Evans & Getch, 2013; Callcott, Knaus, Warren, Wenban, 2014; Mallman & Lee, 2016), this study highlights that mature-age students sometimes felt discriminated against by the younger students and lamented not having other like-minded and similarly motivated students to share ideas with and discuss assignments. These are issues that need to be addressed at the macro and micro-teaching levelsto better support mature-age students' adjustment to, and experiences within, the university.

As noted by Kantanis (2002) and Wilcox et al., (2005) social integration and campus friendships are critical for providing emotional support and supporting successful academic and social adjustment to university. The identification of strategies, which assist mature-age students to meet and form relationships with other students is important in facilitating their social adjustment and improving learning opportunities through social support networks.

5. Conclusions

The results of this study suggest that transition and adjustment for mature-age students presents difficulties in terms of their access to the social culture of the university. The importance of collaboration and communication with other first year students has consequences for academic progress and achievement, while loneliness and isolation has implications for students' feelings of inclusion in and sense of identity with the university culture. It is imperative that universities address the ways in which they support minority student groups to adjust to and feel part of the university culture. As suggested by students in this study, the provision of designated spaces for mature-age students to meet, relax and engage in social and academic discussion is one way that universities can make this minority group feel welcomed and valued.

This study has been limited to the experiences of social transition and adjustment for mature-age, under-graduate students, at one Australian university. Extending the study to other universities and tertiary colleges would provide a wider range of perspectives and a more representative sample, providing results which are more transferable to the broader community.

Issues relating to age and relationships between mature-age and school-leaver students, require more detailed research. The concern that mature-age students may experience age discrimination (or ageism), the lack of research around this issue, and how the universities might address this, is a further area for investigation.

Students emphasised the difficulties of participating in the social culture of the university, including their loneliness, social dislocation and the problems they encountered in forming relationships with other students. An awareness of the difficulties encountered when interacting and working with school-leaver students is essential in promoting a more positive experience for this subgroup of first year students. Understanding the challenges faced by mature-age students in accessing the social culture of the university is important in providing appropriate measures and support to enable a positive adjustment to university and subsequent completion of students' undergraduate courses.

References

Ayres, R. & Guilfoyle, A. (2009). *Experiences of mature-age female students studying psychology: Implications for the university learning environment, In Teaching and Learning for global graduates.* Paper presented at the 18th Annual Teaching Learning Forum, Perth.

Baker, R., and B. Siryk. 1989, 1999. *Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire Manual*. LosAngeles: Western Psychological Services.

Buote, V., S. Pancer, M. Pratt, G. Adams, S. Birnie-Lefcovitch, J. Polivy and M. Wintre. 2007. The Importance of friends. Friendship and Adjustment Among 1st –Year University Students. *Journal of Adolescent Research,22*(6): 665-689.

Callcott, D., Knaus, M. J., Warren, J., & Wenban, A. (2014). " Network Teach": How a student led organisation supports the transition to university. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, *39*(8): 8.

Cresswell, J.W., and V. Plano Clark. 2007. *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Cushman, P. 2004. "Juggling Priorities: A Comparison of Young & Mature Age Students' use of time during their first semester of teacher education.*"Waikako Journal of Education,*10: 1–16.

Dalziel, J., and M. Peat. 1998. "Academic performance during student transition to university studies" in R. Stokell (compiler). Paper presented at the Proceedings of the Third Pacific Rim Conference on the First-year in Higher Education, 1(29).

Dawborn-Gundlach, L. 2016. The Experience of Transition and Adjustment for Mature-Age, Undergraduate Students in their First Year of University. Accessed September 11, 2017, from: https://minerva-access.unime lb.edu.au/handle/11343/91743

De Silva, S., K. Robinson, and R. Watts. 2011. *Mature age student equity project*. Sydney: Western Sydney University. Accessed November 25, 2016, from: www.westernsydney.edu.au/ _data/assets/pdf_file/0005/391361/MASEPFinalReport121012.pdf.Fragoso, A., Goncalves, T., Miguel Ribeiro C., Monteiro, R., Quintas, H., Bago, J., Fonseca H. & Santos, L. Pages 67-81. Published online 21 Jan 2016. Retrieved August 1, 2017 fromhttp://dx.doi.org /10.1080/02660830.2013.11661642.

Howard, C., & Davies, P. (2013). Attracting mature students into higher education: The impact of approaches to learning and social identity.*Journal of Further and Higher Education*,*37*(6): 769-785.

Huon, G., and M. Sankey. 2000. *The transition to university.Understanding differences in success.* Sydney: School of Psychology University of New South Wales.

Kantanis, T. 2000. The role of social transition in students' adjustment to the first year of university *Journal of Institutional Research, 9*(1).

Kantanis, T. 2001. Transition to self-directed learning: Issues faced by students in adjustment to the first-year at University. Paper presented at the Eighth International Learning Conference, Spetses, Greece.

Kantanis, T. 2002. Same or different: Issues that affect mature age undergraduate students' transition to university. Paper presented at the 6th Pacific Rim, First Year in Higher Education Conference, Christchurch.

Kasworm, C. 2009. Adult Learners in a Research University: Negotiating Undergraduate Student Identity. *Adult Education Weekly, 60*(2).

Mallman, M., & Lee, H. (2016). Stigmatised learners: mature-age students negotiating university culture. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, *37*(5): 684-701.

McInnis, C., and R. James. 1995. *First Year on Campus.* Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service. Retrieved April 24, 2010, from: www.dest.gov.au/archive/highered/eippubs/cip98-20/chapter 2.htm.

Meuleman, A-M, Garrett, R., Wrench, A. & King, S., 2015. "Some people Might Say I'm Thriving but?...: Non-Traditional Students' Experiences of University'. *International Journal of Inclusive Education,19*(5): 503-517.

Pargetter, R., C. McInnis, R. James, M. Evans, M. Peel and I. Dobson. 1998. *Transition from Secondary to Tertiary: A Performance Study.* Australia: Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs. Accessed May 25, 2010, from: www.dest.gov.au/archive/highered/eippubs/eip98-20/conc.htm.

Parks, R., Evans, B., & Getch, Y. (2013). Motivations and enculturation of older students returning to a traditional university. *New Horizons in Adult Education and Human Resource Development*, *25*(3): 62-75.

Peel, M. 1999. "Where to now?" *Higher Education Series: Transition from Secondary to Tertiary: A Performance Study, Report No. 36*: 9–12.

Rahat, E., & İlhan, T. (2016). Coping Styles, Social Support, Relational Self-Construal, and Resilience in Predicting Students' Adjustment to University Life. *Educational Sciences: Theory and Practice*, *16*(1): 187-208.

Ramsay, S., E. Jones, and M. Barker. 2007. "Relationship between adjustment and support types: Young and mature-aged local and international first year university students." *Higher Education* 54: 247-265.

Robinson, K., Ballard, F., De Silva, P., Hendrick, L., MacGibbon, M., Mehta, H., & Rouf, A. (2010). Academic guided peer support for struggling first year students. *Learning, Teaching and Social Justice in Higher Education*, *1*(1): 189-199.

Sevinc, S., & Gizir, C. A. (2014). Factors Negatively Affecting University Adjustment from the Views of First-Year University Students: The Case of Mersin University. *Educational Sciences: Theory and Practice*, *14*(4): 1301-1308.

The University of Melbourne, (2010). *Non-school-leaver.* Website. Retrieved Oct. 10, 2010, from http://www.futurestudents.unimelb.edu.au/nonyear12/pathway.

The University of Melbourne, (2015). *Course Search*. Website. Retrieved May 22, 2015, from http://coursesearch.unimelb.edu.au/undergrad.

Tinto, V. 1995. *Keynote Address.* Presented at the Inaugural Pan Pacific First Year Experience Conference, Brisbane, July.

Tinto, V. 1997. "Classrooms as Communities: Exploring the Educational Characteristics of Student Persistence." *Journal of Higher Education* 68: 599-623.

Wilcox, P., S. Winn, and M. Fyvie-Gauld. 2005. "'It was nothing to do with the university, it was just the people': The role of social support in the first-year experience of higher education." *Studies in Higher Education.* *30*(6): 707–722.

Appendices

Appendix 1   Participant demographic profile

Characteristic	Category	Stage 1 N=11	Stage 2 N=40	Stage 3 N=24	Stage 4 N=28
G Gender	Female	9	25	16	18
	Male	2	15	8	10
A Age group	> 40	11	18	No data	No data
	23 - 40	0	22	No data	No data
P Permanent residential address	International	0	5	1	No data
	Local	11	35	23	No data
Fi First language	Other	0	3	1	No data
	English	11	37	23	No data
E Employment situation	No employment	1	11	No data	No data
	Employment	10	28	No data	No data
N Nationality	Other	1	4	2	No data
	Australian	9	29	22	No data

Appendix 2　　Number of participants in each of the four stages of the study

Stage		Number
1	Focus group discussions	11
2	Survey questionnaire	40
3	Individual interviews	24
4	Follow-up survey	28

Note: some of the 56 participants were involved in multiple stages of the study

Appendix 3　　　　　　Item analysis for the Social Adjustment scale

Item No.	Description	StAgree n	%	Agree n	%	Neutral n	%	Disagree n	%	StDisagree n	%	NR n	%
General (SAG)													
1	Fitting in to the university environment	5	12.5	15	37.5	13	32.5	7	17.5	0	0.0	0	0.0
7	Involvement in university social activities	0	0.0	3	7.5	4	10.0	16	40.0	17	42.5	0	0.0
8	Satisfaction with adjustment to university	2	5.0	22	55.0	13	32.5	3	7.5	0	0.0	0	0.0
12	Close ties at university	7	17.5	0	0.0	6	15.0	12	30.0	13	32.5	2	5.0
18	Social skills to get along at university	8	20.0	24	60.0	4	10.0	4	10.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
25	Satisfaction with extent of participation in social activities	1	2.5	9	22.5	10	25.0	9	22.5	11	27.5	1	2.5
41	Satisfaction with university social life	1	2.5	9	22.5	8	20.0	17	42.5	5	12.5	0	0.0
Other People (SAP)													
4	Meeting and making new friends at university	4	10.0	3	7.5	6	15.0	17	42.5	10	25.0	0	0.0
10	Informal, personal contacts with academics	4	10.0	10	25.0	8	20.0	14	35.0	4	10.0	0	0.0
22	Feeling at ease with others at university*	2	5.0	8	20.0	12	30.0	12	30.0	6	15.0	0	0.0
39	Have good friends or acquaintances at university	3	7.5	11	27.5	5	12.5	12	30.0	9	22.5	0	0.0
48	Making friends with school-leavers	2	5.0	10	25.0	8	20.0	11	27.5	9	22.5	0	0.0
49	Making friends with mature-age students	5	12.5	16	40.0	6	15.0	9	22.5	4	10.0	0	0.0
50	Feels part of the first year cohort	2	5.0	6	15.0	7	17.5	13	32.5	12	30.0	0	0.0
51	Academic staff treat me the same as school-leavers	6	15.0	11	27.5	11	27.5	9	22.5	3	7.5	0	0.0
Nostalgia (SAN)													
28	No feelings of loneliness at university*	3	7.5	12	30.0	13	32.5	9	22.5	3	7.5	0	0.0
33	Prefer to be at university than at home*	20	50.0	17	42.5	2	5.0	1	2.5	0	0.0	0	0.0
Environment (SAE)													
11	Satisfaction with decision to attend university	25	62.5	9	22.5	6	15.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
16	Satisfaction with extra-curricular activities	2	5.0	11	27.5	18	45.0	5	12.5	4	10.0	0	0.0
47	Feels included in the university social culture	1	2.5	5	12.5	9	22.5	12	30.0	13	32.5	0	0.0

StAgree – Strongly Agree, StDisagree – Strongly Disagree, NR – No Response

*Items expressed negatively in the survey have been re-coded in the positive form for analysis.