

# BEING AN INTERNATIONAL STUDENT WHO STUDIES LAW

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## I INTRODUCTION

In a post-pandemic environment the market for international students' academic education has become highly competitive. The return of international students to Australia is now one of the stated priorities of the federal government.<sup>1</sup> This is also essential for the financial recovery of the university sector which suffered a dramatic drop in foreign student enrolment as the pandemic erupted.<sup>2</sup> However, this is not just about the finances. International students contribute a critical value in advancing Australian education beyond national borders, serving as an important means for fostering the notions of global citizenship, transformation and change.<sup>3</sup>

## **II WHAT IS IT LIKE TO BE AN INTERNATIONAL STUDENT?**

Perhaps, it is not easy to be an international student. Is there anything universities can do to improve the experience of international students in Western Australia? Are there any specific educational strategies that could enhance their experience as students, specifically as students who are studying law in such programs as the Juris Doctor or Bachelor of Laws? The ensuing paragraphs offer some answers to these questions.

International students face challenges. Arriving to a new continent, country, area and university could be difficult. Some students come from a different legal background that requires a quick adaptation to a new tradition – the common law tradition. This is not trivial, as it involves a different way of thinking about the essentials of the legal order, the role of judges, and the complex interplay between the various areas of law. Students that are new to the country encounter a different culture, face new administrative expectations and need to quickly adapt to a new social environment.

Students who come from non-English speaking countries may encounter serious language barriers despite good formal IELTS (International English Language Testing System) scores. Significantly, the legal doctrine, terms, concepts, principles and rules amplify the linguistic challenge. Anecdotally, international students can feel overwhelmed by the amount of required readings of cases, legislative provisions and secondary literature. They may not understand the nature and logistics of procedural requirements, which leads some international students to slip through the cracks.<sup>4</sup> Put simply, international students in many instances have different expectations of the university, the lecturers and of their own role as students. These all contribute to the challenges faced by international students, and interfere with productive learning.

## **III WHAT CAN BE DONE TO IMPROVE THE EXPERIENCE OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS?**

What can be done to improve the experience of international students? Awareness from the local lecturers and educators – the teachers – must be key and a focal point to address the challenge. This includes awareness as to the significance of being culturally patient and tolerant teachers who understand that through interaction with ‘others’ one may better understand the ‘self’.<sup>5</sup> This vision perceives international students not as a burden, but rather as a unique opportunity for educators to enrich themselves and learn about foreign systems and cultures. The foreign perspective is also a valuable opportunity to critically inquire into the domestic legal system itself. Domestic educators may need to acquire the background of a foreign culture, understand that a different learning curve might be applicable to foreign students and acknowledge the significance of working closely with the university’s international student office.

There are specific learning and teaching strategies which the extant research has found to be effective with respect to international students. These strategies include the use of multiple examples, as well as some extra repetition of the legal doctrine, concepts and principles, legal points, arguments and debates. Provision of ongoing and detailed feedback has also been found to be effective.<sup>6</sup>

These strategies also encourage group work that integrates domestic and international students together. They support the implementation of a variety of assessment methods and tasks, and the provision of model answers to tutorial questions for better understanding of the dynamics and operation of the legal doctrine.<sup>7</sup> Maintaining interaction and engagement could be incredibly valuable for some international students' motivation and transformation from being potentially passive learners towards their role as assertive leaders. Their knowledge of foreign law may frequently contribute to the comparative perspective of the learning experience.

## IV CONCLUSION

Bringing international students back to Western Australian universities is not an easy task. The post-pandemic global drive towards international student recruitment posits not only challenges, but also opportunities. Enrolment growth is important due to governmental priorities and the imminent need to increase universities' revenue. Furthermore, international students play a key role in transformative global change, global citizenship and intercultural learning. The awareness of Western Australian university educators of the difficulties faced by these students and application of the relevant learning strategies could assist in bringing international student enrolment numbers back to (and beyond) pre-COVID-19 levels. After all, the positive experiences of international students here in Western Australian universities, and their feedback, is the best marketing agent to promote our law programs overseas.

### ENDNOTES

1: See, eg. Australian Government Department of Education, 'Australian Strategy for International Education 2021–2030' (Web Page) <<https://www.education.gov.au/australian-strategy-international-education-2021-2030#:~:text=The%20Australian%20Strategy%20for%20International,the%20centre%20and%20global%20competitiveness>>.

2: See, eg. Nancy Arthur, 'COVID Halved International Student Numbers in Australia. The Risk Now is we Lose Future Skilled Workers and Citizens', *The Conversation* (Web Page, 1 February 2022) <<https://theconversation.com/covid-halved-international-student-numbers-in-australia-the-risk-now-is-we-lose-future-skilled-workers-and-citizens-175510>>; ICEF Monitor, Australia: International Enrolments Down 17% in 2021; But Visa Applications Now Trending Up (Web Page, 9 May 2022) <<https://monitor.icef.com/2022/03/australia-international-enrolments-down-17-in-2021-but-visa-applications-now-trending-up/>>.

3: Jude Carroll and Janette Ryan, *Teaching International Students: Improving Learning for All* (Routledge, 2005).

4: Mona Chung and Richard Ingleby, 'Overcoming the Cultural Challenges in Supervising Chinese Research Students in Australia' in Janette Ryan (ed), *China's Higher Education Reform and Internationalisation* (Routledge, 2011) 173.

5: Edilson Arenas, 'How Teachers' Attitudes Affect Their Approaches to Teaching International Students' (2009) 28 (6) *Higher Education Research and Development* 615; Cristine Asmar, 'Internationalising Students' (2005) 30(3) *Studies in Higher Education* 291.

6: Laura Dove and Natalie Bryant, 'Law in Translation: Challenges and Opportunities in Teaching International Students in Business and Legal Environment Courses' (2016) 33 (2) *Journal of Legal Studies Education* 263.

7: *Ibid.*

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