

CHARLES STURT
UNIVERSITY



Internal Students

Living Off Campus

Survey Report

**An online survey conducted between
November 2005 and February 2006 by
the Student Community Coordinators
at the Division of Student Services.**

Summary

Towards the end of the 2005 academic year the Charles Sturt University (CSU) Division of Student Services invited all internal students living off campus to participate in an important survey on a range of issues. The purpose of the survey was to uncover the needs of internal students who live off campus. This group of CSU students have not had their needs assessed in any formal way, unlike internal students who live on campus. The Executive Director of Students Services was keen to find out how a number of important issues affect internal student living off campus. The focus of the survey was on identifying what types of services, social and community activities internal students living off campus may need. The survey was anonymous, confidential and voluntary. It gave students an opportunity to tell the Division of Student Services what is important to them and how the Division of Student Services could best meet their needs. The survey structure was an online questionnaire which was made available to students via CSU's online student home page my.csu. Students were able to access the questionnaire through the general student forums, 'What's New' announcements and via the Charles Sturt University Student Association Bathurst website CSUSAB. The survey was available from November 2005 to February 2006. There were a total of 258 respondents surveyed. The findings of the survey will be used to improve the quality of the services provided to internal students who live off campus.

We would like to thank all of the students who participated in the survey. The information gathered is invaluable for the improvement and development of services to off campus students.

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Survey Findings

The survey questionnaire consisted of qualitative and quantitative data questions across a broad range of issues (see Appendix A for a copy of the survey). Here is an outline of the findings from the survey questionnaire. The results of this survey were compared and contrasted with the basic statistical data gathered by the CSU Office of Planning and Audit in previous years on data for number of students by gender, by enrolment type, by faculty, by location, and by level of course.

1. Gender

Gender	Number of students	Percentage
Male	81	31.3%
Female	177	68.7%

The gender of the respondents is a reflection of the general enrolment patterns of students at CSU over the last few years. There has been a majority of female students enrolled at CSU for a number of years. The total number of full time and part time internal students also reflects these findings. In 2004, 18.2% of females and 12.3% of male were enrolled at CSU as internal students (CSU Office of Planning and Audit).

2. Age:

Age:	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36
No:	5	29	39	37	26	18	14	9	14	5	1	2	1	4	6	3	5	5	2	3

Age:	37	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	47	48	49	51	57	58	59	83
No:	2	6	3	2	1	2	3	1	1	1	2	1	1	2	1	1

Age groups of students	Number of students	Percentage
17 to 21 yrs	135	52.3%
22 to 27 yrs	61	23.6%
28 to 33 yrs	21	8.1%
34 to 39 yrs	18	7%
40 to 44 yrs	11	4.2%
45 to 50 yrs	4	1.5%
51 to 57 yrs	2	0.8%
58 to 81 yrs	4	1.5%

Students have been placed into age brackets above to show the general age groups of students more clearly.

It is not surprising that there are 52.3% of students are under the age of 21 years in our sample as many of the internal students at CSU are recent school leaver. Over 23% of internal students in our sample are over the age of 28 years. While there are a

high percentage of mature age students studying as distance education students at CSU, these findings in our sample show that mature age students are also representative as internal students.

3. Are you enrolled?

Are you enrolled?	Number of students	Percentage
Full time	213	82.5%
Art time	45	17.5%

These findings are representative of other statistical data gathered by CSU on full time and part time enrolments patterns.

4. Are you an Undergraduate or Postgraduate?

Are you an Undergraduate or Postgraduate?	Number of students	Percentage
Undergraduate	239	92.6%
Postgraduate	19	7.4%

This finding is not surprising as the majority of students studying at CSU are undergraduates.

5. What year of study are you currently doing?

What year of study are you currently doing?	Number of students	Percentage
1 st year	128	46.6%
2 nd year	52	20.1%
3 rd year	51	19.7%
4 th year	14	5.4%
Honours	2	0.7%
Postgraduate	11	4.2%

These findings were expected as the highest percentages of students at CSU are commencing first year students.

6. Which faculty are you enrolled in?

Which faculty are you enrolled in?	Number of students	Percentage
Arts	58	22.5%
Commerce	41	15.9%
Education	58	22.5%
Health	61	23.6%
Sci & Agr	40	15.5%

These findings are interesting as there is a slightly higher response rate from the faculties that have smaller student enrolments like Health and Education, than the faculties with larger student enrolments like Commerce and Science and Agriculture.

7. How many class contact hours do you have per week?

Class contact hours per week	Number of students	Percentage
1 to 5	40	15.5%
6 to 10	43	16.6%
11 to 15	75	29%
16 to 20	57	22%
21 to 25	26	10%
26 to 30	11	4.2%
31 to 35	0	0%
36 to 40	6	2.3%

These findings show that there is a variation of class contact hours for students. There are 32.1% of students that only had between 1 and 10 hrs per week. 51.4% of students had between 11 and 20 hrs per week and 16.5% of students had more than 21 to 40 hrs per week. This shows that 67.9% of students surveyed had from between 10 and 40hrs per week class contact time. To compare class contact time with employment hours this equates to study being in a part time or full time job.

8. Which campus do you attend?

Which campus do you attend?	Number of students	Percentage
Albury	37	14.3%
Bathurst	98	37.9%
Canberra	3	1.1%
Dubbo	7	2.7%
Goulburn	3	1.1%
Orange	5	1.9%
Wagga Wagga	105	40.6%

These findings show a good representation from all of the campuses. The larger campuses like Bathurst and Wagga Wagga have the largest response rates. Overall the responses reflect the size and student enrolment patterns for each campus.

9. Did you move to study at your current campus?

Did you move to study at your campus?	Number of Students	Percentage
No, I come from the town	32	12.4%
Yes, from another town in this state	125	48.5%
Yes, from interstate	93	36.0%
Yes, from overseas	8	3.1%

It is commonly assumed that a large percentage of students who are internal students lived off campus because they come from the town in which the campus is located. These results show a high percentage of students come from other towns in the state or from another state. 84% of internal students who live off campus are not local students. It is assumed that students move off campus to live in rental accommodation for a number of reasons. One of the reasons for students living off campus may be the general lack of on campus accommodation.

10. Which one of the following best describes you?

Payment of Student Fees	Number of Students	Percentage
Full-fee paying International student	13	5.0%
Sponsored or Assisted International student	0	0%
Commonwealth Learning Scholarship	2	0.8%
HECS-HELP	217	84.1%
FEE-HELP	10	3.9%
Other	16	6.2%

These findings are not surprising as most internal undergraduate students are HECS-HELP funded. The 16 students who selected the ‘Other’ section were either full fee paying students or had a combination of fee payment methods.

11. Are you employed during the semester?

Are you employed during the semester?	Number of students	Percentage
Yes	157	61%
No	101	39%

The students’ comments showed that students have high rates of full time, part time and casual employment. Students commented on the difficulties with the cost of study and the lack of employment to cover their cost of living.

A sample of student responses:

“I don’t have a job yet but I will need to get one. I can’t afford to continue through uni without one.” Female 19 Albury

“Don’t have time to study and work. I travel from Orange and petrol costs have killed my finances.” Female 25 Bathurst

“I work 2 jobs – as a nanny after school hours and weekends in retail.” Female 25 Bathurst

“Work 3 jobs, customer service, farm work and yearling prep supervisor.” Female 25 Wagga Wagga

“I work 22 hours a week in a restaurant and 6 hours a week doing admin work.”
Female 22 Wagga Wagga

12. How many hours per week on average are you employed?

Employment hours per week	Number of students	Percentage
1 to 5 hrs	14	8.8%
6 to 10 hrs	31	19.5%
11 to 15 hrs	31	19.5%
16 to 20 hrs	20	12.6%
21 to 25 hrs	13	8.2%
26 to 30 hrs	12	7.5%
31 to 35 hrs	6	3.8%
36 to 40 hrs	32	20.1%

These findings are of interest. The percentages show that 51.6% of students have between 6 and 20 hrs employment per week, which is equivalent to working part time. There were 20.1% of students who had between 36 and 40hrs employment per week, which is the equivalent of working full-time. When comparing the class contact hours and employment hours per week of respondents, it indicates that for some students there may be little time left for study. Considering the recommended study hours for each subject is 12 hrs per week many students would be time poor when it came to study time. Further studies into all internal students work and study commitments would be useful in determining the relationship between work, academic achievement and financial hardship.

13. If you are not employed would you like to have paid employment?

If you are not employed would you like to have paid employment?	Number of students	Percentage
Yes	102	92.8%
No	9	8.2%

This finding highlights students’ need for paid employment. The larger majority of students who did not have employment would prefer to have some. Students’ comments highlighted the need for flexible employment options and more casual hours.

A sample of student responses:

“Would need flexible working hours that could be negotiated on a week to week basis.” Female 19 Bathurst

“I would like some extra money but no time for a job.” Female 20 Wagga Wagga

“Just got a job starting next week full time.” Female 19 Bathurst

“I am in the process of looking for a second job.” Female 20 Bathurst

“But it's incredibly hard to find a flexible employer in town who pays properly and doesn't abuse your position as a starving student to their own gain.” Female 22
Bathurst

14. If you were employed what would be your preferred number of work hours per week?

What are your preferred number of hours per week if you are employed	Number of students	Percentage
1 to 5 hrs	10	6.8%
6 to 10 hrs	28	19%
11 to 15 hrs	48	32.6%
16 to 20 hrs	38	25.9%
21 to 25 hrs	5	3.4%
26 to 30 hrs	5	3.4%
31 to 35 hrs	6	4.1%
36 to 40 hrs	7	4.8%

These findings show that students without employment would prefer to have a few hours per week. 77.5% of student would like to have between 6 and 20 hrs per week employment.

15. Do you receive any government assistance?

Please indicate if you receive financial assistance from any of the following.

Type of financial assistance for study	Number of Students	Percentage
Commonwealth Youth Allowance	75	29%
Austudy	1	0.4%
Abstudy	23	8.9%
Commonwealth Pension or equivalent	10	3.9%
Commonwealth Family/Parenting Allowance	16	6.2%
Veterans Affairs payment	1	0.4%
Other Commonwealth income support	0	0.0%
Commonwealth Learning Scholarship	3	1.2%
Overseas Government Sponsor	2	0.8%
Family/Spouse/Partner support	2	0.8%
Employer non-salary financial support	48	18.6%
Other sources	77	29.8%

These results are of interest with higher than expected percentage of students nominating that they were receiving an employer non-salary financial support for financial assistance. 39 students who chose the “Other sources” response indicated they have a combination of sources of financial support and 38 students stated they had no financial support. A general conclusion that can be drawn is half of the surveyed students have a combination of financial supports and while the other half have no financial support at all. The findings for this survey question may have been a result of confusion over the question and the limited types of financial assistance categories respondents were able to select.

16. What degree of financial difficulty do you currently experience?

Degree of financial difficulty	Number of students	Percentage
None	19	7.3%
A little	60	23.2%
Moderate	90	34.8%
Considerable	71	27.5%
Extreme	18	6.9%

A majority of students rated their degree of financial difficulty as moderate to considerable. While it is good to find that 30.5% of students rated their degree of financial difficulty as none to a little, 62.3% classified their degree of financial difficulty as moderate to considerable and another 6.9% stated they were experiencing extreme financial difficulty. It is difficult to determine what the cause of this degree of financial difficulty is as a high percentage of students are receiving some form of financial support and undertaking part time work. It may have something to do with higher expectations regarding living standards, needing to service debt repayments. The results of this question do warrant further investigation in a follow-up study to determine the causes of students’ financial hardship.

17. Who do you share your current place of residence with?

Who do you reside with?	Number of students	Percentage
Living with parent/s	47	18.2%
Living with partner	39	15.1%
Living with partner and dependent children	29	11.2%
Sole Parent living with dependent children	14	5.5%
Living alone	25	9.7%
Living with family members	13	5.0%
Sharing with fellow students	65	25.2%
Sharing with friends	17	6.6%
Other	9	3.5%

These results showed the variety of residential patterns for internal students living off campus. The 3.5% in the 'Other' category included students who boarded or had alternative residential arrangements.

18. Do you have access to a computer at your place of residence?

Do you have access to a computer at your place of residence?	Number of students	Percentage
Yes	240	93%
No	18	7%

These results show that a large majority of students have a computer at home but there is small percentage of students without one. As internal students can access computers on campus this may not be too much of a problem. There was a range of student comments including reporting they own more than one computer, not having a computer due to cost and replacement. Several students commented that they owned or were going to purchase a laptop computer.

A sample of student responses:

“Yes I do NOT wish to pay the ENORMOUS cost that is involved with using the Internet on campus as I was on campus the first year and since I do IT my bill was enormous --- note to uni internet at a lot of other uni’s is FREE!” Male 20 Bathurst

“I just got a new laptop as the other computer died; now I am not eating for a month!” Female 19 Bathurst

“Before I came to uni my parents bought me a computer so I was able to use the computer at my leisure and do my assignments when needed instead of coming up to use the uni computers all the time.” Female 20 Bathurst

“I have a computer though I do not have access to internet network or printer.” Male 18 Bathurst

19. Do you have access to the internet at you place of residence?

Do you have access to the internet at your place of residence?	Number of students	Percentage
Yes	203	78.7%
No	55	21.3%

These results show that a majority of 78.7% of students have internet access at home. 21.3% of students reported they don’t have internet access. Not having internet access at home would make researching assignments and logging on to my.csu at home impossible. It would only be possible when students come on campus to use the university computers. The students’ comments indicate that the main reason for not having the internet at home is the cost. Some students also complained about the cost of using the university internet service.

A sample of student responses:

“Although the added cost is a burden but having it at home anytime is handy.”
Female 18 Bathurst

“It is too costly for us to pay for phone line rental AND internet costs hence we do not have either. We use the net at uni but still find this rather costly.” Female 19 Bathurst

“No and I often feel disadvantaged by this. CSU relies a lot on internet based study/tutorials.” Female 26 Goulburn

“See above 11c per meg at uni what a joke! I pay 40 dollars a month for broad band here and I get unlimited downloads. Uni should introduce a similar system pay 30 a month and get say unlimited hours 1 gig download something like that.” Male 20 Bathurst

20. Is being part of the university community important to you and your studies?

Is being apart of the university community important to you and your studies?	Number of students	Percentage
Yes	199	77.2%
No	59	22.8%

This result highlights the need for a university community to promote a sense of connectedness and belonging for students. Many of the students who did not think being part of the university community was important to them thought it would be a distraction from their studies and that they have social support networks away from university.

A sample of student responses:

“It makes the university experience more enjoyable.” Female 21 Bathurst

“I think it is very important because if you don’t feel included in the community it leads you to feel socially isolated.” Female 22 Wagga Wagga

“It would be nice but people that live in town are forgotten about. We don’t have dorm Olympics or dorm sports etc.” Female 22 Bathurst.

“Work has overtaken it though. Don’t have enough time between work and study to take part in activities.” Female 19 Albury

“Yes very important and I feel I am missing out by not living on campus.” Female 18 Albury

21. What type of social activities would help build a sense of community?

This question was not mandatory in the survey and elicited 151 responses. The most commonly mentioned social activity is sport. Second are social activities based on academic groupings such as tutorial groups and student groups across a faculty or

school. Social activities aimed at bringing ‘Townies’ and on-campus students closer together are also seen as very desirable. Activities that revolve around food, such as dinners and BBQ’s are popular. Family friendly (mature age) functions are mentioned frequently. Fundraising functions and events also merit a mention as an activity students would like to be involved in.

A sample of student responses:

“Instead of such a big focus on sport uni bar and bar nights it would be good to have games nights and chocolate nights. What can you do at uni if you do not enjoy sport or drinking? Not much.” Female 21 Bathurst

“Course team-building days creating contacts with students in other years.” Male 20 Wagga Wagga

“More activities for first year students who live off-campus during O-Week would be good. That is when friendships and networks are formed but the whole O-Week experience seems centred around those living on-campus and ignoring the over 40% of off-campus students.” Male 20 Bathurst

“More activities on the library lawn.” Female 18 Bathurst

“Sporting teams and facilities i.e. basketball volleyball hockey etc... Common interest sports and social clubs such as those found at metro uni’s. Funding for such clubs would also be nice we struggle to get even a tee-shirt to attend events!” Female 23 Albury

“Most social activities are aimed at the younger ones (which usually consist of excess alcohol) and I do not think it is appropriate to encourage such behaviour among students.” Female 30 Wagga Wagga

22. What type of social activities would you be likely to attend on campus?

This was not a mandatory question in the survey and 158 students responded. The top activities mentioned involve social drinking, the uni bar and sport. It is interesting to note however that a significant number of responses (22) to both question 21 and 22 involved comments about the negative aspects of activities that involve excessive intake of alcohol and asked specifically for social events with no alcohol. 67 responses came from students aged 25 years and over, none of their favoured social events include the consumption of alcohol. It would therefore seem that it is mainly the younger students who prefer activities that involve drinking. BBQ’s are regularly mentioned as a popular event. Some students would like to see course based social activities. Other activities mentioned are fundraising events, trivia nights, bands and meals. 16 students responded that they would not attend any social function on campus.

A sample of student responses:

“I would be likely to attend a university games day fundraisers and also join sporting clubs linked to the university participating as a whole in the greater community.”
Male 19 Albury

“Off campus student BBQ's "dorm" sports dorm Olympics anything I don't even feel like a student anymore. I lived on campus first year was great but since then have applied every year for on campus (denied) seems like once you move off campus you have no chance of getting back on! It's ridiculous. Maybe I should just give up on having fun and feeling like a uni student. I would be better off doing study DE. Would probably get more support from the uni.” Female 22 Bathurst

“Band nights ... any excuse to have a beer really.” Male 22 Wagga Wagga

“BBQ's and other casual events during the day.” Female 22 Wagga Wagga

“Comedy nights guest speakers good bands barbeques for a decent purpose.”
Female 22 Bathurst

“Non alcohol nights i.e. movie nights etc.” Female 24 Bathurst

“The ones without excessive consumption of alcohol loud music and huge crowds.”
Female 19 Wagga Wagga

“Study groups social outings with people studying the same course/subject.” Female 19 Wagga Wagga

“Those that were directly related to my degree.” Male 20 Wagga Wagga

“Very little- don't fit in with the young ones into binge drinking.” Female 39 Wagga Wagga

23. How could the university improve its services to off campus students?

This was not a mandatory question in the survey and 135 students responded. There were a variety of suggestions to improve services to off campus students ranging from improving bus services, having cheaper food, activities that involve off campus and on campus students socialising together, providing common rooms for students to use between classes, to improve the off campus accommodation website by including an accommodation wanted section, improving the notification of campus activities by using emails to all students and improving my.csu to make it easier to navigate.

A sample of student responses:

“A more comprehensive bus schedule with actual diagram of where the bus actually travels and stops with rough times of those stops.” Female 20 Wagga Wagga

“Being an off campus student is very difficult. The safety net of on campus has been removed. I like to call on campus (MEET EVERYONE AND NOT FEEL LEFT OUT LIKE OFF CAMPUS LOSERS). Bathurst definitely needs other elder students to help and more specific programs aimed at students like me.” Male 18 Bathurst

“By involving them more in the planning of activities for the students on campus. There are virtually no activities that involve off campus students which make me personally feel isolated.” Female 18 Wagga Wagga

“By providing services that are relevant to off campus students not just focussed on students residing on campus.” Male 29 Wagga Wagga

“From what I have seen during O week the services for off campus students are fine it is more the mature age students’ services that could be improved.” Female 32 Albury

“I think it's currently pretty good.” Female 25 Wagga Wagga

“I've only recently commenced and am highly impressed with quality of all services to date.” Female 42 Wagga Wagga

“My.csu is shocking to navigate. It could be a great way of informing students (on when grades will be available for example) but instead it's difficult to navigate (I can only find how to re-enrol by updating my contact details!) and it could be a great portal for bringing together the different sections of the uni.” Male 32 Wagga Wagga

“Provide UPDATED accommodation rental details and develop an ACCOMODATION WANTED list to help the matching go both ways.” Female 39 Wagga Wagga

“They're doing a swell job though it helps to live near 3rd and 4th year uni students who encourage us to partake in O week festivities and sporting activities etc.” Male 18 Bathurst

“Throw US a dinner. On campus people get one with David Battersby. Why cant we??? Even if it's a BBQ and some salad and jelly!!!” Female 23 Dubbo

24. What type of social support / activities would you like Student Services to facilitate or provide for off campus students?

There were 107 responses to this question.

Top student responses were:

“Townies and dormies” get together, sharing meals – catering – cooking lessons, sport and assistance with tenancy. Many students comment on the need for improved communication regarding activities and they suggest giving information in a newsletter or online.

A sample of student responses:

“I'd like to see student services take over any services that CSUSAB won't be able to offer when VSU comes in. I'd like to see an easier process and less biased attitude from student services in relation to grievances with university academic issues.” 22 Female Bathurst

“It is very hard here in Dubbo as a lot of students are mature aged with children. We don't have the time money or the energy to participate in activities that the younger students enjoy like drinking and more drinking. We are constantly referred to as anti-social because we prefer to partake in activities with our families that the younger students refer to as boring.” Female 36 Dubbo

“Student services needs to ensure that off campus students have access to help getting them set up down town if they aren't already and need to introduce ways of meeting new people and keeping the involvement going within the off campus students so they have the same feeling of belonging that the on campus students do.” Female 20 Bathurst

“This has been a trial and error at Orange for the last few years. Due to the change over enrolment numbers has dropped and the campus cultured has changed. We have tried Monday night touch football and tennis round robins but nothing seems to work. I think this can be put down to the segregation of students. A lot of students were interested they either didn't know the people organising the comp or didn't know the other people in their year. This comes down to a poorly structured o-week and lack of bonding activities amongst students. The campus culture is almost deal.” Female 20 Orange

25. Are the opening hours of Student Services suitable for off campus students?

Are the opening hours of Student Services suitable for off campus students	Number of students	Percentage
Yes	216	83.7%
No	42	16.3%

The majority of students are happy with the opening hours of the Student Services offices. Students' comments indicated that many students did not know what the operating hours were for Student Services. Student liked being able to email and telephone the Help Desk. Mature age students seem to have a greater need for more flexible service hours as evidenced by their comments.

A sample of student responses:

“Don't know what their hours are or where to find them.” Female 36 Dubbo

“Don't know as I have not had a need to contact Student Services.” Male 23 Albury

“Later opening hours could be more useful.” Female 22 Bathurst

“No problem so far.” Male 31 Bathurst

“Later opening hours could be more useful.” Female 22 Bathurst

“I don't know what they are.” Female 23 Wagga Wagga

“A Saturday morning would be helpful.” Female 30 Wagga Wagga

“I have to contact services from work currently - this can be a problem.” Female 58 Bathurst

26. Are there enough services and social activities for mature age students?

Are there enough services and social activities for mature age students	Number of students	Percentage
Yes	139	53.9%
No	119	46.1%

53.9% of students stating that there are enough services and social activities for mature age students. Many students commented that they were not aware of any activities for mature age students. Others commented about the lack of appropriate activities for mature age students that did not include the uni bar. Students suggested some activities for mature age student like, Trivia Nights, Games, Monthly Mature Age Student Lunches at cost price, BBQ's, and Movies.

A sample of student responses:

“During O Week lunch was provided to encourage non recent school leavers to come in and chat. In my opinion this was a great success.” Male 33 Wagga Wagga

“Apart from the Mature Age Forum do they exist?” Female 23 Albury

“I have never had an issue however we tend to do most of our activities down town.” Female 21 Bathurst

“Not all mature age students want to spend their time drinking till they pass out with 18 year olds at the uni bar. It would be nice to see some community building activities available for students. Social events that aren't ruled by alcohol.” Female 22 Bathurst

“I don't feel a lot of mature age students want to get involved in the uni life as much as the younger ones.” Female 20 Bathurst

“Most uni social activities can be intimidating for mature age students. It is not very validating if you go to the bar and I think that a drop in room with coffee.” Male 31 Bathurst

“My mature age friends don't seem to have much of a social life because they feel too old for the bar etc.” Female 19 Bathurst

“We don't have time nor do we wish to do the pub thing and who's going to look after our kids?” Female 36 Dubbo

27. Are the locations of the Student Services accessible for off campus students?

Are the locations of the Student Services accessible for off campus students?	Number of students	Percentage
Yes	205	79.5%
No	53	20.5%

The majority of students believe that the locations of the Student Services are accessible for off campus students. The students who said it wasn't accessible often did not know where the service was located. This could be related to signage or confusion with other services on campus and what the services Student Services provides to students.

A sample of student responses:

"If you are internal it is, if you are not internal then no." Female 19 Wagga Wagga

"Very little parking near the building in Bathurst - and it's on the other side of the university to most students. It's not well signposted and being out of sight it's out of mind. It needs to be relocated to the centre hub of the uni near the lawn for better access." Female 22 Bathurst

"Don't know where Student Services is. Moved here to go to this uni and no-one has told me anything." Female 26 Bathurst

"If you can get to uni you can get to the services." Female 34 Wagga Wagga

"This is a general problem with transport to and from the university. Also the decor sucks. It could be a lot more inviting. I think that it should play more of a role as a hub a place to gather one's wits as much as a support office. Coffee and a place to sit would be nice. The university can seem quite barren place to a townie." Male 31 Bathurst

28. What are the 5 most frustrating things about studying and living off campus?

This question gave students the opportunity to tell us their main frustrations about living off campus. Each respondent was able to enter up to 5 responses. Four main themes emerged: travel, isolation and loneliness, lack of time and cost.

TOP 4 Themes

1. Travel (105 responses)

2. Isolation and loneliness (95 responses)

3. Lack of time (88 responses)

4. Cost (72 responses)

Travel

Comments about travel ranged from the cost and time involved in travelling to and from university, the cost of petrol to public transport. Travelling to and from university is by far the biggest frustration, in particular the time which is lost in transit. Students also comment on missing out on group work or extra lectures and tutorials given at a short notice.

Public transport is often seen as not meeting the need of university students adequately, especially in relation to their timetables. Busses do not always run early enough or late enough.

“Cost of petrol to and from uni (even with car pooling).” Female 20 Bathurst

“Having to drive for 20 mins to use a computer or return library books.” Female 25 Wagga Wagga

“Miss out on many social activities dues to the long drive.” Male 20 Wagga Wagga

“Need to travel to get to uni - time consuming.” Female 21 Bathurst

“Travelling so far to access student services assistance - i.e. maths tutoring.” Female 37 Wagga Wagga

“Travel = more money needed to pay for travel = less money for bills and other important things.” Female 21 Bathurst

“Having to drive to uni for just one class a day.” Female 21 Wagga Wagga

“Having to walk everywhere in the heat / cold while everyone else is close to the action.” Female 21 Bathurst

Isolation and loneliness

Isolation and loneliness have emerged as a major concern to off campus students. Lack of a social network is often cited, with the students describing feeling like outsiders, feeling left out and generally finding it hard to make friends. The off campus students perceive a real divide between themselves and their on campus counterparts. One student describes this phenomenon as “dormies versus townies.” Dormies are viewed as having a high level of camaraderie amongst themselves whereas for townies it is much more difficult to bond with their peers. A common view held is that on campus students are receiving preferential treatment, with some students even expressing feeling inferior. In view of the off campus student experience of isolation from on campus life, it may be necessary to review O Week. Splitting attendance for on and off campus students during O Week could well be the first negative experience of the divide described by some students in this survey and needs to be reviewed. Below follow some examples of comments voicing the above concerns.

"The unequitable treatment early in our uni life i.e. different treatment during O Week." Male 22 Bathurst

"Orientation week is for on campus people really." Female 18 Wagga Wagga

"Lack of programs during O-week for off-campus students." Male 22 Bathurst

"Dormies are told NOT to hang around non-dormies." Female 18 Bathurst

"Exclusion with on campus activities." Male 21 Bathurst

"Being an outsider (not in the loop with all the on-campus kids)." Female 19 Wagga Wagga

"On campus students treating us differently." Female 19 Wagga Wagga

"On campus people form a click which is hard to get into." Female 19 Bathurst

"Harder to make friends as most on campus students' stick to their dorm mates." Female 22 Bathurst

"Missing the sense of community that the students on campus living together do." Female 18 Wagga Wagga

"No community spirit." Female 19 Bathurst

"Lack of friendships formed." Female 34 Wagga Wagga

"Being out of 'the loop' of the on-campus group." Female 20 Wagga Wagga

"Don't get to be as social not living on campus." Female 20 Bathurst

"Feeling out of the loop everyone on campus is having a blast." Female 21 Bathurst

"Harder to make close friends." Male 19 Albury

"Making mates on campus is easier than off campus." Male 18 Wagga Wagga

"Being lonely." Female 23 Dubbo

"Feeling separated and alone." Male 21 Albury

"Not feeling a part of it all." Female 19 Wagga Wagga

"Difficulty in participating in study groups/rehearsals." Male 39 Wagga Wagga

"When you are sick no one to care for you." Female 22 Wagga Wagga

"I feel like a lost boy in a strange world at campus." Male 43 Bathurst

Time

The student's timetable is often mentioned as a frustration and timewaster for students. A lot of time is also wasted in travelling. Downtown students also spend more time on grocery shopping, cooking and cleaning than their on campus counterparts who live in catered accommodation. Many (61%) also have part-time or casual jobs; some even work full-time to assist with the financial burden of living off campus. Working cuts into the time they have available to devote to study as well. A number of students expressed the wish to be able to use EASTS to save time handing in assignments.

"Timetabling huge breaks between classes." Female 22 Bathurst

"The timetable could be organised so that all classes were squeezed into 2-3 days instead of having a couple of days where there is only an hour lecture." Female 25 Bathurst

"Having to work travelling time into study time." Male 18 Orange

"Finding time between work and study." Female 23 Wagga Wagga

"The extra responsibilities e.g. cleaning etc." Female 18 Bathurst

"Having to drive / walk to the university to hand in assignments rather than being allowed to use EASTS." Male 22 Bathurst

"Fitting in household duties around study during exams." Female 21 Bathurst

Cost

Respondents' comments include those about cost of education such as fees and books and the general costs of living such as rent, utilities and food. The cost of petrol is often mentioned as being an additional burden to the off campus student. Quite a number of students complained about the high cost of using CSU to connect to the internet.

"Utility Bills - Soooooo expensive!" Female 21 Bathurst

"The financial strain of studying and paying rent bills etc." Female 18 Bathurst

"High rent payments." Male 19 Albury

"Irregular meals and having to pay for the meals." Female 19 Wagga Wagga

"The expense of text books and finding time to purchase them and read them."
Female 23 Wagga Wagga

"Costs I am bankrupt to the point of nearly quitting uni because I can't afford petrol."
Female 23 Bathurst

“Costs of study and materials and having to travel to the uni for textbooks.” Female
22 Wagga Wagga

29. How important are religious/spiritual support services on campus to you?

How important are religious/spiritual support services on campus to you?	Number of students	Percentage
Not very	174	67.4%
Somewhat important	44	17%
Important	18	6.9%
Very important	22	8.5%

The comments in this section of the survey reflect the high profile the AFES (Australian Federation of Evangelical Students) groups have on the major campuses of CSU. On the Wagga Wagga campus this group is known as the Christian Fellowship, in Bathurst as the Bathurst Christian Students, in Dubbo as FOCUS and in Albury as Uni Bible Study. As expected, some students’ value religion in their lives, others do not.

A sample of student responses:

“Although I know that there is a bible study group that I have not attended I feel this is a very Christian focus rather than spirituality for all faiths and a sense of community for the regular attendants no matter their faith.” Male 19 Albury

“Always good to have these available on campus regardless of faith. Helps keep perspective that uni is still a part of the world.” Male 33 Wagga Wagga

“Being Christian I believe that this is highly important to my wellbeing and relationship with God. Uni is tough and sometimes I need help to give all my worries to God.” Female 23 Dubbo

“I enjoy attending the Bathurst Christian Students club.” Female 21 Bathurst

“Not important to the outcome of learning the curriculum.” Male 30 Wagga Wagga

“Not to me personally but people should have the opportunity to share what they believe with other students however it shouldn’t completely over take study as well and spiritual groups should be more passive. If another person from the CF comes near me I am going to get violent. Not really but if I was interested I am capable of approaching them myself.” Female 23 Wagga Wagga

“It’s not hugely important to me but there is a need for it and I think it should be supported.” Female 22 Bathurst

“I can get these things from other places thanks. Not needed at uni.” Female 26 Bathurst

30. Do you know where to access these religious/spiritual support services?

Do you know where to access these religious/spiritual support services?	Number of students	Percentage
Yes	69	26.7%
No	189	73.3%

Only 31 respondents gave a comment regarding accessing religious spiritual support services. The respondents' comments indicate that about half of the respondents don't know where to access these services because they don't see them as relevant. Out of the 5% of students who indicate they are interested in accessing such services, only 3 students commented that they did not know how to access services; the majority however said they would know how to find out if they were interested. Religious involvement with CSU currently revolves around two axes; the interest and availability of religious denominations wishing to be involved with the university and the request/need of students. This survey reflects that these services are important to a significant minority of the student population. The responses to question 29 showed that only 15.4% of respondents rated religious/spiritual support on campus as important or very important!

A sample of student responses:

"If I was interested I could easily have found out but I am not interested." Female 32 Albury

"No but if God ever appeared to me and told me to go and join one I can't imagine it would be to hard to find out." Male 33 Wagga Wagga

"No groups available for such persons. Have been very, very depressed as a result of such isolation." Female 19 Bathurst

"More groups could be started that are aimed at specific denominations." Male 20 Wagga Wagga

31. What would be the most effective way to inform you of activities on campus?

What would be the most effective way to inform you of activities on campus?	Number of students	Percentage
Newsletter	22	8.5%
Student Magazine	28	10.8%
Email	137	53.1%
Student Forums	26	10%
Posters around campus	22	8.5%
Notice in What's New	7	2.7%
Other	16	6.2%

The preferred way students would like to be notified about activities on campus was by email. Although this method is not practical as access to students email addresses are limited by Student Administration. It could be developed if students submitted their email addresses to a data base for the notification of activities on campus. This would need to be developed for each campus.

From the 'Other' category the methods respondents indicated that could be used to inform students of activities on campus included:

- By mail, not all students have easy access to email
- eBox
- SMS
- A complete timetable of all events handed out or displayed somewhere
- A combination of posters, email, forum messages and newsletters

32. Are there any other issues you would like to give us feedback on?

There were 51 responses to this non mandatory question. Students' feedback covered a range of issues.

A sample of student responses:

"I think this study is very important for off campus students and I would like to thank all those involved." Female 22 Wagga Wagga

"The presence of the survey indicates you are concerned for students which is reassuring." Male 43 Bathurst

"Off campus accommodation should come as a pack for students who do not apply to live on campus. Moving to Bathurst at the beginning of the year was incredibly hard and was not helped by access to the off campus accommodation list because I had no map of Bathurst no access to bus time tables or anything that could have helped. There should be a service run by students that have been through it that new students can go to for help. First contact is the hardest." Female 22 Bathurst

"Cutting student representation will have a negative impact on obtaining information about student needs and as such should be considered a vital component of university structure for the campus and lifestyle of the student." Male 22 Bathurst

"Improve O Week as it is the first week of the rest of the lives of uni students. This week makes or breaks whether you will stay at uni. If you make it more interactive between off campus students and on campus students then that will help greatly. You need to bridge the gap between on and off campus students. Off campus students feel as though they don't get as much as on campus students." Male 22 Bathurst

"It would be good to seem some way to unite campus dwellers with townies." Male 21 Wagga Wagga

“Personally I think the whole change over has been a very rough patch for current students. We were made promises that have not been upheld by both Sydney Uni and CSU. Students are not sure whether they have to now comply with CSU policies or what they have always complied with Sydney Uni. There has been a mixed message and this is due to facilitators on campus not even knowing themselves what is going on. It has been a major let down and I can tell you that the feeling amongst students who are graduating is to hurry up and finish before more disappointment fails them again.” Female 20 Orange

“Lack of information and protective services for people moving around Bathurst has had prowlers about my home but Police Real Estate and uni don't seem to give a flying fig about student safety.” Female 19 Bathurst

“Not enough on campus accommodation for students. More accommodation needs to be built and all first years that apply for accommodation should get it in first year straight away. Nothing is worse than being told a few weeks before uni starts that you have no where to live and need to find somewhere to live in a strange town and then they don't receive enough money off Centrelink to survive so they must on top of moving into a place not on campus get a job. All their time is now taken up between travel work and studies so there's no time to socialise. Uni then becomes a tiresome or bad experience.” Female 21 Bathurst

“The uni really needs to look at the accommodation I was on campus the first year and I was pushed away by high internet fees and too much emphasis on drinking(I mean not everyone has to be an alco right?).” Male 20 Bathurst

CONCLUSIONS

The survey findings highlighted a number of important issues for internal students living off campus in the areas of:

- Financial hardship and associated difficulties with travel, time pressure for study, due to part time employment; difficulty securing employment
- Feeling disconnected from the CSU on-campus community, and deprived of opportunities for social contact and support relative to their on-campus counterparts. A good number of specific suggestions have been made regarding social and other activities that students living off-campus would like to see developed.

The survey indicates that a surprisingly large majority of the respondents (88%) have relocated from elsewhere within the state, interstate and in a small number of cases from overseas, to study at CSU. We know that relocating places additional stresses and demands on all students (both those living off-campus and those living on-campus) in the early stages of their university life. There is evidence that the off-campus internal students are somewhat less supported in the transition than are the on-campus internal students, by virtue of their distance (perceived or otherwise) from the hub of on-campus life.

The survey responses indicate that a number of these students have applied to live on-campus and been unsuccessful. The perception of exclusion and disadvantage may be greater among this particular group of students, who it seems would by preference live on campus, than other internal students living off-campus, and may warrant special attention.

In the absence of a control or reference group of on-campus students for this survey, it is difficult to know to what extent the issues identified in the survey are specific to students living off-campus and to what extent these issues could also be found among the general student population.

However, we know from anecdotal experience as well as recent research findings (Krause et al 2005) that there is evidence that students in general are more likely to be working part time, and report financial difficulties, time constraints and so on.

Many of the issues associated with study and living expenses are difficult for the University to address as they reside in Commonwealth Government income support policy and are affected by the many variables that impact on cost of living for the general community. Ensuring that university policies on scholarships, student loans (and any related matters) give fair consideration to these students is important. The high cost of using university I.T. facilities for internet access is an area that a number of survey respondents pointed to as a significant cost burden.

The survey results demonstrate that off-campus students have a significant risk of failure to connect and feel a part of the university community. Responses to Question 20 indicate that a large majority of students living off-campus (77.2% of respondents) believe that being part of the CSU student community is important. Nevertheless, the theme of students living off campus perceiving themselves as separate from, and

disadvantaged, in a social sense, to their on-campus counterparts emerged very strongly in many students' comments. On this issue (as opposed to the financial, time and travel issues), there seems to be a clear distinction between this group and the internal students living on campus. There is some evidence that this dynamic develops very early, arising as an (unintended) outcome of the structure and focus of Orientation Week.

The Student Experience Strategic Proposal (2003, p.22) outlines a number of indicators which can be used to identify students who are 'at risk'. The failure of some students living off-campus to connect socially may be another 'at risk' indicator for these students and may contribute to the risk of academic failure in the long term. It is likely that this sense of separateness and deprivation would impact adversely on these students' overall satisfaction with their student experience while at CSU.

Interestingly, a fairly substantial minority (of 23%) of respondents to Question 20 indicate that participation in the CSU community is of relatively low importance to them. This suggests that any efforts to ameliorate issues of marginalisation from student life need to be targeted carefully to those off-campus students for whom participating in the CSU community is important.

The findings also indicate that it may be important to develop a greater variety of social occasions than currently exists to enable students to interact with one another. In addition, the findings suggest that it may be important to find ways to help off-campus students to access information about social activities.

The survey responses indicate some largely positive experiences among the internal students living off-campus regarding the accessibility of Student Services, the availability of religious/spiritual support and so on.

A response to Question 32, which was offered by a female student studying at Orange is concerning in that it indicates some confusion and disappointment among students at that campus arising from issues associated with the transition of the campus from Sydney University to CSU. This may warrant further investigation to determine whether/what action may need to be taken.

The issues of social connectedness and participation would seem to be the area in which Student Services may be able to make a substantial contribution, with some targeted programs. It is this area to which the majority of our recommendations for action pertain. The assumption is that improvements to this aspect of student's experience will have positive flow-on effects to their academic performance and their overall satisfaction with their student experience at CSU.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Note that the recommendations include a range of suggestions for action which would need to be prioritised. Consideration should be given to how certain recommendations, if implemented, may impact on, or overlap with the implementation of other recommendations.

The authors of the report recommend the following:

- Policies on student scholarships be reviewed by Student Equity Officers with specific reference to their fairness and impact on internal students living off-campus and that the review process takes into consideration the relevant findings in this survey report.
- Student Equity Officers examine the feasibility of providing relief for students who are experiencing financial hardship from CSU charges associated with the use of I.T. facilities.
- Policies on student loans be reviewed by Student Services with consideration to the findings in this survey report which identified that students are experiencing financial hardship due to the high cost of CSU Internet charges and that the payment of CSU internet charges become an approved educational expense for the Special Assistance Loan Scheme.
- Creation of a mentor scheme for off-campus students (similar to the Residential Support Scheme) by the Division of Student Services, to engage and assist students to settle into CSU and the wider local community during their first session of study. This could be a pilot programme and a good way for CSU to show care for these students, enhance their sense of connectedness and improve their student experience.
- Use the waiting list for students that have applied unsuccessfully for on-campus accommodation to identify “at risk students.” Ensure that notices sent by the Accommodation Office to students whose applications were unsuccessful encourage those students to contact the Student Community Coordinator for support should they require it. This may be an additional way for us to reach out to these students and also perhaps to get some more substantial evidence that this group is indeed the most vulnerable of the off-campus cohort.
- Conduct a small scale survey, via the eBox letter sent out by the Accommodation Office, of the students who miss out on on-campus accommodation. Invite these students to attend a forum which aims to help identify and address off-campus student’s needs. Alternatively invite the students to give their permission to be contacted by phone should they not wish to attend a forum.
- Student Services to encourage schools & faculties to build community among their students. Student Services to offer schools and faculties forums or

workshops on student support and the offer of resources in the form of ideas and/or assistance with community building activities.

- Create an online forum or use an existing online forum for students to disseminate information about their social activities. Student Community Coordinators can use this resource to promote activities to students living off-campus. A social activities forum would be ideal way to communicate to students. The success of the mature age student forum in facilitating social activities for distance education students is an example of how well this can work.
- The Residences and Catering section of the Division of Student Services extend invitations for formal dinners for on-campus students to any interested off-campus students as well.
- The Residences and Catering section of the Division of Student Services to organise a once a week (fortnight or month) off-campus luncheon so off-campus students can come and be a part of the scene and share a meal with their on-campus counterparts.
- Establish a buddy system for O Week. Buddy up an on-campus student with an off-campus student for the duration of O Week.
- Ensure that mature age and off-campus students are recruited for positions of O Week Coordinator and Leader to assist in bringing different perspectives to the organisation of O Week.
- Student Community Coordinators in conjunction with the Residential Support Staff to initiate and support a scheme whereby Dorms 'adopt' a group of off-campus students who can then share an O Week experience as similar to the on-campus students as possible. This may also facilitate social mingling of the on and off-campus student groups beyond O Week.

The purpose of distributing this survey report is to stimulate thought and/or discussion regarding the identified needs of internal students living off campus and how staff of CSU can assist in prioritising and implementing the report's recommendations. The Student Community Coordinators therefore encourage any feedback and invite you to submit your comments and suggestions on the findings of the report and its recommendations before the 1st of September 2006. See below for the contact details for the Student Community Coordinators.

Albury

Student Community Coordinator

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Bathurst

Student Community Coordinator

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Wagga Wagga

Student Community Coordinator

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Email: croche@csu.edu.au

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Appendix A

Charles Sturt University Division of Student Services

Internal Students Living Off Campus Survey

YOUR VIEW COUNTS

The Division of Student Services at Charles Sturt University invites you to participate in this important survey which will assist us to plan services for 2006. This is a voluntary questionnaire and by completing it you are consenting to participate. This is your opportunity to tell us what is important to you and how we, as the Student Community Coordinators and the Division of Student Services can best meet your needs. The focus of the survey is on identifying what types of services, social and community activities internal students who live off campus need. The results of your feedback will help CSU to improve the quality of our services to you. A report on the findings of the survey will be available in 2006. **Please note that this survey is anonymous and your privacy and confidentiality is assured.**

If you wish to discuss any aspect of the survey, please contact the Student Community Coordinators at: <http://www.csu.edu.au/division/studserv/chaplain/contact.htm>

Thank you in advance for your participation.

This survey is only for Internal Students Living Off Campus.

1. Gender Male Female
2. Age Years
3. Are you enrolled ...? Full time Part time
4. Are you a? Undergraduate Postgraduate
5. What Year of Study are you currently doing?
 1st 2nd 3rd 4th
 Honours Postgraduate
6. Which faculty are you enrolled in?
 ARTS
 COMMERCE
 EDUCATION
 HEALTH
 SCIENCE & AG

7. How many class contact hours do you have per week?

- 1-5 6-10 11-15 16-20 21-25 26-30 31-35 36-40

8. Which campus do you attend?

- Albury
 Canberra
 Bathurst
 Dubbo
 Goulburn
 Orange
 Wagga Wagga

9. Did you move to study at your current campus?

- No, I come from this town
 Yes, from another town in this state
 Yes, from interstate
 Yes, from overseas

10. Which one of the following best describes you?

- Full-fee paying International Student
 Sponsored or Assisted International Student
 Commonwealth Learning Scholarship
 HECS-HELP
 FEE-HELP
 Other

11. Are you employed during the semester?

- Yes No

Comment
.....

12. How many hours per week on average are you employed?

- 1-5 6-10 11-15 16-20 21-25 26-30 31-35 36-40

13. If you are not employed would you like to have paid employment?

- Yes No

Comment
.....

19. Do you have access to the internet at your place of residence?

Yes No

Comment.....
.....

20. Is being part of the university community important to you and your studies?

Yes No

Comment
.....

21. What type of social activities would help build a sense of community?

Comment
.....

22. What type of social activities would you be likely to attend on campus?

Comment
.....

23. How could the university improve its services to off campus students?

Comment
.....

24. What type of social support / activities would you like Student Services facilitate or provide for off campus students ?

Comment
.....

25. Are the opening hours of Student Services suitable for off campus students?

Yes No

Comment
.....

26. Are there enough services and social activities for mature age students?

Yes No

Comment
.....

27. Are the locations of Student Services accessible for off campus students?

Yes No

Comment
.....

28. What are the 5 most frustrating things about study and living off campus?

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

29. How important are religious/ spiritual support services on campus to you?

Not Very Somewhat Important Important Very Important

Comment
.....

30. Do you know where to access these religious/spiritual support services?

Yes No

Comment
.....

31. What would be the most effective way to inform you of activities on campus?

- Newsletter
- Student Magazine.
- Email
- Student Forums
- Posters around campus
- Notice in What's New
- Other

32. Are there any other issues you would like to give us feedback on?

Comment
.....
.....
.....

Thank you for your time