International Marketing Communication in Higher Education: An Interpretive Communication Audit of Victoria University in Melbourne, Australia

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ABSTRACT

This research regards universities as highly influential entities. Aside from producing and disseminating knowledge, one of the purposes of higher education is to contribute to the intellectual development of a society. In addition to this original purpose universities also have unique characteristics which, when recognised, can help them with designing new and creative approaches to marketing communication strategies. To identify these distinctive qualities, this study implemented an interpretive communication audit that focuses on the specifics and characteristics of international communication activities at Victoria University (VU).

Specifically, this study set out three key research objectives: to identify specifics and characteristics of a university that can serve as a valuable source for designing new approaches to university marketing; to explore the creative potential of students to actively contribute to the development of university marketing and to test the viability of an interpretive communication audit within the university framework, while using the subjective insight and experience of a researcher.

Emphasising the interpretive approach, this thesis analysed the interpretations of the University's communication given by the international and domestic students of VU. In particular, focus groups and action groups, in which 29 VU students participated, served as specific methods for collecting these individual opinions and understandings. Following the philosophical and methodological practice of an interpretive communication audit, this thesis used students' as well as the researcher's own interpretations for developing creative *feedforward* that gives concrete recommendations on how to work with the University's communication activities. The outcome of this mainly reveals how a university can benefit from cooperating with students on developing marketing strategies. Additionally, the last chapter of this thesis sets out specific ideas Victoria University can use for preparing new communication activities.

KEYWORDS

university marketing

Australian university sector

university students

international students

theory of communication

marketing communication

communication audit

student co-production

interpretivism

feedforward

subjectivity in research

focus groups

action groups

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY STUDENT DECLARATION

"I, Zuzana Lešková, declare that the PhD thesis entitled International Marketing Communication in Higher Education: An Interpretive Communication Audit of Victoria University in Melbourne, Australia is no more than 100,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references and footnotes. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work."

Signature   **Date**

10th of December, 2016

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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KEY DEFINITIONS

„INTERNATIONAL" – The word *international* can be associated or even interchanged with qualities of difference, diversity or uniqueness.

„COMMUNICATION" – Communication is everything: activity or inactivity, words or silence; all have message value and can be defined as communication (Watzlawick et al. 2011).

„MARKETING COMMUNICATION" – Marketing communication is recognized as persuasive communication, the aim of which is to achieve change (after Bettinghaus 1980) – or to even *construct* something completely new and unheard of.

„POWER" – In most cases my research refers to power as a productive force that makes development possible (Sadan 1997).

„INTERPRETIVE COMMUNICATION AUDIT" – Interpretive communication audit is an evaluation of existing marketing communication patterns in the institution with special focus on how these patterns are experienced and interpreted among particular institutional members (Jones 2002).

„FOCUS GROUP" – Focus group is a group discussion in which the researcher is actively encouraging of, and attentive to, the group interaction (Kitzinger & Barbour 1999).

„ACTION GROUP" – Action group as a group of people who have been brought together to accomplish some task (Macfarlane 2013). By contrast with focus groups, the action groups do not only serve solely as discussion groups, instead, they function as "decision-making units whose decisions govern the process of arrangemental innovation" (Davis et. al. 1971, p. 8).

„FEEDFORWARD" – Feedforward is a concept of evaluation firstly introduced by Marshall Goldsmith (2012). It is a process that focuses on future performance. Here, instead of looking back at what a particular organization could have done better or differently, the people involved in this process are trying to actively suggest what kind of steps should be taken to improve the situation.

1 Introduction

1.1 The research problem

University marketing (or marketing in higher education, as we often find in business literature, Burns & Hayes 2009) is a heavily researched area. The research has predominantly focused on how universities should adopt the marketing practices that work in the business sector or how they should follow marketing trends set by corporations (Helgensen 2008). For example, the available literature often creates metaphors of students being the customers of education (Nicolescu 2009) or education being the product that is offered to current and mainly to prospective students (Conway 1994). In international marketing communication, which creates a main domain of this study, research literature has concentrated on several themes. For instance, a number of studies have explored the image and reputation of particular universities as perceived by international students (Binsardi & Ekwulugo 2003), evaluated the communication impact of university advertising materials (Gatfield et al. 1999), analysed the structure of integrated marketing communication in higher education (Horrigan 2007) or investigated the on-line communication of foreign universities (Gray et al. 2003). However, most of these studies approach marketing as a discipline that originates in the business sphere and should thus respect the principles and laws which are set by that market. Therefore, the literature that concentrates on university marketing can be labelled as "business literature," because it looks at a university as a business operating in the market rather than at the role it fulfils in society (including its historical anchorage, academic tradition, cultural influence).

As opposed to these "market" approaches exploring how already existing business models can be used or transferred from the commercial world to the university sphere, some authors argue that university marketing does not hold a legitimate place within higher education. Some researchers specifically emphasise the fact that a business corporation has an entirely different role than a university, in that "universities should be places for discovering, sharing and passing on knowledge rather than companies for hoarding and selling it" (Kirp 2003, p. 261). The scholars and theorists who adopt this perspective usually ask questions such as: is it possible to grade your students if they are "customers"? Can knowledge be sold? What happens to the values and beliefs of education once they become commodified by the market? Through this prism which we might label "marketing scepticism", "education marketing" is

regarded as an oxymoron – a term which violates the mission of education and suggests that economic forces, which have had a transformative impact on universities, work not for but against real education.

This view might be explained by the fact that even if university marketing is a growing practice, it suffers from a lack of theoretical discourse: it is a relatively new discipline which has not had time to get deeply embedded into the academic world. Scholars who study it often argue that marketing and "similar business areas" do not belong to the sphere of higher education because its main purpose is to increase profit rather than enrich culture and society:

> The word *marketing* often evokes feeling of concern, even mistrust, within the world of education. It is associated with sales, advertising and public relations. Educational practitioners, whose mission is vocational and who believe sometimes in knowledge for knowledge's sake, often feel uncomfortable and want to distance themselves from it (Gibbs & Knapp 2002).

For some, the term university marketing is thus provocative – it belongs to the same category as "profitable literature", "best-selling researchers" or "consuming students" (Kirp 2009). For others, university marketing constitutes a business discipline that has specific rules and principles that a university should follow in order to succeed on the market (Helgensen 2008). Being strongly motivated by the controversial character of this topic, my research aims to enrich the business scope of university marketing with deeper theoretical analysis.

In particular, my thesis seeks to show that universities should be inspired by marketing practices that have proved to work in the business world, but that in doing so, they need to be aware of their uniqueness and distinctive identity. My project thus addresses a particularly under-developed area of the literature: despite the fact that there is a strong empirical foundation on practices in university marketing (Horrigan 2007), not much attention has been given to the unique nature of universities which should be considered when developing marketing and communication strategies. This is also in accordance with Temple and Shattock (2007 cited in Nicolescu 2009, p. 42) who suggested that approaches taken from the commercial or other sectors are not readily transferrable to higher education.

My research specifically suggests that, due to the unique nature of the field of higher education, universities have a great potential which can serve them well for designing new and creative approaches to marketing communication strategies. Within the framework of higher education, the integration of marketing and education embodies special characteristics which

need further examination. For example, my research proposes a certain shift in how we see power relations between a university and its students. Instead of supporting the idea that the main power of students lies in their customer behaviour (Thomas & Tobe 2013; Conway, Mackay & Yorke 1994), my thesis will argue that a student voice has the power to influence the whole strategy of university marketing. A similarly constructivist perspective (after Constructivism, see section 1.5) will be applied to the relationship between marketing and education. Instead of a product, this study is sympathetic to Marginson's seminal account (1997) of education as a mission, value or an experience of benefit to society at large. Working with such an advantage over corporate businesses, university marketing campaigns themselves can gain a unique educational character and promote the role and purpose of universities through exemplary activities.

1.2 The research questions and aims

Drawing on my own experience as well as the available literature and research on university marketing, this study particularly proposes that the field of higher education has a broad range of attributes which need to be acknowledged when preparing marketing communication campaigns and other communication activities. I specifically suggest that due to their unique nature, universities can work with the creative and distinctive potential the field of higher education offers. To reveal this potential, the central purpose of this research is to explore the specifics and characteristics of international marketing communication in tertiary education.

It is important to emphasise that my research is greatly informed by my own experience as an international student. From 2012 to the present year of 2016 I have been working as a PhD student at Victoria University in Melbourne. This experience gave me a unique opportunity to observe, study and monitor the Australian university sector from a very close perspective. Building on this experience, my project will look at the communication of Victoria University which occurs outside the institution and will investigate particular communication vehicles the University uses to address its international audiences.

Given this perspective, the research tries to provide answers to the following research question: *When applying an interpretive communication audit, what are the specifics and characteristics of a university that should be reflected in university marketing?* To specify this question, the research has three principal aims:

1) To identify specifics and characteristics of a university that can serve as a valuable source for designing new approaches to university marketing.

2) To explore the creative potential of students to actively contribute to the development of university marketing.

3) To test the viability of an interpretive communication audit within the university framework, while using the subjective insight and experience of a researcher.

1.3 Contextual framework of the study – the key terms

Before the methodological and philosophical background of this study is introduced in greater detail, it is valuable to define the key terms this study works with. My project is mainly concerned with marketing communication activities in the Australian university sector (between the years of 2012 to 2015). Australia has among the best of the higher education institutions in the world which cater to approximately 5% of Australia's population as well as around 230,000 international students (Indalytics 2014). The continent belongs to the top three most attractive destinations for international students (OECD 2014). The internationalization of the Australian higher education sector is now recognised as one of the key forces that are currently shaping the character, mission and function of Australian universities. This particular trend is both the reason for and the main subject of my work and it is elaborated upon further in chapter 2.

It is, however, important to note that this study does not put as much emphasis on the word "internationalization" as the term "international". Instead of looking at the ongoing process of globalization or the education system itself that is undergoing multiple changes, I have been interested in the individual participants involved in it. Here, the main emphasis is placed on international students where the word *international* can be associated or even interchanged with qualities of difference, diversity or uniqueness.

A similar distinction must be made for the word "communication", a key term that provides my study with both a theoretical and methodological framework. Following Watzlawick's philosophy (2011), I see communication as everything: activity or inactivity, words or silence; all have message value and can be defined as communication (Watzlawick et al. 2011) – "if it is accepted that all behaviour in an interactional situation has message value, i.e., is communication, it follows that no matter how one may try, one cannot not communicate" (Watzlawick et al. 2011, p.48). Not only do I see communication as something unavoidable, I also consider it to have constructivist potential as it creates the reality we live in.

The business term "marketing communication" is then identified in the light of communication's definition. Instead of saying that marketing communication is only about generating purchase through promoting products and services, here I place the main focus rather on the word "communication" than on "marketing". Marketing communication is recognized as persuasive communication, the aim of which is to achieve change (after Bettinghaus 1980) – or to even *construct* something completely new and unheard of.

The philosophy of constructivism which underlines this approach (and is further explained in section 1.5) also frames my research with another important concept and that is a concept of power. Despite the fact that it is very difficult to define power or to propose a consistent, coherent and uniform theory (Dahl 1957), in most cases my research refers to power as a productive force that makes development possible (Sadan 1997).

Using the interpretive research approach, my study looks at various research areas while *empowering* the voice of different agents (mainly students – both myself and other students of VU). I will be very interested in what the students have to say about the university. The methodological scope of power thus lies in shifting the research perspective from the authorities – such as a university or other institutions – to the research subjects themselves. Since an interpretive approach allows for subjectivism, my own "interpretations"[1] will serve as the optics through which we can see the research problem – as a certain prism that captures possible *ways* we can observe it. Therefore, the term *I* will be methodologically *empowered*; the way *I* understand the research problem will ultimately be used as a specific research approach.

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[1] The word "interpretation" might be interchanged with the words "voice", "perspective", "viewpoint", "understanding", "opinion" or "belief".

1.4 Methodological background of the study

For the purposes of this research, an interpretive communication audit will be regarded as an evaluation of existing marketing communication patterns in the institution with special focus on how these patterns are experienced and interpreted among particular institutional members. It is important to note that these interpretations do not exclude the researcher – or the auditor to be precise – but on the contrary, it is a subjective, evaluative process in which the researcher himself or herself participates. According to Deborah Jones, one of the pioneers in the field of the interpretive communication audit, "the auditor is a skilled and committed listener to organizational communication process" as opposed to "an outside expert, a diagnostician of communication problems" (Jones 2002, p. 466). Here, "an interpretive audit conceptualizes the auditor as an intrigued and enquiring voyager, within the members of the organization as conductors or guides" (Hargie & Tourish 2009, p. 290).

That said, the auditor/researcher is recognized as a principal method of this research. In fact, to build on the methodological literature: "interpretation exists in all types of scientific studies, be they quantitative or qualitative" (Gummesson 2003, p. 482). It can therefore be argued that all research is interpretive as it is always based on the researcher's experience, knowledge and understanding. We can illustrate this argument with an example. Usually, at the beginning of an academic study or a thesis, there is a research question. Regardless of whether this particular research is quantitative or qualitative, it is the question that determines what the research will (or will not) cover and reveal. There are very limited ways to propose the research question without being subjective. The very question is a decision. It is a decision what the researcher will study, what field or discipline will be investigated, what problem will be solved. No matter how "objective" the methods are, the decision to deal with a certain issue will always remain subjective because decisions are results of individual thinking and interest. To put it simply: decisions cannot be made objective; they are, by definition, subjective.

My study proposes that the researcher's insights, opinions and experiences are equally important to the insights, opinions and experiences of the objects he or she is studying. By using subjective thought the researcher is able to frame his or her research within a unique context that would not have been formed had other "methods" been used. Regardless of the tools the researcher uses to reveal the interpretations of the researched objects, he or she will never be able to illuminate the deepest qualities, nuances and processes of someone else's

thinking. This is only possible when being subjective, when paying attention to his or her own feelings and experiences which are relevant to the researched topic.

I explicitly define my study as subjective because, while I am as a researcher a part of VU's environment and also a member of its target audience, my insight is integral to this study. Therefore, instead of trying to suppress this "bias" or "conflict of interest", I am going to make use of the fact that my research involves my experience – that my study is, to some extent, about me. In other words, not only do I "admit" that my research is greatly individual, both its subjective focus and source create two of the main methodological pillars of this work.

In order to ensure the clarity of why I am applying the interpretive approach to my research (which is not so common in the field of higher education or university marketing), it is important to provide my methodology with a deeper rationale. As interpretivism dictates, the main viewpoints through which we can investigate and analyse things around us lie within ourselves. In this case, the interpretations, ideas and opinions I will be using to analyse the specifics of university marketing will be mainly those of myself – the researcher – and, as I will later explain, of the other students who also study at Victoria University. This "subjectified position" is a relatively unique methodological approach in the field of university marketing. Much of the literature on higher education takes the viewpoint of the particular institution (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka 2006) or it provides comparison among different theoretical perspectives represented by authors and researchers who might have never met or worked together. My research, however, aims to challenge this status quo by shifting the "methodological power" from authorities (the institutions, researchers and theorists renowned in the field of higher education) to students who are actively and presently involved therein.

This strategy builds on the literature that has focused on the concept of student power and/or student voice. For example, Alison Cook-Sather (2006) uses the term "voice" to promote a repositioning of the role of students in educational research. Here, voice is understood as a power the students are entitled to have and use (Cook-Sather 2006) in order to form and shape their education as well as the institution where their education happens. However, it is important to note that for a student to use his or her voice the options are mainly limited to various surveys, feedbacks or class participation the student is asked to take part in (Cook-Sather 2006). Fine and her colleagues (2004) describe this trend of sending out emails to students and inviting them to "participate" in various evaluations or polls as the gathering of student voices as though they were Christmas tree decorations (Fine et al., 2004). What both Fine and Cook-Sather suggest is that student voices are usually given a certain space they can be heard. Even if students have a right to say what they think, they can only do so under certain

circumstances – they can speak especially when they are asked. As Bragg (2001) suggests, the main challenge the student voice provokes lies in having to listen to things that we do not want to hear. This can be illustrated by the fact that there are many questions (surveys, emails, class discussions initiated by the teacher) students can answer – by using their voice. These questions however represent only things we do want to hear – otherwise we would not be asking them.

But what happens if students decide to speak without being asked? What if they start speaking on a matter of their choosing? What happens if they also choose the platform upon which they will hold the speech? What if their voice is not a reaction to something but is a call to action? Not only can these questions be applied to student participation and engagement but also to student research. Following Holdsworth's view (2000, p. 358) on the power of the student voice, my study challenges the move from "speaking out and being heard" to "being listened to seriously and with respect". However, such a shift will not be simple. Not only is it hard for us to learn from voices we did not ask to speak but it is also very difficult to learn from the voices we do not know how to hear (Johnston & Nicholls 1995). This problem is something I am trying to overcome through the methodology I have set for my research.

My study works within an interpretive framework in which it is possible for the students (including the researcher) to use their voices the way they choose. It is therefore possible to find the use of rather informal language which is not otherwise standard for a PhD study, to encounter terms that describe subjective feelings and opinions, to see the research problem through my eyes and experience. However, it is important to note that it might not be that simple. Specifically speaking, when an earlier version of my thesis was read by an expert in the field of higher education, she found it rather difficult to understand what an interpretive audit really means. She was mainly concerned with the possibility that my research is simply about me "experiencing something at Victoria University for three years and then just writing about it".

Now, instead of trying to clarify her doubt and prove her wrong, I need to admit that her concern basically summarizes the foundation of my methodology. It is just that the form of my "voice" might be unusual and, as we now know, it is very difficult to learn from the voices we do not know *how* to hear – especially when we expect them to sound the way we are used to hearing them. The essence of an interpretive approach thus lies in the liberty to speak the way I and other students who are involved in this research find important and about matters we find important. By doing so, my aim is to achieve a certain shift in power from what we are *supposed to* and *expected to* say to what we choose to say.

The interpretive research approach used throughout this thesis has thus an ambition to extend the academic discourse by way of subjective terminology that is relatively uncommon for this area. We may argue that such an aspiration could possibly be offered by any other study regardless of its focus or research area. The validity of my thesis to use interpretive methods is however strengthened by its context as well as its research problem. My study uses the researcher's perspective not only because it is *interesting* to investigate the research problem from this subjective point of view. This study uses the researcher's perspective because she represents a research subject as well – being a student, her experience with university marketing belongs within that which is being investigated. At the same time, to look at a university from the perspective of a student is a very topical approach in other areas of higher education. For example, as chapter 6 will show, new learning methods in education are now being focused on encouraging the active participation of the students. My thesis follows this trend when emphasising the active role of a student in the sphere of university marketing.

1.5 Philosophical background of the study

As mentioned in the section above, interpretive research is not concerned only with the interpretations of the researcher; it is not only concerned with his or her voice. Even if subjective, internal perspectives stand in the centre of the researcher's focus, not all of them originate in the researcher's mind. On the contrary – in interpretive research, the researcher is also concerned with relevant interpretations given by his or her surroundings or the objects of his or her research. This explanation gives a wider context to my research. Being placed largely in the academic area of communication disciplines, the entire study is framed by particular communication theories that provide my research with a certain philosophical direction as well as a practical methodological perspective. To be more specific, this study builds on the communicational paradigms of constructivism and symbolic interactionism, according to which people actively create the world in which they participate (Blumer 1969; Keaton & Bodie 2011). Unlike positivism, interpretivism sees society as something different from the natural world. Here, the social world can be understood ("interpreted") only within the viewpoints of particular people in particular situations. The "facts" are always socially context-bound and the subjectivity of a researcher constitutes the main domain of the research methods (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow 2012).

Originally, communication tended to be viewed as a transmission of information, as a linear process, in which a message was transmitted from a sender to a receiver (Shannon-

Weaver 1963, Laswell 1948). When studying communication, the main focus was placed upon the information and its flow. The mutual interaction between a sender and a receiver was not considered very significant. Literature often defines this concept of communication as a *transmission model of communication* (Mohan et al. 2013). This concept is highly focused on the message itself and thus reminds us to choose the information correctly, structure it carefully and make sure that the choice of channel or medium will deliver the message effectively. Critics of this communication model or mode say that it places too much focus on the information and on the channel and that it does not consider the wider context of the particular communicational interaction (Mohan et al. 2013).

My thesis joins this critical approach; within the context of this research, the role of communication is seen as much more than making messages and moving information. Rather, building on the communication theories (and critics of the transmission mode of communication) which were introduced in the second half of the twentieth century (Morley 1980, Fiske 1986, Hobson 1982, Goffman 1981), the research recognizes communication as a construction of meaning in a huge variety of contexts with many influential factors involved (relationship between the sender and receiver, language, gender, power, culture, setting, etc.). Some scholars call this approach to communication a *transactional model of communication* (Mohan et al. 2013, p. 25):

> The transaction model foregrounds meaning rather than message: its creation and sharing, its subjectivity and unreliability, and the fact that there is always a gap between meanings attributed to the same phenomena. People, it says, create their individual meanings and social groups do the same. We see the world through our own frames of reference and also through the society we belong to. Society is the way we organise our communication, lives and relationships.

Instead of talking about the transmission or transaction model of communication, John Fiske (2002) compares these two approaches as *the process school* (for which communication is a social interaction in terms of a process by which one relates to another) and *the semiotic school* (which sees communication as a social interaction which constitutes an individual as a particular member of a society or a culture). In this thesis, the research perspective is drawing on the semiotic paradigm, recognizing communication as a highly complex phenomenon that is produced, reproduced and transformed by activities and interpretations of individual actors within the context of their culture or society.

I assume that communication is central to the life of our culture: without it culture of any kind must die. Consequently the study of communication involves the study of the culture with which it is integrated (Fiske 2002, p. 2).

Given this context, my research views universities as a subjective phenomenon, as a culture consisting of abstract values, beliefs, and perceptions (Papa & Daniels et al. 2008). This interpretive perspective, which dictates the main research approach, regards a university as a network of various meanings.

Thus, an organization exists in the shared experience of the people who constitute it. This doesn't mean that the organization is an unreal figment of someone's imagination. It means, instead, that organizational reality is socially constructed through communication (Papa & Daniels et al. 2008, p. 10).

The role of communication is therefore crucial, as it constitutes "the existence" of an organization. The complexity of the studied communication is then stressed not only by the pluralities of an organizational culture, but also by the fact that it occurs within the international context. As chapters 7 and 8 will show, my communication audit is focused on both domestic and international students who study at Victoria University. When comparing (and sometimes confronting) the views they have on university communication, I provide my study with another communication dimension. By studying university marketing (and communication activities in particular) from the perspectives of overseas students, it enables us to look at this phenomenon from a large variety of points of view. Here, communication is not only seen as a creation of meaning composed by a diverse group of individuals, but by different *cultures.* In this case, the interpretive method gains a new dimension – aside from working with the individual, subjective perspectives, it is also concerned with the cultural, social viewpoints. My thesis thus attempts to enhance the communicational scope of interpretivism – within a methodology that is largely built on individualistic perceptions (both of the students and of myself).

1.6 Interpretive audit as a methodological approach

Despite the substantial literature on the evaluation of marketing communication in higher education, the communication audit is a relatively new approach to this field. Significant

literature exists in the field of organizational communication audits, but most of the books have a broader focus in terms of providing the general terminology and principles of auditing the communication activities (Hargie & Tourish 2009; Hogard & Ellis 2006).

Research for this literature survey and for earlier projects (Dvorakova 2008) has shown that evaluations of higher education institutions' marketing programs to date more often take the form of professional reports and case studies than of academic analysis. Since literature on auditing business firms as consumer goods and services organizations prevails (Reid 2005), there is a need for extending the widespread acceptance of product-oriented approaches. For this reason, this study seeks to investigate the viability of the interpretive approach to communication audits within the context of higher education. It will challenge traditional perceptions of the communication audit originating in finance and accounting, whose methods are primarily quantitative and statistical.

The interpretive audit is now a well-established approach, primarily in the area of information systems and other similar fields (Walsham 2006). Even if the interpretive perspective is now gradually being recognized also within the sphere of organizational communication (Papa & Daniels at al. 2008), there is a lack of its application within the field of higher education. Maybe because interpretivism might be seen as "rather more of a mindset and theoretical orientation" than a designated method (Hargie & Tourish 2009, p. 291), the interpretive approach has yet to establish itself within methodologies for the study of university marketing.

As I mentioned before, my research draws on the theory of Deborah Jones, who has reframed the communication audit and argued that an interpretive perspective should play a crucial role when evaluating organizational communication (Jones 2002). Following her theory, one of the main aims of this research will thus be to test this approach in practice. Using my subjective insight and experience as well as the subjective interpretations of the research subjects, I will test the viability of an interpretive communication audit within an organizational framework using the university environment as a specific case study.

1.7 Specific methods used in this research and the outline of the thesis

The purpose of this study is to explore the specifics of VU's potential for developing creative strategies in international marketing communication. There are several reasons this study focuses on this particular university. Working within the field of international university

marketing, it is essential for this project to look at a university that attracts or aims to attract international students. Victoria University belongs to the top six Australian universities and top three Victorian universities with the biggest international student ratio. The average proportion of international students currently studying in Australian universities is 25%, while there are 32.8% of students from abroad currently enrolled at VU (DET 2014b). At the same time, VU has recently moved up the scale more than 100 places in the QS World University Rankings, due especially to strengthening its position in the international student ranking. Here, VU rated 145th for international student ratio (with around 16,000 universities across the globe, this places VU in the top 1.1% of internationally oriented universities in the world) (VU 2016a). Also, founded in Footscray in 1916, VU has been historically connected with the most culturally diverse suburbs of Melbourne which might have shaped its positioning towards students with culturally diverse backgrounds. VU's current vision is to "achieve success through outstanding educational opportunities for students from diverse countries, cultures, socioeconomic and educational backgrounds" (VU 2016a). VU's focus on diversity and internationality thus builds a strong case for a university whose communication activities concentrate on addressing international students.

It is important to note that this research is concerned with more than just testing the effectiveness of Victoria University's communication. The study has not been initiated by the management and it does not seek to compare the actual communication performance of VU against any standards (Hargie & Tourish 2009, p. 410). It does not aim to explore university marketing from the perspective of the particular institution. Instead, my study wants to challenge the interpretive communication audit, which is now seen rather as a methodical tool (Hargie & Tourish 2009) and shift it to a complex methodological approach – a methodological perspective. This particular perspective could be titled *a student voice*. Working within this interpretive and subjective research framework, the complex methodology of my project will be consistently taking the viewpoint of students – whether that is mine or other students' studying at Victoria University.

In terms of the structure, my thesis has the form of a reverse pyramid. Starting with establishing the theoretical context, the project will gradually narrow down the topic to the practical case studies. In other words, in order to be able to audit the international communication activities of VU, I will first look at the Australian university sector and its international scope. I will analyse the identity of an Australian university in general. I will concentrate on the role and needs of an international student. I will look at the best practices of involving students in developing university marketing strategies outside Australia. Only then,

building on this thorough analysis, will I be able to focus on Victoria University in particular. Methodologically speaking, the project involves four specific methods of data collection: literature review, participant observation, focus groups and action groups. The literature review will try to establish an essential foundation upon which new theories can be built. This method will mainly be used in chapters 2, 3 and 4. I will also implement participant observation emphasising the active character of an interpretive approach in which the activity or experience of the researcher serves as a crucial tool of data collection. This active method will be implemented in chapter 6. In the final part of my thesis, I will be using other two active methods which will shift the attention from seeing the research topic (or problem) from my perspective to particular viewpoints of selected students at VU. Specifically, I will use focus groups to let students *voice* their opinion and I will also use action groups in which I will encourage students to use their voices to call for action (hence – the *action* groups). Overall, it is important to note that this is an intentionally accumulative approach; the chronological order of these methods will enable the focus groups to build on the themes identified as most important within the literature survey and it will also help the action groups to build on the topics discussed by the focus groups. The particular methods, sample sizes, data collection tools used in this research will be fully explained in individual chapters. My research uses a wide range of methods and disciplinary perspectives, so I believe it would be more comprehensive for a reader to read about the specific methodology in more detail in the relevant chapters.

Following the already discussed theories, philosophies and methodologies, it is now valuable to introduce the particular chapters of my thesis. In order to answer the research question, my thesis will try to address all three research aims (*highlighted in italics*) in the following order: I will *identify the specifics and characteristics of a university that can serve as a valuable source for designing new approaches to university marketing*. This will be done throughout the whole thesis, but I will especially focus on this particular aim in chapters 2 and 3 and partially in chapter 4. Specifically, chapter 2 will establish the current context of my research. Here, I will introduce Australian higher education, demographics of international students and current trends so that it is apparent what factors shape the nature of an Australian university. Chapters 3 and 4 will look more deeply into theory. I will provide my research with a strong literature review which will mainly look at the problematics of a university's identity and that of a student. Here, I will try to "demystify" the common biases, hypotheses and presumptions about what a university is, whom it serves, what it does and why. The same

themes will apply to university students. I will especially focus on international students and on the relationship they have with the domestic students and the host institution.

I will also *explore the creative potential of students to actively contribute to the development of university marketing* – which will be done especially in 5, 6, 7 and 8. In particular, chapter 5 will discuss some methods and strategies for exactly how both domestic and international students can be involved in their educational process, how they can exchange their interests, experience and knowledge and, more importantly, how such an exchange can be implemented into the student-university relationship. Including some examples from abroad, I will introduce possible methods for how university students can actively contribute not only to their education, but also to the university image and identity.

While focusing on the interpretations of the students and revealing their creative potential, I will be constantly *testing the viability of an interpretive communication audit within the university framework* – this will be put in practice especially within chapters 6, 7 and 8. Chapter 6 will describe the process and the outcomes of my interpretive communication audit of Victoria University. Within this chapter, I will mainly be comparing the University's strategy to its real and implemented practices. Using my own experience as a student of this university, I will use my student life cycle to describe and evaluate the communication vehicles Victoria University uses to address both its prospective and current students. Chapters 7 and 8 will then take the interpretive communication audit onto the next level and communicate the perception of VU given by the VU students. Here, I will analyse the focus groups (group discussions) and action groups (brainstorming sessions) I have conducted with 29 students of Victoria University. Even if this is relatively a small sample size, it enabled me to carefully illuminate students' opinions, perspectives and suggestions within personal group and brainstorming sessions which are designed for smaller group settings. In particular, these chapters talk about the ways VU can enhance its communication activities, what it can do differently in terms of distinguishingly positioning itself on the market.

The final chapter of my thesis will try to conclude all the theoretical and practical findings. Drawing on these revelations, I will also articulate and define creative feed-forward – a set of concrete recommendations Victoria University can potentially use in creating or improving its marketing activities.

Since my study applies a broad range of different methods and disciplines, there is a certain risk it may be understood as a collection of different theories and concepts that are mutually independent. However, while interdisciplinary research may have some disadvantages, it is important to mention that its benefits have potential to give a particular

study a new dimension – this is described in more detail in the Conclusion. Other possible limitations of this thesis are fully explained at the end of each chapter.

1.8 Conclusion of introduction – contribution to knowledge

My research builds on various theoretical and practical concepts ranging from communication theories, marketing communication, university marketing, higher education, international student problematics, student co-production, action research to subjective or interpretive research. By borrowing concepts and practices from different fields, my thesis looks at a university from various perspectives, acknowledging the vast complexity of this particular research topic. This interdisciplinary approach allows for "real world applications" (Tait & Lyall 2007). The parallel that exists in between interdisciplinary study and "the real world" lies in their diversity. It would be impossible to understand "the real world" through a prism of a single discipline.

However, it does not mean my methodology lacks a unifying theoretical framework. As the title of this thesis suggests and as this chapter introduced, the core of my research methodology lies in interpretive research audit. The subjective perspective and experience (of everyone involved in this research) directs the focus of the whole study. In light of this interpretive method, I seek to challenge the traditional perception of an audit and locate the "interpretive communication audit" within the field of higher education which is something that has not been validated or discussed within this area of study.

I also attempt to challenge the traditional perception of a thesis – a thesis that should be strictly located within a specific field using a specific set of methods, in a specific way. Building on theories from different disciplines and on experiences and subjective insights of various research participants, I tried to conduct a study that would reflect the already mentioned "real world" in its complexity. The discussed theories and ideas are therefore not only to be read, but my thesis also proposes solutions how exactly they can be put into practice. The big variety of concepts therefore reflects the diversity of life as we know it and my study does not only work with well-established theories but also with ideas or "attempts at theories" that are not deeply anchored in the academic world.

Communication is the lifeblood of a university, the fundamental way this institution has been created (Cooren et al. 2007). In the climate of current global space and internationalization of tertiary education, international marketing communication is increasingly recognized as a crucial variable in determining a university's success, viewed in

holistic terms, and as a vital issue requiring further research (Hargie & Tourish 2009). This now especially applies to Victoria University where, due to the rapidly changing environment of budgetary and funding cuts in the Victorian TAFE sector, VU has been undergoing one of the most significant organizational changes in its history. Given this historical context, I propose to conduct a communication audit at VU. Drawing on the extensive literature in the area of evaluation of university communication, this study introduces a relatively new auditory approach, which builds on the particular insights and interpretations of the subjects involved in this field. When auditing the particular communication activities of VU, I will use my own experience as an international student at VU and I will also conduct focus groups and action groups when engaging VU's current students to investigate their interpretations of VU's communication (see detailed analysis in chapter 6). In light of this interpretive method, the research seeks to challenge the traditional perception of an audit and locate its own interpretive communication audit within the field of higher education. Such a positioning has not been previously attempted.

This research thus seeks to set new and distinctive standards for international communication in the university sector in more general terms. Arguing that university marketing should be about more than transferring already established and well anchored marketing models from the commercial sphere, I propose to investigate the specifics and characteristics of a university as a whole. This will enable me to emphasize the unique nature of a university's identity as well as to reveal its creative potential, which communication professionals can draw upon when developing original approaches to marketing communication strategies – they can be later used in "the real world".

2 International higher education in Australia: the system, the market and *the students*

2.1 Introduction

Addressing the first aim of my research, this chapter will try to reveal specifics and characteristics of Australian higher education which shape the nature of an Australian university. Because the main focus of this thesis is placed on the role of international marketing

communication in the Australian university sector, this chapter will explain the Australian education system in particular, with an emphasis on international education. I will mainly try to provide my research with a particular context, describing the main aspects of the environment this study is anchored in – the main purpose of this chapter is to give the reader a sense of relevance and topicality.

Three interdependent sections will introduce the unique approaches and strategies to tertiary education that distinguish Australia from other countries. Section two will therefore portray the landscape of Australian tertiary education including its students and the courses they can study. The third section will be focused on the international scope of higher education and will attempt to answer questions such as: *Who is an international student? What does he/she want to do in Australia? Where is he/she from?* After answering these queries, the last section will concentrate on how international students are recruited and which communication activities Australian education providers use to attract them to come to study in Australia.

2.2 The higher education system in Australia

Recent strategies and policies implemented by Australian governments acknowledge the importance of higher education and therefore try to promote activities that will build Australia's reputation as a highly innovative and educated nation (UniAus 2014). Australian universities function as active players in the determination and formulation of public policies and, through their relationships with governments, industry and professions, they bring social, economic and cultural value to the society as a whole. Universities and other educational institutions prepare their students to become leaders and innovators who will potentially drive their country to a better future. They educate scientists and philosophers whose ideas and knowledge inspire others. They provide opportunities for students of all backgrounds to increase the standard of living for themselves and next generations (EY 2012).

2.2.1 Demographics of Australian students

According to an OECD report that compared educational trends across OECD countries, educational attainment is relatively high in Australia. The majority of 25-64 year-olds holds at least an upper secondary qualification (OECD 2014). The proportion of adults completing upper secondary education has increased significantly across the generations, with 84% of 25-34 year-olds holding an upper secondary qualification compared to 61% among 55-64 year-olds. Overall, tertiary attainment rates are well above the OECD average: 38% of the working

age population holds a university degree (OECD average 32%). The proportion rises to 45% among 25-34 year-olds, which is again higher than the OECD average that is approximately 39%.

Generally speaking, the prospects for higher education students of finding jobs in the future seem to be good also. Labour market outcomes by education level reflect very well on the Australian educational system. The country has strong overall employment rates, with educational attainment also increasing the likelihood of graduates being employed (OECD 2012).

2.2.2 The system and structure of tertiary education in Australia

These positive indicators can be explained by a number of factors. First of all, Australia's investments in the education sector are comparatively very high and are not fully dependent on public funds. For example, in 2010, 74% of Australia's total expenditure on educational institutions came from public sources, which is lower than the OECD average of 84% (OECD 2014). In fact, at 26%, Australia has the sixth largest proportion of private expenditure in the OECD for all levels of education compared with an OECD average of 16%. These proportions are even higher when it comes to the tertiary level. Within this sector in 2010, 54% of all spending came from private sources, which is again much higher than the OECD average of 32% (OECD 2014).

Alongside rich investments, there is another significant feature that quite likely improves the quality of higher education (and later professional life); it is the system itself. In Australia, there are opportunities to obtain a tertiary degree for nearly everyone. The number of pathways to higher education is relatively large compared to other countries. Like elsewhere, Australia's education system is traditionally divided into three broad areas: primary school, secondary school and tertiary education. Each of these levels feature both public (government-funded) and private (independently funded) institutions, although the majority of private institutions also receive some government funding. However, what is significantly distinctive about this system is the structure of the highest educational level. Unlike a number of other countries, Australian tertiary education has two main branches; traditional Higher Education and Vocational Education and Training (VET). The main reason for mentioning this division at the beginning of this chapter is to fully explain the definitional difference between the ideas of

"higher education" and "tertiary education" as these two terms are often interchanged and, especially within the Australian context, misused or wrongly interpreted.

The VET sector represents the key educational sector that currently positively contributes to high employment rates in the country. According to the already mentioned OECD report, the graduates of upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary education with a vocational orientation do particularly well in the labour market compared with their peers in other countries: 86% of 25-34 year-olds with this level of education were employed in 2011, the sixth highest level among OECD countries (OECD average: 79%), while employment rates for graduates from a general programme were only around 78% (OECD 2014). What is so specific about the VET sector? Vocational education focuses mainly on developing skills and competencies relevant to a particular trade or specialization. In this sector, there are a decent number of training organizations that provide specialised courses and programs that are highly practical and closely connected to industries and corporations. These programs often reflect the demands of the students who can then choose to study almost tailor-made subjects such as audio engineering for the music industry, computer graphics for digital animation and gaming or even pilot training (AES 2014). The VET sector consists of two main bodies: the private and the public. Government-funded or public training institutions are known as colleges or institutes of Technical and Further Education – TAFE for short (AES 2014). All VET institutes offer a range of training courses and students can obtain various levels of degree – from certificate to bachelor. At some institutes students can study masters programs, but that is less common.

That is, however, not the case in the sector frequently labelled as higher education. Here, students can traditionally study both bachelor's and masters programs and if they want to further their studies, doctoral degrees are also available. As mentioned before, within the framework of the Australian education system, not all forms of tertiary education can be understood as higher education. Higher education is mostly limited to universities. There are 37 public and 2 private universities offering a wide variety of courses ranging from business to highly specialised programs that are often based on the location of the institution (UniAus 2014).

For example, regional or country universities might offer programs in Agriculture, Ecology and Animal Husbandry, while universities with campuses in tropical regions might have developed courses in Tropical Medicine, Marine Biology and the like (AES 2014). The existence of similar subjects might seem unimportant when defining the Australian education system, but the pure fact that Queensland's universities introduce subjects such as Tropical

Medicine emphasises the uniqueness of the system and explains how exactly we can distinguish local approaches to higher education from other countries.

2.3 International higher education in Australia

The most distinctive feature of the Australian higher education does not lie within the offered courses or the structure of the system. As has been regularly shown in the OECD reports, the most significant characteristic of the tertiary education landscape in Australia is the large proportion of international students (OECD 2014, 2012). Australia is a key destination for students from around the world, hosting more than 6% of the world's foreign students (OECD 2014). This figure makes Australia the third most popular destination among overseas students. The first place belongs to the United States (16% of international students worldwide), the second to the United Kingdom (13%) (OECD 2014).

One in five of the students enrolled in tertiary education in Australia in 2011 was an international student, which is the highest proportion among all OECD countries, against an OECD average of 7% (OECD 2014). Getting to an exact number, a total of 1,313,776 domestic and international students were enrolled at Australian higher education institutions in 2013, an increase of 4.5% from 2012 (DET 2013b).

There were 985,374 domestic students (75% of all students) and 328,402 international students studying in Australia in 2013 (DET 2013b). These numbers refer to the field of higher education or, in other words, this is how many students were studying at Australian universities. The reason for mentioning this is that sometimes the numbers might seem confusing as it is often stated that there are more than 400,000 international students enrolled at Australian institutions of higher education (for example, see UniCampus 2014). There were, in fact, 410,925 international students studying in Australia in 2013 (DET 2014a). This number, however, includes students enrolled not only in higher education courses but also in English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students (ELICOS), vocational education and training (VET), non-award institutions and other schools (DET 2014a).

2.3.1 Who is an international student?

For the purposes of this study, international students will be considered as overseas students who are more closely defined in the ESOS Act (Educational Services for Overseas Students

Act, 2000), by which the Australian universities abide. According to the ESOS Act and its National Code, an overseas student is a person who holds a student visa and must comply with its conditions (AEI 2012).[2] A domestic student then "refers to all students who are not overseas students" (AEI 2012). To become an international student, a person needs to therefore undergo the rather complicated procedure of obtaining an Australian student visa. This process varies depending on which country the student comes from, what courses and for how long he or she wants to study in Australia (DIBP 2014).

Generally speaking, approximately 10% of those who apply for student visas in Australia are not successful with their applications even if there is no legislative cap for how many students can study on visas in the country (DIBP 2014). The reason for the applications to be turned down may simply be explained by the fact that there are strict requirements and eligibility criteria the applicants have to meet to be granted an appropriate form of visa (DIBP 2014). When the student receives his or her permission to study and live in Australia, he or she needs to respect a list of conditions, such as the number of working hours, the form of health insurance and school attendance, among other things (DIBP 2014). That is why I am choosing to see an international student as someone who studies on a visa because this document partially defines his or her student experience and distinguishes him/her from domestic students who might study the same courses but are not limited by as many rules as their international peers are.

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[2] The role and characteristics of the ESOS Act and the National Code are fully explained on page 41.

2.3.2 Where does an international student come from?

In 2013, visas were granted to overseas students from 193 countries (DIBP 2014). The biggest number of visas was issued to students from China. China constantly represents the largest single nation contributor to the international student population in Australia. In 2013, 29% of all international students in Australia were Chinese, the highest of any nationality (DET 2014a). India and the Republic of Korea were the next highest, contributing 8.8% and 4.9% respectively in the same year. Nearly 70% of all international students studying in Australia come from ten countries: China, India, the Republic of Korea, Vietnam, Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, Brazil, Nepal and the United States of America (DET 2014a).

According to a study published by Central Queensland University, "the most important factors motivating Chinese students to study in Australia are future migration opportunities after graduation, Australia's high quality of education, and competitive lower tuition fees and cost of living" (Yang 2007, p. 1). To be successful in their future careers, Chinese students are therefore choosing to study English and looking at the quality and the reputation of the school while costs are gradually becoming less important. The explanation behind the smaller emphasis given to tuition fees is the strong economic growth in China (Xu 2012).

That economic growth has meant increases in disposable income and has brought education in Australia within reach of an increasing number of Chinese families (IntStudy 2014a). Being aware of the increasing strength of the market, the Australian government together with universities has implemented a number of strategies to support the export of education and training services to China. Australian universities are, for example, very productive in terms of creating partnerships with Chinese institutions in the field of higher education. In 2012, Australia held more formal partnerships with Chinese universities than any other country (Marszalek 2012). At that time, most of the 885 agreements with China were pertaining to academic or research collaboration, including projects in which Australian and Chinese scientists are working together on medical breakthroughs (Marszalek 2012). These partnerships may have also resulted in an increase in the number of students going to Australia to continue Australian courses started in China (IntStudy 2014a).

It is also important to note that Chinese students represent the biggest group of students studying abroad. In 2011, China had more students studying abroad than any other country (DET 2013c). There were 722,915 Chinese students studying abroad, which is 16.8% of all students studying abroad worldwide (DET 2013c). Approximately 12% of these students

choose to study in Australia and the Australian government is implementing more and more activities to increase this number as much as possible (IntStudy 2014a).

2.3.3 Other key demographics of international students in Australia

In terms of other demographic factors, the available statistics show that international students arriving to study in Australia were relatively young. In 2013, the most common age range for overseas students was between 20 and 24 years. This group represents nearly one half of all international students (DET 2014a). Only six per cent were over 35 years and 3.4 % were under 18 years (DET 2014a). However, it is interesting to note that the students in the VET sector tended to be slightly older, where 37.2% were aged 25 to 29 (DET 2014a).

In 2013, there were slightly more male international students than female. The exact proportion was 52.6% male to 47.4% female (DET 2014a). These numbers, however, do not represent all nationalities very well. For example, there were more female Chinese, Korean or Vietnamese students and regarding students from Thailand and the USA, the proportion of women was more than 60% (DET 2014a).

Regardless of their age and gender, the vast majority of international students choose to study in New South Wales and Victoria. Their choice is simply influenced by the fact that these two states offer the biggest number of universities nationwide (UniAus 2014). Melbourne is also frequently listed as the most liveable city in the world (Gordon 2014) which might be attractive for overseas students as well. It may not therefore be so surprising that the highest proportion of international students can be found at Federation University, which is based in Victoria and has its campuses in Melbourne, in Gippsland and in the town of Ballarat. In 2013, 43.6% of all students studying at this university were international (DET 2014b). This high proportion might be explained by what Federation University often advertises about itself (50 programs –from short courses to degrees and beyond, pathways to higher education including TAFE, the highest graduate employment rating of any Victorian-based university, great teaching quality ratings and so on, FedUni 2014). But it might also be simply given the fact that in conjunction with these "attractions", Federation University belongs to the top ten low-fee universities in the country (UniRev 2014).

Putting proportions aside, the biggest absolute number of international students is enrolled with the University of Melbourne (14,165 overseas students) and the University of New South Wales (13,123 overseas students) – as shown at least in the research report prepared by the Australian government in August 2014 (DET 2014b). These two universities

are based in Melbourne and Sydney, the biggest cities in Australia. Due to their size and location, these two capitals offer more employment possibilities than any other city in Australia. The Australian government has recently published a report that identifies international higher education student satisfaction[3] with opportunities for work experience and employment in Australia. As this study showed, employment opportunities are very important for international students (Lawson 2014). Most forms of student visas allow international students to work and since the majority of them have to pay their accommodation and tuition fees, they are trying to use this opportunity as much as possible.

2.3.4 What does an international student want?

In a survey conducted in 2012, 75% of international students stated the ability to work during and after study belonged to the most influential factors in choosing Australia as a study destination (Lawson 2014). Three quarters of overseas students thus come to Australia in hope of earning money to support their studies. However, as the study revealed, not everyone was satisfied with their job opportunities – and the majority of students stated that they were not working even though they wanted to. Out of 40% of students who said they were working, only 12% had a job relevant to what they were studying or what they wanted to do in the future. Around 60% of international students who participated in this survey said that they were satisfied with the opportunity to earn money while studying. This result is very similar to the one collected earlier in the 2010 International Student Report which identified that international students were overall not very happy with their employment possibilities as only 59% of them stated that they were satisfied with their work opportunities outside school (AEI 2010). For comparison, the same analysis for example showed that 69% of domestic students were satisfied with their "part-time" employment.

The low score recorded by international students could be due to relative language difficulties which might especially limit them when obtaining a job within the area of their studies. Some overseas students also come to study in Australia for a short period of time which may discourage them to look for prospective and stable employment. Nonetheless, even if it is domestic students who earn more money while studying, we can say that international

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[3] In order to explore the wider context of the Australian university market, this chapter does not focus on the particular results of student satisfaction surveys conducted at Victoria University. They are, however, further described in chapter 6 and 9.

students "are in greater need". Unlike domestic students, most international students cannot stay with their parents who often provide food and other necessary supplies. To visit their relatives they spend thousands of dollars on transportation. In order to obtain visas (also an expense), they need to pay for health insurance for the duration of their stay in the country. Additionally, as I will later discuss in chapter 4, through engagement in *various* areas of human activities (which are not necessarily limited to the curriculum), students can obtain valuable knowledge and experience which can "boost" their confidence and improve their language skills. This places international students in rather a complicated position – or in a so-called "vicious circle" – as with inadequate language skills their prospects of finding a relevant job position are significantly lowered.

2.3.5 What challenges does an international student face?

The most significant difference in terms of living costs between domestic and overseas students can be noted when looking at tuition fees at particular universities. According to "Study in Australia", the official government site for international students, tuition fees per year for international students for an undergraduate bachelor's degree range from 15,000 to 33,000 dollars; a postgraduate master's degree ranges from 20,000 to 37,000 dollars; and a doctoral degree from 14,000 to 37,000 dollars (IntStudy 2014b). These amounts are much lower for domestic students. In their case, the government sets the minimum and maximum range for the so-called "fee band" (meaning the area of study) which, for 2014, ranged from 0 to approximately 10,000 dollars.

The costs depend on which subjects/units the students choose and how many credits they intend to aim for in each unit (StudyAssist 2014). In addition to these regulations or "caps" (which are scheduled to change in 2016), unlike international students, domestic students are eligible for the Higher Education Loan Program (HELP) and for Commonwealth supported places (StudyAssist 2014). These government loans and support services help domestic students with covering many costs – from paying their contribution amount in full, covering the tuition fees, vocational education, training fees, overseas study expenses or paying other student services and amenities fees (TopUni 2013). None of this applies to international students, so, as this thesis will also show, there are many more challenges they have to face and surmount to successfully finish their studies than in the case of their domestic peers.

One of these challenges is living a "normal" life. When they need help, want to have fun or just have someone to talk to, domestic students can rely on their existing networks of friends. This, however, is often impossible for international students – especially at the beginning of their studies. Coming to the country alone, leaving everyone they knew behind, overseas students often find themselves lonely or even isolated (AEI 2010). As the *International Student Report* that focused on the experience of international students living in Australia revealed, the area of living experience that recorded a very low level of satisfaction among international students was "the host country friends". Here, only 69% of international respondents stated they were happy with this sphere of their life whereas 92% of domestic students could make an equivalent statement. Some of the reasons for this difference between scores have already been explained, but the report also found that aside from seeing English as a barrier in making new friends, some overseas students stated that they felt there was a lack of interest by Australian students in creating new friendships with them (AEI 2010).[4]

It is therefore surprising that in terms of the studying experience itself, the majority of international students seem to enjoy it (AEI 2010). According to the already mentioned *International Student Report* that was conducted in 2010,

> ...the survey results confirmed that a high percentage of international students in Australia are satisfied with their study and living experience. This result mirrored the international benchmark as measured through the International Student Barometer,[5] and was an improvement on the levels reported in the last international student survey conducted in Australia in 2006 (ISR 2010, p.1).

Overall 84% of international students at Australian universities who responded to the 2010 survey were satisfied with their studying experience (ISR 2010). That is a very positive outcome as across all respondents in the HE and VET sectors, the top four factors that influenced the choice of where to study in Australia were related to the learning experience

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[4] I will elaborate this interesting revelation further in chapter 4 where I discuss the complexity of a relationship between domestic and international students.

[5] International HE benchmark study (ISB) includes data from ISB surveys run at 162 universities in Europe, North America, South Africa, Singapore, Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom. The International Student Report drew on the ISB conducted in 2009/2010. The size of the ISB survey sample is significant – it includes around 121,834 student responses from 162 participating universities (ISR 2010).

itself. Specifically, 94% of international students perceived the quality of teaching to be the most important criterion and of these, 90% stated the deciding factor was the research quality of the institution (ISR 2010).

2.3.6 What does an international student study?

International students study a range of different courses in Australia. While a small proportion study in schools and other post-secondary courses, most international students (80%) were engaged in higher education and VET courses in 2010, with some of these students having also studied English through an ELICOS provider (AST 2010). A more recent report, published by the Department of Education in 2013, showed the specific courses and degrees international students choose to follow in the field of higher education (the university sector). According to its statistics, out of 328,402 overseas students studying in Australian universities in 2013, 177,838 were studying bachelor's degrees; 86,681 master's degrees by coursework; 17,917 doctoral degrees and the rest were spread across other degree variations (DET 2013a).

Of international enrolments and commencements in higher education in 2013, "Management and Commerce" – which includes disciplines such as accounting, business and management, and sales and marketing – was the largest broad field of education, with about half of enrolments and commencements in this field (AST 2010). More precisely, there were 164,425 students enrolled in these courses (DET 2013a). No other individual broad field of education contributed more than 10% of enrolments or commencements in the higher education sector (DET 2013a). Other popular courses among international students were (and probably still are) Engineering and Related Technologies with 31,680 students taking this course, Society and Culture took third place with 26,879 students studying it, and Information Technology and Health were another two favourite courses with approximately 25,000 students studying in each field (DET 2013a).

In 2010, "Management and Commerce" was also the largest broad field of education for the VET sector, with over two fifths (43%) of enrolments and almost half (48%) of commencements in this field (ATS 2010). The significant preference and emphasis that is given to this course might be explained by a student's plans and especially by the plans of his or her parents. As the following chapters will discuss, some parents invest in their children's education in order to secure them a successful career in the future. Business oriented courses such as finance and marketing can be perceived as one of the possible pathways to achieve this.

2.4 International recruitment strategies and promotion: other distinctive features of Australian higher education

An aim of this thesis is to focus on the specifics and characteristics of international higher education in Australia. Some of these features have already been introduced: Australia's education system consists of both higher education and the VET sector, it offers highly specialized courses depending on the location of the educational institution and it belongs to the top three countries with the biggest international student proportions. As explained in the first section of this chapter, because international students are so vital to Australian culture, society and economy, it is important for the country to know not only who the international students are, but also how to approach them.

The international education industry reportedly provides 15% of the combined revenues of Australian universities (Becker & Kolster 2012). The international student market is Australia's third largest source of export income after iron ore and coal, and larger than gold and personal travel services. It is the top export in the state of Victoria, where universities compete for the title of "Exporter of the Year" (Chow 2012). As a consequence, there exist a number of strategies that are meant to support this "business" and knowledge exchange. What makes it really interesting is that some of these strategies belong to the features previously discussed which make the international university sector in Australia so distinctive.

In terms of higher education strategies there are three main areas in which Australia can distinguish itself from other countries. First, there is a high level of Commonwealth federal government involvement in international education (both regulatory and in terms of industry support) (Chow 2012). Secondly, Australian universities use a complex network of education agents resulting in the highest proportion of international students being recruited through this pathway, when compared to the rest of the world's universities (Jashik 2014). Lastly, when promoting higher education to international students, Australia uses centralized strategies and approaches that are implemented across the whole nation, by both small and large universities. The next section of this chapter will aim to elaborate these three main distinctions further.

2.4.1 Government involvement in international education

The main governmental body that is responsible for international higher education in Australia is the federal Department of Education. The department works with the education sector, other

government agencies and ministries to ensure that Australia is recognised as a regional and world leader in education and a partner of choice for international collaboration (AEI 2014). It provides leadership and coordination across government, delivering programs and policies to support mobility and the global exchange of knowledge (AEI 2014).

As for the international sector, it has appointed a special managing body which is the so-called "International Group". The international group controls student mobility, legislation and policy and it conducts surveys and research in various fields. It also develops the international student strategy and safeguards the ESOS Act, one of the most important documents which aim to ensure that international students are better supported and protected in Australian education.

This report, whose full title reads as *Education Services for Overseas Students (ESOS) Act 2000* was first adopted in 2000. There have been several amendments and a number of government recommendations. Its main objectives currently are:

(a) to provide tuition assurance, and refunds, for overseas students for courses for which they have paid; and (b) to protect and enhance Australia's reputation for quality education and training services; and (c) to complement Australia's migration laws by ensuring providers collect and report information relevant to the administration of the law relating to student visas (ESOS Act 2014).

This act applies to all international education providers in Australia, which are required to register if they want to offer education services to overseas students. The ESOS Act is widely recognised as being among the best frameworks for international education regulation in the world, especially for tuition fee protection (AEI 2010).

As previously mentioned in this chapter, the quality of education represents one of the key factors motivating international students to study in Australia. To ensure this criterion will be met, in December 2010 the ESOS Act was amended to require all international education providers to re-register under tighter, new regulatory criteria (Becker & Kolster 2012). For example, universities and other educational institutions that recruit international students now must clearly demonstrate the capacity to provide education at a satisfactory level (Becker & Kolster 2012). Such rules ensure that only high quality providers remain on the market.

Quality assurance is also an objective of other important policies and documents, such as the International Student Strategy for 2010-2014. This strategy was developed with the cooperation of Commonwealth, State and Territory governments through the Council of

Australian Governments, recognising that all governments are responsible for aspects of the international student experience (AEI 2010).

> The strategy aims to support a high-quality experience for international students by improving student wellbeing, assuring the quality of education, strengthening consumer protection for international students and providing better information to current and future students (AEI 2010, p. 8).

The strategy is well written, using direct and plain language enabling others (not only experts in the field) to read what exactly is intended to enhance the experience of international students and how specifically these strategies will help international students themselves. For example, regarding "providing better information to current and future students", the strategy addresses this objective by listing specific tools that will be used to achieve it. The report expressed, for example, the need for "a single, authoritative source of comprehensive, up-to-date and accurate information about international education in Australia and it should be online" (AEI 2010). It then suggested that a new web portal should be created bearing the title "Study in Australia" and it was to be introduced in several language versions. As we now know, this website was indeed created and, even though it has been changed and modified several times (one of its modifications is the well-known Future Unlimited program), it regularly welcomes thousands of visitors (FutureUnlimited 2014). These and other communication activities which are implemented by the Australian government will be fully elaborated in the next section on centralized promotion.

There is another governmental body which we have to keep in mind when talking about policies and legislation that shape and define international higher education in Australia. Without the existence of the Department of Immigration and Border Protection and the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service, international students would not be able to even come to the country. This department handles hundreds of visa applications that are lodged by overseas students every day. To be eligible for a student visa, applicants must meet financial, health insurance, English language proficiency, health and character requirements (DIBP 2014). The students also need to be accepted for full time study in a course listed on the Commonwealth Register of Institutions and Courses for Overseas Students (CRICOS). The course should be conducted in English and should be completed in no less than 16 calendar months.

By having this requirement, the Department of Immigration controls not only the "quality" of the international students who apply to study in Australia, but it also makes sure that only certified education providers will be permitted to accept a student from overseas. To make the student's living experience better (and affordable), the Department of Immigration allows students to work in paid employment for a maximum of twenty hours per week and fulltime during holidays (DIBP 2014). "This fairly generous regulation provides students with the opportunity to interact with the local community, acquire income, improve their language skills and develop professional expertise" (Becker & Kolster 2012, p. 41). That said, in order to enjoy their studies and life in Australia, overseas students need to undergo the rather complicated process of applying for a student visa which can be stressful and confusing. This is one of the reasons students often approach education agents who can help them (to some extent) with submitting visa applications.

2.4.2 International recruitment through education agents

For Australian educational institutions, agents are an integral part of international education recruitment in Australia and have been for several decades (Chow 2012). International students currently fill over 20% of higher education seats in Australia, and agents are responsible for recruiting from 60% to 80% of international students enrolled at an institution − 10 to 15% of all higher education. In a 2012 survey of 181 colleges and universities in seven countries by the Observatory on Borderless Higher Education, the Australian universities reported that 53% of international students had been recruited through agents (Jashik 2014). That is the biggest share of the countries surveyed, which includes the United States (Jashik 2014).

In the US, which attracts the biggest number of overseas students in the world, only 11% of them were recruited by education agents (Jashik 2014). "However, the Australian agent model is quite different from what has developed in the U.S., and both sides need to be mindful of this when attempting to compare the situation in their respective countries" (Chow 2012, p.11). The main difference is that the agent activity is highly regulated in Australia. Under Australian Government law, every Australian education institution that uses the services of education agents needs to have a contract with them and it needs to list on their website every education agent it has appointed to represent them in each country (StudyAustralia 2014). Furthermore, the agents are forbidden by law from charging students fees for university

placements – their revenue comes from the university in the form of a percentage of the student's first term tuition payment, usually around 20% (Chow 2012, p. 41).

That is not the case elsewhere – for example, the agents recruiting students for the United States do charge the students, sometimes very high fees for their services (Chow 2012).Whether or not to allow the use of agents in the recruitment of international students is a topic of many debates (e.g. Smith 2011).The agents may be biased – some education agents represent only a limited number of Australian institutions making the choices limited for the overseas student. Also, he or she might have an agreement with selected institutions which pay them a high commission for enrolling the student with them. Additionally, they may be giving misleading information about their competencies, for example, in terms of submitting visa applications on the behalf of students – as they are not allowed to provide immigration assistance even though they claim they can (DIBP 2014). However, despite these disadvantages, Australian universities and other education institutions are widely using their networks of agents as this system has proved to work. Therefore, international education providers usually have more than one education agent appointed in a foreign country to speak on their behalf (StudyAustralia 2014).

There also exist many agencies that take care of the whole process of recruitment and that appoint their own agents overseas while cooperating with the local universities in Australia – such as the Australian Agency for Education and Training, for example, which was already founded in 1997 (AAET 2014). To improve the quality of this type of recruitment process and to eliminate the number of potential risks education agents can bring both to students and universities, the Department of Immigration provides courses and programs that help agents to understand the educational environment in Australia and to stay abreast of changes and developments in international education services (DIBP 2014). The Education Agent Training Course is one of these programs – it is designed solely for individuals working as education agents for Australian education institutions and its objective is, among other things, to help agents "clearly delineate the allowable activities of registered Australian migration agents and others" (DIBP 2014).

2.4.3 Centralised promotion of international education in Australia

The system of control – both in terms of legislative regulations and training that apply to education agents recruiting for Australian universities – leads to a much smaller potential for

misdirecting students in choosing the final institution where they will study. However, as some argue, similar initiatives work not because they are given by law, but because of the education environment itself (Chow 2012). In comparison with its main competitors in international education, the Australian university sector is relatively small. The country has only 43 accredited universities (there are thousands of universities in the USA, NCES 2014). "In a smaller system, it is easier for students to find their own way, and students often already know which institution they want to attend in Australia" (Chow 2012, p. 41). Also, the Australian universities are not so differentiated from each other and the same thing applies to the location (the major capital city locations in Australia do not differ from each other as much as in bigger and more populated countries, such the United States) creating a level playing field among institutions.

The relatively small system not only influences the role of education agents in the recruitment process, but it also allows for more complex and centralised promotion activities that target international students. The "nationwide" style of promotion is then the third and last area (in which Australian international education differs from other countries) this chapter will discuss – but it does not mean it is the least important. Australia uses several national instruments that support and strengthen international student recruitment which serve all education providers in the country. The Australian government has positioned education counsellors at Australian embassies abroad. Their task is, among other things, to build education partnerships with local institutions (Becker & Kolster 2012). These offices are situated in China, Europe, India, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, North America, Taiwan, Thailand and Vietnam. Australian higher education institutions offer a high number of degree programmes abroad, e.g. through overseas branch campuses of Australian institutions. Of all international students enrolled in Australian higher education institutions in 2008, a third studied for an Australian degree outside of Australia.

The Department of Education supports the flow of international students by offering postgraduate scholarships to overseas students (IPRS 2014). International postgraduate research scholarships (IPRS) enable international students to undertake a postgraduate research qualification in Australia and gain experience in the field in which they want to specialize. Because applications for an IPRS need to be made directly to participating universities, this scheme indirectly supports the promotion of particular institutions – for example, the Department of Education offers links to universities that are involved in this program and the Study in Australia website provides the contact details of all participating organizations, including general information about their courses and programs.

Some of the information about scholarships can be also found at Australia Education International (aei.gov.au) which is also managed by the Department of Education. It is the leading website that gathers information, statistics and analysis about international students. Here, all the available data are centralised making it easier to understand how the international higher education system is regulated and governed. However, it is my belief that this website does not directly target international students – it rather provides a valuable source of information for other communication activities, such as the aforementioned Study in Australia website.

The Study in Australia portal is the official Australian Government website for international students (StudyAustralia 2014). The establishment of this site was a part of the greater "Study in Australia 2010" campaign which was launched in March 2010. This campaign targeted potential students in China (including Hong Kong), India, South Korea, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and later Vietnam and Nepal (Becker & Kolster 2012). International students can now use the website to search for courses, institutions and scholarships, read about studying and living in Australia, watch stories from other students and much more (StudyAustralia 2014). This website is managed by the Australian Trade Commission (Austrade) but the information on the site is sourced from a range of official government organizations in Australia, such as the Department of Education, the Tuition Protection Scheme, the Department of Immigration and from the Australian State and Territory Governments. The website is thus a very complex source of information and recommendations which help guide the international student and possibly make his or her choice easier. For the promotion of Australian education, the site uses a wide range of arguments starting from describing the natural beauties of the country to listing advantages of the Australian education system.

These arguments go in hand with the Building Brand Australia Program: a whole-of-government initiative administered by Austrade – the agency responsible for promoting Australian trade, investment and education (AusUnlimited 2014). This program positions Australia as a word-class business partner and as a clever and beautiful country whose narrative is based on collaboration, capability, confidence and creativity (AusUnlimited 2014). Using a digital content platform, the Building Brand Australia Program promotes the nation's commercial, intellectual and creative credentials (AusUnlimited 2014). In terms of education, the program initiated various activities that served to address international students and attract them to study in Australia. Some of these communication activities were interactive, meaning

that international students could participate in them by contributing their stories about their dreams and plans to study in Australia (this campaign is described in more detail in chapter 6).

2.4.4 International student representation

Similar calls for engaging international students in university marketing have been made before, especially in terms of discussing to what extent international students should participate in creating Australian international education policies and strategies, or how they can contribute to their direct implementation. For example, the Australian government has recognised the need for better mechanisms for consultation with international students (AEI 2010). Specifically, the "ESOS Act review and the 2009 Senate Inquiry into the Welfare of International Students identified the need for an official body for international student representation and access to an independent complaints and appeals mechanism" (AEI 2010, p. 22).

In 2010, the National Union of Students, the Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations and the Australian Federation of International Students joined efforts in creating a new representative body for international students at all levels of tertiary education in Australia (CISA 2014). The main purpose of this organization is to advocate the interests and needs of international students, such as non-racist, non-discriminatory law reforms, high quality education and networks that support students who arrive in Australia from overseas (CISA 2014). In my view, this organization is trying to address the issues the government identified as the most important when assessing the ESOS framework; and that is to have an independent body of international students that will protect the rights of overseas students while reflecting on their direct experience with studying in Australia. There are many activities whose aim is to make this mission work. To name an illustrative example, in July 2014 the CISA generated articles that called for harsh crackdowns on employers who exploit international students at work (Ubudy 2014).

While protection of the rights and needs of international students is very important and even more powerful when the particular advocacy comes from the students themselves, the involvement of international students in the overall governmental communication is based on a *reactive* rather than a *proactive* basis. What I mean is that international students currently have limited platforms to be creative, to voice their ideas and recommendations in terms of what Australian higher education is about and what exact activities and programs could be put in place.

In summary, Australia employs a highly elaborate and complex system of national promotion of international education which can be demonstrated by the recent success of creative campaigns celebrating the potential of international students (FutureUnlimited 2014). To make the most of this potential and to make sure that international education is not only *about* students, but that it is formed together with the students, the government might consider broadening the competencies of existing student organizations, so that their work does not only react to changes, but actively makes them. The following chapters of this thesis will try to explain what kind of advantages creative student engagement can bring and how exactly it can be beneficial for the students, universities and for education as a whole.

2.5 Limitations and discussion

This chapter has tried to give readers a sense of relevance for the research topic and introduce its context in greater scope. Focusing on the system, market and the students at the same time has resulted in discussing many significant themes which, for an Australian reader, might seem too obvious or even unnecessary. However, since my thesis concentrates on international marketing communication in higher education and analyses the role and position of international students, I found it important to introduce the field of Australian higher education to international readers as well.

The issue of tuition fees leads us to another question this chapter provokes: what role do international students actually play in Australian economy? While some university marketing discourses and theories would talk about international students being commodified (Stensaker & D'Andrea 2007) and treated as cash cows, this chapter has attempted to illustrate the economic power which international students exercise over countries such as Australia which are, to some extent, dependent on them. Considering the significant level of income international students bring to the Australian economy every year, we may argue that overseas students have a strong impact or influence on the country's economic welfare. Following Dahl's view on power (1957), while it is necessary to make distinction between power and influence, these two concepts are closely related and can even sometimes be interchanged. This is a very important note to make; the following chapters will talk about international students being seen as those who are often helpless or powerless when facing the challenges of their new life in a foreign country. I will also discuss various initiatives that aim to help international students with their struggles and hardships during their studies in Australia.

Despite the fact these approaches have legitimate grounding, this chapter has shown that international students are not powerless – Australia's economy depends on the decision of every single international student who is thinking about where to study abroad. Aside from the clear economic influence, the power of international students also lies in other important components that can positively contribute to Australia's higher education. As the discussed studies have shown, Australia is the third most popular destination for international students – it hosts around 6% of all foreign students in the world (OECD 2014). More than 300,000 individuals with different perspectives, opinions and cultural background are now enrolled in various institutions of tertiary education in Australia. This has a great potential for creating a diverse and open learning environment which would allow for cultural and intellectual exchange among students (as well as among students, teachers and management). The following chapters will try to explore whether Australian universities use this potential and how they work with it.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter has tried to give a descriptive overview of the Australian education system with an emphasis on international education. Special focus was given to what makes Australian education distinctive and how exactly it differs from systems elsewhere in the world. The main purpose of this part of the thesis was to provide my study with a particular context so that it is clear what kind of education environment frames my research and on what and whom exactly I give the most focus.

First, Australia tertiary education system has three specialties: it consists of both universities (higher education) and training institutes (VET sector); it offers highly specialized courses depending on the location of the educational institution; and it is heavily privately funded (Australia has the sixth largest proportion of private expenditure in the OECD for all levels of education compared with other OECD countries, OECD 2014). These rich investments and the greater number of pathways to obtain a higher qualification contribute to the very high employment rates in the country. Graduates of a vocational orientation do particularly well in the labour market compared with their peers in other countries: 86% of 25-34 year-olds with this level of education were employed in 2011, the sixth highest level among OECD countries (OECD 2014).

Another very distinctive feature of Australian tertiary education is a very high proportion of international students. When compared to other countries, Australia is the third

most popular destination for studying abroad. Of all students studying here, approximately 25% of them are overseas students and the country hosts around 6% of the world's foreign students (OECD 2014). The vast majority of international students studying in Australia come from Asia with China being the most common place of origin (DET 2014a). While most international students are satisfied with their studying experience, most of them are less content when it comes to job opportunities and friendships they can make locally.

The international student market is Australia's third largest source of export income and it contributes approximately 16 billion dollars in export income to the Australian economy every year (COA 2013). The flow of the market is supported by a series of strong initiatives that are also unique when compared worldwide. First, there is a high level of Commonwealth federal government involvement in international education – both regulatory and in terms of industry support (Chow 2012). Secondly, Australian universities use a complex network of education agents resulting in the highest proportion of international students being recruited through this pathway – when compared to other world's universities (Jashik 2014). Lastly, when promoting higher education to international students, Australia uses centralized strategies and approaches that are implemented across the whole nation, by both small and large universities.

Despite the uniqueness and success of higher (and especially international) education activities in Australia, there is room for improvement. Among other things, strategies that serve to strengthen relationships among international students, domestic students, foreign and local governments could be developed using the creative potential of the students – meaning that students should not only be listened to, they should have an opportunity to act. The following chapters will explain when, why and also how this can be achieved.

3 Defining the identity of a university

3.1 Introduction

The main aim of this chapter is to frame my thesis with a philosophical and theoretical background. Here, I will try to reveal what stands at the centre of attention of my thesis: the university. Addressing the first aim of my research (which is to identify specifics and characteristics of a university that can serve as a valuable source for designing new approaches to university marketing), this chapter will specifically focus on the university's identity and authenticity – mapping the qualities that are inherent to a university.

This chapter will explain why it matters to be concerned with identity – why knowing the university's true potential is the key for creating successful marketing strategies. I will be particularly concerned with inherent qualities of a university.[6] Here, I will discuss several philosophical theories often used in different areas or disciplines to reveal what is often overlooked or misunderstood by marketing professionals when working with the university identity. This chapter thus builds a certain philosophical foundation for the chapters that follow. By working with marketing, existential and psychological theories, as well as with practical case studies, this chapter seeks to demonstrate that the "philosophy" and "practice" of university marketing are domains whose creative potential lies in their intersection.

Implementing the *interpretive methodology* (after Jones 2002), this chapter will study university identity mainly from a student's perspective. In particular, I will specifically focus on students' needs and expectations, I will describe what they experience and feel during their studies, and I will do so while citing international student surveys as well as my own interpretations of what I think and experience as a student. This unorthodox approach shifts methodological power (as discussed in Cook-Sarther 2006) from authorities (institutions or research experts and authors) to the key agents of my thesis as well as university marketing – the students.

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[6]Building on the concept of Heidegger's authenticity, this chapter will refer to these inherent qualities as *authentic.*

3.2 The identity of an Australian university

Many marketing practitioners claim that the key to successful marketing communication is to know the customers precisely (Thomas & Tobe 2013; Conway, Mackay & Yorke 1994). Even if there is nothing to doubt here, I propose that first we need to know ourselves well; it is our identity we need to fully understand before we start effectively communicating with others. My research works in a field which literature recognizes as controversial. "University marketing" is often described as an oxymoron, as a combination of two areas which will always be in conflict. Some authors talk about the commercialization of higher education (Bo 2003), of bringing marketing values to areas they do not belong (Slaughter & Leslie 1997). And yet there are experts arguing that marketing is something universities desperately need to improve and develop, following successful examples from the commercial sphere (Gibbs & Knapp 2002). This chapter is going to advocate that this continuous conflict does not exist between opponents and supporters of university marketing. Instead, I suggest that their constant disagreements have a common source: a misunderstanding of university identity. My aim is not to claim that I am the only one who has managed to reveal the true potential of a university, but to show that the better a university knows itself – the better it understands what it has and how it differs – the more possibilities it will gain for its marketing and communication activities.

3.2.1 The "enterprise university"

As Jevons writes, "despite the unclear purpose...vast quantities of money are spent on promoting whatever it is that universities are, do and how they do it" (Jevons 2006, p. 466-467). While Jevons (2006) focuses rather on research of efficiency or on the outcomes of these investments, my study wants to explore precisely what this "whatever" could be. What is it that universities are? What do they do? How do they do it? Answering these questions will help to constitute the core identity of a university revealing its potential for powerful marketing communication.

Much of the research on marketing in the university sector is based around the idea that, due to the competitive environment, universities can be regarded as profit-driven institutions which can operate with the same market practices as "other" businesses (Burns & Hayes 2009). Literature on education marketing thus focuses on how to implement marketing strategies inherent to the business sector within the field of higher education (Kotler & Fox 1985). Authors and researchers have studied the marketing of universities predominantly in

comparison with the commercial sphere. Drawing on this paradigm, some authors suggest that in an increasingly competitive and complex higher education consumer market, colleges and universities need to become better with the coordination of their marketing communication programs and create a strong emotional bond with their markets in order to be perceived as a relevant choice in their target markets' minds (Horrigan 2007).

Having said that, the literature also concentrates on analysing university marketing within more specific disciplines, such as service marketing (Mazzarol 1998), product marketing (Kotler & Fox 1985) or relationship marketing (Klassen 2002), which are rather common or typical for the corporate world. However, more recent literature shows that corporation-like values, beliefs and practises which are now occupying the university sector, may cause damage to the university identity. Simon Marginson, one of the most highly regarded professors of higher education, even talks about "the enterprise university" (Marginson & Considine 2000). In his systematic study of the Australian university sector Marginson and Considine contend that modern universities are characterised by corporate-style executive leadership, governance and identity (Marginson & Considine 2000). He writes:

> In becoming the Enterprise University, the university seems at risk of losing sight of its own distinctive features and achievements. In fact it might be losing control over the very means by which its own identity is formed (Marginson & Considine 2000, p. 6).

According to Whetten (2006), the role of organizational identity is to differentiate the institution from others. It should encompass everything that is unique, individual and central to the institution, it should tell the world "who the institution is" and "what it does". For marketing purposes, there is nothing more important than a strong identity – the aim of all communication campaigns is to differentiate a particular organization from others, to make it stand out in its field.

3.2.2 Falling in with others: average everydayness and imitation

Since having a strong identity is about being different, why do universities tend to imitate the practices of commercial companies? Why does it seem that they have lost their own path and that they are just following others? Why is university marketing mainly about adopting marketing practices that have proved to work in the corporate world? Even if giving proper and

sufficient answers might never be possible, there are theories which can help us understand such phenomena. Drawing on the philosophy of Martin Heidegger, it is natural and normal for people to do what others do. In his phenomenological work *Being and Time* Heidegger talks about the concept of so-called average everydayness (Heidegger 1962). He explains it as something which is common and typical for our being, describing it as "our tendency simply to allow ourselves to be carried along with the way things are done by those around us" (Barnett 2012, p. 117)[7]. "Falling in" with others is convenient, it is safe. And because this research does not regard universities as empty entities but rather as "organizations that exist in the shared experience of the people who constitute it" (Papa et al. 2008, p. 10), human elements dominate all the activities, including marketing and communication. People in university management are thus adopting pre-made and pre-used marketing practices simply because that is how others do it. Interestingly enough, however, this does not only affect the relationship between universities and corporations. The concept of average everydayness applies to practices which emerge within the university sector itself. The fact that universities are copying each other's strategies and ideas has, according to Marginson and Considine (Marginson & Considine 2000), a strong homogenising effect on the university identity. They call such a process "an imitation ritual" and their study on the Australian university sector shows that these imitation rituals interestingly also held true between institutions. "The University of Ballarat sought to mimic Harvard or Stanford. The University of Ballarat modelled the University of Iowa or some other upwardly mobile regional icon" (Marginson & Considine 2000, p. 21)[8].

3.2.3 Role of university marketing: creating original and authentic ideas

Is it not rather impossible *not* to be inspired by others? In other words, by imitating other institutions or corporations, are universities really jeopardising their marketing opportunities? Is it not something everyone does and knows – a new idea is never new as it always sources the already-discovered and already-invented? Martin Heidegger would agree. Even his concept of

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[7] In his books, *The Future University: Ideas and Possibilities* and *Being a University*, Ronald Barnett assembled colleagues from various disciplines to explore current state as well as the future of a university. Discussing mainly the university's global potential and its social mission, different authors draw various metaphors and analogies to how the university works (or should work). This thesis builds on Barnett's work – my study includes particular ideas and examples from both books and it also uses their interdisciplinary approach.

[8] The University of Ballarat is now called Federation University – viewed 14 February 2016, http://federation.edu.au

average everydayness is something which cannot be avoided (Heidegger 1962). It is important and essential for us to be aware of the outside world, to be in harmony with the actions of others. That is where we all begin and that is how we "proximally and for the most part" exist (Heidegger 1962, p. 54).

My study proposes that the source of these inspirations is better found mainly at the university. As a president of Harvard University stated – universities are supposed to transform individuals as they learn, transform the world as our inquiries alter our understanding of it and transform all societies (HU 2007). That is why "universities matter" (Coady 2000) and this is exactly what my study tries to demonstrate. From the perspective of marketing communication, I propose that universities do more to live up to their role. They should give examples, show the world possibilities of communication and they should be inspirational and innovative. In his short novel, *This Book is Not for Sale*, Jarod Kintz (2011) writes: "I don't want to adopt your ideas; I want to give birth to them". Kintz's approach would comply with Heidegger's philosophy. As an opposite to average everydayness (when we follow the actions of others) Heidegger proposes a concept of authenticity. "For Heidegger, authenticity is a uniquely temporal structure and a process of unfolding possibility. It is a state of being that is active, congruent, contemplative and dynamic" (Mills & Polanowski 1997, p. 70). The current marketing trend of universities adopting values, beliefs and qualities which are typical for the corporate world thus implies that some universities have lost their authenticity and have become, as Heidegger would put it, inauthentic. Here, "the unique-ness of selfhood is diffuse and lost in depersonalization and averageness" (Mills & Polanowski 1997, p. 72).

From a marketing perspective, such qualities are definitely not desirable; promotion and communication activities cannot build on average, diffuse or even false identity. This average, diffuse and false identity of a university is what Marginson (2000) defines as the aforementioned "enterprise university". According to Marginson, universities are lost. They have lost faith in themselves. They do not believe in their own potential and they are therefore imitating choices and actions of apparently successful enterprises. Here, the enterprise approach is regarded as inauthentic for many of the universities that have tried to adopt it. My research therefore suggests that if a university manages to recognize its own uniqueness, if it manages to discover its very own characteristics, it will be able to position itself as a distinctive and original institution. If "authenticity is the process of becoming one's possibilities" (Mills & Polanowski 1997, p. 87), then the role of university marketing is to be fully devoted to these authentic revelations as there is nothing more powerful than advertising which is not only original, but most importantly true.

3.3 Revealing authentic qualities of a university: the importance of *now*

3.3.1 Fascination with the *future* in university marketing

We live for the future. We go to work counting the days that separate us from holidays. We do Christmas shopping in October and once Boxing Day arrives, we spend hours planning our New Year's celebrations. Later, surrounded by sparkles and fireworks, we are busy thinking about our resolutions for the upcoming year. As Green (2013) notices, the education process functions no differently. We study hard so that we can go to high school. We go to high school so that we can to university. We go to university so that we can have a career. And once we have the job we always wanted, we want more money so that our kids can go to school. So that they can go to university, so that they get good jobs, etc.

It is our mind set. According to psychology research, we are supposed to be future oriented so that we can carry on – so that we have motivation to live our lives, always be looking forward to what comes next. Our natural tendency to think of what will happen next can be explained as a dominant illusion of today's society (Sharot 2012). Instead of focusing (or enjoying) a present moment, we are preoccupied with expectation of a seemingly better future. This chapter endorses Sharot's view and attempts to show that the illusion of time[9], the fascination with future has evaded the university sector as well – especially in its communication tools and methods. Universities are often promoted as a connecting link between our present absent-minded self and our future super-successful more than self.

No small number of communication campaigns by Australian universities are built on promoting so-called fast-track courses which promise to get to "the other" world more quickly and effectively. Even more traditional universities, such as The University of Melbourne, are opening courses with fast-track options (UniMelb 2013). Deakin University promotes its courses using a fast-track degree pathway (MIBT 2013), among Murdoch University's target audience also belong students "who do not have time to study" (MurUni 2012) and La Trobe university has recently published a news release titled "Fast track to success" (Knight 2013).

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[9] It is important to note that future orientation is culturally specific and that some cultures might value future differently than others.

This marketing focus on the future is not only apparent in external communication, but it also significantly influences the innermost qualities of a university. The slogan of Swinburne University of Technology is "Think Forward". Federation University characterises itself by using the slogan "Learn to Succeed". Even if Charles Darwin University's slogan is different, its heading statement on the main webpage asks "What is your next life?". The oldest of all aforementioned institutions, The University of Melbourne, has placed a distinctive statement which cannot be overlooked. It reads:

> To compete on the world stage, you need a world-standard education. At the University of Melbourne, you'll gain an internationally recognised degree that will open doors to an outstanding future (UniMelb 2013).

3.3.2 Why we should expect more from a university

This chapter suggests that university marketing is focused on attracting students to what happens *after* graduation – how the particular university degree will serve the students in the *future*. In his imaginative piece, *The Art of Living*, Crispin Sartwell (1995) captures such phenomena by saying:

> Many of us have pursued a goal single-mindedly, only to find that, when it is achieved, we have a feeling of emptiness. One reason for this is that we focus exclusively on the goal and regard the means of achieving it merely as obstructions (Sartwell 1995, p. 31).

If university identity is positioned similarly to one of the universities described above – where future success is the ultimate goal – the main message these universities communicate is thus highly undesirable. By telling the world "this is what you need to do first to get what you really want" the universities are paradoxically proclaiming that they are the annoying obstruction students need to deal with in order to be seated in the warmth of their future office chairs.

However, it is important to emphasise that my research does not aim to question or criticise the fact that modern universities are trying to educate future professionals. It is, by all means, vital for each university to make sure that their students will learn something they will be able to use, something "tangible" or "practical" they will be able to benefit from in the future. On the other hand, if that were the only thing students were after – if that were the only reason young people chose to study at university – it might be better for them to start working

instead. It would possibly be more effective to learn those practical skills in an organization where such know-how is trained on an everyday basis. It would be less time-consuming if they skipped university and went to work where they could learn all those "applicable" and "usable" skills directly from professionals. So, in order to distinguish itself and offer something students would not otherwise get, a university has to offer something extra. In a sense, it has to offer *more* than a workplace. Going back to the authentic qualities of a university, this "more" is what my study considers crucial to identify in order to enhance the scope of university marketing. Being aware of the "more", a university will be able to promote those additional values which higher education can bring to students. Here, this "more" is closely related to the fact that universities represent a unique phase in one's life, a nonesuch experience which will ever be repeated. According to a survey conducted for London South Bank University by Opinion Matters Market Research Agency, 87% of respondents who were also university graduates said that the lessons learnt at university "stay with you forever" (StudentRoom 2015).

Also, for those who studied at university, this was one of the best periods in their lives, the time when they met their best friends, their business partners, their loves. For example, as the survey of the London South Bank University showed, 44% of respondents met their closest life-long friends at university, 25% met their husband, wife or life partner whilst at university and 12% met their life-long intellectual mentor at university. Another study, this time in marketing research, showed that university provides the background for the best times of our lives. The research, carried out by the Chimes Shopping Centre in Uxbridge, UK in 2012 involved 1,000 adults who were no longer students, but university graduates. The researchers asked the respondents to list thirteen life experiences and then to select their top five. As a result, the university experience was placed on the very top. It was ranked higher than getting married or having a first child (Bodkin 2012). Cameron Dean from the University of Illinois in Springfield addressed his students with a message reflecting similar opinions the London South Bank University's survey has shown:

> Have you heard the statement, "College…the best years of your life?" I agree. College can be fun and exciting. It is a time for learning, meeting new people, being introduced to new ideas and philosophies, participating in clubs and organizations, and pursuing your personal dreams or goals. Clearly, a lot more than academic learning takes place at college. It's also a time of social and personal growth (Dean 2016).

Aside from the already mentioned reasons why university has such a strong (and also positive) impact on our life – such as meeting our best friends, our life partners and mentors – I believe there are other factors which make university such an influential experience. It is the time when people (students) are encouraged to say what they think, when reading novels is their homework, when questioning authorities is not taboo but something that is even required. Having such great and distinctive offerings to work with, it is very counterproductive for a university to voluntarily disregard them. The future-oriented promotion overlooks the uniqueness and the exceptional benefits a university can bring. Knowing that university belongs to the most important periods of people's lives, my study proposes (and this proposal will be fully explained in the final chapter) that universities might better be served by communicating not what happens after, but *during* life at university.

3.3.3 The power of *current* experience in university marketing

Not only university graduates but current students are also aware of the importance of the university experience: various Australian surveys which looked at first year students' expectations show that what students are really after is a "rewarding and fulfilling experience" (Nelson et al. 2008, p. 6). Even in studies conducted on an international level, the factor rated as the most influencing element when it comes to choosing a university, was "quality of teaching" – where a vast majority of students selected this criterion as the most important (AEI 2010). Such findings suggest that the future-oriented promotion of some universities might be built on a wrong assumption. Building on these studies, we can assume that a considerable number of students expect their studies to be somehow unforgettable, to be focused on the moment – not on the far future. It is likely to say that they choose to study at university because they want to experience something unique, they want to learn from great teachers – and this learning experience does not have to be necessarily related to their future professions. Also, since previously mentioned studies show that most universities can fulfil such needs and expectations, it is surprising that some universities are still choosing to promote themselves as a certain means to an end. In strictly marketing terms, instead of promoting a great product whose value lies in an intense and fulfilling experience, universities invest in the same promotion as other companies: in promoting the workplace (that will be more accessible *after* graduation).

My study proposes that the "now", the "in the moment", the "unrepeatable" are authentic and distinctive characteristics of a university that can be used for its marketing and communication activities. University promotion can draw from the fact that we are studying not only to become lawyers, accountants or doctors, but we are studying for the sake of study (as we might not have the same opportunity to study so intensively in the future again). Through promoting "the life after", universities are losing the attention of their target audiences as they will always be looking at what happens next, in a different life, instead of focusing on what the university life is about here and now. Even if the future possibilities were something the students were after, saying that "we will take you there as quickly as we can" only degrades the university's reputation. It is the same as the university saying: it does not really matter what happens here – what matters is what comes next.

3.4 Revealing authentic qualities of a university: the importance of *reality*

The authentic quality of now which a university can use for its communication can also be supported by another powerful characteristic. Because reality is only and solely in the now (Davey 2007), we can argue that another important quality through which a university can promote itself is "realness". The main reason I choose to point out this quality is that universities are somehow regarded as institutions that "simulate reality". Drawing on the previous section, universities are often promoted as simulators of the next life, of what happens after graduating. Marketing activities are thus focused on emphasising the practical nature of the courses, the involvement of "real" professionals in academic staff. For some reason we tend to believe that our university life is less real than the one that comes after obtaining a degree. Being aware of this common assumption, some Australian universities are using it in their communication activities. We can see that some universities are using the quality of "real" as something they position themselves against. For example, Queensland University of Technology identifies itself as "A university for the real world." We might assume that this university can prepare us for the real world which we have not yet entered. That it will equip us with relevant know-how to deal with real problems, real issues and real people. Queensland University of Technology is not the only one which makes such a promise. University of the Sunshine Coast also implies that, when it comes to reality, there is a difference between academic and professional life. Its slogan "The best of both worlds" suggests that a university

is somehow separate from the other world, that there are two isolated worlds: the real one and the one that pretends to be real.

During one of his lectures, Richard Hugo, a well-known American poet, was asked: "You worked for thirteen years in the real world before you went into academia? What are the differences for a poet?" (Hugo 1982, p. 9). Hugo's inspiring answer to such a question might guide us to understand that a university is anything but unreal. He replied: "I hate that phrase 'the real world' – why is an aircraft factory more real than a university? Is it?" (Hugo 1982, p. 9). If anything, I would like to argue that a university can get more real than an aircraft, automotive, jam or any other factory. Once at university we are put to the test - we have to face reality in all its forms: only a university can challenge us to explore reality from various perspectives, from hundreds of different points of view. Here, we can examine what is real through the prism of history, sociology, chemistry, mathematics or philosophy. The more we study, the more we know about the world and ourselves – the more we immerse ourselves in reality. The English poet John Keats said: "Nothing ever becomes real 'til it is experienced" (Britton 1997, p. xi). Real experience – this is another authentic feature a university identity possesses. Instead of boasting about how well it can simulate the real world, a university has the potential to cherish its innermost quality of being "super real". In acknowledging this quality, a university might be able to stop pretending and build its communication activities on what it really is. It would be able to say: We are not an office. We are not a bank. We are not an open space with overcrowded cubes. We don't simulate a future. We don't simulate anything. We are what we are to be: a university – a place where you can read and be commended for it, a place where you can talk to your friends without being disturbed. We are a place where you can learn about the world, about life, but most of all, about yourself.

3.5 Revealing authentic qualities of a university: the importance of being

The last sentence of the previous section brings us to another important potentiality a university might acknowledge before it starts designing expensive communication campaigns. In fact, my study wants to argue that "learning about oneself" is what constitutes a university; it is an essential part of its identity. The main reason I want to highlight this unique component of the university's essence is that, again, the marketing focus on such a distinctive feature is often suppressed or even neglected. Drawing on Olson's rather critical piece "Wounded by Schools" (2009), this study aims to claim that communication activities of some universities are concentrated on promoting "outside rewards" – on advertising what a student will "physically" obtain through graduation. For example, the slogan of the University of Western Australia promises that its graduates will "achieve international excellence". Federation University suggests that its students are "learning to succeed" and the identity of Flinders University is based around the concept of "inspiring achievement".

The marketing focus which is placed on these "outside rewards" discourages the true mission of university learning – and that is to work with internal reasons and internal motivations of students. According to Kirsten Olson (2009), our schools teach students to perform tasks only for external benefits. Olson thinks that students' internal incentives and motives are being gradually taken away – because what happens inside oneself is difficult to control and monitor (Olson 2009). When I was applying to study in Australia, I was often surprised by marketing surveys I was asked to fill out. Aside from questions such as "How did you learn about our university?" or "What do you want to study?" the surveys also asked "Why do you want to study?" Even if I knew my reasons, I had to choose from given answers. They usually included options such as "to obtain knowledge and skills necessary for the workforce", "to have better career opportunities in Australia and overseas", "to learn from professionals" or "to enjoy the university lifestyle". Not being able to choose "my reason", I always wrote my answer down, on the questionnaire's page margin: "I want to study to learn something new about myself, to reveal my own potential".

3.5.1 University's purpose and function: opening possibilities of being

Barnett (2012) proposes that it is about time we start discussing the real function of a university. He suggests we should have "a re-framing debate about the purpose of the

university through a shift in focus from knowledge and skills to possibilities for being, as these relate to higher education, research and engagement with society. A key argument here is that the university has the potential to open and interrogate *possibilities for being*, at individual and collective levels…" (Barnett 2012, p. 114). What can we understand by being? Being is a central concept to Heidegger (1962). In his view, being always referred to *being possible* (Heidegger 1962). Being is replete for potentiality (Barnett 2010). Since universities have the power to show their students the possibilities that lay ahead, this concept thus helps us to identify another important feature of a university identity: that a university can teach us *how to be*. Some might argue that such a message would not be sufficiently powerful – that it would not work with the target audience as young people only react to so-called "calls for actions" or real challenges. But is there any greater challenge than to understand oneself – than to learn how to be? Ralph Waldo Emerson writes: "To be yourself in a world that is constantly trying to make you something else is the greatest accomplishment" (Holbrook 2007, p. 192). Therefore, instead of asking "challenging" questions, such as "What do you want to change?", "What is your next life?", "What are your aspirations?", university communication campaigns could try to ask more provocative question: "Who are you?".

In terms of marketing communication, such a question harbours incredible strength as it can give rise to many other questions which seek the internal, not external motivations of university students. The seemingly simple question "Who are you?" can effectively invoke other important questions we ask ourselves in our lifetime: "Why am I here?", "What can I do?", "What possibilities do I have?" (Barnett 2010, p. 2). Interestingly enough, a university's mission is not to create completely new human beings. Instead, a university can propose that the real magic it possesses is to help students become who they already are. And that is what universities can build their "unique marketing propositions" on: *study with us and learn how to be you.*

3.5.2 Involving academics and students in university marketing

A university can be considered "a body of persons constituting a university" (Harper 2013). Since the methodological background of this study builds on the paradigms of constructivism and symbolic interactionism, it is easy to understand why I see university as a rather subjective phenomenon that is created by individual actors. In other words, I say again that my study advocates that a university is mainly and primarily about the people who constitute it.

Therefore, in order to be able to identify the authentic qualities of a university identity, we should not be focusing only on *what* a university is, but also on *who* represents it. What is the body of persons constituting a university? Who are the people making a university a *university*? Essentially, literature divides a university community into three distinctive groups: students, faculty and staff (Brown-Sica et al. 2009). To be more specific, I will title these groups as students (both domestic and international), academics and management representatives (the order responds to numeric proportions).

Since students and academics always form a significant majority, it is surprising that university marketing often reflects the beliefs and values of the management. Of course every university needs governance and leadership – this also applies to promotional activities. I believe that a university does need marketing or communication departments whose members are responsible for communication campaigns and projects. However, their responsibility lies in making sure that the promoted university identity reflects not only management but also other groups who constitute the university.

This reflection is even more important in the context of Australian higher education. As the previous chapter illustrated, there are around 300,000 international students studying in Australia (which is approximately 25% of all students). This makes Australian universities highly diverse places concentrating different values, cultures and perspectives. In order to develop effective marketing strategies that would a) capture the diversity and complexity of a university's identity and b) address both internal and external target audiences, it could be valuable to provide domestic as well as international student voices not only with the freedom to speak, but with a certain platform on which they can act – where they can influence and shape the university marketing overall. Therefore, this study proposes that both students and academics should be involved in important decision-making processes which are normally conducted by management. This will help a university to establish an identity which will not only be strong and shared, but especially authentic.

Unfortunately, such a routine is uncommon across universities. Within the framework of university marketing, students are often seen as "customers" (Nicolescu 2009), "consumers" (Stensaker & D'Andrea 2007) or even "products" which are to be sold to future employers (Conway 1994). Academics, on the other hand, are considered to have nothing in common with university marketing. They are often labelled as those who "stand in the way" or are simply against everything that has something to do with advertising. For example, in April 2012, The Guardian held a roundtable and the purpose of the debate was to discuss the role of branding in higher education (Neumark 2012). Among other things, the discussion participants talked about

the importance of marketing communication in the university sector. This theme however, as it was said, is allegedly not easy to get across to academics. Some roundtable participants shared their stories of difficult cooperation and problems academics caused when it came to approving logos and crests. It was also said that involving academics in university branding had proven to be difficult as "academics in general do not like to perceive their institutions "like a KitKat" (Neumark 2012). Leaving aside the fact that comparing a university to a candy bar might be difficult not only for academics, the most interesting feature of this discussion was its members. Even if the debate was focused on (and often against) academics, there were no academics present at the table (except for one academic officer). Strangely enough, the roundtable participants also talked about the importance of engaging academics in planning marketing and branding activities. Specifically, it was said that there is "a huge branding potential in their commitment" as "they (academics) are passionate off the scale" (Neumark 2012). The final key points that summarized the main outcomes of the discussion later contended that "academics should be involved as much as possible; their enthusiasm can often bring big dividends" (Neumark 2012).Since no academics attended this roundtable which concluded that academics should be involved in similar activities, it is difficult to believe that it will become possible anytime soon.

But it was not the only key point the roundtable itself failed to live up to. It was also suggested that university marketing should reflect students' testimonials (Neumark 2012). And yet again, such a conclusion was drawn without having heard from a single student. Some participants even mentioned that it is beneficial for a university to have students participating in planning advertising campaigns and that positive student experience contributes to the brand equity. My study appreciates this perspective on students' engagement, but since no students attended such an important discussion, it offers a further reason why the importance of the subjective, personal facet of university identity deserves to be discussed in greater detail.

As mentioned above, while applying perspectives of constructivism and interpretivism, my study does not see universities as empty, mechanical entities. Here, a university is constantly produced and reproduced by the people who constitute it. My thesis proposes that this applies especially to students. While existing literature favours the description of students as customers or clients (see above), this study works with a different definition. Within this research, I see the students as "co-producers" of the university's development. Here, instead of passively receiving the service of education, students are actively involved in the decision-making processes of a university. Not only does this active participation enhance students' learning, motivation and social interaction skills (Panitz 2000), but their engagement can also

directly benefit the development of marketing communication strategies of a university. Chapter 5 shows a specific case study which illustrates the positive effect students' direct involvement can have. My study tries to demonstrate that university is not *about* students, academics and management. It *is* the students, academics and management. It is a living organism whose parts co-exist in a constantly changing environment. The possibilities of being, therefore, do not only apply to what a university can offer to its members. This concept also works conversely. Here, the university identity is formed by "beings" of particular persons who form it. If university marketing wants to benefit from a strong identity, then this identity needs to be, using Heidegger's term again – authentic. Therefore, when it comes to planning communication strategies, marketing departments would do well to be interested in engaging students and academics in such processes. Some universities would argue that it is something they are already doing – that they are trying to use testimonials and stories given by students and lecturers in their advertising campaigns. However, this is not what my study considers as an "engagement". The authentic potential of being can only be used when students and academics ARE actively present at creating these promotional activities. Specific examples and case studies which reflect what such an active engagement can bring are discussed in the following chapters.

3.6 Revealing authentic qualities of a university: the importance of not knowing

3.6.1 University as a fool

Another quality of a university's authenticity I want to discuss in this chapter is related to the innermost element of university identity – knowledge. Existing literature shows that the purpose of a university is to produce and disseminate knowledge and to contribute to the intellectual development of a society (e.g. Kirp 2013). Having this in mind, university marketing often tries to present such a prestigious university role in communication activities. Therefore, there are many communication campaigns that position a university as an ultimate provider of the world's wisdom. Some universities are then including superlatives in their slogans to reflect their knowledgeable character. For example, Monash University is using the word *brilliant* as a main theme on its website, University of Western Australia's slogan talks

about achieving *excellence* and University of the Sunshine Coast's slogan is employing the king of all superlatives – *the best*.

However, my study wants to propose that the most powerful quality of university identity does not lie in its perfection. On the contrary, this section tries to demonstrate that university is, in fact, a mere fool. My purpose is not to depreciate university identity – for this study, "foolishness" is the most authentic character a university could work with (especially in terms of its marketing activities). Why? A fool is not an ignorant entity who knows everything and thinks that he does not need to know more. A fool is not perfect and does not expect others to be. Instead, a "fool is an irritant, a provocateur, whose modus operandi is to provoke new wisdom in others" (Barnett 2012, p. 109). The term "fool" was first philosophically approached by Dahrendorf (1969). For him, the fools of modern society were the intellectuals who had "the duty to doubt everything that it is obvious, to make relative all authority, to ask all those questions that no one else dares to ask" (Dahrendorf, 1969, p. 51).

For the purposes of this study, Dahrendorf thus identified quite a powerful quality universities might consider acknowledging to develop distinctive and creative communication strategies. By doing so, universities would be able to work with more than promising prospective students that they can equip them with a degree and the knowledge each graduate needs to succeed in the workplace. Instead, the "promise" could be focused on the actual experience a university can bring. Here, universities could promote that knowledge is not something we can "get", that studying at university does not mean passively receiving information and that university students are expected not to know – that they are required to act as fools, to question authorities, to be provocative, to be different, to be rebels. My study proposes that, in order to know something, a person needs to be courageous enough to admit that he knows nothing in the first place.

I regard foolishness as an essential part of a university identity which marketing practitioners or theorists have not discussed much or worked with. The current common practice on the university market is rather an opposite of what we can understand by developing the foolishness potential. As I already mentioned earlier, universities prefer to position themselves as rather "the best" or "excellent" universities wanting "the best" and "excellent" students to apply to study there. However, I believe that the foolishness element has a great, yet unused, potential to address both high-achieving and "average" students even

better. According to the 2013 ACT[10] report that focused on high school (ACT-tested) graduates and the choices they made in terms of selecting their future studies, only 28% of them chose a major that fit their interests (ACT 2013). Also, despite the fact that a large majority of ACT-tested students eventually selected a planned major, only 2 out of 5 who did so indicated that they were very sure of their planned major choice (ACT 2013). In other words, high school graduates are not very sure about what they want to study and do in the future – and that is a powerful revelation for university marketing to work with. For example, by telling students it is alright not to know what they want to study, that it is quite fine not to be sure about their specialization and focus, a university can come to more closely understand the mindset of its target audience. This can be achieved by working with the potential of a university being a fool, emphasising the fact that university primarily provides space for its students to explore the unknown, to find their passion, to decide on their specialization: *Do you know nothing? Are you confused and lost? You don't know exactly what you want to do? Great! We want you!* Exposing the foolishness element in communication activities could benefit the university in terms of addressing those students who are undecided and uncertain – and considering the fact that only 40% high school graduates are very sure of their planned major (ACT 2013), such a move could bring many positives.

3.7 Limitations and discussion

This chapter has focused on specific elements and attributes that, when brought together, constitute a university identity. It is worth noting that the aim of this part of the thesis is not to list all components that make a university a university – there are definitely many other characteristics and specifics university marketing practitioners could build on when developing marketing strategies which this chapter does not name. On the other hand, I have introduced many various themes which, as it may seem, bring more questions than answers. Therefore, I intentionally place this chapter at the beginning of the study, so that the reader has those questions in mind when reading through the remaining parts.

At the same time, it can be argued that there is too much emphasis given to what the individual students do and think without acknowledging the role of those who influence their actions and decisions - such as their parents, education agents or career advisors. I will look at

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[10] ACT (originally stands for American College Testing) is a standardized test for high school graduates.

these important factors in the following chapters. What also could use more elaboration is the case study I included in this chapter. The roundtable discussion is only an example and cannot serve as a main source of insights and ideas about how a university identity should be constituted or improved. Chapter 5 provides another case study and chapters 7 and 8 analyse more specific insights that will contribute to this topic significantly.

When discussing different topics that form a university identity, I offer various *insights* a university can use for developing distinctive marketing activities that could help it succeed on the market. This brings me to another issue the previous chapter might have provoked: do I discuss these topics in order to show what universities can do to further contribute to the public good? The answer is no. Even if my research project is structured as critical, it is not critical towards the overall purpose of university marketing, which is to generate profit. Quite on the contrary, my thesis has aimed and will aim to highlight areas which can positively contribute to developing marketing strategies that have a potential to increase income – and thus contribute to the "private" purpose of a university.

That being said, I do think that universities should fulfil their role of a creator of public good: by generating and disseminating knowledge, increasing employment, promoting social, economic or technical change through research and development and by cultivating social cohesion, community values and stability (Marginson 2007). But instead of doing so selflessly, my project proposes that by highlighting their mission and role (or positioning) by way of their marketing and brand building activities, they serve to strengthen their position on the market. That is also the reason my thesis lacks a theoretical or practical comparison with marketing activities of non-profit organizations. Similarly to this chapter, the following chapters will also discuss potential specifics and characteristics of a university that can eventually contribute to its economic power and success.

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter has focused on the university's identity in its philosophical complexity. I have specifically argued that in order to produce successful marketing campaigns and strategies, we must first fully understand what a university is about, what its role is in society and what it does (should or can do) for the students. To be more concrete, I have proposed that a university's identity is created by those who study, live or work there. It is a place for being; here, the experience should be focused on the present moment, on discovering our talent and potential rather than on the future. I hold the position that this future focus does not provide

adequate space and time for placing ourselves, our needs and dreams at the centre of attention. However, that does not mean this makes it less real than other periods or places of our life. On the contrary – by actually studying the reality, by looking at it from so many different angles, a university provides reality with other layers of the "real".

I have also concluded that a university might do well to advocate not knowing (foolishness) rather than knowing (or knowing it all) by asking the right questions. Thinking about things from other perspectives or constantly questioning the status quo should be inherent to the university's curriculum. I believe that university marketing could creatively benefit from such unique positioning of a university. Its foolishness also supports other elements this chapter has discussed. Accepting that university identity is about being courageous enough to question the status-quo, to never stop learning, to admit that knowledge is not a result of education but rather a process and a journey effectively emphasises the importance of what matters "now" and what is "real". Moreover, the element of "being" could not be stressed more effectively – a university's foolishness shows that a university is a place for fools and rebels who dare to ask the unasked, who do not pretend anything, who might aim to be different – who strive to be, above all, themselves.

The strength of these authentic qualities of a university (the importance of now, real, being and not knowing) has also been summarised by Steve Jobs. His words show us that university marketing is not about following those who succeed, but that there is nothing more successful than to be truly and entirely authentic:

> Here's to the crazy ones, the misfits, the rebels, the troublemakers, the round pegs in the square holes... the ones who see things differently – they're not fond of rules... You can quote them, disagree with them, glorify or vilify them, but the only thing you can't do is ignore them because they change things... they push the human race forward, and while some may see them as the crazy ones, we see genius, because the ones who are crazy enough to think that they can change the world, are the ones who do (Gallo 2010, p. 108).

4 Demystification of international students – international students as brand ambassadors in the university sector

4.1 Introduction

As the previous chapters established, a university's identity is created by those who study, work and live there. Because the main focus of my thesis is given to international marketing communication that occurs in the Australian higher education, it will now be valuable to concentrate on those to whom this communication is devoted: the international students. Addressing especially the first and second aims of my research, I will focus on international students as those who create a key component of what constitutes an Australian university and what represents the essential specifics and characteristics of a university. Additionally, by learning about their role and nature, I will also explore the creative potential international students have to actively contribute to the development of university marketing.

As we discovered in chapter 2, more than 25% (DET 2013b) of all higher education students studying in Australia come from overseas. Together with current trends of increasing globalization and internationalization of higher education, this particular group of students represents one of the crucial and powerful elements that form a university identity. International markets constitute one of the main priorities of Australian higher education as they carry a great potential of significant income. However, this chapter will try to show that even if international students bring a great economic benefit to universities, they also have the power to provide a wealth of cultural capital, rich diversity and potential international connections both for the institutions and the students. The question is: are they empowered to do so? This chapter aims to show that universities can more effectively develop the international student market if they integrate the often overlooked components of "international" into the development of their marketing strategies. Also, as one of the often cited strategic aims of many universities is to "*empower* a diverse community of students" (VU 2012b) and to develop global citizenship across students (VU 2012b), such integration could benefit not only the communication activities addressing overseas students but it could create a significant element of communication strategies for the local markets as well.

To support this theory, this chapter draws on various surveys and reports that have investigated who international students are and what they really want. The second section will focus on how a student becomes an international student and what challenges and difficulties he or she faces both before and after arrival to the new country. The third section will describe the process of "enculturation" of international students into the local environment while

focusing on the limitations of this transition. The fourth section will try to explain why international students are often perceived as "students with special needs". Finally, the last section will argue that it is important to empower students' capabilities rather than their disabilities.

4.2 Turning into an international student

Turning into an international student is a transformative experience which, for many, is much more difficult than it may seem. Being an international student myself, the most difficult thing I faced during the transition process was not being able to deal with challenges as I would have normally in my home country.

The level of my English speaking skills was already very good at that time, but it still posed a frustrating limitation which ultimately overshadowed my other skills and qualities. For example, I consider myself an optimistic person with a good sense of humour. I believe that having fun is always the best way to meet new people and make new friends. However, for me, to tell jokes in a foreign language is nearly impossible. Humour, sarcasm, metaphors or funny analogies are so culturally bound that after two years of living in Australia, I still find it very difficult to have a good laugh with locals. Since a humorous attitude has always been the most important component of my coping strategy, this was something that was taken away from me the moment I had to stop speaking Czech.

Another problem I struggled with was my high expectations. Coming from the Czech Republic, an inland country with severe weather, I was looking forward to spending my days in Australia on the beach enjoying the hot temperatures. Unfortunately, after arriving to Melbourne in late March I realised how much my dreams were far from the reality. It was raining and cold, the beaches were empty, the ocean freezing. Eager to discover the country, I wanted to travel but had no money. I could not afford to buy a car and there was no point in travelling anyway since the weather was not very pleasant. My depression grew stronger.

The more time I spent in the land down under, the more I felt like an international student. I believe this is a very important note to make in that it was not my home country that made me international, it was the country I moved into. At the beginning, there were many things that were very similar to those I was used to. The process of finding new accommodation, arranging a bank account, insurance, internet connection or a phone line seemed to be almost the same as the process back in Europe. As I soon found out, it *is* the

same, but only for Australians. There were special policies that applied to overseas residents, for instance, it was impossible to arrange the internet with Telstra as plans were not offered to those staying here on visa. Also, even if I paid thousands of dollars for health insurance, I could only make appointments with doctors that could assist "international patients" and were assigned to me by the insurance company.

Even if I wanted to "fit in" and become Australian to some extent, I was gradually realising that I was different. Therefore, the overall process of my "enculturation" felt more like "isolation" and soon it was not only due to English that it was difficult to understand or be understood. If someone had asked me what it was like to be an international student in Australia, I would have said that I had never thought of myself as an international student until I came here. Receiving excellent marks at my home university, I was confident my performance would be similar overseas, but I have never felt like a "top" student since my arrival. The perception I had about how we, international students, are perceived by others has not changed: we are the ones to be patient with, the ones who need help, the ones who are not very good at discussions, debates or communication overall. Such a revelation goes very much in hand with the constructivist theory of communication (Fiske 1989). Here, as my thesis has already discussed, meaning is not inherent to the content of communication (to the words), but to the people communicating. Reality is thus constructed through human interactions and relationships (Mohan et al. 2013). My reality of being a student changed with the meaning given by my new social surrounding as to who an *international* student is. My frames of reference shifted from being a successful PhD student to being an international student with special needs.

4.2.1 Culture shocks and other hardships experienced by international students

Despite the fact that my experience of becoming an international student is highly subjective, research shows that other international students face similar challenges and problems. For example, in a study on international student security consisting of 200 intensive interviews with resident onshore students in Australia, it was revealed that two thirds of them had experienced problems of loneliness and isolation especially shortly after their arrival (Sawir et al. 2007). In this study the authors specifically identified that the type of loneliness experienced by international students can be seen as "cultural loneliness" because "it is triggered by the absence of the preferred cultural or linguistic environment" (Sawir et al. 2007, p. 1). Newly arrived international students feel lost because they no longer know where they belong; they are not sure of how to identify themselves. As Grinberg and Grinberg put it (1989, p. 2): "One ceases to belong to the world one left behind, and does not yet belong to the world in which one has nearly arrived." The feeling of confusion, lost identity, isolation and loneliness are listed as often symptoms of "culture shock" (Zhou et al. 2008).

What I believe causes the shock is not the external as much as the internal factors. International students are exposed to a completely new environment and find themselves anywhere but in harmony with the outside world. That is the moment when they start learning things about their own personality which may have been previously unknown. Here, the shock does not come from how different everything is, but at how much they differ from everything else. According to some authors, the newcomers are often trapped by their accustomed interpretations of themselves and reality and they often end up "lost in translation" (Zhou et al. 2008).

For many international students studying in Australia, the adaptation to the culture shock can be weakened simply by the fact that it is a very distant country, they have not been here before and they have not experienced anything like it. As a 2012 report prepared by the Australian Education International concluded, for many international students, their time in Australia will be the first time that they have ever travelled alone; they have never been abroad before. Most of them are young travellers with minimum traveling experience, with limited knowledge of Australia (AEI 2012). Also, the study showed that these students often have no friends waiting for them in Australia and their moderate level of English does not really help them to make new ones.

Internationalization of higher education is no longer an emerging trend, but common practice. Therefore, the literature that focuses on the transitional journey of international students offers great evidence of what exactly the students struggle with upon their arrival and in later studies in a foreign country. In the context of the Australian university sector, the research looks at both the living and learning experiences of an international student. Among other things, it has been found that international students find local costs of living very high, especially in comparison to their home environments.

According to a recent report that provided perspectives on university experience in Australia given by international students from six different countries, the cost of living and tuition belonged to the three most important factors in deciding where to study (Lawson 2011). As this study showed, "Australia is perceived to be a provider of quality education, but the current high value of the Australian dollar impacts on both the cost of tuition and the cost of living in Australia relative to competitor countries" (p. 6). In this case, the expectation meets the reality: numerous studies have revealed that international students experience financial hardship (e.g. in Krause et al. 2005). Specifically, they feel more pressured by the financial commitment their parents made on their behalf than domestic students and they have more difficulties finding a job in comparison to local students (Krause et al. 2005).

Krause's report also revealed that there are many other signs of stress experienced by international students living in Australia. The previously mentioned study that focused on the first year experience in Australian universities brought findings from a decade of national studies (1994 to 2004). During this time, it became more and more apparent that international students have problems participating in class discussion, they receive lower grades than expected and they find the work load heavier than domestic students. As the conclusions of the study suggest, this may be caused by the low level of social integration of international students. Fewer international students report they feel part of a group committed to learning (46 per cent of international compared with 56 per cent of domestic students) and fewer experience a sense of belonging – 35 per cent international compared with 52 per cent of domestic students (Krause et al. 2005). Similar findings apply to the comparison of expectations held by international and domestic students, where more international students report that university has not lived up to their expectations.

Such findings, however, are not very surprising and other reports draw similar conclusions (James et al. 2010). The awareness of the problems that international students cope with, especially during the first year of studies, is relatively high. We can therefore find a decent number of projects addressing these issues or providing guidelines for what universities

can do to better help international students cope with academic stress or unmet expectations. A majority of such initiatives focuses on social integration, enculturation or adaptation of international students to the local environment.

4.3 Enculturation, adaptation, integration: the process international students should avoid

In September 2009, The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations published a brochure that sought to promote good practices in assisting international students' integration with Australian students and the wider community (DEEWR 2009). The document includes a series of interesting case studies offering various perspectives on how to help international students with their transition to the local environment. Among other things, the case studies show examples of how to run orientation weeks and supportive services for international students, how to encourage collaborative learning between international and domestic students and they also promote engagement of international students with the wider community. Several Australian universities from nearly all states contributed to this material and provided information about their programs and activities they put in place in order to assist international students with their social integration. One of them is, for example, the Barrier Reef Institute (BRIT):

> In 2009, there were 225 international students enrolled at BRIT, with further increases expected in 2010. To support continued international enrolments, BRIT has implemented some key programs including a 4-day 'International Induction Program' to introduce international students to Australia, Queensland, and Townsville. One result has been a number of international students joining local sporting clubs (DEEWR 2009).

Also, bigger institutions such as the University of Western Australia (UWA) introduced programs to develop intercultural friendship. In 2005, UWA started the Language and Cultural Exchange initiative and within its framework of "coursework and research, students are able to practise their English and make social and academic connections beyond their field of study" (DEEWR 2009). Inspired by similar concepts, more and more universities are now organising programs that aim to expose international students to Australian culture and lifestyle. Probably the most complex example of such an effort is given by the GLoBALL Program which is a

joint initiative of the Essendon Football Club, Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT), the City of Melbourne and the Australian Federation of International Students (AFIS). It is designed to help international students learn about Australian culture and connect with the local community. Mentors from the University and the Australian Football League (AFL) host international students for free games with players and community events are also held at the football grounds to highlight social aspects of Australian culture and expose international students to some of Australia's history and traditions" (DEEWR 2009) .

Probably the most popular approach among Australian universities in supporting international students with their enculturation is represented by a variety of orientation and induction programs whose purpose is to show students "how it really works here" and "what they are expected to do". Universities publish brochures full of essential information on how to navigate the new environment, how to enrol in courses, where to find accommodation and so on. Many Australian universities then run orientation weeks with daily programs full of activities such as borrowing books from the library, having lunch in the university canteen, visiting the student support centres and so on. Some universities are implementing creative solutions for such programs. For example, the University of Adelaide organises "peer mentor programs" which recruit current students who then help new international students familiarise themselves with the University and academic expectations and to develop connections within and outside the institution (DEEWR 2009).

The logic behind these enculturation programs makes sense. According to the Australia Education International's 2012 report *Student Voices: Enhancing the experience of international students in Australia,* international students, despite their heterogeneous demographics, have similar expectations in regards to their studies in Australia (Lawson 2012). What most of them have in common is that they want to improve their English, improve overall studies and gain experience by studying in another country and culture (Lawson 2012). Activities and programs that are currently run by Australian universities (such as those described above) are certainly aimed at helping the students achieve such objectives and they strongly encourage students to *adapt, integrate and enculturate*.

So why is it that both domestic and international students often report that orientation programs did not play a role in helping them to feel that they are part of the university (Krause et al. 2005, p. 35)? Why, when compared to domestic students, do fewer international students experience an overall sense of belonging to the community of students (Krause et al. 2005; James et al. 2010)? Why is it that studies report that international students are significantly less

likely to indicate that orientation programs helped them make a good start to university (Krause et al. 2005)? The following section will try to provide answers to these questions.

4.3.1 Cultural adaptation versus cultural engagement

International students are essential to Australian university survival, both from a financial and a relevance point of view (Dalglish 2005, p. 1). The revenue generated by international students studying in Australia is more than significant; "the market" of higher education is aware of its dependence on enrolments that come from overseas. But this paper wants to propose that international students not only provide universities with an economic benefit, they also bring a wealth of cultural capital, rich diversity and potential international connections both for the institutions and the students. "They provide an opportunity for intercultural learning, for a sharing of knowledge and perspectives that could be so important for success in today's global business environment" (Dalglish 2005, p. 2). Yet research suggests that cultural engagement is largely unidirectional – Australian students expect international students to adjust to them, not vice versa (Marginson 2002b cited in Dalglish 2005, p. 2).

Current research and literature concentrates mainly on how to help international students *adjust* to the local environment, how to assist them with their enculturation (Hellstén 2002), acculturation (Bishop & Yeadon-Lee 2011), transition (Sidoryn & Slade 2008) or social integration (Rienties et al. 2012). Often emphasised are approaches and strategies that could serve universities in assisting international students with their acclimatization to the local environment, with their assimilation to local culture. For example, in her conference paper that focuses on international students in transition studying in Australian universities, Meeri Hellstén presents a series of case studies that provide insights into "aspects of enculturation, socio cultural adaptation, adjustment and learning difficulties" (Hellstén 2002, p. 2) and into "ways of understanding various implications of international students' transition into their new Australian study environment" (Hellstén 2002, p. 2). In this study, the findings show that international students know what the cultural norms and conventions are, they are aware of the standards of the Australian learning discourse, they know what is generally expected from them and what differs from their own culture. However, the author of the study is concerned with the fact that the overall process of integration is not happening very fast. "Enculturation into the accepted ways and practices seems however, to be slow, if not characterized by a sense of resistance. The sense of difference is ever present among students" (Hellstén 2002, p. 11).

Being an international student myself, a similar *concern* is one of the main reasons I personally oppose enculturation as a means of diminishing the differences amongst individual students no matter if they are international or domestic. People *are* different, but I do not believe that is why we should be worried – on the contrary, that is something we should celebrate! However, some universities still believe that international students, despite their exciting diversity and inspiring uniqueness, should become as similar to the local students as possible: as we could see in the brochure that listed "good examples" of current practices of how to work with international students, most of the activities at these universities are focused on helping international students learn English, navigate in the local environment and blend in with the local lifestyle and culture (DEEWR 2009). What is stressed here is that international students are foreigners coming from abroad and should therefore try to embrace local customs.

The overall attitude of Australian universities to encourage international students to integrate to what is *here* can be illustrated by a video spot that introduces "Life at Victoria University in Melbourne" (VU). The spot was uploaded onto VU's Youtube channel by Victoria University International and gives advice to international students on how to "fit in" and make new friends (vuicommunication 2011a). In the short spot, an apparently local student encourages overseas students not to be shy: "Us Aussies, we enjoy meeting international students. However, we expect them to make the first move. Once they have made the first move, we can become best of friends" (vuicommunication 2011a, see Video 2.1 in the Appendices).

Such rhetoric still dominates the overall approach to international students. Instead of using the opportunity to learn about different cultures, different perspectives on life, different attitudes to work and study, different mind-sets and so on, the marketing activities of universities (such as the VU video) encourage local students to wait for the international students to make the first move – as if they were the ones to learn, not the domestic students.

4.3.2 Empowering a diverse community of students and their global competence

Australian universities are generally aware of how it is important to be in touch with the outside world, to work on the international level, to think globally. According to Victoria University's strategic plan for 2012–2016, the vision of the university is "to empower a diverse community of students to grow their capabilities and transform their lives" (VU 2012b). Universities in general are committed to encouraging intercultural relationships, supporting diversity of students and, I dare say, above all they want to develop global citizenship among their students (UNSW 2014; UniMelb 2014). The concept of global citizenship and competence then constitutes an important objective which is often cited in many strategic documents that govern Australian universities (UNSW 2014, UniMelb 2014).

However, it is impossible to be a global citizen without exposing oneself to everything that is different, without learning from other people no matter how strange and alien their opinions appear to be. In their scholarly paper, Russo and Osborne listed five essential characteristics of a globally competent student. According to their research and theory, a student who is a globally competent citizen is someone who 1) has a diverse and knowledgeable worldview, 2) comprehends the international dimensions of his/her major field of study, 3) communicates effectively in another language and/or cross-culturally, 4) exhibits cross-cultural sensitivity and adaptability and 5) carries global competencies throughout life (Russo & Osborne 2004). The underlying argument in this approach is that the globally competent student "no longer views the world through a single cultural lens and is able to identify and appreciate various viewpoints" (Russo & Osborne 2004, p. 1).

The concept of global citizenship, which is supported and emphasised by universities, thus lies in increasing diversity among students, in highlighting their different individualities and perspectives. However, there is not much research which would support this viewpoint. Both the literature and the "practical" policies and guidelines focus on how to help international students adopt local cultural values and beliefs – how to acclimatise, enculturate and integrate into the local context. Having said that, it is not my argument that only domestic students should develop their global competence but in essence the overseas students did make the first move, having first made that journey over the sea. This so-called global competence could thus be something both domestic and international students can work on and develop – and this could be achieved by mutual cooperation, by learning from each other.

4.4 *Us* versus *Them*: labelling international students

Unfortunately, it often happens that domestic students are not so eager to "play". This might be caused by various factors. First, I believe that a strong emphasis put on who *they* are and who *we* are. For example in 2011, Australian Education International conducted 41 focus groups across Australia. One of the aims was to develop a greater understanding of and ideas for improving the interaction between domestic and international students. Among other things, the study found that when there is an event that targets international students, domestic students do not feel that they are invited (Lawson 2012, p. 20):

> Domestic higher education student (participant in the focus group conducted by AEI in 2010): "For me, when I see an international students' event, I think "Well, that's for international students". Like, you know, it wouldn't really occur to me to go to something that's sort of marketed to international students, I feel. So, maybe if it was more like, "Hey guys, why don't you come along and you know, make some connections around the world and why don't you show people what your life is like here", and let them into – like, really inviting domestic students to come and be part of the experience. For me personally, like, I see international students there, it's kind of like, well, that's not for me, because I live here, so why would I go?

As the research shows, the interaction between domestic and international students is often made more difficult simply by the fact that domestic students do come from *here* and the international from *somewhere else*. That means that domestic students already have existing networks of friends they want to spend time with (Lawson 2012) and they might not feel the need to make friends for life with those who may eventually leave them. They also have their routine, part-time jobs and their life outside school which had been created long before they entered the university (Lawson 2012). International students, on the other hand, have to start from scratch – most often with no history, no friends, and no place to retreat when something goes wrong. In my perspective, no matter how adventurous this situation may seem, it also puts a certain frame onto who an international student is and how he or she is perceived by the local students.

4.4.1 International students as students with special needs

Building on the previous discussion, this chapter proposes that international students are often labelled as students with special needs, as students with physical or mental disabilities. As an

international student myself, I have witnessed that international students are often perceived as those who cannot speak the language, cannot write, have problems with learning, working in teams, they do not understand the course requirements and they need the teachers to parent them. Even recent literature talks about the themes of parenting as if it was something the students not only need, but should always be provided with. The study conducted by Meeri Hellstén suggests that a host institution should provide international students with authoritative support; it should take care of them as their parents would, look after the students in terms of making them comfortable (Hellstén 2002). Even if this particular study was based on the series of focus groups and it reflected students' perspectives, the question remains whether it is the international students who feel they need help or whether it is the institution that makes them feel so – whether it makes them feel helpless.

Many universities, for example, are building their communication with international students around the assumption that the more help the institution shows it can give, the more likely the student will choose to study there. To illustrate this, let me point to the series of promotional videos that were created by Victoria University International (VUI) for international students who are studying or intending to study at VU. The project called *Life at VU* shows a wide variety of spots that give students instructions on how to open a bank account in Melbourne, how to find accommodation, how to stay safe and how to fit in and make new friends (vuicommunication 2011a). Even if I completely understand why such videos are needed – I (as an international student) do not think this is the most relevant and appropriate way to attract prospective international students to apply for studies at VU.[11] More specifically, my study suggests that it would be more effective to show what VU's international students succeed in, what they excel at, what their student projects and presentations are about, what they bring to the university and how the university is proud of having them on board. A more detailed proposal of how and what VU can do exactly will be introduced in the final chapter.

There is another video created by VUI whose promising title "Our Stories" suggests this would be the case. However, this spot shows confessions given by several international students who talk about how "they felt insecure", "were worried" and "missed their family" when arriving and later studying at VU (vuicommunication 2011b). Since all of these students were those who had been studying at VU for some time, it would be good to know what they

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[11] It might be argued that these videos are aimed at different stages of the student lifecycle (other than recruitment). However, as I will later describe in chapter 6 – these were the main projects I (as a *prospective* student at that time) encountered with when searching for videos about VU.

have achieved in terms of their professional or educational development. Instead, we hear them talking about "English improving programs", "international support services" about how they arranged accommodation and how they used local transportation (vuicommunication 2011b).

Yes, VU was not talking on behalf of the international students, the students did all the talking by themselves – but would the international students not speak, answer or even think differently if they were asked different questions? Questions such as: "which courses are you taking and why?" "Can you tell us about your essay you have recently written?" "Where do you see yourself after you graduate?" "What are the projects you are currently working on?" Such questions could potentially generate different answers, answers that empower the students and do not make them look vulnerable, worried, insecure and weak.

The latter qualities are still part of the label being given to international students by their host institutions. The fact that they are often seen as those with special needs can be illustrated by various brochures and other communication tools that universities publish every year. For example, in the electronic International Course Brochure that can be obtained online from Victoria University's website (VU 2014c), the university promotes support services that help students feel safe and "gain confidence" (VU 2014c, p. 19). One section in the brochure is titled "Student support and safety" and it lists three areas in which VU supports its students. These areas are "international student support", "student safety" and "disability support". All of these categories are listed on one page as if they belonged to the same category of problematics. But do they? Do international students require similar support to the students with disabilities and medical conditions? Is student safety comparable to the needs of international students? Yes, international students do need support in terms of their professional development, academic writing, presentation skills and so on – so it is surprising that domestic students are not listed on this page at all.

A similar example can be illustrated by University of Technology in Sydney. On their website, in the section that is devoted to future students, specifically in the category "health", the university presents its "clinical facilitators", "special needs service", "special consideration" procedures and for some reason, one paragraph is titled "Director of International Activities" (UTS 2014). According to this webpage, the Director of International Activities assists international students with academic, personal and study issues (UTS 2014). Again, I do not want to argue that international students do not need any kind of support, but having said that, I am not sure whether this type of support should be categorised as "clinical".

The mentioned examples show us that it might be a problem to indicate whether it is the international students who need "special consideration" and similar services that are provided

to students with special needs or whether is the host institution that tells the students "this is the help you need". Instead of empowering the students and showing what they can do, the support services (which are usually promoted as the reason why overseas students should choose the particular institution) are, to some extent, disempowering the students while listing the areas in which the students do not stand out, in which they need help and support.

4.5 Supporting capabilities of international students

This leads us back to the question of why domestic students are not so keen to interact with international students. Their universities are constantly presenting "weaknesses" of international students, not their talents and strengths – not their power. Instead of encouraging domestic students to engage with international students, it may be more effective to communicate what benefits such cooperation and the overall relationship can bring – both to the overseas and the local students. It might also be more supportive if the centres for "international student support" focused on empowering capabilities instead of overcoming disabilities. The following section will try to provide some inspiration and show what exactly international students do to deserve that support services support their talents, not their "academic and personal issues".

4.5.1 International students as our inspiration

The Centre for the Study of Higher Education at the University of Melbourne released a study that monitored the first year experience in Australian universities and was based on findings from 1994 to 2009 (James et al. 2010). The study extended already existing research which focused on the same area and brought findings from a decade of national studies (1994 to 2004, Krause et al. 2005). Some of its outcomes have been cited earlier, in the section that focused on hardships experienced by international students. However, both studies showed that even if overseas students often face many challenges and difficulties, there are many areas in which international students could help their domestic colleagues (not the other way around, as it is commonly encouraged).

For example, Krause's study revealed that international students are more motivated than domestic students in their studies. They spend more time studying, they borrow books from the library more often, they talk to their teachers more often, and they study the lectures

online more often than do local students. According to a more recent report, "international students express high levels of satisfaction with the teaching they experience. They are more engaged in their studies than domestic students and their responses show they are prepared to seize the opportunities available to them" (James et al. 2010, p. 4).

James's report also shows that international students spend more time on campus, they study more and they participate in online discussions with other students much more often than domestic students. Surprisingly enough, despite the difficulties they face during the transition process, the international students "are also less likely to experience stress managing their study and other commitments (45 per cent [of international students] reported stress compared with 59 per cent [of domestic students])" (James et al. 2010, p. 69). This particular finding is very important to mention as it somewhat questions the usual role of international support services and their dominant focus on helping the *stressed* international students coping with their studies.

Another significant finding that was brought to attention, both in the study from 2005 and in the report from 2010, is related to what it is exactly that international students would like their universities to help them with. Here, the studies showed that international students are highly focused and goal oriented (Krause et al. 2005). Overseas students want to work with their skills and they are overall "significantly more likely to say that developing their talents and creativity is an important part of their university studies" (James et al. 2010, p. 18) especially when compared to domestic student groups.

4.5.2 Diversity of students as a resource of learning and teaching

What could universities possibly do better to help international students make the best of their studies at host institution? First of all, universities can make sure that international students feel that they do not need to change in order to be accepted. Being different is not something we should fight against, it should be something we should encourage, promote and appreciate. The diversity among students with different backgrounds should therefore be cultivated, not suppressed and limited. Diversity among students can provide not only students, but also teachers and other academics, with different perspectives on life and work, it can bring new solutions to problems, it can encourage students be open minded and develop their intercultural communication skills and global competence.

> Research indicates that increasing interaction between international and domestic students in teaching and learning contexts has a number of benefits. For students these include developing

cognitive skills, effective communication skills and cultural awareness. In addition, increased interaction can assist in developing greater independence for students as they are not as reliant on academics if they have the opportunities to learn from their fellow students (Arkoudis et al. 2010, p. 28).

Some universities have managed to recognize this potential and there are now many interesting examples that demonstrate the importance and creative potential of student diversity. For example, the Faculty of Design, Architecture and Building at the University of Technology in Sydney developed a course titled "Typography, Text and Form". The coordinators of this subject, which was offered to first year visual communication students, later initiated a font design project in which students were to design fonts while drawing upon their cultural origins and reflecting the multicultural nature of Australia. The lecturers prompted their students "to explore their own cultural heritage and seek out influences from the world around them" (Brown 2011).

The students were therefore designing a large variety of fonts and typeface while looking for inspiration everywhere. They were studying ancient typefaces and were also looking at different fonts used in different cultures. For example, one student named Hsu developed a font inspired by Chinese art and he believed that his work "was representative of his own personal Chinese perspective". Another student, Jane, developed a font that was influenced by Egyptian culture, because her father was born in Egypt and even though she had not been there, she wanted to immerse herself in the culture and history of this country. The students of this subject were encouraged not to operate in vacuum, but to talk to each other, draw on their own experience and explore the world around them. The whole project was very successful as some students' works are being commercially produced (Brown 2011).

In terms of supporting multicultural dimension of students' life, Victoria University in Melbourne developed a similar project to harness diversity across their student body. Every year, the university organises Multicultural Week at its main campuses. During this event, students and staff promote their countries and cultural backgrounds through food, music, traditional dress and so on. Both domestic and international students can learn interesting things about other cultures and the university believes that this event creates greater awareness of the variety of cultures at Victoria University and it supports students and staff to promote where they are from and be proud of it (VU 2013b).

The University of Notre Dame Australia can also serve as a good example in terms of how to communicate the international focus of a university. In 2013, it organised a unique

conference that hosted both international and Australian speakers. The Tradition Conference, as it was named, posed an important question: "does tradition unite or divide us"? (UNDA 2013). The renowned speakers of the conference later spoke about "how religious and cultural customs shape our understanding of ourselves and the world we inhabit" (UNDA 2013).

4.5.3 Diversity of students as a marketing tool

The fact that we can find similar examples at other institutions is a good sign. Universities are gradually realising that international students and staff can positively contribute to learning and teaching and that they can offer many things that would not be offered otherwise. In terms of marketing communication, the presence of international students has a great potential for many creative communication activities. Drawing on the already mentioned research, we can argue that international students know their university better than domestic students do. They spend more time on campus, with their teachers and also with other students (James et al. 2010). In general, international students seem to be enjoying their studies and they like living in Australia. In 2012, Australian Education International (AEI) commissioned a study into the overall satisfaction of international students studying in Australia. The research used the International Student Barometer (ISB) survey as the main methodological instrument and was conducted in collaboration with many Australian universities (AEI 2013). Among other findings, the survey showed that the majority of international students in Australia are satisfied both with their learning and living experience (AEI 2013). This applies across various educational sectors including higher education, vocational education and training and the English language intensive courses for overseas students (AEI 2013).

What every organization needs are good brand ambassadors. These "champions of the brand" (Thomson & Lorrie 2000) can help the institution to be perceived well among its stakeholders, both externally and internally (Thomson & Lorrie 2000). International students are motivated members of their school and they seem to enjoy opportunities which are offered them. Many universities are now trying to promote their brands by highlighting their international qualities and cross-cultural values. However, not so many of them are doing this by cooperating with those who can really contribute to such a promotion. I believe that current marketing practices in higher education should not only focus on attracting international students by showing what the institution can do for them, but what the students can do for the university and why it is important for the university to have international students on board.

Because international students contribute to the diversity of the student body and, as research has shown (James et al. 2010), they represent a great source of inspiration and motivation, universities could potentially benefit from their presence when developing marketing activities that target domestic students as well. Such activities could tell real stories of international students, talk about what they have managed to achieve, how many languages they can speak, what their culture has taught them and what they have learnt while living abroad. These real, inspiring stories (in contrast to those that highlight what international students cannot do) could serve as great marketing material and a foundation for many interesting campaigns and projects. In such a scenario, not only would the universities be able to "sell" their programs to international students while highlighting their English language courses, but they would be also able to promote activities that focus on linguistic interaction between international and domestic students.

There could be courses of Vietnamese language taught by Vietnamese students, one to one conversations in Italian led by Italian students, students from all across the university would be able to learn how to write in Chinese while having Chinese students as their teachers. Multicultural weeks and similar events could be extended beyond their short-term programs and could become a stable part of the university curriculum. International trade, cross-cultural marketing or intercultural communication could become subjects that would not only cover theory, but would be based on real case studies and examples potentially given by international students present in the class. The universities would not have to present themselves as international institutions. It would be their international students representing them. More examples of what exactly international students can bring to their institution are included in the following chapters.

4.6 Limitations and discussion

Diversity, as we have established, as well as the number of overseas students studying in Australia influence local culture and society. Unlike in other countries where the proportion of international students in higher education is significantly lower than in Australia (see OECD comparative report from 2014), the identity of an Australian university is shaped and created by different cultural values, specifics and characteristics. This chapter specifically proposes that the voice of international students should not be integrated or enculturated within the university identity that had existed before the internationalization of higher education. Instead, it is my claim that the voice of international students is what enriches and empowers a university identity; it is what makes an Australian university special. Unfortunately, even if there are initiatives that might be aware of this (e.g. GloBALL Program as cited in DEEWR 2009), by trying to *help* international students adjust to the local culture they are unintentionally silencing the voices that are different – the voices that have the power to make the identity of an Australian university distinctive and authentic.

It is worth noting it can be difficult to define who international students are and who they are not. This chapter has worked with a definition of overseas students as those who need a visa for studying at a university. But there are many other students who can be "labelled" as international. For example, there are many students coming from migrant and refugee communities living in Australia. Australia's migrant population is one of the largest among Western nations – there are especially large migrant Chinese, Indian, Italian and Vietnamese communities (ABS 2014). Students from these communities may already have the status of an Australian resident, but their characteristics might be similar to other international students who are visa holders (they might also have a language barrier, different values, tradition or learning approach).

Another limitation of this study lies in focusing solely on the international students. It is essential to note that it is not only overseas students who experience struggles and hardships while studying at a university. It is not only overseas students whose potential is overlooked or not used to its maximum; it is not only international students whose voice is not heard (Cook-Sather 2006). As the following chapters will show, both international and domestic students are what make a university a university. The aim of this chapter was only to point out another authentic quality of a university's identity which can be characterised by the word *international*.

4.7 Conclusion

The field of higher education can be characterised by one word: international. This expression automatically provokes connotations such as *different, heterogeneous, multicultural* or *distinctive.* For a university to be really international, it needs to encourage similar qualities and empower the diversity of its students. This, however, cannot be achieved by the process of enculturation or integration of international students into the local environment. Instead, international students might be encouraged to stay as different as they can possibly be. The initial struggles and hardships experienced upon their arrival in the new country create an essential part of their overall experience, which most of them see as valuable and the majority of overseas students living in Australia are satisfied both with their life and their studies (AEI 2013).

Even if international students may seem vulnerable and insecure at the beginning of their journey, they are focused and motivated, work harder and they are less stressed than domestic students (James et al. 2010). Because they represent a great resource of different perspectives, opinions and inspiration, they should be recognised as those who can positively contribute to the learning process and enhance the experience of all students regardless of their cultural background or origin (Arkoudis et al. 2010). Marketing activities could also benefit from the presence of overseas students and make the most of this opportunity not only in their international, but also in their domestic communication campaigns.

5 Empowering the student voice: a case study

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapters of my thesis focused on revealing authentic qualities of a university (of an Australian university, to be more specific). Even if they dealt with seemingly different problematics and themes, there was one unifying element that could be found and heard in every chapter: the student voice. The second chapter revealed the findings of surveys and reports which asked international students about their studying experience in Australia. The third chapter looked at the authentic qualities of a university – the importance of now, of being and of foolishness – all of which were analysed through a student experience. The fourth chapter dealt with the problematics of international students finding out that their voices are often silenced. While adding my personal experience, I have also used my own voice which I want to be heard not as the voice of a researcher – but of a student. All of these voices were those that did the talking. This chapter will try to reveal what happens if these voices are listened to – if these voices have a power to act. While the student voice might be seen as "synonymous with people simply expressing their point of view on a subject" (Hadfield & Haw 2001, p. 488), my thesis sees the student voice as a much more involved act of participation in which a student engages with the other communities of a university and creates their learning experience and the university as a whole.

To illustrate this with an example, this chapter will include a case study on a project that was conducted at Charles University in Prague. This project involved students and their task was to prepare a communication strategy for the university – as this chapter will show, they were not only expressing their opinion about the communication activities of their university, but they proposed what the university should expressly say and how.

In order to meet the needs and expectations of their main target audience, universities are trying to empower the voices of students, to emphasise their active role in the learning process as a positive contribution to their experience. The concepts of collaborative learning, student engagement and co-production of knowledge now represent the critical student experience themes universities adopt and work with (Kotzé & du Plessis 2003). However, available research and practice shows that these models of co-production are mostly limited to classroom exercises, leisure activities or work-related programs (Panitz 2000). Knowing that

university surveys, evaluation studies and rankings are currently highly concerned with the students' expectations and later experiences, universities are now trying to emphasise the active role of a student in the education process. In order to explain the importance of this trend, the second section of this chapter attempts to demonstrate how these concepts have been incorporated into the field of higher education and which topics universities usually emphasise. The third section of this chapter shows which areas of student engagement universities often overlook and how they could benefit from their experiential potential in a much greater manner than they do at this moment. As an example of such practice, the fourth section relates a case study of a creative student project conducted at Charles University in Prague. Finally, this chapter highlights the benefits that student engagement can bring – especially in cases when the students directly contribute to the decision-making processes of their university.

By exploring the concepts of co-production, student power and student voice, this chapter will thus directly address the second aim of my research which is to explore the creative potential for students to actively contribute to the development of university marketing. This is also something the following chapters will focus on. The case study "borrowed" from Charles University is to demonstrate an example of student co-production which prepares an empirical groundwork for the second part of my thesis, which will work with much bigger and richer case study – the one of Victoria University. This chapter thus constitutes a certain methodological turning point; building on the theoretical background the previous chapters have set, I will be gradually putting these theoretical concepts in practice.

5.2 Student engagement, co-production and collaborative learning: what universities already do

Even if some marketing practitioners and theorists still recognise students as customers (Banks & Smart 2006), other researchers prefer to see them as active co-producers of the university experience (Kotzé & du Plessis 2003). Acknowledging the fact that students are no longer passive recipients of education and knowledge, universities have started to understand that "active student participation is an essential ingredient in ensuring process, as well as outcome quality in higher education" (Kotzé & du Plessis 2003, p. 20). Lecturers and tutors are currently applying interactive teaching models that require students to be responsible for their learning process, to relate knowledge to their experience, to put theory into practice. Students are no longer spectators passively viewing their educational journey, instead they are now

encouraged to make what they learn part of themselves (Chickering & Ehrmann 1996). Discussions during lectures, students' presentations and creative student projects have become a standard part of teaching curricula; the role of a teacher is not to "preach", but mainly to facilitate.

5.2.1 Collaborative learning: classroom technique or personal philosophy?

The concept of collaborative learning now belongs among the key approaches for how to structure a course, design units or train academics. It is becoming recognised as not only a classroom technique, but as a personal philosophy (Panitz 2002).

> As pedagogy collaborative learning involves the entire spectrum of learning activities in which groups of students work together in or out of class. It can be as simple and informal as pairs working together in a Think-Pair-Share procedure, where students consider a question individually, discuss their ideas with another student to form a consensus answer, and then share their results with the entire class, to the more formally structured process known as cooperative learning which has been defined by Johnson and Johnson (as cited in Panitz 2000, pp. 7-8).

Similar activities, however, can be used in many extra-curricular university projects as well as incorporated within the standard curriculum – the case study included in the fourth section of this chapter is a particular example of such a situation.

As literature shows, the collaborative or cooperative model of learning can bring various benefits. Research has focused mainly on identifying benefits for students and teachers. As early research already showed, co-operative discussions and debates improve students' recall of text content (Dansereau 1985; Slavin & Tanner 1979). They can also stimulate critical thinking and help students clarify ideas (Johnson 1973). Collaborative learning also improves oral communication skills (Yager et al. 1985), as students are required to voice their opinions, share their ideas and contribute their individual perspectives. Also, when students are working together and actively participate in the learning process, such practises can develop their higher level thinking skills (Webb 1982).

From the perspective of a teacher, this type of active learning can positively contribute to a number of outcomes. First, teachers may be more satisfied with their teaching as students will attend classes more often (Hagman & Hayes 1986), students may participate more and perhaps like what they do – which is all positive feedback to a teacher and often effectively

reflects on the quality of the teacher's work. Since collaborative learning is now a well elaborated area, it also provides a great variety of strategies and techniques teachers can apply in their classes. From ice-breakers to group building exercises, teachers can draw from a long list of activities which will enable them to innovate in their teaching and classroom procedures (Slavin 1990).

Secondly, a teacher can take advantage of the fact that the underlying premise of collaborative learning is to engage students in all learning processes. Therefore, they can use student input to design courses, assignments and overall curriculum (Kort 1992). This leads to a greater buy-in from the students.

Thirdly, while focusing on active work of the students, this type of learning can help teachers to change their role as an authoritative teacher to a creative facilitator. This will advance the overall learning experience from teacher-centred to student-centred learning (Hertz-Lazarowitz 1992). Through the application of such approaches, both students and teachers will also benefit from another outcome of collaborative learning: their interpersonal relationships will be significantly improved (Johnson & Johnson 1987). Nevertheless, as the next section and especially the case study demonstrate, student co-production has the potential to strengthen interpersonal relationships at many more levels than just that of student-teacher.

5.2.2 Student co-production outside the classroom: current approaches and practices

Even if the majority of studies and analyses on student co-production focuses on student participation in classroom activities, it is necessary to note that many universities are aware of the benefits this creative approach to student engagement can bring and they are therefore trying to use these models in other teaching and learning. University students are encouraged to *co-produce* their academic experience outside lectures and tutorials. Usually, the students are provided with various options of how to actively contribute to their student life. They can become members of student associations and clubs (e.g. international student association, student union or parliament), they can take part in volunteering programs, play for university sports teams, or help organise university events such as *orientation day, open day and welcome day.*

Students' co-production outside their standard timetable is also often supported by university projects that are based on a form of work-related learning. Here, the concept of co-

production is greatly emphasised, as students are contributing with their ideas and are actively putting what they have learnt at school into practice.

> *Work* and *learning* are concepts which used to belong to different categories. Work was about producing or doing things to earn a living. Learning was about education, it occurred in life before work. (…) A gulf has existed between the two (Boud & Garrick 2012, pp. 1-2).

Within the framework of work-related learning, this gulf has been overcome. Here, the students see their education as both giving and receiving, as they are required to devise and propose novel ideas but they are also rewarded by valuable insights and experiences. The particular models of this type of co-production are usually organised through programs such as internships, enterprise education, workplace simulation, charity projects etc. However, the following section will reveal that neither universities nor students always benefit from these programs and that there are many more possibilities for getting the best out of projects which aim to harness students' working skills.

Because of the wide range of forms that can engage university students in the process of learning and life (both on and off campus), literature on higher education is constantly creating new metaphors which attempt to illustrate the current role of a student. Aside from already mentioned co-producers, some theorists recognise students as "partial employees" of tertiary institutions (Mills & Morris 1986; Hoffman & Kretovics 2004):

> Accepting students as partial employees or co-producers is consistent with today's call for experiential education as well as calls for instructors to desist in their roles as programmed knowledge dispensers (Measelle & Egol 1992). Increasingly, educators are being encouraged to create classes that are 'learner centered' and collaborative (Cunningham 1995; Koch 1997). This requires instructors to 'engage learners as full partners in the learning process, with learners assuming primary responsibility for their own choices' (O'Banion 1997, p. 49). Adopting the 'students as partial employees' or 'students as co-producers' perspective involves viewing the educational process as a collaborative environment in which educators are transformed from lecturers to managers and from bosses and dictators to coaches and facilitators (Kretovics 2010, p. 23).

Beyond seeing a student as a co-producer or a partial employee, some researchers argue that the analogy of students as co-creators is more appropriate. Here, the student is not only encouraged to actively participate in classroom activities, but he or she is also expected to

contribute to the development of the course itself. For example, at All Hallows College the students create their own plan for the degree program: they are engaged in the development of the learning process as they define the learning outcomes which should align with their life and work experience (Berry 2011). As the third section of this chapter will show, even if all of these imaginative metaphors creatively illustrate the role of a student as an interactive member of university environment, there is still a more suitable description which captures the collaborative character of student life even more fittingly – a description that does not need analogies.

Before I argue that these mentioned practices in the sphere of collaborative learning do not go beyond their (now rather traditional) application, a crucial component should be noted, without which co-productive learning might never occur: motivation. To be successfully involved in the co-production of his or her education, a student needs to want to participate in such a process. An unmotivated student is less likely to enjoy the exciting journey of learning, is less likely to contribute his or her ideas and opinions to the particular topic. Therefore, sustaining student motivations day in and day out is a central topic in the area of student engagement (Pestoff et al. 2013). Literature that focuses on this theme emphasises that students' participation in their education must be voluntary (Pestoff et al. 2013; Kotzé & du Plessis 2003). Students cannot be forced or commanded to be actively engaged in the process of learning. According to Alford (2002) material rewards and sanctions have proved to be ineffective in motivating participants to take part in co-production tasks. Alford believes that the motivators should be more complex, non-material incentives "that co-production scholars have identified as influencing other kinds of co-producers such as volunteers or citizens: intrinsic rewards, sociality, and expressive values" (Alford 2002, p. 51). In other words, to be willing to co-produce, people need to know what kind of benefits are in it for them. Regarding non-material incentives, student co-production can be motivated by emphasising values students can gain from this process. Drawing on Clark and Wilson (1961), these incentives or values are, for example, a sense of belonging, associating with others, membership in a certain group and the fact that co-production can be fun. Also, by engaging in collaboration with others, students can enhance their self-esteem.

Regardless of the types of motivators, teachers and academics should ensure that these and other potential benefits will be explicitly communicated to everyone who will be involved in the process of co-production. The following sections will show that this applies especially to the projects which are not directly included in a standard curriculum and which require further explanation. Additionally, aside from emphasising how the motivation could be developed, the

next part together with the case study will give examples of particular motivators which have a rather material form and can serve as useful criteria for students' assessments.

5.3 Student engagement, co-production and collaborative learning: what universities overlook

5.3.1 Exploring the potential of student co-production: a university is more than a classroom

First, while recognizing co-production as an underlying element in the concept of collaborative learning, I argue that the role of a student as a co-producer should not be limited to his or her participation in the class activities or assignments. Even if the majority of universities offer areas where students can creatively contribute their ideas and talents, university clubs and associations do not necessarily need to be the only tools to support student co-production. A university does not only consist of classrooms, libraries and student organizations. A university community is not only about teachers and students. Co-production should not occur only on the basis of student discussion, group activities and presentations. There are many other areas students can contribute to, learn from, be inspired by and many more university members with whom they can engage than just teachers. There are financial departments, marketing departments and international relations departments, most of which universities have, but they usually have little to do directly with students. They are separate units that university management has access to and student co-production rarely occurs on this level. My study proposes that if the students started to engage with university administrative staff and management, they would enhance their knowledge and experience gained in the classes. More specifically, I claim that university co-production is not only a specific way of learning, but it is a form of doing something together – not only with other students and teachers, but with everyone that belongs to the university.

5.3.2 Student co-production as a return on investment

If we start to recognise student co-production as a means of creating a university environment, identity and image, we will be able to see other benefits this process can bring. Because this concept emphasises the incorporation of students into various parts and projects of a university,

co-production can positively affect relationships not only between students and teachers, but also between students and the university. However, some would say that this is already the paradigm universities are applying when it comes to student co-production. The concept of "learning by doing things together" is usually grasped by work-related learning programs. Here, as I described earlier, students actively work on specific projects with concrete companies in the "real" environment. But in what way is a university less real than any other institution? If universities want their students to learn something through hands-on activities and projects, why would they only allow external organizations to use these creative hands?

These techniques of co-production can be compared to how bees teach their young to collect pollen. All bees fly together, they work together, they communicate together and one day the young bees can do this on their own while more experienced bees observe them. However, during this learning process, it would never happen for young bees to bring collected pollen into a different home so that different bees can enjoy it. The fruits of their labour, no matter how incomplete, are always enjoyed by those who provided them with knowledge, skills and resources. Student co-production can therefore also be seen as a certain process of return on investments. Students are equipped with knowledge, experience and skills they can later use for contributing to university development. By doing so, the university can benefit from this endless source of student ideas, proposals and suggestions, thereby strengthening its identity, image and overall existence. The following case study will try to show how exactly this can be achieved.

5.3.3 Understanding the role of students and their motivations

As the second section of this chapter illustrated, much has been said about the role of a student. Literature has compared students to co-producers (Kotzé & du Plessis 2003), co-creators (Berry 2011) or even to partial employees (Hoffman & Kretovics 2004). While acknowledging the creative character of all of these metaphors, I want to work with a not-so-imaginative description for a university student. As boring as it may sound, I propose viewing students as students. According to the Oxford Dictionary, a student is "a person who is studying at a university or other place of higher education" (OED 2013). The expression originates from Latin where the term *student* means *applying oneself to* (OED 2013). Drawing from the definition as well as the etymology of this word, I therefore argue that students might better be recognised as members of a university who are constantly involved in the process of the

application of their ideas, opinions and experience. Here, instead of looking for suitable analogies for what kind of position students should have in the university, I propose to see them as they are meant to be seen: as those who are not only receiving but who have a lot to give.

However, to be willing to give, share or contribute, a person needs to be motivated to do so. The previous section listed several motivators that can be used to encourage students to be actively engaged in their learning process. Outside emphasising non-material values which a student can gain from participating in, for example, an extracurricular activity, the following case study will try to demonstrate that co-production programs do not necessarily have to be built on a voluntary basis. I claim that a student should be rewarded by much more than just *a good feeling* from doing something for others. The following case study will show that student co-production does not only include active and voluntary participation in charity programs, university associations or classroom activities. If a university wants its students to contribute something, it first needs to give something to them. The next section will explore what can be achieved when this happens.

5.4 Beyond traditional student co-production – a case study

From 2010 to 2012, I worked as a Project Manager at the Rectorate's PR Department of Charles University in Prague. Here, our team developed a unique marketing project that actively involved students of the University. The following case study will try to show how exactly this project was structured, what caused its initiation and some of its achievements. The main objective of this section is to demonstrate how student co-production can be enhanced and that the role of a student is not only to study but also to actively participate in university development.

5.4.1 Charles University: history and current role

Charles University in Prague is the most renowned Czech university, and is also the best-rated Czech university according to international rankings (UK 2013b). There are currently seventeen faculties at the University, three institutes and six other centres of teaching, research, development and other creative activities, a centre providing information services, five

facilities serving the whole University, and the Rectorate – which is the executive management body for the whole University (UK 2013b). The university is also the biggest university in the Czech Republic. It has over 53,000 students – roughly a sixth of all students in the country – enrolled in more than 300 accredited degree programmes that offer over 642 different courses (UK 2013b).

Aside from being the largest and the best-rated, Charles University is also one of the oldest universities in the world. It was established in 1348 by Charles IV, King of Bohemia and King of the Romans, as the first *Studium generale* north of the Alps and east of Paris (UK 2013c). Charles University is thus the oldest university in central Europe and its tradition and historical values play a significant role even in its current existence.

5.4.2 Beginning of the projects: getting the most out of students' potential

Paradoxically, the well-established reputation and tradition of the University was something that our department (Department for Public Relations) identified as an obstacle in our work. I and my colleagues from this department recognised that the communication strategy of the University should be based on much more than historical values and artefacts. We felt that the University needed something new, modern, fresh and creative. It was at that time we realised that all of these qualities can be offered and met by those who are or should be creating the University image and identity: the university students. To get the most out of the students' potential we therefore decided to initiate a project which would directly involve them. The main aim of this project was to develop a new communication strategy for Charles University in the hope that it would provide new ideas on what to improve in terms of communicating both with external and internal audiences of the University.

Acknowledging the fact that development of such strategy takes time and should be built on vast research and analysis, the project was expected to run for approximately four months. We therefore decided to outline our concept on the basis of a unit of study which would run for one semester. In February 2011, we managed to start a new course which was called "Communication Strategy of Charles University", open to undergraduate students majoring in marketing communication in the Faculty of Social Sciences. There was only one assignment: participation in developing a new strategy for the University's communication.

The course was designed as an elective subject and its completion was worth three credits which represented a significant contribution to a student's overall assessment.[12]

The interest in enrolment in the course was outstanding. Over one hundred students wanted to be part of this project but, after interviewing them all, we selected only fourteen students who seemed to be highly motivated and also available, as they were told the project would be very time consuming. This number enabled us to build the unit on the basis of creative workshops that required student's active engagement. Each workshop was coordinated by the PR Department's representative (myself) and a senior lecturer specialising in public relations and marketing communication, Ladislav Kopecky, who is currently teaching at the Faculty of Social Sciences. Ladislav and I designed both the content and the schedule of the course, and we met with the students on weekly basis. Ladislav was the guarantor of the course and I was the leading lecturer.[13]

We met with the students each Thursday for nearly four hours during the entire semester. Our sessions generally consisted of two parts – theory and practice. In the theoretical section of each workshop, the students were introduced to some theoretical concepts related to the topic. For example, we helped them learn the essentials of marketing communication, university marketing and some sessions were also focused on communication research methods. In the practical part of the workshop (and also outside school), the students were constantly putting theory into practice as they were analysing, evaluating and preparing concepts relevant to the communication strategy of the University. When doing so, they were working in teams and each group was responsible for different research that was related to a particular area of the University's external or internal environment. Their findings and the overall process were being continuously discussed in every workshop to make sure that the students were "on the right track".

5.4.3 Research and analysis: what students discovered about their university

To be more specific, the students' analysis focused on four different areas. The first group of students looked at the communication activities of the five oldest universities – since the

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[12] The standard range of credits a student can obtain from one subject is 2 – 5 (applicable to students of Marketing Communication and PR at Faculty of Social Sciences in 2010/2011).

[13] It is important to note that since the course was not designed as a research tool, but as a course that was listed in the students' standard curriculum, there were no academic research procedures put in place (such as, for example Ethics Approval).

students recognised that the role of their traditions was equally significant, as in the case of Charles University.[14] The second team focused on analysing marketing projects of the five best-rated universities (top five universities in the Times Higher Education in 2010)[15] as their success was considered a certain indicator of what universities could or even should do in terms of their image management. The third group of students evaluated the activities of three Czech universities that were identified as the closest competitors for the University.[16] The fourth team was then working on the analysis of the particular communication activities of Charles University, focusing especially on online communication, the university magazine, university environment and university events.

The analysis of the internal and external communication environment was only a part of the students' evaluation. Aside from the desk research, the students went to the field as well. First, they asked nearly five hundred students from all seventeen faculties of the University about their knowledge, understanding and experience regarding the communication activities of their university. They collected these perceptions using online and paper-based questionnaires and some of their findings gave interesting input as to what should be improved or changed. Drawing on the University's vision which specifies that Charles University should "present itself as a self-confident and cohesive cultural community" (UK 2013d), our students asked their peers what they considered to be the *centre* of the University – a physical meeting point where all students from different disciplines could meet and be part of the wider community. As Graph 3.1.1 shows, 71% of respondents did not know of any place which would meet such description (see the Appendices). Additionally, only 15% of respondents reported that they felt a belonging to Charles University (see Graph 3.1.2) – the majority of them said they considered themselves to be members of a particular course, rather than of the University in general.

The survey conducted by students throughout the duration of the unit also revealed that even major communication tools used by the University needed a significant improvement. When asked about the University's leading magazine *Forum*, 85% of the respondents reported

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[14] These universities were: University of Oxford, University of Bologna, University of Cambridge, University of Salamanca and Paris Sorbonne University.

[15] These universities were: Harvard University, California Institute of Technology, Stanford University, Princeton University and Massachusetts Institute of Technology

[16] These universities were: České vysoké učení technické, Vysoká škola ekonomická and Masarykova Univerzita v Brně

that they were not using it or that they did not even know it existed (see Graph 3.1.3). Knowing that students are not the only target audience of the University, our students later left the University grounds and asked their families, friends and colleagues about their thoughts on Charles University. Their public survey showed, for example, that the respondents felt that the University should improve its facilities, web pages and that it should be more open and accessible towards the public.

5.4.4 Students' suggestions on how to improve university communication

In the last stage of the course, the students analysed all of their data collected during both desk and field research in order to prepare a plan on what should be changed or improved in terms of the University's communication. Their suggestions later created the most important part of the overall communication strategy. As mentioned earlier, their proposals were related to three main areas of the University's communication: online communication, university events and environment. In regard to the latter, the University's environment, the students suggested that the University should promote the university club *K4* which is situated just in the heart of Prague, in the building that is connected to the Rectorate. Here, as their strategy proposed, concerts, poetry readings and other events organised by students could occur which could attract students across all faculties and the wider community outside the University.

As for the online communication, the students placed great emphasis upon changing the main web page of the University. Here, they recommended that the University could incorporate its traditional colour *cardinal* and that it should be well interconnected with other online communication vehicles of the University, including social media and the university magazine. Acknowledging the fact that the majority of respondents did not read the University magazine, the students suggested that it should be based mainly on its electronic version, which should be interlinked with the University's website. As I will later explain, these recommendations were later implemented in practice and all of these suggested changes were taken into consideration by the University's management (see Section 3.3 in the Appendices).

The same applies to the University's presentation on social media. At the time of our project, Charles University did not have an official profile on Facebook. Thanks to the students, all existing profiles of the University were brought together creating an official profile which is now generating a large number of fans and their number is still increasing (see Images 3.3.4 and 3.3.4 in the Appendices). In regard to university events, students' suggestions primarily focused on the exhibition show Gaudeamus which is one of the biggest fairs of

higher education in central Europe (Gaudeamus 2013). Charles University has been participating in this major event for over fifteen years. Until the time of our project it had never been represented by all seventeen faculties. What the students recommended to change was not only the number of faculties being part of the University's exhibition, they also proposed to change the staff of the promotional stall. The students suggested that instead of academic or administrative representatives it should be university students who should promote their university. This significant change was finally implemented in 2011 when, for the very first time, the University employed its own students to promote faculties and courses at Gaudeamus.

5.4.5 Project outcomes and further development

At the end of the semester, the students put together a two-hour long presentation which included these recommendations and other suggestions for the University. The students invited selected representatives of the university management, staff and other students from different courses. The Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences was also present. Not long after this presentation, some suggested changes were put into practice, especially by the University's PR Department. The entire strategy continues to represent an underlying document that helps the University to navigate its communication activities. Additionally, aside from these productive changes, which are shown in more detail in section 3.3 of the Appendices, the project has had many other successful outcomes.

First of all, the University managed to establish a creative co-operation with its students which has been continuing ever since. Students are now contributing to University development and communication, for example by promoting their faculties at higher education fairs. Once the project was released, it immediately drew the attention of major Czech media and it also generated articles in the leading expert magazines focused on marketing or strategy planning.[17]Acknowledging the originality as well as the scope of the unit, the Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences awarded our project a special prize and even implemented some parts of the recommended strategy – especially the parts that were related to the communication activities of the faculties.

Also, the PR department gained valuable insight into how students work and think and our management and education staff began to understand what the students expect from their university experience. Not only did the project manage to improve relationships between the University and the students, but the connections on the management and academics level were

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[17] For example, see the online magazine *Strategie* (July 2011).

strengthened, too. While designing and coordinating the unit, our department was constantly developing its content together with other lecturers and faculty representatives who had to accredit the course long before it even started. The topics and themes discussed in the workshops were designed to meet academic requirements but they also reflected current trends and problems which the PR department considered important to address. Interestingly, the discussion between academic and management staff in the area of the University's communication is now ongoing and it continues to develop.

5.4.6 Project benefits, inspiration and reflection

This project has brought many benefits both to the University and the students. The student engagement on this level showed how productive it can be and how much it can contribute to university development. To see the perspective of the students firsthand, I include their own comments made just after the conclusion of the project (see Figure 3.4 in the Appendices). The following section will try to reflect their insights as well as the overall progress and outcomes of this project and will attempt to show exactly how a university can benefit from creating co-productive projects of this kind. It is worth noting that similar projects can also have certain limitations – I discuss them in more detail in section 5.6.

5.5 Benefits of creative student co-production

As the case study showed, student engagement can be enhanced at various levels and can be applied to various areas of student experience. The purpose of this chapter has been to demonstrate that student co-production can be understood as mutual co-operation between university management, students and academic staff.[18] Engaging students in the decision-making activities of a university can bring many benefits not only to the students, but to everyone who is involved in such a process. The following section will try to outline these benefits in more detail.

5.5.1 Creative co-production: benefits for university students

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[18] For example, the project conducted at Charles University engaged students, a lecturer (Mr. Ladislav Kopecky from Faculty of Social Sciences) and a university management representative (Ms. Zuzana Leskova from the PR Office).

As the second section of this chapter tried to explain, current literature predominantly focuses on emphasising benefits of student co-production that are related to learning experience. Engaging students in active collaboration during their studies can bring positive outcomes such as development of students' critical thinking, oral communication skills and creativity (Panitz 2002). Also, when students are not forced to participate, when the voluntary character of their work is emphasised, it can lead to better engagement and students can obtain non-material rewards, such as improvement of their social relationships, boosting of their self-confidence and better academic results (Panitz 2002).

Involving students in co-productive activities that are related to university development can generate all of these benefits – and many others. For example, in the case of the Communication Strategy of Charles University unit, the students were asked to contribute their ideas even if this project was not directly related to their curriculum. It was something students could do outside their compulsory classes and timetable. However, aside from motivating students through highlighting non-material values they could obtain from this experience, other motivators (and later rewards) were offered. Participation in this project was rewarded by three credits that were later included in the students' overall assessment. Also, since the whole unit was designed as a real project that led to specific changes and actions, the students could use their experience as a valuable reference for their resumes. During their later job interviews, they could benefit from participating in this unit as they had a clear idea of how non-academic projects work.[19] I consider this benefit of creative student co-production to be very important; various surveys that look at student experience and expectations reveal that students have "high expectations of the value of the academic programs for future employability" (Vargnese & Brett 2010, p. 1). In other words, through co-production in *various* areas of higher education (which are not necessarily limited to classroom activities), students can obtain valuable knowledge and experience, develop highly specific skills and directly contribute to the university's development as well as to its reputation, which will effectively strengthen the recognition of their own.

5.5.2 Creative co-production: benefits for university staff

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[19]The positive experience from job interviews was later mentioned by the students in follow-up correspondence and one-to-one evaluation that took place after the project finished.

Even if current research on collaborative learning focuses on emphasising benefits that this approach can generate for teachers, teachers are not the only staff of a university. There are managers, accountants, lawyers and various other administrative officers. I believe they should be equally encouraged to participate in activities that are to support university development. The Charles University project showed that this can be achieved. The entire program was coordinated by a lecturer from one of the faculties of the University and by a project manager from the PR Department which is part of the University's management. Their mutual co-operation was effective and not only did it lead to the development of a highly successful project, it also contributed to the establishment of a new relationship between management and academic staff of the University. Even now, the PR team is in touch with lecturers who specialise in marketing communication and their ideas and reflections serve as a great support for its work. From the perspective of the lecturers, this cooperation generates interesting and tangible themes they can use for their teaching or even research.

Aside from strengthening the relationships between management and academic staff, what co-production projects support the most is the relationship between students and the university. Through working with students, both university managers and academics can obtain valuable insight into what students enjoy and appreciate. They can also see what they do not like and would like to avoid. They can also start to understand what students expect from their learning experience including how exactly they would like this to be achieved. The projects of co-production that are related to university development can therefore be considered an evaluation processes. Here, not only does the university receive specific feedback from the students, but the students are encouraged to produce concrete ideas and suggestions on how to do things better or differently.

With all of the aforementioned benefits considered, the process of student co-production moves student feedback to a whole new level. The student are no longer passively talking about how they see certain situations, instead, they are actively contributing ideas on how these situation can change in the future. Within the framework of student co-production, student evaluation is no longer feedback, it is *feedforward*. Feedforward as a concept of evaluation was first introduced by Marshall Goldsmith (2012), who considered this approach much more effective than just feedback. He defined it as a process that focuses on future performance. Here, instead of looking back at what a particular organization could have done better or differently, the people involved in this process are trying to actively suggest what kind of steps should be taken to improve the situation. The participants are then actively engaged in

the evaluation process as they are giving specific recommendations for future activities. Evaluation is then no longer passive, but highly active, or an even interactive activity.

I believe that student co-production is or should be directly linked to student evaluation that adopts this creative approach. Through feeding-forward, both university managers and teachers can get a clear sense of what to focus on and what exactly to include in their work. They can directly generate unique ideas which would otherwise never be identified.

Here, it is important to note that the feed-forward approach is highly futuristic as it is focused on creating ideas which are to provoke change in the future. This goes against my previous suggestion (which I fully elaborated in Chapter 3) claiming that university marketing activities are so much future oriented that they could have a negative impact on what a university can offer to students while they are studying it. However, while feeding-forward is very much concerned with what happens next, I mainly see it as an activity that highlights what is possible for students to experience *while* at a university. Knowing that a university is not *about* students, but that a university *is* the students, student co-production (as interactive feedforward) can create a student-oriented institution which *is* creative, passionate and integrated – having its members belonging to the same community and making the most of the present moment.

5.5.3 Creative co-production: marketing benefits

Interestingly enough, there has not been much attention given to the area of marketing benefits that student co-production can generate. Yes, we can assume that all of the benefits mentioned earlier can contribute to building a positive image of a university. Through involving students in decision making processes that influence the university's development, relationships at various levels can be reinforced which can serve as a great platform for creating an integrated brand. The sense of togetherness or belonging can also greatly contribute to strengthening university identity, where good internal communication can have a positive effect on the activities that are directed outside the university.

In terms of internal environment, as the case study demonstrated, involving students in co-production activities that are focused on university development can constitute a productive, effective and friendly atmosphere where everyone enjoys their work or studies. Appreciating their creative participation in projects of this kind, the students themselves work as brand ambassadors as they share their positive experience with their friends, family or colleagues outside school. Knowing that word-of-mouth belongs among the most powerful of marketing tools (Silverman 2011), this benefit should definitely not be underestimated. Additionally, since the concept of creative co-production reinforces student evaluation, the quality of a student's experience can be continuously monitored and improved. While doing so, the marketing team will receive valuable insight into how students think, work and what they expect from their university experience. Later work with such data can not only empower internal communication with current students, but it can also support effective targeting outside the university.

Even if the development of projects that go beyond the standards of student co-production is time consuming and also takes a lot of energy and perseverance, it usually *pays off*. The project conducted at Charles University was awarded a prize for outstanding projects and it drew the attention of a wider public eye, including major Czech media. The publicity generated through articles, stories and reports that were published both in printed and on social media were very positive and effectively contributed to the overall image of Charles University. The more creative projects a university has, the more accessible, engaged and open it looks. The better the product, the better its reputation and the easier the work for the marketing team.

Last but not least, what cannot be overlooked is the fact that it was the students themselves who provided concrete suggestions and ideas on how the University should communicate. In this case, their out-of-box thinking contributed to the development of a unique communication strategy that incorporated the most valuable element of the University as a brand: the students' spirit. The role of a student as a co-producer is therefore not only about him or her obtaining a positive experience; it is also about the university receiving a creative perspective which would not be found elsewhere.

5.6 Limitations and discussion

Similar to previous parts of my thesis, this chapter also has its limitations that need to be considered. For example, one of the negative aspects of student co-production identified in research literature highlights that student voice can have a monolithic quality – that there is often the semblance of a single student voice (Silva & Rubin 2003). It would be naïve to say that all the students want to be active and participate on more levels than is required, than they have to. Participation needs hard work and we can therefore assume that only students who are willing to do extra work will want to be involved in co-production. That can lead to having only a certain type of students being active – only those who want to speak will be speaking. I want to therefore emphasise that students involved in the project conducted at Charles University do not represent all the students. Their views and especially their approach to work cannot be generalized and uncritically applied to other students – we cannot assume that all students *want* to co-produce.

It is also important to note that student co-production itself is not an ideal concept either. The term co-production draws attention especially because of the prefix *co-*. According to Edgar Cahn (2000) this prefix connotes a relationship or a partnership. However, as he points out, *co-* does not necessarily mean entirely equal. Yes, combining *co-* and *production* results in achieving a change in status from subordination to some kind of parity, but it is still quite unclear how equal this parity is. As we could see in the case study, it was not students alone who were working on the project – they did not even initiate it. If it had not been for the management or the academics, would this course have been opened? This question also sheds a light on the possible risk of me being personally involved in this course. It was me who initiated the course and motivated the students to participate. I definitely found myself as "an activation agent" in the whole process – from the initiation to the development of the whole project. If it had not been me, but the students who had first approached the faculty with an

idea to create a communication strategy for the entire university, would they have been given the freedom and space to do it? Unlike them, I was in a position that entitled me to organise similar activities (as my job, I was paid for, was fully devoted to university marketing initiatives) – so it is very important to see this as a certain limitation of this particular case study. On the other hand, my personal involvement serves as an overarching method for this thesis. Without being aware of it at that time, I conducted my first stage of interpretive research at Charles University. This enabled me to later use my experience in the interpretive communication audit at VU.

Despite the fact that this thesis promotes the idea of student co-production in terms of students actively participating in their education and university life at all levels, it is quite likely that for some future readers this concept would seem outdated. Theoretically speaking, the ideal student co-production would not need to appoint superior decision-makers (the current producers) who would decide what students *can* participate in and contribute to and what should still remain in hands of the "main" producers. Therefore, maybe instead of trying to compensate for the lack of students' (as well as academic) involvement in important decision-making processes with inventive prefixes, it is worth considering leaving the prefix out completely, and proceeding simply with the concept of *production.*

Another critique of this case study may be addressed to possible exploitation of free student labour. Since the students were working on a project that was later implemented in practice (and to some extent they compensated for work that would have been otherwise done by employees of the University's PR department), there is a question of financial reimbursement. The critique of cheap student labour has already been discussed in the literature (for example in Samuels 2013). However, such critique is often related to graduate students or students that are not sufficiently rewarded for their work *outside* university. At the same time, as I mentioned earlier, after the course finished the students received credits which were included in their overall academic results. Still, it might have been even more adequate to provide students with extra reward given they did such a tremendous job. Unfortunately, the PR department did not have any budget allocated to this course.

Last, but definitely not least, limitation of this chapter may lie in the case study it uses. The central focus of this thesis is Victoria University and yet this chapter described a project conducted at Charles University in Prague. As the following parts of this study will show, the ideas of how to involve students in university marketing are greatly inspired by the Charles University project. This may raise an issue of how original the thesis is, using similar methods and premises, of a different university. However, it needs to be said that this particular case

study does not only serve as an inspiration, it creates a significant part of the foundation of the whole research project. When applying for a PhD at Victoria University, I designed a research proposal outlining the aim to further develop the Charles University case study and validate the principles of student co-production at Victoria University in Melbourne.

5.7 Conclusion

The emphasis on students' experience has never been greater. Knowing that current university surveys, evaluation studies and rankings are now highly concerned with students' expectations and later experiences, universities are now trying to emphasise the active role of a student in the education process. The recognized concepts of collaborative learning, student engagement and co-production represent critical themes for universities. Nevertheless, available research and practice show that these are implemented primarily in classroom activities, such as presentations, project assignments or teamwork exercises. Some universities realise the potential of student engagement and are trying to harness it through offering various extracurricular activities such as membership in student associations or student internships. The benefits of student co-production that have been identified in recent literature focus on students and teachers while the rewards usually have the form of non-material value.

However, this chapter argues that student co-production can be enhanced and used more effectively – going beyond its traditional and standard application. To demonstrate the potential greatness of student engagement, a case study of Charles University and its project that focused on the development of a communication strategy for the University is presented. Here, recognizing students not only as the most valuable members of a university's target audience, but also as the co-creators of a university's identity, the University opened an undergraduate course which focused on its communication activities. Within its curriculum, the students spent nearly the entire semester collecting data from other students and university staff. Building on their analysis, they later developed a complex communication strategy for the University. Their proposed recommendations focused on the University's online presentation, such as its use of social media and website pages. The final strategy also suggested that students should participate more in university events – not only as visitors, but as organisers. Some of the students' suggestions were implemented in practice and are still being applied by the University.

Involving students in various level of co-production that are not limited to their study-related duties and obligations generated a number of benefits. The students obtained experience

from real projects that positively contributed to their future employability. Students, managers and academics can work together in ways that strengthen their mutual relationships and empower university identity. Appreciating their creative experience, internal audiences of a university can serve as brand ambassadors as they are most likely to share their positive stories with others. If a university allows its students to contribute their ideas freely and if it manages to motivate them to do so continually, it can also generate powerful *feedforward* that will be constantly moving the institution onto a new level. Yes, students should be recognised as co-producers, co-creators and even as partial employees. Perhaps instead of labelling them with metaphors however, it is important to ask *who are the students and what can they do*? The following chapters will therefore try to provide answers to this question.

6 Interpretive communication audit of Victoria University: subjective analysis of VU as a brand

6.1 Introduction

In previous chapters, I focused on three main components of international university marketing: I studied what a university is, who an international student is and I also looked at the role students can play in developing university marketing activities. This chapter, as well as chapters 7 and 8, will work with these three components on a more empirical level. Essentially, I will particularly focus on what Victoria University is, what it says and how I experienced it as an international student.

Using the student life cycle as a time frame, I will analyse the communication tools VU uses to address its students during the process of pre-application, application, registration, teaching and learning, engagement and graduation. Addressing the third aim of my research (which is to test viability of an interpretive communication audit within the university framework while using the subjective insight and experience of a researcher), I will specifically draw on my personal experiences in the individual stages of this cycle.

The fourth section of this chapter will look at VU as a brand. While using my own interpretations, I will analyse the correspondence among three critical components of VU's brand: its communication, action and "physical appearance". The categories of "what VU does" "what VU says" and "how VU looks" will be the key themes on which I will reflect while contrasting them with an observed reality and with each other. Together with the next two analytical chapters, the following part of my thesis will look at the marketing communication of VU. In particular, I will try to describe my own personal experience specifically while pointing to specific themes that might deserve further attention. This chapter will thus serve as a collection of impulses and inspirations that VU can potentially take advantage of in order to enhance its communication activities. The specific and possibly creative suggestions for how it might improve will be described in the final chapter of this thesis.

Also, there is an important methodological component to this chapter worth mentioning at this point. When I was collecting data for this chapter and later writing it, I had a particular reader in mind. I thought of VU's representatives. I wrote this chapter as a student addressing

the management – especially those who are in charge of marketing communication. I wanted VU's marketing managers to see what is happening in the head of an international student before, during and after her studies at the university. Drawing on the theory of student voice, my thesis proposes students should voice their opinions, ideas and beliefs without fear and on more levels, even if it means they will create their own platform for speaking. My platform is built on the foundation of interpretivism. I am not only choosing what I will say, I am not only including my own interpretations of the studied object; I am also choosing how I will say it and who I intend for my interpretations to reach.

6.2 Victoria University's profile – history and current practice

First established in 1916, Victoria University now belongs to one of the largest universities in Melbourne. It was founded as Footscray Technical School in Melbourne's western suburbs, where its main campus is also currently located (VU 2014i). Since its establishment, it has changed names several times and merged with other educational institutions across the west of Melbourne. In 1990, it received the official title of "university" and the Victorian State Parliament named it Victoria University of Technology (VU 2014i). Fifteen years later, the word "Technology" was dropped from its name and as of 2005 it has been known as Victoria University (VU 2014i).

The University serves as a dual-sector institution offering both higher education and vocational and further education. VU has a number of campuses across Melbourne's western region as well as in the central business district. It also conducts offshore programs for students at various sites in Asia and in Germany (in 2014 there were 9,400 international students studying in Victoria University courses at overseas partner institutions, VU 2014g). In 2014, VU had 48,922 students studying in Melbourne, out of which almost 5,000 were international (VU 2014a).

Students can choose from a wide variety of short courses, apprenticeships, certificates, degrees, diplomas or postgraduate studies. Since January 2013, these programs have been provided by eight colleges: Arts; Business; Education; Engineering and Science; Health and Biomedicine; Law and Justice; Sport and Exercise Science and VU College, which brings together the University's delivery of English language courses, pathway diplomas and courses at VU Sydney and with international education partners (VU 2014g). These new colleges replaced the former five-faculty structure that had been in place until 2013. Aside from the

colleges, the University also manages six research institutes and seven research centres conducting studies both locally and internationally.

The University is strongly committed to the trades sector and focuses on the delivery of apprenticeships, pre-apprenticeships, skills recognition and other programs tailored to industry needs (VU 2013a). This commitment is reflected by Victoria Polytechnic which is spread across several campuses and offers training in engineering, hospitality, hairdressing and make-up, as well as the construction trades (VU 2013a). Victoria Polytechnic was established as Trades College in 2013, the same year when the new model of colleges was introduced.

6.2.1 VU Agenda

The restructuring was part of a wider organizational reform known as the VU Agenda. In short, the VU Agenda implemented three major changes which created the profile of VU as we know it today. First of all, the eight aforementioned integrated colleges were drawn together from staff in belonging to the then existing higher education and vocational education faculties. Secondly, to support more specific career pathways and the career development of students who are "practically" oriented, Career Start Bachelor Degrees, Professional Bachelor Degrees and Professional Masters Degrees were established (VU 2014i). Last, in order to reduce the costs of University spending on administration, VU introduced a new Shared Services model for administrative, educational and research services to support the new Colleges. This meant retrenchment of administration staff who were asked to leave the organization. In 2014, the University had around 2,500 ongoing and fixed-term staff, almost evenly split between professional staff, teachers and academics and about 2,100 casual and sessional staff (VU 2014g).

According to the 2013 Annual Report, "Victoria University's major ambition is to be an international leader in providing access to an excellent tertiary education to students from diverse backgrounds to help them achieve true success, and earning a reputation as the University of Opportunity" (VU 2013a, p. 14). The new strategic plan, which significantly draws on the already introduced VU Agenda, proposes key tactics that seek to achieve this ambition. One of the main objectives of this chapter will be to analyse these tactics while reflecting on the mission and the vision of the University.

6.3 Participant observation – the student life cycle

It is important to note that the description of the University's profile was not set in a random time frame. I started my PhD studies in 2012, so I was able to physically observe the structural changes that were occurring at VU. This "physical observation" allowed me to better understand VU as a brand and explore its communication activities in immersive detail. Using an interpretive research approach which was explained in the first section of this thesis, I have implemented my own experience and insight as a full-time student of VU. In order to give this research approach a specific structure, I decided to apply the very specific qualitative research method of participant observation.

6.3.1 Participant observation – definition, contextualization, limitations

By definition, participant observation is inherently a qualitative and interactive research method that is relatively unstructured (FHI 2014). It is generally associated with exploratory and explanatory research objectives—why questions, causal explanations and uncovering the cognitive elements, rules, and norms that underlie the observable subjects (Martinéz 2014, p. 79). Participant observation belongs to the most natural and most challenging of qualitative data collection methods. "It connects the researcher to the most basic of human experiences, discovering through immersion and participation the *hows* and *whys* of human behaviour in a particular context" (Martinéz 2014, p. 75).

Drawing on the available literature regarding this methodology, I followed three main principles of participant observation. First, during 2012 to 2015 "I was part of the action" (Martinéz 2014, p. 75) – meaning that I was physically involved in the life of the University, I attended the school on a daily basis, I was where the University's members were. Secondly, "I built rapport with the participant of my study" (Martinéz 2014, p. 75) – I could learn about the things students, teachers and other VU representatives did in the normal course of their lives. I was a member of the same community, I was accepted as "a complete insider" and I believe that others could be themselves in front of me at all times. Thirdly, my study took more than three years – which was a long enough period to have a sufficient range of experiences, conversations, and other types of research observations for my project and further analysis.

By applying participant observation, I was not only looking around – I was living the "VU experience". This method gave me a nuanced understanding of the University's social, cultural, economic, organizational and mainly communicational context that can come only

from personal experience. There is no substitute for witnessing or participating in phenomena of human interaction – interaction with other people, with places and things (FHI 2014, p. 14). Observing and participating are integral to understanding the breadth and complexities of the human experience – an overarching research endeavour not only for the field of communication but any kind of research project (Bernard 2006).

The documentation of the data is another possible difficulty that limits participant observation as a method. It is difficult to write down everything that is important while having to experience and observe surroundings at the same time. The researcher must rely on his or her memory which, of course, is neither infallible nor indelible. I tried to overcome this difficulty by way of using specifically designed collection tools – something I discuss in detail in the section that follows.

6.3.2 Participant observation – data collection

In applied research, as in traditional ethnography, participant observation is almost always used with other qualitative methods (FHI 2014, p. 16). Participant observation was not therefore the only research method I used in my project. As the following chapters will show I was also "observing" while I was conducting focus groups and action groups with the students of VU. But the students were not the only University members I was speaking with. I met with more than twenty VU representatives from various fields and departments – from management to the academics and administration staff. All of these meetings had a highly informal and unstructured character and they were neither video nor audio recorded. However, I did collect data when these conversations occurred. Typically for the method of participant observation, I enlisted the help of "field notes" (Bernard 2006).

At the beginning of my studies at VU I created a field notebook which I gradually divided into different sections or categories. These sections were: *VU's communication activities*, *international students, domestic students, VU's staff* and *other observations*. I kept my notebook with me almost at all times and my handwritten notes served me very well especially when analysing the relationships within the VU community together with the University's approaches to both internal and external communication. In addition to my field notebook I also created a folder on my computer where I collected relevant articles, commentaries or reports that were published by or about VU. Other important virtual data that were also included in this folder were copies of emails that were sent to me by VU and its departments and I also kept my email conversations with VU's representatives in there. My

experience and observations that are related mainly to VU and its communication are thus documented and monitored in these two main sources – in my handwritten notebook and in the folders on my computer.

There is another important element that I would like to present before I proceed to the analysis of the data collected through participant observation – and that is its time frame. Though I have already stated that my research took place from 2012 to 2016, I believe this period deserves a more detailed specification. Based on the literature and mainly on the conversations I had with the VU representatives, what is seen as a defining force and characteristic of university marketing is the so-called "student life cycle".

6.3.3 Student life cycle – definition and its stages

The student life cycle can be defined as a certain track or a journey an individual student takes into, through and out of the system of higher education (Oracle 2014). The student life cycle thus consists of several stages or types of actions a student goes through as he or she moves throughout his or her journey of education. There are a number of different definitions of the student life cycle's stages in use in different contexts (Paull 2008). They are valid in accordance with the focus of their particular work. Those with a wider focus have fewer states, whereas those with a narrow focus have more (Paull 2008). For the purposes of this study, the life cycle stages were defined according to broad functions carried out within higher education, which might be managed by different organizational units, and supported by distinct processes. Because this chapter aims to analyse what VU does when communicating with its students, I am going to look at this life cycle both from the student's and the university's perspective.

The first stage of student life-cycle is the "pre-application". In this phase, a university tries to recruit new students, attracting them to choose it for their studies. In terms of communication, universities usually provide website information about study opportunities and lifestyle facilities, they employ agents to contact students at different locations (mostly internationally) and they are engaged in face to face interaction at higher education fairs. The students who are considering studying at that particular institution attend open days, summer schools or similar programs. It is also very common that the students have many enquiries and that they contact selected universities directly, mainly via email.

The second stage of student life cycle is described as an application process. From the university's point of view, this phase is seen as an admission. Depending on the procedures at a particular institution, students apply for study either electronically or through paper-based

forms. In this stage, the communication between the university and the student is mostly direct (electronic conversations are in place). The students are informed about the progress of their application, they are invited to attend applicant visit days, the relevant school or department provides additional information about the course of study and so on.

If the student's application is successful, he or she enters the third stage of the student life cycle and that is registration. Here, the university instructs the student on how to enrol and how to access university facilities; it also provides student log-ins to student portals and informs about the university rules and regulations. Also, financial issues are discussed and sorted in this phase – such as payment of fees, student loans, institution scholarships or bursary support.

The fourth stage can be characterised as the first "physical" entry point to higher education. We call it "the induction phase". Here, the university organises welcome and orientation events, it tries to familiarise the student with the university environment, its campuses, libraries, class rooms, research labs, cafeterias and other facilities. The students are usually invited to become members of university clubs, they complete surveys about their expectations of the learning experience, they meet with university staff and other students.

The fifth stage is basically the longest stage of all, because once the student enrols in the chosen courses and programs, he or she sets out on the journey of learning. This learning or teaching phase involves direct contact with staff through formal and informal study opportunities. The students use "blackboards" (a web course tool) or other types of online platforms to access their learning modules, grades, reading materials and so on. Most of these platforms also enable interaction with teachers and other students (chat rooms, blogs or theme discussions to name a few). The university also monitors the student's progress, it offers tutoring or other types of learning support and it organises surveys asking the students to give feedback on their learning experience, etc.

Based on the available literature on the student life cycle and its management, the name of the sixth stage varies. Some see it as a phase of "pastoral care" (Paull 2008), others prefer to emphasise "the employability and careers services" (Oracle 2014). Because this study focuses on what else the students do outside their coursework, I chose to call this stage "the engagement". It is important to note, that this stage does not follow the previous phase of teaching and learning – instead, these two stages significantly overlap and they influence the quality of the other. Aside from a provision of personal support through student advice centres, counselling and health services, in this "stage" a university also offers employability and careers services, it provides internships or other industrial experiences. Sometimes, the students

can also participate in volunteering and community work or they are invited to enrol in courses that concentrate on developing their professional skills or on gaining specific employability skills.

The last two stages are the final states of the student life cycle. The process of graduation also requires some communication effort from the university – and so does the stage of being alumni. Here, the university sends invitations to graduation and alumni events; it issues alumni newsletters or directly addresses selected alumni to donate to university development campaigns. Some tracking activities are also put in place so that the university knows whether their graduates are successful and how they have progressed in their careers and lives.

Because this thesis uses an interpretive research approach and draws on the data collected by participant observation, I will describe my own journey throughout these stages and I will focus specifically on my observations related to VU's communication towards its students (myself included). The next part of this chapter will thus combine two specific research frameworks that the preceding sections attempted to illuminate: the outcomes of participation observation within my life cycle as a student of VU.

6.3.4 The first stage – pre-application

Before I describe my personal experience related to the individual stages of my student life cycle, I think it is very important to say that my interpretations are strongly influenced by my professional interest, which is marketing communication. I am specifically passionate about university marketing which is not a new theme for me – for example, I wrote a bachelor's thesis which analysed the specific uses of corporate design of a concrete educational institution and once I had completed my master studies, I began working in the PR Office of the biggest Czech university, Charles University in Prague.

So, when I started to consider studying in Australia, I had already been involved in the field of higher education as a professional. However, I do not see my experience as a negative bias that would invalidate my current research – on the contrary, thanks to my education and professional practice, I am sure I could see "more" than students with different interests might see – at least in terms of the communication strategies and activities of particular Australian universities. Having explained this, it may now seem unsurprising that when choosing where to study in Australia I was examining the complexity of the universities' websites – especially the corporate design used both on their websites and in other available materials. Emphasising the

colours blue, white and black, the clean, simple design of VU was definitely one of the best I had seen at that time.

It is important to note that my communication choices are not uncommon. Using online communication to select a university now represents one of the main methods by which international students gather information about their future studies; as current research shows, online platforms belong to the key communication channels university use to address international students (Grey et al. 2010). According to Reddy (2014) university online marketing can effectively influence international students' university decision-making process. In the pre-application or "search" stage, international students navigate the university search, decision-making and selection process using a variety of university online channels. When looking at VU's website, I found all the information very comprehensive and a great advantage VU had over other institutions was that I could directly contact researchers and other academics without having to deal with the automatic "contact us" forms which typically generate some irrelevant responses.

Another selection criterion or so-called "push and pull" factor that influences the decision-making and selection process of international students is the study destination (Mazzarol & Soutar 2002). Usually, international students who have already been to a particular host country (to a visit, for example) are more likely to study there (Mazzarol & Soutar 2002). My reasoning to study in Australia was the country's reputation. This also belongs to the common factors influencing international students' selection. According to other authors, a city or nation's reputation has a great impact on where international students decide to study abroad (Cubillo et al. 2006). This factor played a deciding role in my pre-application stage too. I was not deciding where to study abroad – I was deciding where to study in Australia. The country's image and reputation (especially in terms of its *laid-back* culture) was what attracted me the most. I was interested in studying nearly anywhere in Australia but all my Australian friends, whom I had met in Europe, recommended that I apply to study in Melbourne. Despite the fact that during this pre-application stage I was looking at many different Melbourne universities, VU was the only of Melbourne's universities that answered all of my questions and queries.

The only thing I found slightly confusing was the information about particular courses. I slowly realized that the category dedicated to "future students" was not for me (which I did not understand since I definitely was not a current student) because this section was designed for domestic students only. Even if this was quickly fixed simply by my realization that I belong to the category of "international students", something did not feel right. By having to

read only "relevant information" that was tailored to the needs of international students, I got the sense that VU is somehow divided in two large communities of students – the local and the international. Of course I knew that both groups attend the same university, but I felt that the selection of courses is limited for international students and that domestic and international students abide by different rules and regulations. Also, the whole idea of two "separate" groups was unsettling to me because I did see myself as a student, not necessarily as an international student that has "special needs". Having said that, it is important to admit that all other universities I was considering had a very similar division, so from this "pre-application" stage onwards I focused on the communication the particular university was maintaining with international students only.

6.3.5 The second stage – application

Altogether, I was applying for a postgraduate research study program at seven different universities in Australia, five based in Melbourne. The application process at all of these institutions was highly demanding because I was trying to obtain a scholarship which required me to obtain a very high score in English tests, prepare a research proposal, have two potential supervisors from Australia who would be willing to guide me through my PhD studies, two written references from Czech academics who knew me well enough and other documents necessary for my admission. The need to obtain a scholarship could be explained by two reasons – first of all, I could not afford to enrol in a PhD course paying full tuition and being a scholarship student was a prestigious position to which I was aspiring. This selection logic is commonly found amongst international students who are applying to study at a certain university; according to Maringe's research (2006), when choosing programs or courses, including which schools or universities to attend, international students put emphasis on value for money. The economic (or financial) factors thus often decide which institution the international students select or whether they even apply (Mazzarol & Soutar 2002).

Aside from offering scholarship programs, VU's staff had a hand in convincing me to place VU at the top of my preference list. This personal influence occurred on two levels. First of all, during the entire application process I was in touch with representatives for the Office for Postgraduate Research who were responding to my highly confusing emails within 24 hours. This was not a common practice among other universities – most of the time I received a reply to my email within three to five business days and a vast majority of these emails were automatically generated, meaning that I was constantly being redirected to different

departments or schools. The direct contact with the Office for Postgraduate Research made my application process comprehensive and I knew exactly what to do, what materials I had to send and who I had to talk to.

Who I needed to talk to especially were my potential supervisors. In a very short amount of time, thanks to VU's contact mechanism, I was in touch with two academics whose entire profiles were available online so I could learn about their specialization and find out whether their research interests would be close to my own. Following our email conversations, my (now current) supervisor suggested we could have a Skype interview and talk about my research proposal and my entire application "in person". This interview really helped me understand exactly what was expected of me – and also what I could expect from studying at VU. It was the only Skype conversation I had; though I managed to contact supervisors at different universities, our email conversations were rather short, highly formal and not especially inspiring.

6.3.6 The third stage – registration

Four of the seven applications I sent to Australian universities were successful. Since I was still overseas at that time, I could not go to physically compare these universities, their campuses, environment or their "vibe." The only tangible evidence I had to work with was the information available online (such as virtual tours, videos, images, etc.) and mainly the "experience" or "relationship" I had managed to develop with particular institutions. So, since I did not have any kind of a relationship with other universities, Victoria University made this decision process very easy for me. I chose to study at Victoria University simply because I felt I knew someone there – and I knew these people would play an important role in my studies. The personal contact and willingness to answer my questions thus belonged to the most significant "push and pull" factor that influenced my decision – and so it is for other international students; according to Engelke's study (2008), most international students choose universities that are committed to satisfying and addressing their needs and expectations.

After receiving the official offer letter that was issued by the Office for Postgraduate Research, things became more complicated. I was informed I had to complete the International Student Acceptance Form and, because I took the process of enrolling very seriously, I did not want to underestimate any deadlines and downloaded this form from the official VU website for international students. However, I soon realized that some sections were not relevant to my study program and the Office for Postgraduate Research advised me that I would be contacted

by the Victoria University International Office (VUI) and that they would send me a different form. I did receive all the documents from VUI but communication with the office was a bit more challenging because every time I sent them an email I received a response from a different person. Also, I began to be quite unsure about with whom I should discuss all of my queries – whether I should stay in touch with the Office for Postgraduate Research or whether to contact VUI. At the same time, though I understood that I am an international student and that I had to contact departments that are in charge of the international student agenda, I was not sure which department was the most relevant to my needs. Aside from these offices there was also the International Student Support Office (ISS) and the faculty's Research and Graduate Studies Centre, all of which were somehow involved in the process of my enrolment. I was often redirected to a different department and gradually it became very difficult to follow who I should contact and why.

Considering electronic communication insufficient, I ordered a hard copy of the VU Student Brochure which I had sent to me in the Czech Republic before my departure to Australia. This brochure, with the official title "Arrive and Thrive, a Guide to Living and Studying in Melbourne" (VU 2011), was promoted as a comprehensive guide that would give me all the relevant advice about my future studies at VU and that would introduce the University from the international perspective. The forty-page long brochure contained important information mainly about visa procedures, health, student services and safety. In terms of its visual appearance, it was well aligned with the VU corporate manual, respecting the same graphic design as other communication vehicles I had come across, such as the university webpage and online microsites. The same consistency applied to the photos used which were in most cases quite natural and authentic, capturing well the look and feel of the local campuses and the city (see brochure's page 7, 8 or 35 in the Appendices, section 6). I also appreciated the fact the particular articles in the brochure were linked to specific websites where I could get more information on the chosen topic.

Regarding the brochure from a purely marketing perspective, I think it was well executed but the targeting was somewhat unclear. The content of the brochure was very much focused on giving instructions, listing addresses and telephone numbers instead of introducing reader to the "living and studying in Melbourne" as promised on the cover. From this I can assume the brochure is targeted to students who are already decided – who have already chosen VU as their place to study. Even if I consider it important to equip students with necessary information and advice before they arrive in Melbourne, I would find it even more important to have a high quality brochure the purpose of which would be to convince those who have not

made their choice yet. At the time of my pre-enrolment (in the "first stage" period), such a brochure – or any kind of a compact communication material – was not available.

Since the website address, which was printed on the brochure's cover, was linked to "life at VU", I assumed the brochure was related to a wider communication project called "Life at VU". This project, analysed in chapter 4, targets international students and is built on a series of videos on YouTube. These videos give instructions to students on how to open a bank account, how to make friends or how to stay safe in the city and on campus. Again, without underestimating the importance of such information, I do not think these videos were to attract international students to study at VU. My interpretation again was that they were created for students who have already enrolled with VU. However, since these videos were the only spots targeted to international students in 2011 (before I decided where to study in Australia) and no other audio-visual communication was available, I continued to watch them in order to gain a sense of what it is like to study at VU.

Since my expectations were not fulfilled, I expected it would be compensated by the "Arrive and Thrive" brochure. They were not. The brochure contained very similar information to the videos. The brochure was mainly focused on making sure the students stay safe and healthy – both mentally and physically – during their studies at VU. There is nothing wrong with staying safe, but such advice was not exactly what I needed before my departure to Australia. I wanted to read more about the courses, the PhD program, or the professional and personal development opportunities that would potentially enable me to get the most out of my studying experience.

Instead, for example on page 32 of the brochure, I was given very detailed instructions on how to turn on and turn off a computer, how to prepare food in the kitchen or how to handle candles and cigarettes. Since I received this brochure prior my arrival in Melbourne – and prior to my enrolment – I found such information highly irrelevant or even offensive. This again points out the argument I made earlier in my thesis. Instead of showing international students how they can use their talent and potential while studying at VU, the content as well as language of the brochure addressed international students as if they were incapable of doing basic tasks. Even topics that were not focused on the issues of safety provided very vague and obvious information; for example the section devoted to Australian culture and where I expected to learn more about Australian lifestyle, talked about "obvious cultural differences (…) such as climate, food, the absence of friends and family" (VU 2011, p. 34). Other sections, such as the one that focused on coping with transition shock, were listing "popular strategies for dealing with transition shock" such as "listening to or playing music", "playing video

games" or "reading" (VU 2011, p. 29). The picture on the back of the cover page was depicting students playing with a floating ball with the colours of the Australian flag.

What these examples serve to demonstrate is that many parts of this brochure address international students as if they were children. Yes, we can argue that most international students arriving in Melbourne have enrolled in a bachelor program (approximately two thirds of all international students studying in Australia, DET 2013a) meaning that they would be young adults with a limited sense of what it takes to be a university student. However, it does not mean they are not adults and have no previous experience with turning on computers or knowing that the climate will be different in Australia than in their home country. In fact, the vast majority of international students are adults. In 2013, the most common age range for overseas students was between 20 and 24 years. This group represents nearly one half of all international students (DET 2014a). Only 6% were over 35 years and 3.4 % were under 18 years (DET 2014a). Also, there are over 100,000 international students studying masters or doctoral degrees and this number is not to be overlooked. Since this brochure is also designated to master's and PhD students and most of the bachelor students are already adults, I find the brochure's content irrelevant and insufficient in terms of fulfilling students' expectations about what is ahead of them, about what they will be doing at VU. At the same time, some sections tend to patronize international students; instead of showing them how to grow (which is another claim the brochure offers – the back cover showcases a claim saying "Live, Learn and Grow at VU"), the brochure tells the students what to be aware of. It would be interesting to compare a brochure aimed at domestic students, but such a brochure was not available at VU at time of my enrolment.

Despite the lack of motivation and initial confusion, I successfully enrolled in my course – I first had to do it electronically as being enrolled was one of many conditions I had to meet in order to obtain a student visa. The whole process of applying for the student visa was, however, also complicated. Despite the fact that I had all the required documents prepared (filled-in questionnaires, personal documents, photos, etc.) I still had to wait for the Confirmation of Enrolment which had to be attached to my visa application. I consider the visa application process a certain barrier I had to overcome in order to be able to commence my studies and it is not surprising that some students decide not to study in countries where students visas is required – according to Chen and Zimitat (2006), less restricted visa application process belongs among the reasons international students choose a particular study destination.

6.3.7 The fourth stage – induction

Two weeks after I officially started my studies at VU I was invited to "Welcome induction for newly enrolled research students". This one-day event gathered all new research students from various fields. I considered the induction to be well-executed; all teachers I later met were there including administrative staff and people from the library and other university facilities. What I found even more important was the fact that I could meet other research students and talk about our excitement, fears or problems. However, I would have appreciated if there had been more (already) current research students, as they knew much more about the University and the studies than did the new students (including myself).

It was at this induction where we were asked to register to two courses that were compulsory for all research students. I found this very stressful as I had not decided what times and dates would work best for me – and when I finally made a choice, other (also new) students warned me that the night courses at Footscray Park Campus are not something they would recommend as this part of the city can be very dangerous when it is dark. This concerned me as I had already had the experience of having travelled from the St. Albans Campus by a train full of people who seemed to be drunk. I immediately began to question VU's reputation and my university choice overall – and it is not surprising that one of the main aspects that relates to the choice of destination for international students include safety or security (Chen & Zimitat 2006). Some Australian studies even raised concern about safety and security of international students in particular. For example, Victoria University's 2010 report examined community safety of international students in Melbourne and pointed out the increasing incidence of violence against international students. One of the crucial findings of the report was that international student expectations about safety are informed largely by the knowledge of others who study or who have studied in Australia (Babacan et al. 2010). From the perspective of university reputation management, this finding suggests that when considering safety and security of their study destination, international students tend to assess it through personal contacts and recommendations. Knowing no one at VU before coming to Australia, I was unable to evaluate this aspect to the full extent.

Safety and security belongs to the main topics that are discussed during orientation days organized by universities in order to introduce international students to the local culture, university life and particular facilities (DEEWR 2009). Unfortunately, I was not able to attend VU's orientation day for new students as it was held in February and I did not enrol until the end of March. When I asked other students (my later friends) what exactly they learnt during

this program, they recalled that they were given a map of the campus and shown where the library and student canteen were. Despite the fact that orientation days belong to the common induction programs university prepare both for their domestic and international students, their quality is often questioned – for example, as I explained in chapter 5, international students are significantly less likely to indicate that orientation programs helped them make a good start to a university (Krause et al. 2005). Having not attended orientation day, I decided to dive in head first, as it were, and I found my way around the campus myself. Again, what helped the most with my "orientation" were the people – and especially my supervisors. They did not only tell me what was expected from me in terms of my studies, but they also took me to the University café, student canteen and even the train station. Looking back at this stage, I find these seemingly small things to be the most essential and helpful parts of the whole "induction program" at VU.

6.3.8 The fifth stage – teaching and learning

2012 was the first year in which VU implemented an official coursework program that was compulsory for all research students. Throughout the duration of the program, the University made sure that we (the research students) knew that the courses were being run in their pilot versions. This was obvious mainly by the requirements these courses had – no one really knew what the actual outcomes should be and whether we should receive grades after we completed the program.

In terms of communication, everything was happening "on the fly" – I did not know my schedule until one week before the program started, I was not sure how to use the online platform on which all the reading materials were to be available (the WebCT portal), other students seemed to be often confused about the content of the course and they often complained that the coursework was not related to their field of research. I enjoyed the broad focus of the courses; it enabled me to apply various perspectives to my research project. I believed this was caused by the excellent guidance and learning support that was provided by the teachers involved in this program. They were inspiring and even though all of them had a research interest in a different field, their advice and suggestions were highly relevant to what I was studying (or to my new life overall). Having said that, what I appreciated most was the fact that thanks to the coursework, I could also meet other students who later became my friends.

With activities and programs that have not been conducted before, the most important thing is to make sure above all that everyone is well informed and that all changes are properly

communicated once they happen (Marshak 2005). However, too much communication can sometimes be counterproductive. Being used to reading every single email I received from my home university in the Czech Republic, I slowly realized that VU must have many more important topics to talk about. Almost every day I received approximately three emails from the University – most of them were related to the changes of the MYVU Student Portal and the issues with its access. I also received many emails from the Graduate Research Centre, Student Connections, Dean of Students and International Student Support Office. I do not want to say that the emails these departments were sending were irrelevant, however, I found it very difficult to follow them all – so even if I tried to take the electronic communication seriously, due to this information overload, I caught myself skipping some emails and reading only a few.

The emails I read most consistently were those I received from the Graduate Research Centre and the International Student Support Office (ISS). The emails that were designated to "all onshore international students" were especially important to me as they contained information that was essential for me to know in order to "stay" in the country. Aside from the updates about student visa and regular enrolments, the ISS was also sending communication about multicultural events such as Forum for International Students, Multicultural Week or other activities that were prepared by the International Student Association or other clubs that gather overseas students. To my surprise, my colleagues (other PhD candidates) who were domestic students did not know about these events and they had no idea that they were happening.

As for the learning process itself – speaking in marketing terminology – I believe that VU has a fantastic product of high quality. During my studies at VU, I believe I developed both as a researcher and as a person. This growth was definitely enabled mainly thanks to my supervisors whom I met often and regularly. My supervisors did not tell me what to do, they did not force me to work on my project in a certain way – instead, they inspired me and I could feel they believed in my project and my abilities. Our communication was constant and frequent; when either of us was overseas we got in touch via email or Skype.

Chapter 3 discussed the importance of quality of teaching and the role it plays when it comes to evaluating the overall quality of a university and VU proved to offer a high standard for its students. Based both on the coursework and the supervision I was provided, I believe there is a great potential to focus on promoting VU's teachers and their outstanding work. Similar positive characteristics can be applied to VU's facilities. I have never had a problem with borrowing books from the University's libraries and if there was something VU did not have, I was able to order it from a different institution. I travelled especially to Footscray Park

(FP) and City Flinders Campus (CF) and both of these facilities were modern and spacious which was something I appreciated (especially after studying at a conservative historical university in Prague). I often went to the "common working space" at FP designated for postgraduate research students which was also well designed and functional. The only thing I was missing about this office space was some informal zone where we could interact with other PhD students – without disturbing those who were working. Similar interactivity or "friendliness" was lacking at City Flinders campus where some of its higher levels seemed to be nearly abandoned (the labyrinth of empty walls was not particularly inspiring for me).

6.3.9 The sixth stage – engagement

After a year of enrolment in my PhD I became a member of two University clubs: the International Student Association (ISA) and the Victoria University Postgraduate Association (VUPA). Even though I enjoyed the fact that a majority of both clubs were international students, I found it unfortunate that there were almost no domestic students. All members of ISA were overseas students and the events the club organized and I participated in were not attended by the local ones – even though it was nowhere specified that those events were for international students only. Based on the discussions I had with other students from my course (all of them were domestic students), they felt that when activities are organised by international students they are for their own community only. Basically, the domestic students I talked to did not feel invited to these events and they did not participate in any of them. Even more surprising was the distribution of the students in the VUPA which gathers students who study on a postgraduate level. Unlike the case of ISA, the main agenda of VUPA is not necessarily international and yet, most of its active members are international students.[20]

Building on what I observed, international students appear to be more active than domestic students – at least in terms of on campus activities. There is a straightforward explanation behind this phenomenon. When international students move overseas they have to basically start from scratch, create a completely new life. Their friends and family live far away and their leisure activities are strongly bound to their hometowns (sport clubs, cultural or religious meeting points and other familiar places). Suddenly, they are challenged with

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[20] According to then president of VUPA, the statistics about the exact proportion of international and domestic students were not available. The president of VUPA in 2013 was a domestic student and he managed a group of postgraduate students, the majority of whom were overseas students (he knew of only two other domestic students in VUPA at that time).

unexpected emptiness in their free time. Therefore they decide to stay on-campus even after they finish their coursework as it seems to be the best way to fill this *void* with something meaningful and active. Of course that this is not the only possible explanation of why international students create the greatest membership foundation of most university clubs, but this is the most common reason I encountered when talking to other international students from the already mentioned associations.

6.3.9.1 Victoria University Student Union

Both ISA and VUPA are governed by Victoria University Student Union, which is the biggest university club at VU. VUSU is the peak body representing and supporting all students at VU (VUSU 2014). The main objectives of VUSU are to provide a range of representation and general services to all students from the University. Primarily, VUSU voices students' opinions about VU. Its representatives often provide support to students when they have to appear at show cause hearings, discipline hearings and also when students have complaints and grievances against VU. The union organises meetings and forums all students can attend to discuss their own issues or problems they face at VU. These events are usually prepared by the executive team. The members of VUSU Executive Committee are elected annually in the democratic elections and in 2014 there were eight representatives from various colleges in total.

I attended one VUSU forum in 2013. The main agenda of this forum was the new structure of the executive committee. To my great surprise, none of the members of the executive committee were international students (despite the fact that two main organizations that belong to VUSU are ISA and VUPA whose members are mostly overseas students). When I asked why, I was told that it is also seen as an issue and that the committee is considering creating a specific role of an International Student Officer who would advocate the specific needs of all international students at VU.

6.3.9.2 International student engagement

To summarize what has been said, based on my observations, I think there is a certain division between "them" (the domestic students) and "us" (the international students). This is created by the existence and the character of function of international student associations which unintentionally isolate the international students from the rest of the community, as well as by

the University itself whose departments are promoting events for international students without informing local students about them.

Although its two main bodies have a strong international foundation, the executive committee of the uppermost student representative union (VUSU) consists of no international members and sees the international student agenda rather as a set of policies that should protect and defend the rights of overseas students. This goes in conjunction with other activities VU prepares for international students; during my studies at VU I was invited to many events and programs that are "*for* international students". In other words, there are many programs that focus on "what VU can do for international students" but almost no initiatives that would emphasise "what international students can do for VU".

6.3.9.3   Students as Staff Program

A good example of what international students can do for the University is demonstrated by the "Students as Staff Program of VU". This program is designed for all students of VU and its main objective is to offer various job opportunities at the University ranging from the research ambassadors to members of administrative teams. Based on my observations and meetings I had with people who were somehow involved in this program (either as students or as managing staff), the majority of students who are employed in this program are international. The logic behind the dominance of overseas students in this program is similar to the already explained membership in the University's clubs and associations: first of all, it is easier for domestic students to find jobs elsewhere as they can rely on an existing network of connections and for many, their first language is English. These two elements are something the international students are missing and the University is aware of it. At the same time, overseas students are eager to do something and they often spend more time on campus[21] – unlike domestic students who have a tendency to leave the school once the coursework has finished and they go to work found outside the University (some even found their jobs even before their first year of study which is impossible for international students).

Despite these disproportions, domestic students are involved in the "Students as Staff Program" and there is no significant division in what international and domestic students do. Interestingly enough, even if domestic students have an advantage over the majority of

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[21] According to various studies, international students know their universities better than domestic students do. They spend more time on campus, with their teachers and also with other students (James et al. 2010).

international students in the form of language, according to the University staff I talked to, international students tend to work harder than the local students. This is allegedly caused simply by their concern or fear that they are not good enough, that they cannot provide what domestic students can. To compensate for the fact that English (in most of the cases) is not their first language, they tend to work harder and spend more time on preparation for work.

This was also my case when I stared working as a tutor at the College of Arts of VU. My supervisor offered that I run Public Speaking tutorials and I accepted it as a great challenge. Since the discipline of Public Speaking is largely focused on communication, I was concerned that my English speaking skills would not be sufficient for this excellent job opportunity. Therefore, in the first semester I spent more than five hours of preparation for each class, being afraid that the students would not understand me. I was very grateful for this chance to engage with the University on a different level (than our previous "student-university" relationship had been) and I did my best not to disappoint my supervisor and the students I was teaching. In the end, my efforts proved successful, because when the course finished I received very positive feedback from the students (and I am still in touch with some of them to the present date).

6.4 Victoria University as a brand

The next part of this chapter will take the observations to a more sophisticated level. While continuing with an interpretive communication audit of Victoria University, I would like to focus on VU as a brand. The concept of brand and branding has been debated recently as a major topic of study in marketing disciplines (Moore & Reid 2008). The brand is a very complex phenomenon which reflects the overall strategy of a particular organization. Branding means more than just offering names and signalling to the outside world that such a product or service has been stamped with the mark (Maurya 2012). It is an ongoing, long-term process that requires a high level of involvement at all levels of an organization. Available literature shows that brand has various definitions that are ever changing; each expert comes up with his or her own definition of brand or nuances of definition (Kapferer 2004) which increases the complexity in brand interpretation as well as its management (Maurya 2012). Brand sometimes works as a synonym for a logo (Crainer 1995), a company (van Reil & Balmer 1997) or it can be seen as a certain legal instrument (Isaac 2000).

More recent research considers brand as a phenomenon that has a certain identity structure consisting of a personality, a physique, self-projection and relationships (Maurya

2012). My thesis follows these more recent views and sees brand as a unique system of values, behaviours, policies and standards that a particular company pursues and wants to be known for. In other words, successful brands consistently integrate three components across everything they do: presentation, communication and behaviour. Simply put, we can say that a brand can be described by what a particular organization does, what it says and how comes accross (Cumming 2011).

The following section of this chapter will apply this very perspective. I will look at VU as a brand while analysing the correspondence among its communication, action and physical appearance. This comparative approach is not new in the field of university marketing. In her doctoral thesis, Jindra Stříbrská (2012) compared how regional colleges and universities in the Czech Republic reflect their brand values – how exactly (or even whether) they put their variously articulated missions, visions and objectives into practice. Building on her method of looking at what is stated and whether it is fulfilled, the categories of "what VU does" "what VU says" and "how VU looks" will be the key themes I will reflect on while contrasting them with an observed reality. Again, it is important to note that my main research tool is myself: the following analysis will primarily build on my observations and my own experiences.

6.4.1 VU's mission, values and behaviours

In 2012, VU issued a strategic plan for 2012-2016. In 2014, this material was refreshed and updated showcasing VU as "The University of Opportunity" (which is another specific theme I will discuss later, VU 2014f). This plan highlights the mission, vision, key values and behaviours VU wants to pursue most in the years discussed above. To be more specific, I am including the University's full mission statement here:

> Through its distinctive approach to curriculum, the student experience, research and knowledge exchange, emphasising engagement with industry and the community, Victoria University will be renowned for:
> - empowering students from diverse countries and cultures, socioeconomic and educational backgrounds, to be successful lifelong learners, grow their skills and capabilities for the changing world of work, and be confident, creative, ethical and respectful, local and global citizens; finding creative and evidence-based solutions.
> - finding creative and evidence-based solutions to important contemporary challenges in Australia, Asia and globally, relating especially to education and lifelong learning, to health and active living, to the cultural diversity and well-being of communities, to

economic development and environmental sustainability, and to the success of particular industries and places, especially our heartland of the West of Melbourne, Australia's Melbourne, Australia's fastest growing region (VU 2014f, p. 4).

This mission is underpinned by the three dominant values of "access" (VU is a friendly university to students and staff), "excellence" (VU is committed to excellence in education and research) and "respect" (VU's students and staff demonstrate respect for others from diverse countries and cultures). To emphasize and concretize these values, VU also lists specific behaviours which are integral to guiding the implementation of the Strategic Plan as well. Because of their concrete manifestations and practical overlap, I am going to use these behaviours in the analysis of VU as a brand. These promoted behaviours are: Engagement, Collegiality and Courage, boldness, innovation and agility.

6.4.2 VU's behaviour of *engagement*

What VU says: "Victoria University is proactive in building relations with industry, government, community and other education and training providers for the mutual benefit of the partners and the University."

What VU does: VU is a very active player in terms of industry engagement. Within the framework of the VU Industry Connect initiative, VU representatives coordinate interactions, engagement and partnerships not only with industry but also with particular professions, government and the community. For example, VU organises industry and corporate training through "Victoria Plus", the corporate training entity of VU. The Victoria Plus team specialises on workforce development programs and especially on strategic projects that aim to achieve the organization's visions and goals.

In terms of government and community engagement, VU and Maribyrnong City Council have recently initiated a project whose ambition is to revitalise the Footscray suburb where two main campuses of VU are located. The so-called Footscray University Town project aims to "build community and deliver long lasting benefits to residents, traders, workers and to VU students and staff" (VU 2014b). The project is supposed to showcase Footscray as a diverse, vibrant and creative destination. This is being achieved by diverse activities and partnerships such as collaboration with Western Hospital, the Footscray Community Arts Centre and the Western Bulldogs, the Melbourne AFL team which is based at the VU Whitten

Oval. Students of VU benefit from this cooperation as well – for example, three months after I enrolled in my studies I received an AFL membership card that allowed me to go to three matches with Western Bulldogs for free. Also, my colleagues and fellow PhD candidates with College of Sports and Exercise Science have a wide range of opportunities to cooperate with Western Bulldogs players in person; some of them create this a main focus of their research.

This active interconnection between the University and industry (and community) is also demonstrated by a series of "work-integrated learning programs" that VU offers its students. These programs enable students to put theory into practice, to learn while they are employed and to monitor their skills and abilities in the workplace before they actually start working "for real" after graduating (VU 2014j). Particularly speaking, similar projects include work placements, project work, field work, practicum or simulations and the students receive course credits upon completing them. All offers are available at VU's CareerHub which is an online platform for current VU students, its graduates and staff through which they can connect with potential employers. Among other things, by using CareerHub, students can apply for jobs, work on their resumes and interview skills or directly make an appointment with a Careers Educator, who can help guide their decision making as far as what do after or in addition to studying.

The mentioned examples of VU's collaboration with industry and community are only a few of many. The new strategic plan and the overall restructuring process of the University emphasise the professional, practical role of VU with a strong focus on students' future and employability skills. They also serve to encourage the University's industry connections that could potentially lead to a powerful sponsorship. On this level, VU's set behaviour of "engagement" works very well and fully reflects the stated mission.

However, the outside world is not the only thing a university and its students should engage with. To ensure that a university will function as an integrated organization with a unified brand identity, what needs to work even better than the engagement "with others" is the engagement "within".[22] As a student of VU, I understand the word "engagement" as an active relationship between me and the University. I am aware of the fact that the University invests in my personal and professional development, that it provides me with high-quality education and that it has excellent teachers who can inspire me to do my best. On the other hand, I do not think this should be necessarily a one-way process. I do not want to be a passive recipient of

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[22] The importance of the university's internal engagement was discussed in chapter 5 in which I used an analogy with bees.

my education; I also want to create it. Yes, there is a wide range of possibilities for VU's students to design their own timetables and select courses they want to study, but this is not what I understand as an engagement. Building on the previous chapters, engagement belongs to the concept of student co-production. Here, the students are given the power to actively influence the university's development, its image and identity.

One of VU's projects inspired by the same paradigm is the Students as Staff Program (SAS) which was discussed in the previous section. This program is designed for all students of VU and its main objective is to offer various job opportunities in the particular departments and teams of VU. As the observations recorded in my field notebook show, the activities of this program were "visible" on VU's web pages in 2012 and 2013 also. It now (2014) seems, however, that the program has finished as some of the sites are no longer active. During its "peak period", this program enabled students to become members of student advisory groups, Victoria University International office and other student service centres which provided guidance for current and prospective students of the University. Being interested in job opportunities in the marketing department, I was watching out for similar job postings but nothing related ever surfaced. Similar phenomena appeared in other areas as well – through the SAS program, the students were offered only administrative jobs that had nothing to do with "bigger" activities that could directly shape the University's current or future profile.

To my surprise, even the students' associations, whose executive representatives were elected by other students, were not given much freedom to actively engage with the University or to influence its development. Based on conversations I had with individual members of these clubs, students often wanted to participate, for example, in a communication campaign's development, but they felt there were not any opportunities to do so. Indeed, some of the students were directly involved in related activities – but only on the basis of a photo shoot where they served as models. The University also conducts many focus groups and surveys but again, the students are here engaged with VU on a passive rather than active basis – meaning the students are asked to voice their "reactions" to a situation (such as the quality of teaching or facilities) rather than "pro-actions" (giving specific suggestions or being involved in creating a particular project).[23] Aside from student engagement, there is another element included in the concept of "internal engagement": engagement with (and across) staff. Because this kind of

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[23] The main difference between being reactive to proactive as a student is discussed in chapter 5, where the concept of "feedback" versus "feedforward" is used.

relationship is closely related to the concept of collegiality (another promoted behaviour of VU), this area is discussed in the section that follows.

6.4.3 VU's behaviour of *collegiality*

What VU says: "The Victoria University community demonstrates collegiality and teamwork with fellow students and staff".

What VU does: VU's teaching staff is of high quality. Significant teacher achievements in 2013 include the awarding of four national Citations for Learning and Teaching, and the securing of one of only two National Senior Teaching Fellowships (VU 2013a). The University's scholarship and excellence has also translated into grant success, with Victoria University staff being members of several successful applications for 2014 Office for Learning and Teaching grants (VU 2013a). VU also had success in the 2013 Australian Research Council rounds for Linkage, Discovery and Discovery Early Career Research grants, as well as staff being published in prestigious publications such as Nature and Lancet (VU 2013a).

In order to maintain this high standard of workforce, VU's so-called "People and Culture Portfolio" was created. This initiative tries to implement a strategy that is focused on:

1. Embedding of a "One University" mindset based on a collaborative and cohesive organization.
2. Talent identification and development.
3. Optimization of transparent decision-making processes, service efficiency and performance accountability.
4. Modernization of the workforce to meet the increasingly diverse student population and modern tertiary education environment (VU 2014f).

The People and Culture portfolio thus provides support and services to VU's staff through an integrated specialist team that comprises HR Business Services, Workplace Environment, Partnership and People and Organizational Development team units. All of these teams mainly focus on sustaining a high-quality workforce while actively exploring opportunities in leadership, culture, talent management and an integrated tertiary workforce (VU 2014e).

VU regards its staff as its most important resource and is aware of the fact that it is the workforce who plays the most important role in driving VU's reputation in learning and teaching, research and knowledge exchange (VU 2013a). In my view, VU believes that relevant departments (such the Marketing Department) are not solely responsible for how VU is perceived – that the University's teaching staff plays a significant role as well. The promoted "collegiality" should, therefore, theoretically work also on the basis of reputation and image building of VU – whereby management cooperates with staff and involves others in decision-making processes that are relevant to marketing and brand building strategies. However, based on my observations, this is not what is currently happening at VU. Management rarely calls upon other co-workers (especially teaching staff) to contribute the ideas they have about the University's communication activities. Even lecturers and researchers who are engaged in the field of marketing communication do not collaborate on the marketing strategies of VU; there is no platform upon which managers of the marketing department and academics from the College of Business could cooperate. From what I have experienced, heard and seen, VU's academics hold a great many ideas concerning what VU could potentially do better or differently in terms of branding and promotion. However, it seems these suggestions (made by marketing experts) are not something VU is interested in or ready for at present.

Unfortunately, at least according to my experience, the same reactions are often given to the professional interest shown by VU's students. Since my study is directly focused on the marketing communication of VU, I addressed several relevant departments and specific people from VU with whom I wanted to discuss my research project. Unfortunately, I was not successful. The people I most wanted to talk to replied to my exhortative emails that they did not have time for me. Obviously, I do understand that managers of such a large university must be otherwise preoccupied and it would be understandably complicated for them to find time in their crowded schedule. On the other hand, my request was for only one meeting in which I could get a sense of what were the most pressing issues in terms of VU's marketing and what VU needs or possibly wants to change. Having professional experience in the field of university marketing and focusing directly on VU's communication, my hope was also that the University's managers would appreciate hearing the perspective of a person who not only chose to pursue her studies at VU, but decided to study the University's communication and relevant activities. It is my intention for this thesis to show that I truly care about VU and that VU would greatly benefit from caring about the ideas of its students. If that were the case, the promoted behaviour of "collegiality" would take on a new dimension. By enabling managers, students and academics to work together, share their ideas, views and relevant suggestions, the

University would not be divided into three separate communities – there would, rather, be just "one university", a university that is creative, open-minded and that is made for and by its people.

6.4.4 VU's behaviour of *courage, boldness, innovation and agility*

What VU says: "Victoria University pursues its mission with courage, boldness, innovation and agility".

What VU does: The University's mission has an international overlap. As described earlier, the core of VU's mission lies in empowering students from diverse countries and cultures, socioeconomic and educational backgrounds to be successful confident, creative, ethical and respectful, local and global citizens.[24] In 2014, VU released an updated version of its strategic plan for the years of 2014-2016 in which it introduced a new positioning concept of VU as "The University of Opportunity". This concept draws on the core message of the University's mission as its main idea is to emphasise the role of VU as an accessible university that welcomes students from diverse backgrounds. Nearly a third of the University's students come from non-English speaking backgrounds, with over one fifth of families from low socio-economic backgrounds. Significantly, students entering with ATARs in the 4th to 7th deciles[25] and non-year 12 graduates also form a large proportion of VU's student base (VU 2014f). The new positioning of VU as the *University of Opportunity* thus highlights the fact that VU gives an opportunity to study to those who are not necessarily high-achievers – that it is open to nearly "everyone".

This approach is what I see as a rather bold move or courageous step in terms of student recruitment. It provides VU with a certain differentiation over other Melbourne universities and

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[24] The concept of global citizenship in university marketing was discussed in chapter 4. Also, it would be worth exploring this topic further while looking at possible limitations of the internationalization of higher education (such as violence against international students, xenophobia or the role of race in Australian culture). These are however very complex topics that are outside the scope of my research .

[25] The Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) is a rank that allows students who have completed different combinations of higher school courses to be compared. It is calculated for institutions to rank and select school leavers for admission to tertiary courses. The ATAR is a number between 0.00 and 99.95 with increments of 0.05. An ATAR of 80.00 indicates that a student is in the top 20 per cent of his or her age group (UAC 2014).

it stresses the value of accessibility that underpins the University's mission and is integral to guiding the implementation of the mentioned strategic plan. This courageous positioning may meet with success since VU is already creating a unique community of students who are open to new possibilities since some among them might be uncertain about their own ambitions and goals. However, as with every bold move or courageous approach, there are certain risks involved. In the case of "The University of Opportunity" these threats may lie in going "against" the value of "excellence" which is something VU says that it is also committed to. Particularly speaking, VU wants to be known for its excellence in education, research and knowledge exchange. It might therefore be discussable whether recruiting students who are not high-achievers diminishes or overshadows the value of the pursuit of excellence.

For example, before I came to Australia I considered VU to be one of the best universities in Melbourne. From what I read, I understood that VU belongs among the biggest universities in the country and its name suggested that it would be on the same level as the University of Queensland (the name of the state being incorporated in its title also). Unfortunately, the more people I met in and outside the University, the worse an image of VU was being received. I often heard that VU is the university for students who did not have luck at any other schools, who did not do well at high school or who did not score high in the ATAR. Sometimes I even encountered remarks such as "The University of Melbourne plays the A league while VU plays the C league" or similar, rather negative analogies. Nobody I met saw VU as an excellent university mainly due its location in the Western suburbs and also because of the belief that it did not recruit excellent students.

Despite the fact that I am a high achiever myself (I obtained first class honours in both bachelor's and master's studies at my home university), I do not actually believe that students who receive less exemplary grades at high school or who do not score well in the ATAR are necessarily not "good". It is my view that everyone has the potential to be excellent in what he or she does, given the proper motivation and application of skill and ethic. While teaching at VU, I met many students who I felt simply lacked motivation. They did not know why they were studying and were not certain about their plans for the future. However, the more time we spent together – the more we talked about their dreams, fears, plans or worries – the better their "performance" at school became. I put a lot of emphasis on the present moment, I repeated many times how important it is to realize that studying at university is something that will not happen again – that no one will ever tell us that we "have to" read, that we "have to" explore

and that we "have to" talk to others and learn from them.[26] I saw great success with this approach – a majority of the students I taught received distinction or high distinction results.

Nevertheless, I am afraid there is a certain gap in how VU positions itself and what it really does or what it focuses on. By creating new professional degrees and opening new institutes such as Victoria Polytechnic the University does say that it provides an opportunity – that it is "The University of Opportunity", but in which sense? From my perspective, what this really says is that "we give opportunity to those who did not do well at high school to go through college as quickly as possible in order to finally do something real in their life." While such a view might be exaggerated, I maintain that by focusing on the future VU decreases its own importance and role. To become an excellent university of opportunity, VU might rather communicate what students can experience during, not after, their studies. It should communicate that the opportunity lies in exploring one's own potential, talent and skills. It might also highlight the fact that at VU, students can develop fields of interest or identify aversions; that they can discover their passion which does not necessarily have to become a profession. The journey is the opportunity, not the destination. To say that may take courage, but bold and innovative actions are something (as I introduced at the beginning of this section) VU proclaims it is ready for.

6.4.5 How VU looks – and smells, fells and tastes

While the previous sections talked about two important components of the University's brand (what the University says versus what it does), the third attribute of "how it looks" has not yet been discussed in much detail. Therefore, the next part of this chapter will focus on the sensory presentation of VU – especially in terms of its "physical" and "virtual" experience.

6.4.5.1 VU's facilities

The first VU campus I visited after arriving to Melbourne was at Footscray Park. My first impression was excellent and I must admit it still is. Especially the new, modern building together with its outdoor square presents VU as a dynamic, fresh and up-to-date university that provides students with enough space and freedom to be creative. Despite the fact that my commute was nearly one hour, it was always worthwhile as I greatly enjoyed studying in the modern library or drinking coffee with friends in a nearby café. Even if other campuses were

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[26] I discussed the importance of *now* while studying at a university in chapter 3.

not as ultra-modern as Footscray Park campus, I would choose quite positive qualities to describe them.

Of course, there is always room for improvement. Specifically, as I have already mentioned, I felt as though the same thorough care was not given to every single corridor, corner or bathroom as was given to the entrance halls or main meeting rooms. For example, at City Flinders campus, the twelfth floor came across as unkempt or nearly abandoned – the classrooms were always messy and the hall felt dark and forsaken. A similar situation applied to St. Albans campus, where some of its corridors were full of leaflets and brochures lying on the floor. The campus on Flinders Lane seemed modern until I walked up a dirty staircase, full of dust and spider-webs, as though no one else had ventured that way before (which could have well been the case).

On a positive note, from a professional perspective, what I found very inventive and sophisticated was the fact that VU's mission and values were framed and hung on the walls next to nearly every elevator's doors. While waiting for the lift, I often observed other students reading it. To use VU's own facilities (walls especially) as an effective communication vehicle thus seems a clever idea – it just invites more ideas of how to use those which remain empty. Overall, I find VU's campuses to be in good condition and I also enjoy the fact that the University is constantly making sure that its libraries, lounge halls and other "physical" facilities follow the main standards and principle of the University's corporate identity.

6.4.5.2 VU's online presentation

The theme of blue, black and white dominates the University's website whose layout, design and overall structure is highly professional (see Image 5.2 in the Appendices). The navigation is easy to understand, the font reads well and the search tool works quickly. The website is also well-connected with social networks such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. Being a fan of VU's profiles and pages on these networks, I have good experience with its communication in this dimension also. Basically, I have no negative remarks about VU's activity in social media. Its Facebook profile is very active and there are updates every day – a vast majority of them are highly relevant and sometimes even amusing (see Image 5.3 in the Appendices).

Interestingly enough, during the selection process of where to study in Australia, I did not pay attention to the universities' social media presence whatsoever. Instead, I always looked at their websites and studied the offered courses and opportunities that were described there. In the case of VU, I remember I was especially interested in watching explanatory videos

or viewing spots that would introduce and summarize VU. Unfortunately, there were no videos uploaded directly to the University's websites, so I had to search for them elsewhere.

Wanting to gain some tangible, audio-visual impression of VU, I went to Youtube to find some University spots there. I was successful – I managed to find video clips that were targeted to international students (I described these spots in detail in chapter 4). However, as I mentioned before these videos had rather a counterproductive effect on me. All of them explained how VU is helping international students, but none mentioned why VU is interested in them. None of the spots showcased international students enjoying their studies while learning from others or contributing their own multicultural perspective to the University's culture and environment. I wanted reassurance that VU appreciates those who travel thousands of kilometres to study at their University, but such a message was not conveyed in these videos.

6.4.5.3   The "Victory is yours for the making" campaign

In 2014, VU launched a new video that introduces VU from the perspectives of students with different backgrounds (see Video 5.1 in the Appendices). The spot, which is called "Victory is yours for the making", does not explicitly explain what "kind" of students the video is about or whether it is for international or domestic students. Instead, the stars of this video are students of different cultures and the main emphasis is given to what they can achieve (not on how VU can assist them, for example, in opening a new bank account). The text of the video reads as follows:

> We all have it in us to achieve our potential. Just decide what victory means to you.
> Is it being the first person in your family to go to Uni?
> Is it finding your passion?
> Or getting into the career you've always dreamed of?
> No matter where you are in life or where you've been we believe victory is yours for the making (VU 2014h).

In terms of university marketing, I find this video to be a great step forward. Addressing students and their own potential, their own reasons, their own motivation to do something interesting with their life is, in my opinion, the best way how to voice the new positioning of VU as "The University of Opportunity". Also, the fact that this video is targeted to both students groups − international and domestic − works very well here. As chapter 4 described, international students do not want to be isolated during their studies, they want to be part of the local community. Being an international student myself, I enjoyed watching this video for this very reason − it promoted VU as a university of not two separate communities, but as a university with *one* diverse community full of people who are finding themselves, their paths and dreams.

However, the promotion of this spot and the "campaign" overall is very weak. A link can be found on the University's website which lists the video's full transcript but does not reveal much about its creation or the key mission. There is no context given to this spot and the website does not say how it is linked to the University's mission, vision or overall strategy. If it had not been for my supervisor who emailed this video to me, I might have never seen it. Yes, it ran as a TV commercial (2014). I assume it was mainly targeted to prospective students), but by not being communicated internally, it completely overlooked current students. The current students are those who have the strongest communication potential to add value to this video campaign − simply by relating to the story the University is telling and in which they are essentially the main heroes.

Similar finesse to higher education campaigns targeting international students has already been implemented within the Australian university sector. Under the government initiative "Future Unlimited", which I mentioned in chapter 2, there was a virtual campaign launched in 2014 (see Video 2.2 in the Appendices). The main vehicle of the campaign was a video competition which invited people from all over the world to show how an Australian education would help them reach their goals. The competition ran for seven weeks in October and November 2013 and it was placed on the Study in Australia website without being directly linked to any particular university or institution. There were approximately 37,000 entries received from over 190 countries and the website generated more than 850,000 visits. The winner of this competition won 12 months of study in Australia, return flights, accommodation, a stipend and the opportunity for an internship. He has commenced study at the University of New South Wales in July 2014.

In my view, the success of the Future Unlimited competition was given by the fact, that the overall campaign did not focus on what the international students want and need or how Australians can help or assist them with "adjusting" to the local lifestyle. Instead, it celebrated their diversity and showed what they are capable of and how they can contribute to Australian culture, society and economy. I believe that similar communication styles can strengthen the image of Australia as a country that cares about the potential of the arriving students and that international students have much more to give to Australian universities than their savings.

In 2015 this opportunity was taken by Western Sydney University. It launched a campaign featuring students with various cultural backgrounds who share their unique success stories. Working with the word "unlimited" as well, its key video spot is about a former child soldier in Africa who had gone on to become a student of Western Sydney University and later a lawyer for refugees. At the beginning of 2016, the video had over 2 million views on YouTube (see Video 2.3 in the Appendices). Targeting primarily domestic students, such a campaign works with students exactly the way my thesis tries to promote: it features the uniqueness of every individual. Coming from overseas is not then depicted as a disadvantage or a weakness, but as a strength that can inspire others.

6.4.6 What VU does not say – the slogan problem

There is another question mark that hangs above this new TV commercial: is "Victory is yours for the making" a new slogan of VU? It isn't immediately clear – I remember that the same question occurred to me when I saw the previous TV commercial that ran in 2011/2012. The

2012 ad (with the main motive of a blue feather flying in the air) was expanded into a full campaign and, at both VU and outside the campuses, people could see the main keyword of this communication activity: GROW (see Figure 4.3 in the Appendices). Yet again, to date I am still not certain whether that was considered to be an official slogan of the University.

This confusion over VU's slogans leads me to the last topic related to VU as a brand. The previous section discussed what VU does, how it looks and what it says. What can be very revealing about the brand, however, are not only its activities but also its passivity. In other words – we can analyse the brand not only according to what it says, but also according to what it does not say. VU as a brand has lot of things that remain unspoken. By not including its slogan on its home page (or at least specifically communicating what the slogan is), it weakens the complexity of its brand identity. People might therefore be asking: "what is VU really about?" "What is its main mission or contribution to the world?"

While studying at VU I came across many slogan variations. Aside from those I talked about earlier ("Victory is yours for the making", "Grow"), other slogans I noticed were: "A new school of thought" or "Turn your passion into profession" (VU 2014d, see Figure 4.1 and Figure 4.2 in the Appendices). Even now, when Google searching an official VU logo, one of the top results is a logo accompanied by text which reads "A new school of thought" (see Figure 4.1 in the Appendices). I discussed the existence with my research colleagues and also with some representatives of VU's management. I was told that this slogan is no longer being used because it did not work for overseas students. Coming from a different language background, I can understand why this slogan was not internationally successful. While this slogan uses the word "school" in terms of an "approach" the associations with school, as in high school, are much more dominant. The slogan thus might have not worked simply because it weakened the status of VU as a university.

Concerning the "Turn your passion into profession" campaign, my observation field notebook tells me that it was an outdoor campaign running in Melbourne in winter 2012. Having seen many posters across the city, I went online to check whether that was a new, official slogan of the University. Even at that time, this claim did not appear on the main home page of VU, it was only uploaded as a cover page on VU's Facebook profile.[27] At this moment (2014), the University's home page does not promote any slogan and the new campaign "Victory is yours for the making" is not showcased here either. As chapter 3 determined, having a slogan is very important as it unifies the message the University is sending to both the

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[27] See the cover photo in the Appendices – Image 5.2.

inside and outside world into one. By having one, clear slogan a university comes across as more certain about its own activities and missions; both the institution and its stakeholders know what the University says and does, and by including the slogan with the logo, it also creates an important part of how it looks.

A slogan works as a certain intersection of the discussed brand attributes. It links the promises with the activities as well as with the appearance. At the moment VU chooses its slogan and places it onto its main website, all of its communicational efforts will become clearer and more comprehensive. While this might sound like hyperbole, there is no integrated marketing communication without an integrating force. In the case of VU, this force could very well be the (as yet unrevealed) slogan. Nevertheless, with the commendable "Victory is yours for the making" campaign that has the "Think victory" overlap which corresponds very well with "The University of Opportunity" concept, I believe VU is on the right track to establish a long-lasting slogan that will guide its current and future communication activities.

6.5 Limitations and discussion

One of the main limitations of this chapter might lie in its structure and methodology. It is uncommon for a PhD dissertation to introduce research methodology in the middle of the thesis (Dunleavy 2003). However, as it might have been valuable to discuss the role of participant observation in the introduction of the thesis, I find it more practical to explain it in the context of the chapter to which it belongs. Also, it is worth noting that my thesis distinguishes between a research methodological approach and research methods. While interpretivism or an interpretive communication audit is what I consider an overall research approach, participant observation is the concrete research method I applied for analysing VU's communication activities. The methodological context of interpetivism is explained in better detail in chapter 1 while this chapter discusses the use of participant observation as a specific methodological tool of an interpretive communication audit. This method enabled me to be more concrete and use my position (as a researcher who is personally involved in this study) in the collection of specific findings.

I am aware that it is not common for PhD research (unless it is a creative work) to use a personal story as a collection of facts and scientific revelations (Dunleavy 2003; Evans et al. 2011). Some could therefore argue that this chapter is not more than an array of journal entries and personal opinions – and they would be right. Being strictly, maybe even passionately, devoted to the interpretive research approach, I use these chosen methods as a vehicle for

shifting methodological power from the institutions (both the university and the academia) to the students. I intentionally chose my own story to provide my study with insight which would be impossible to obtain if other methods were used. This "story-telling" has enabled me to look at VU's communication over a length of time, to describe the *impressions* it makes on a student throughout the student life-cycle and to describe the feelings, emotions and actions it provokes in an international student such as myself.

6.6 Conclusion

Victoria University belongs among the biggest universities in Australia. It offers education to nearly 50,000 students with diverse cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. All of these students are provided with excellent guiding and learning support given to them by both the teaching and administrative staff. From a marketing perspective, the "people" factor is what I see as the main "unique selling proposition" that VU possesses. The quality of teaching and student services is of a high quality at all levels of the student life cycle. Building on my own experience, the personal relationship that the University established with me even prior to my admission was one of the main reasons I decided to study at VU.

Given that the people I have met during my studies at VU have been highly knowledgeable and inspirational, it is a shame that there are not greater opportunities for them to collaborate. There is a lack, for example, of "diagonal communication" that would flow across all the communities of the University – students, management and teaching staff do not have any official platform upon which they can interact and share their ideas with each other. The division among these groups is apparent and it is very difficult to cross.

The same thing applies to the community of overseas students. Based on my observations, I think there is a certain division between "them" (the domestic students) and "us" (the international students). This is created in part by the existence and the character of work of the international student associations which unintentionally isolate the international students from the rest of the community. The University departments themselves play a role by promoting events for international students without informing local students about them.

Yet international students do want to participate in the functioning of the University. Based on my observations, they spend more time on campus and they want to be engaged in extracurricular activities such as the Students as Staff Program. This program provides job opportunities for the students of VU on the premises and in the selected departments of the

University. It is a unique path to interconnecting those three mentioned communities (management, academics, staff), but unfortunately it seems it is no longer VU's priority.

What seems to be its priority is to position itself as the University of Opportunity[28] – a university for everyone. This rather courageous positioning definitely differentiates VU from other universities but brings many risks and limitations. By saying that VU is open to everyone, the value of excellence might be threatened. However, I believe such a distinction could be effective if VU's approach to brand building did not put so much emphasis on the future. By highlighting the journey and the experience of "finding ourselves", VU could truly be seen as The University of Opportunity – meaning that the opportunity will be seen as the wild river one has to swim in – not the bridge that easily gets us to the opposite shore. To make its positioning work, VU also needs to decide what its leading slogan will be. Having too many variations at this moment, only one slogan should be selected and VU should explicitly present it on its website.

In summary, by making sure that all three brand components (what VU says, what VU does and how VU looks) do not clash but rather correspond, VU can build a strong brand and an image of a university full of creative students, teachers and managers that work together and enjoy the opportunity to do it *now*.

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[28] In 2016, the slogan has changed to the "University of Opportunity and Success".

7 Focus groups with students of Victoria University: investigating the specifics and characteristics of VU as a brand

7.1 Introduction

My research looks at the international marketing communication of Victoria University and it mainly investigates particular communication vehicles the University uses to address its international audience – overseas students. Being an international student of VU myself, instead of approaching my "personal involvement" as a certain limitation, I took advantage of it as an opportunity. Therefore, in order to analyse VU's communication activities and its overall approach to international students, I drew on my own insights and experiences as a current international student of VU. This enabled me to monitor VU's communicational actions and behaviour on a long-term basis and I was able to identify and explore particular communication strategies and tactics the University is implementing in different stages of a student life cycle. This chapter will therefore aim to meet the third objective of my research which is to test the viability of an interpretive communication audit within a university framework, while using the subjective insight and experience of the researcher.

As the first chapter of my thesis explained, I believe that all research is subjective, no matter what kind of quantitative methods it uses (Gummesson 2003). The researcher himself or herself always represents the driving force of the given research project. It is he or she who decides what is going to be researched, for which reasons and what the particular goals are. Within the framework of my thesis, the term "subjective" thus does not bear any negative connotations. On the contrary, by admitting that my research does apply a subjective research approach, I am emphasising the importance of my experience – of what I saw, felt and did while studying at VU.

Nevertheless, the methodological core of an interpretive research approach is based on the possible variety of interpretations a given phenomenon can have. Being aware of the importance of this *plurality*, I knew from the very beginning that my own point of view on the University and its communication would not be enough in itself. During three years of study at VU I therefore applied a method of *participant observation* and I managed to talk to and work with many different people who were somehow involved in life at University. This method

was, however, very much unstructured, free-flowing and highly informal. Also, as available research and literature show, participant observation is designed to be accompanied by other qualitative research methods which would provide its findings with different points of view (Bernard 2006). Therefore, to enhance my research with more perspectives, opinions and interpretations of VU's marketing communication, I decided to run focus groups and action groups with the University's students. This chapter will focus on the analysis of focus groups only.

More specifically, the following section of this chapter will examine the methodological framework of my study while introducing the nature of focus groups and explaining what exactly this method can achieve and how it is applicable to my research. The third section will be more concrete as it will describe the design, procedures and also the profile of the participants that were selected for the focus groups I conducted. The fourth section will then reveal the findings of my study while focusing on the dominating themes brought up by the participants. By letting the student voice speak, I will thus be focusing on another important aim of my study – which is to explore the creative potential of students to actively contribute to the development of university marketing.

7.2 Methodological framework of the study

Building on the existing literature on human research (Webb & Kevern 2001), conducting focus groups helps illuminate specific qualities, ideas and opinions of the researched subject that would not be otherwise revealed if other research methods were used. Additionally, in accordance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research, focus groups belong among commonly used approaches to data collection in qualitative research (Government of Australia 2007, p. 31) and they are also frequently used as one of the basic methodological tools in communication audits of organizations (Hargie & Tourish 2009).

Also, focus groups belong to the qualitative methods widely used in the interpretive research approach (Hargie & Tourish 2009). Focusing mainly on particular interpretations both of myself as well as other students, I saw a focus group as the most preferable tool to illuminate particular interpretations without taking them out of context. Specifically, the application of this method allowed me to gain an access to students' opinions about and their relationship to university communication in their natural setting – directly on campus.

There are many definitions of a focus group. The available literature shows that even the name of this method has not been unified as we can encounter with different variations ranging from a *group interview, focus group interview, focus group discussions* to just *focus group* (Barbour 2007). Regardless of the chosen title, the core of this method lies in active communicational interaction among a group of selected individuals. Usually, the discussion among the participants is largely informal, but is built around a particular, pre-selected topic (Wilkinson 2004). That is also the reason why the group of participants is described as *focus* – their conversations are always focused on a given theme, a given problem. To put it differently, the group is focused because "it involves some kind of collective activity" (Kitzinger 2005, p. 56). Within this methodological framework, what I understand by *being active* is the active interaction that happens across all participants who are actively contributing with their own perspective, opinions and ideas while drawing on what has already been said in the group. For a moderator or a researcher it is then crucial to encourage the participants to talk amongst themselves rather than interacting only with the researcher.

The definition of a focus group that I wish to apply to my study therefore emphasises the "active focus" of a focus group. Drawing on Kitzinger and Barbour (1999), "any group discussion may be called a focus group as long as the researcher is actively encouraging of, and attentive to, the group interaction" (Kitzinger & Barbour 1999, p. 20). Being attentive to group interaction refers to the process of being actively interested in individual interpretations given by the participants (Kitzinger & Barbour 1999). This is how a focus group as a method relates to my research – aside from examining my own interpretation of a given phenomenon (which is in this case VU's marketing communication), I am mainly interested in how *others* see this issue.

Emphasising the importance of individual contributions, the given definition also highlights the importance of paying attention to group dynamics and to the particular topics discussed by the group. Therefore, despite its informal nature, it is very important to be well prepared for the discussion, to have a set of predetermined questions, to know the background of the participants – and primarily to know what the objective of the focus group is, what exactly it is trying to achieve and how exactly it enhances the research study overall.

7.3 Focus groups with students of VU – participants, design and procedures

Because my research subject is Victoria University and its communication activities, I decided to organise focus groups with those who have a direct and possibly the closest relationship with the University – its current students. The main objective of this method was to understand how students perceive the communication activities of their university – to illuminate their individual thoughts and perspectives that are somehow related to VU and its communication. The focus groups drew on the preceding literature survey analysed in the previous chapters, concentrating on topics identified as the most important. In order to obtain a certain comparison as well as a distance, the focus groups were run in two sessions. Each session took approximately 90 minutes. To support the natural dynamics in the group, the focus groups were held in a setting with which the participants were familiar, where they normally co-exist under "regular" circumstances; both sessions were organised at City Flinders Campus during a regular teaching day.

The recruitment process occurred prior to the focus groups and all of the applicants were provided with all the required information, including the Consent Form before the sessions. As a main recruitment tool I primarily used direct emails which were distributed for me by VU International, Student Service Centres, Student Connections and Graduate Research Centre. I also advertised an invitation to the focus groups on VU's official Facebook profile and on its websites. Then, I selected students (the future participants of my study) from the received responses to these announcements. The crucial selection criteria were their student status (they had to be current students of VU) and their availability and willingness to participate in the particular session.

7.3.1 The profile of the participants

The existing literature on qualitative research provides evidence that a typical number of participants involved in focus groups is eight to ten, with a maximum of twelve (Mack & Woodsong 2005). Within this study, the ideal number of participants in one session was therefore set to ten participants. However, for both sessions I tried to recruit twelve participants because it is common that some participants will not show up in time of the session (Mack & Woodsong 2005). In order to emphasise the distinctive characteristics of the University's

international communication, the participants were recruited from both international and domestic groups of students. The main requirement was that they had to be at least 18 years old to participate, be current students of Victoria University and they had to be enrolled in an undergraduate or postgraduate degree at VU. For the purposes of this study, international students were considered as overseas students which are more closely defined in the ESOS Act (Educational Services for Overseas Students Act 2000) by which Australian universities abide, including VU. According to ESOS Act as well as the National Code, an overseas student is a person who holds a student visa and must comply with its conditions (Australian Education International, 2012). A domestic student then "refers to all students who are not overseas students" (Australian Education International, 2012).

Altogether, I recruited eighteen participants – eight students attended the first focus group, ten students participated in the second session. Altogether, there were seven female and eleven male participants with their ages ranging from eighteen to thirty-nine years. There were more international than domestic students involved in the focus groups – with only two students being domestic and the rest coming from overseas (sixteen in total). For the purposes of ethical research conduct, I provide students with randomly created pseudonyms so that the participants remain anonymous.

The international students mostly came from Asian countries – there were three students from China: **Marry**, a twenty-three year old female, majoring in Marketing; **Zara**, a twenty year old female, majoring in Hospitality Management and **Ross**, a twenty year old male, majoring in Marketing. There were two students from India: **Eric**, a twenty-nine year old male, majoring in Enterprise Resource Planning and **Nick**, a twenty-two year old male, majoring in Accounting. There were also two students from Bangladesh: **Manu,** a thirty-eight year old female, majoring in Immigration Law and **Chris**, a nineteen year old male, majoring in Electrical Engineering and two students from Vietnam: **Anastazia**, a twenty-five year old female, majoring in Supply Chain Management and **Ben**, a twenty-four year old male, majoring in Electrical Engineering. There was one twenty-six year old male from Thailand – **Berry** – majoring in Finance; one from the Philippines – **Michele**, a thirty-three year old female, majoring in Nursing; one from Pakistan – **Kevin**, a twenty-five year old male, majoring in Supply Chain Management, one from Brazil – **Bernard**, an eighteen year old male, majoring in Management; one from Iran – **Claire,** a twenty-nine year old female, majoring in Industrial Engineering; one from Indonesia – **Peter**, a thirty-nine year old male, majoring in Law and Justice and one twenty-eight year old female from East Timor named **Anna** who was majoring in Education. There were only two students from Australia – **Patrick**, a nineteen year old male,

majoring in Communication and **Chandler,** a twenty-four year old male, majoring in Marketing (who originally came from South Africa).

The dominance of international students is something that is very apparent. This proportion is a result of the recruitment process. Most of the responses I received to my invitations (that were sent to different students and posted online for all the students of VU to see) came from international students. The overall interest to participate in the focus groups was substantial, as all eighteen students agreed to participate in my study within a relatively short time of period (approximately two weeks before the study ran) despite the fact they were offered no financial reimbursement for their participation whatsoever. The only incentive promoted in the invitations was refreshment which, as the participants later confirmed, was definitely not the motivation to be involved in my study.

7.3.2 Design of the focus groups

The focus groups were designed as semi-structured discussions that were built around a set of predetermined questions. However, while applying an interpretive research approach, I primarily tried to encourage a free-flowing character of the discussion to illuminate the individual thoughts and perspectives of all the participants, Therefore, all the prepared questions were open-ended and designed in a way that "yes" or "no" answers were not possible. Implementing the Eliot et al. (2005) design of a focus group's discussion framework, there were three types of questions structuring the focus group: the engagement questions, the exploration questions and the exit questions. The main objective of the engagement questions was to introduce participants to the topic and make them comfortable with the style of discussion (for example, I asked the students what they study at VU). The exploration questions focused on the central topics of the discussion (e.g. *Why did you choose to study at VU? What was the crucial criterion for you? What made you choose VU over other universities?*). The exit or the last questions tried to make sure that all the participants had contributed their opinions and that nothing important had been missed out.

7.3.3 Conducting the focus groups

As a moderator, my main goal was to facilitate a dynamic discussion and make sure that all of the participants would contribute their independent opinions. During each session, I listened

sensitively and with empathy and I encouraged the participants to do most of the talking. While running the focus group, I was recording the discussion on a digital audio device and taking notes at the same time.

All of the participants had been informed about the manner in which the data would be collected, analysed and stored before the session started (the Consent Form and all necessary information about the research were introduced prior to each session). Also, after reminding the participants of the purpose of my study, I introduced them to a set of ground rules which were to be respected within the session. Following Eliot (2005), these rules were as follows: everyone should participate and contribute to the discussion; there are no right or wrong answers and what is said during the discussion is not shared anywhere else but within the group.

7.4 The findings

Drawing on the written transcripts I prepared after both focus groups had finished, my study identified five recurring themes. The first theme to be discussed is the students' motivation to study at VU both in terms of what matters to them now and what made them choose VU. Following this, we will examine the difference between how international and domestic students are perceived at VU, the matter of whether the participants were proud to study at VU and the idea of students as brand ambassadors. The fifth and last theme to be described in this section is concerned with how VU differs from other universities, and particularly examines the weaknesses and strengths of VU as a brand.

7.4.1 Theme no. 1: Motivation to study at a university

The focus group icebreaker asked students to comment on what made them say "yes, I want to be a university student". The participants were generally in agreement saying that they were studying in order to improve their chances of employment in the future. Some students also mentioned that they are trying to obtain a degree in order to obtain a certain status in society. "Society appreciates anybody who has a degree, whether it's a bachelor, master's, even postgraduate, then it's more highly appreciated," said Afari from Iran.

However, as the discussion proceeded further, the students started emphasising that there is another important reason why after graduating from high school they took their journey into the field of higher education. Some students said that their motivation to study at

university was to make good friends, learn about others, understand the world from a different perspective and experience a different education in a different country. To illustrate this with a specific example, Anna from East Timor said that she "wanted to learn something and find something."

While not all participants managed to explain what that "something" could be specifically, a majority confessed that they saw their opportunity to study as "an experience of a lifetime." Also, some students stressed that what is important about being at university is the learning process itself, the learning experience at university which is "not only for our future but also for this stage" (Peter, Indonesia). Other students were also discussing the importance of the present moment, for example Chandler from Australia said:

> When I first started my degree, I just wanted a job like everyone else but then I realized that when you enter university, there's always that continuous learning. There's always new information that's being researched and introduced so you're always developing your mental capacity when you enter uni. So that's why I'm still here.

It is interesting that very similar responses were given to another discussion topic whose aim was to take the icebreaker question to a new level. Since all the students agreed on the fact that we go to university to develop certain skills that will help us to get a good job in the future, I suggested that we could go directly to the workplace and obtain those skills there – that we could learn directly from professionals. The participants, however, were opposing: "[At university] we get to practice our skills in a safe environment, so we are free to make mistakes which are corrected by the tutors there and then" (Michele, Phillipines). Other students also agreed on the fact that there is a considerable difference between a university and a workplace – while emphasising that, unlike in the workplace, at university you "do not have to impress the right people," "follow the hierarchy" or "think in a particular way". "In university, you are more free to think or even do what you want" (Bernard, Brazil).

Not only that students "are free to make mistakes" when they are at university – other students felt that it is also fine to be uncertain about the future, that not knowing what exactly we want to do is part of the university experience. "You go to university, you can open some doors or just make you realize there are more things out there that you may or may not want to do." Such a perspective seemed to resonate across all the participants.

7.4.2 Theme no. 2: Motivation to study at Victoria University

In terms of students' motivation to continue in their educational journey, another important topic that was discussed in the focus groups was why they chose to study at Victoria University. There were three most often cited reasons for which the students decided to study at VU. First of all was location. For some, it was Australia itself. Others saw Melbourne as "a really great city to study in." Mainly international students from Asia were describing VU's location as preferable because it had an advantage in terms of climate: "[Here], it is a bit better than how it is in the UK, raining every day, the weather (…)," Eric from India said. Relative accessibility was also important: "During my interview, I was asked which country I preferred to go and I said Australia because it is closer to East Timor", added Anna.

Second was financial affordability. "The tuition fee is not too high like at Melbourne Uni or RMIT. It's very reasonable for myself and my parents, especially for international students," said Anastazia from Vietnam. Third were the specific courses: "[I chose VU] because I was looking to do something very specific in IT," said Eric, and their duration: "[At VU], It is only a two year degree, if I went to La Trobe University, it is going to be three years," mentioned Berry.

Aside from these factors, there was another attribute that made students choose Victoria University – and that was the personal contact. While some participants talked about how their friends or family relatives who had already been living in Australia suggested that they come to VU, others knew some of VU's representatives directly from their home institutions, for example Anna said:

> I chose VU because I knew about VU before. I worked at an institution that had a close relationship with VU. I used to view VU lectures many times before in my home country. I even met the President of VU, as well. (…) So the first time when I applied for the scholarship and I had to fill up the form, when they asked the question about which university, Victoria University came to my mind.

7.4.3 Theme no. 3: International and (or versus?) domestic students at VU

In both focus groups the participants agreed that there exist certain differences between being an international and a domestic student. As some students mentioned, international students face more difficulties during their studies than many domestic ones, for example Ben from China confessed:

> [International students] come here by themselves and their family just give them very specific amount of money for them to spend, so they have to decide how to spend them in a more efficient way. That includes accommodation, food, and so on…It's difficult for them to make new friends with domestic students.

What most of the participants found especially challenging or even unfair was the fact that international students have to pay much higher tuition fees that the local students do: "Whenever people learn that I'm an international student, the first comment I hear is, You're rich!", said Michele. While some students said they thought they paid double the fees of domestic students, other international participants stated that they heard their tuition fees were five times higher than those of local students. As previously described in chapter 4, tuition fees per year for international students are higher than for domestic students. They do not pay five times the amount of tuition but the range does vary. For example, an international student's undergraduate bachelor's degree ranges from 15,000 dollars to 33,000 dollars, while domestic students pay from 0 to approximately 10,000 dollars per year (the costs always depend on which subjects/units the students choose and how many credits they will try to aim for in each unit, StudyAssist 2014). While the main difference may lie in their financial commitments, some participants confessed that they feel international and domestic students are simply treated differently at VU, for example, Chandler (who is originally from South Africa) stated:

> I don't know if anyone else has seen this but I've seen some sort of set segregation in VU. For example, an exchange student who is essentially international, will be known as an exchange student and people automatically perceive them that way whereas an international student is perceived in a different way and domestic students in a different way.

This idea of *segregation* might be also supported by events that are targeted to international students but unintentionally demotivate domestic students to participate. A domestic student, Patrick, reflected on this by saying that he has seen

...some invitations to international student parties like on the walls of Footscray Park. When I look at them, I feel like this doesn't really apply to me so I just let it go. I just feel that that poster wasn't for me. I just wished that domestic students had parties.

Although it may seem that international students are somewhat isolated from the University's community and that they have special needs because they are facing many more difficulties than are domestic students, when asked about connotations evoked by the term "international student", most participants spoke about rather positive associations. While mainly domestic students said that "international students are different," the international students emphasised that, from their perspective, everything here is new and different *to them*. In saying that, they did not see their lack of knowledge of the local lifestyle as a disadvantage – on the contrary, the international participants considered their "foreignness" a certain advantage they hold over domestic students. Eric commented, for example:

> As an international student, because you're far away from home you have to learn new things. You have to network because you don't know anyone. Those aspects help you develop personally (…). I think that's one advantage over domestic students who might already be in their comfort zone, where everything is already laid out for them.

A very similar perspective was also offered by Anna: "International student, when I hear the words, I'm thinking about, far away from family, being independent [overlap] Do everything by yourself, budgeting by yourself. Everything by yourself". It is interesting, however, that none of these "positive" connotations were brought up by domestic students, neither was it something they could relate to. Here, an often cited characteristic of an international student was "poor English" or "shyness". While the language barrier may be generally seen as something that weakens overseas students, the international participants of the focus group saw the language factor as their strength: "I think an advantage is that I can speak two languages, I can read. Some of the local students they can only speak English. I can speak another, my home tongue language. I feel confident", Marry from China said.

However, it is important to note that despite the fact that a vast majority of the participants were international students, some of them did not see VU as an international institution, for example Claire said:

> [VU] has so many international students but it doesn't mean that the university itself is an international organization. I think it's more an Australian organization rather than an international organization. By the meaning of globalization, international and domestic, this is a domestic organization having lots of international students.

As the discussion progressed, the participants then agreed on the fact that VU should start doing something about this discrepancy – that it should somehow support the University's multicultural scope, but much more actively than it had been until that point. Two domestic students (Chandler and Patrick) suggested that the *international* dimension should be incorporated directly into the curriculum as they feel it something that is currently not happening at VU:

> [At VU] they don't really educate the group members that, 'Listen, we're in a group of different diversities so here's what they appreciate.' Now because they're giving you this knowledge, it teaches you how to work together. Instead of, 'Hey, you're in a group. Work it out among yourselves.' That's why, sometimes, a lot of groups do not work because they either have a local student who doesn't appreciate how the international students work or the international students feel overburdened because the local students bring another work ethic. I don't want to say 'a better one' because international students 'don't have a better one' – they're just different.

7.4.4 Theme no. 4: Students as the University's ambassadors – the concept of pride

According to Goutam (2013, p. 2), "a brand ambassador, as the name suggests, is an endorser of a brand. An ambassador is a representative of the brand that he/she endorses." Following this definition, we can say that university students play a very important role as brand ambassadors, where by *brand* we understand the institution or the *product* of education they are receiving.

To find out whether students are aware of their role and whether they would be even willing to actively represent VU and recommend it to others, I asked them during both focus groups whether they were proud to be students of VU. The first, spontaneous reaction to this question was "*Yes!*" The participants explained their positive answer by saying, for example: "I am proud because VU helped me to find a job" (Marry), *"I am definitely proud of being a member of VU. (…) We have a centre in our Law and Justice College that is really good. I will definitely recommend VU to other fellows back home as well"* (Peter) or "I met and befriended many people here, I think from more than ten countries now. I am proud to be in VU" (Anna).

This excitement was not, however, shared across all the participants. For instance, while reflecting on the positivity of his international colleagues, a domestic student mentioned that he would not say he was proud of studying at VU, but he said he was not ashamed either.

Since he felt he was the only one who saw it this way, he also said that "it is obviously an international or domestic student thing" meaning that in his perspective, international students are generally prouder to be students of VU than domestic students are.   This view resonated with the previous comments made by some international students, who explained that VU has much better reputation in their home country: "Most of my friends know this university because the name, Victoria, is a state name," Marry said. Manu, a female student from Bangladesh shared a very similar experience with the group: "I don't know why the University of Melbourne is so popular. VU is more popular in my country. I had no idea this name came to my country, but VU is the best one." However, as the international participants later admitted, this image of VU as a great institution was seriously harmed when they arrived to Australia or when they spoke to someone who lived here. Nick from India said:

> Back in India, when I was telling my friend that I will go to Victoria University for my masters, they all go, 'it's a good university' but when I landed there, I spoke to one of my friends who has been there for the last 6 or 7 years. She said, "Victoria University? It's crap… at the bottom...

A similar experience occurred to a female student from Bangladesh whose perception of VU "as the best university" was described above, but who, after arriving to Melbourne noticed that "no, that is not the one. That is not the best one". Mainly because of a large number of negative reactions they receive from "the outside world", it seemed that some participants felt that their pride in being students of VU exists *in spite of* something. To be more specific, Bernard said:

> I'm actually proud to study here because it's very different from the uni in Brazil. I arrived and studied here in City Flinders which is in the middle of the city where everything's near, very nice classes. The lecturers seem like they really want to help you. I really see no reason not to be proud. Maybe one reason would be the image that other people have about VU but I don't really care.

In terms of this "image other people have", other participants also confessed that they often encountered rather negative reactions to them studying at VU. For example, Ross from China said that the first year he came to study at VU, others told him "you might change the uni"; Kevin from Pakistan said that "[VU] does not have the wow factor" and Patrick thought that VU did not have a good reputation due to its location in Western Suburbs.

It was, however, interesting, that all the participants shared this kind of an experience while emphasising the fact that when such a rather unpleasant situation happened, they had a tendency to defend their university. Ross from China described his position to VU: "When students from Monash or Melbourne Uni ask me, 'Where are you from?' 'I'm from VU.' 'Ahh, VU.' And I'll say, 'So what?! You want to apply?'". Kevin saw it similarly: "no matter how much negative things you hear about VU, try to see the bigger picture" and so did Patrick: "I'm here for my own reasons. Some of you said VU sucks. Dude, I don't care. I'm here for my reasons."

The students also agreed that, in reality, VU is a much better institution than "it seems to be". Specifically, some participants mentioned that the teaching staff is excellent, that the facilities are modern and functional – with many campuses providing "a lot of space" for students. "At RMIT or Melbourne Uni, they're really, really crowded. At VU, it's easy to find a seat. If they can't, they can easily go to Footscray Campus to find one. The facilities are very important", Ross added.

7.4.5 Theme no. 5: How VU differs from other universities

7.4.5.1 Disadvantages and threats

Because all the participants agreed on the fact that VU does not have a good reputation "in the outside world", the following topics of our discussion tried to identify the sources of this rather negative image. Aside from the bad reputation of Footscray as one of the main locations of VU's campuses, some participants saw VU's weakness in its undemanding requirements. Chris from Bangladesh said: "Studying in VU isn't as hard as in other universities so that's why I came to VU". This was also a deciding selection criterion for Marry: "The agent told me it's not very hard to study. I guess it's easy to graduate". According to other participants, such an image is not only shared across those who are interested in studying at VU, but they think that "others" also perceive VU as an institution "anyone can pass". For example, Ross described his encounters with other people's view on VU as follows: "A lot of people think that VU doesn't care about attendance, whether they come or not. With the reports, they say that you just write and they give you a mark."

While some students posited that, in reality, "it is difficult to study at VU", others admitted that the courses at VU are not very demanding in general. To illustrate this with an example, Eric said: "[During the lecture] we just read slides or fell asleep. It wasn't very engaging. Or you would miss the class. It was just a matter of passing for the sake of it." Other

participants added that they were aware of the fact that other universities have stricter requirements than VU does: "Pass rate is pretty, I mean, not as high as other unis. So it gives us some chance, to pass basically", Chris described. Another factor that has a negative impact on VU's image may lie, at least according to the participants, in internal communication. To be more specific, some students described their unpleasant experiences with the Student Service Centre (SSC): "The Student Service Centre even lost one of my forms. It's an important form and they can't find it in the system as well", Michele said; "the Student Service Centre is pretty bad, actually. I asked them about the pigeonhole at St. Alban's. They told me it didn't exist despite the lecturer telling me it exists", Patrick mentioned; "[The Student Service Centre] misplaced my form. I wanted to change my course, I gave it to them and they lost it. I had to do that again and again five times", Berry said. Other participants also added that they think that particular departments of VU do not communicate with the lecturers nor with each other. Therefore, as some students mentioned, the University's activities might often seem uncoordinated and its overall communication does not have a unified tone, Michele described this issue as follows:

> My problem with this way of communication is that every department has different information about one topic. (…) Sometimes a nursing student would go to the Student Service Centre to ask for specific information about their placement and the SSC would answer them with something but the reliability of that answer is somewhat questionable. So we would go to the Clinical Learning Office and would be given another info *[sic]*, a different one. Then when we go to the specific Unit Coordinator for the Clinical Practicum placement and we would be given another info *[sic]*. My goodness, I wish they would coordinate with one another and give the same information.

The lack of coordination in terms of communication was something mainly international students experienced – especially when dealing with VU's departments that were responsible for international students' agenda:

> I don't remember what it was about but I was redirected from SSC to International then from International back to SSC. (…) They said, 'No, we can't send you something, go to international'. International said, 'No, that's not our job. Go to student services'. I went back to SSC.

Also, as it turned out during the discussions, the internal communication of VU does not resonate very well with the external communication activities. For instance, when asked

about the slogan, none of the participants was able to recall it except for one who said "Excellent or something…Is it School of Thought?" Other students were aware of some communication campaigns of VU, but no one could remember anything specific. Anastazia said that she noticed some advertising activities on the tram – something about "the future, your dreams, some stuff like that" and others recalled that VU supports Western Bulldogs. Aside from these themes, the students did know not what else "VU was saying about itself".

A bad reputation for the Western suburbs, undemanding requirements and the lack of coordination in terms of communication with public, students and across particular departments were the main negative features of VU brought up by the participants. Some of them also mentioned that VU's brand as a university is relatively young which might serve as an explanation why the University has not managed to establish a good reputation yet: "I think that [VU] has been here for around 20 years. Maybe 10 years down the line, it will create a name for itself", Kevin finished this discussion on a positive note. Exactly what VU has to work with and what good qualities could possibly be built upon during this upcoming decade will be the main topic of the following section.

7.4.5.2   Strengths and advantages

Despite the fact that, in terms of VU's image there is much room for improvement, both focus groups identified many positive attributes from which VU as a brand can benefit already. When asked about how VU differs from other universities, many participants stated that VU has modern and well-functioning facilities: "[At Monash or RMIT], during finals, [the students] can't find a seat in the library. At RMIT or Melbourne Uni, they're really, really crowded. At VU, it's easy to find a seat. If they can't, they can easily go to Footscray Campus to find one. The facilities are very important", Ross said together with Eric who thought that: "[VU] has very good facilities and good resources".

This goes in conjunction with seeing VU as an *accessible university*, an attribute mentioned by more than one participant: "The best part is, it's right next to the main station of the city", Nick added to this theme. Other students also saw VU's location in the heart of the city as a great benefit and they emphasised the fact that its main campuses are well kept and looked after: "I have a friend from RMIT. One day, she came over and said, 'Wow, VU is very clean, looks very good and modern'", stated Marry.

Aside from an attribute of "accessibility", the focus groups managed to identify other unique qualities that distinguish VU from other universities. Specifically, the participants

mentioned that VU is friendly, supportive, caring and encouraging: "For me, whenever I hear or read Victoria Uni, in my mind, I see helpful people and supportive members and staff", Peter from Indonesia stated – similarly to Michele who noted, "[At VU] if you're interested in doing something, you get the support". Other participants mostly agreed with such a perspective and added that mainly "the lecturers seem like they really want to help you".

Maybe the most distinctive feature of VU that students discussed during the focus groups applied to the existence of *teamwork*: "I think I have a couple of realizations to [VU's] attitude. The first one is *teamwork*. I think this is the most important. At Monash or RMIT, they don't have teamwork. They just focus on the reports and other things", said Ross.

Other participants related to this realization and emphasised the existence of specific programs that support teamwork across the whole University. In particular, Berry from Thailand talked about the benefits of the Students as Staff Program[29] and described how this platform can help students with finding a job in the future:

> VU is the only university that I know that offers jobs for students called "Students as Staff". When you put that on your resume and say, *Employer: Victoria University,* it looks much better than if you say you worked at McDonalds or something. I was at Monash for three whole years and wasn't able to get a job. The job would be advertised in the internal mail first and all working staff would more likely get it first. It never comes to the students. At VU, if you go to the career hub, even international students can apply and they pay good money. (…) I can guarantee you, I'm from Monash myself, I've got a lot of friends from Melbourne University, the best job they can get is to work at a book shop, the Co-op Bookshop at Melbourne University. There's no *Students as Staff*.

Other participants then started to share their personal experiences when they worked as *student ambassadors* or *student assistants* and they also confirmed that the cooperation between students and university staff is something that is quite unique for a university in general – Peter added:

> I've talked to other fellows from other universities in Melbourne and they're not provided with the same opportunity. They're offered a job at campus but not as staff. It's different from the experience that we have here. (…) I think most universities in the Melbourne area don't have something like that. VU provides a good opportunity for students to work or engage at the level of staff so that is a very good experience.

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[29] The Students as Staff program is fully described in chapter 6.

7.4.6 Discussion and analysis

7.4.6.1 Motivations to study at a university and at Victoria University

Most of the students who were involved in the focus groups showed that they were glad to be university students. Aside from preparation for their successful future, some participants felt that there was something to be gained from the University already at that moment. Mainly the international students saw that the principle benefit of studying at university lies in meeting new people and understanding the world from a different perspective. What was not said explicitly, but what I saw as a recurring theme, was that the participants were taking the question of why they were university students very personally. This "personal" dimension can be noticed not only in the responses I described above, but in other contributions as well. For example, when describing his journey and reasons that brought him to the university, Chris from Bangladesh said:

> I have a cousin who also goes to university. He is five years older than me. So I always hear him talk about university this and that. When I was in high school, he used to wear casual dress and I used to wear uniforms. That made me really jealous. So that's one of the reasons I want to go to university.

When studying at university, students do not have to know what they want to do in the future and are free to make mistakes. They want to learn continuously not only about the outside world, but mainly about themselves. It is possible that by something as simple as "not wearing a uniform" anymore, they feel they can finally be themselves – without trying to make a good impression, pretending to be something they are not or following rules they do not believe in. By focusing on the present moment, trying to be *oneself* and feeling free to make mistakes, the students' comments lead us to think about the University's identity (and effectively about its brand positioning) with a regard to three essential elements that form the *authentic* (after Heidegger 1962) characteristic of a university. These qualities were already fully discussed in chapter 3, which suggested that a university identity is constituted by students who can be themselves, who can be themselves *now* and whose mistakes form their educational journey; they form who they are as well as what the purpose of a university is overall ("University as a fool", Dahrendorf 1969). I believe that the University's marketing could creatively benefit from these authentic qualities which could potentially lead to establishing a distinctive positioning. The specific examples of how to achieve this will be outlined in the final chapter of this thesis.

In terms of the specific motivation of the students – as to why they chose VU – the main factors that influenced the participants of the focus groups to choose to study at VU were the location, the relatively low tuition fees, the specific courses and their duration. However, perhaps the most influential attribute was given to the personal contact which VU managed to establish with them during their studies at their home institutions. For students, being in touch with a university is not equal to being able to read about their courses online or talk to agents that represent it. Being in touch means being able to approach people who are directly involved in the life of VU, who are "the insiders".

As the previous chapter showed, the "people factor" plays an important role for the University and is a very effective recruitment tool. This is not, however, a completely new revelation. As, for example, Biswas and Srivastava (2010) suggested, the uniqueness of educational marketing is that, instead of the traditional four Ps, (Product, Price, Place, Promotion) there are three additional Ps that consist of Physical evidence, Process and People – which proved to be the most vibrant component of the educational marketing mix (Biswas & Srivastava 2010). This is given by the fact that satisfaction and retention of the students solely depends on the relationship they have with university staff (mainly teachers). Such a relationship then forms the overall *connectedness* (Blum & Libbey 2004) that exists between a university and the students. The concept of connectedness can then determine how much students can relate to their institution – the higher level of connectedness, the better experience for students, the stronger the brand. As the term itself suggests, the connectedness can be built and strengthened only through the connections students create with other people at university. The university representatives (teachers, administrative staff, and management) are thus those who do not stand behind the brand, they *are* the brand because they create it.

7.4.6.2 Us versus them

The participants of the focus group felt there is a certain gap that lies between international and domestic students. While there are many "natural" factors that contribute to this division (language, unfamiliarity, foreignness), the students think that their University does not celebrate this difference, but rather supports *segregation.* This is enhanced by the fact that international students pay higher tuition fees and that their "strangeness" is not something that could be celebrated and shared, but rather as something that should be adjusted and minimized. While domestic students often see international students as shy, overseas students are aware of

their own strengths. Those lie especially in their newly acquired independence which is teaching them to do things on their own and makes them step outside their comfort zone.

As participants themselves suggested, these diverse approaches and experiences in life and studies could be directly incorporated into the University's curriculum (the specific suggestions of what to do exactly will be outlined in the final chapter of this thesis). What the focus groups identified as even more important was the need to stop the obsessive diversification and to see both international and domestic students as part of the same community, as "just students": "Just forget about those labels, 'this is domestic, this is international'. That's something I think the university should think about", Chandler suggested specifically.

7.4.6.3   Students as brand ambassadors

As the available literature shows, the concept of pride in terms of students' relationship to their university has not yet been much discussed. Instead of focusing on whether the students are proud of their institution, the current research focuses on whether the particular university is prestigious (Brewer, Gates & Goldman 2001). That makes it an interesting revelation, because in order for a university to be prestigious, the students must feel a certain pride towards it – so that they can "confirm" its prestige or enhance it further. In case of the focus groups with students of VU, most participants said they were proud of their university. However, at this stage, their pride is somewhat limited. The students cannot work well as brand ambassadors because they are busy working as brand "defenders". It seems that VU's "external" reputation is not in very good form; every time students come across a negative comment from an outsider, they immediately feel the need to somehow protect the image of their university – instead of positively enhancing it further. However, since VU has a generally good reputation overseas, the international students are more inclined to support it and be prouder to study there.

Overall, the power to endorse the brand and improve the image of VU lies mainly within its students who, as the focus groups showed, just need more reasons to "play for" the VU team (and play not only defence, but the offence, too). The final chapter of this thesis will try to elaborate this unique marketing potential further.

7.4.6.4   VU's weaknesses and strengths

Like every university, VU has its weaknesses and strengths. In terms of what could be possibly improved upon, VU could mainly rethink its positioning as a university with undemanding requirements, based on what the students suggested. It could make clear that its accessibility does not lie in accepting everyone and allowing them to stay no matter what they do or do not do. This potential repositioning (which will be discussed further in the final chapter) could then be communicated well and explicitly – both internally and externally – while emphasising the positive and unique qualities of the University.

According to the participants, the most distinctive attribute of VU lies in its people. It is mainly the friendly students, the supportive staff and the caring lecturers the participants said they could find at VU. In some cases, the *people* factor even belonged to the main reasons why the students chose VU: "I tried to apply at La Trobe but I didn't get any contact from them. (…) At the same time, I applied at VU and got a reply from them first", Chris from Bangladesh stated. Maybe the greatest potential to enhance the importance of people and their teamwork lies in the project called *Students as Staff Program.* As the previous chapter described, while offering job positions within particular departments of VU this program aims to interconnect students and staff, it tries to involve students in the professional sphere of a university life. The final chapter of this thesis will try to reflect on its significance and aims to specifically propose how this program can contribute to the University's communication strategy and its overall development.

7.5 Limitations of the study

Similarly to all research that engages human participants, this study has various limitations that are related to the research sample. First of all, due to a much higher demand for international students to be involved in this study, there is a certain imbalance between overseas and domestic student representation. Despite the fact the interpretations related to VU's communication given by the domestic students are included and well explained in this chapter, the perceptions of international students dominate. Even if this disproportion will be somewhat remedied in the following study on action groups, it is still important to note that this particular study mainly highlights the relationship between the University and the international students.

I also want to draw attention to the sections that summarize the particular implications of the research findings. Despite the fact that I make deductions guided by what was said

during the focus groups, it is valuable to point out that these deductions are not to be understood as general conclusions. The selected participants consist of active students who showed their willingness to be engaged in the University's affairs simply by participating in my study (there was no reimbursement offered). These active students might therefore represent other energetic students of VU, but may not voice opinions of those who are rather passive in their approach to studies and life at the University.

Additionally, some generalizations are made by the participants themselves. Especially when comparing VU to other universities, the students often jump to conclusions by saying that VU has a more spacious library, classrooms or friendlier teachers than other Melbourne universities – that VU is simply better. Again, even if some students had been previously enrolled with other universities, I would like to emphasise the subjectivity of their interpretations – for example, in terms of university rankings, both RMIT and the University of Melbourne (that are specifically named by the participants) have continuously achieved a significantly better score than VU (THE 2014).

Last but not least, I would like to comment on the method used in this study. A focus group is a research method that requires the moderator to ask questions in order to generate discussion. This was definitely achieved and the students actively contributed their ideas and opinions. However, it is important to admit that their particular confessions were greatly influenced by the questions asked during the session. Specifically, when talking about the difference between international and domestic students, the international students started talking about being greatly disadvantaged (in terms of the language barrier, the tuition and transportation fees, etc.). However, when I concretely asked them to discuss what international students have and domestic students do not, the discussions generated many interesting stories that eventually showed that international students hold a big advantage over those who are local. Even if I find it important to mention this as a certain limitation of the method (different queries generate different answers), this particular example leads us to an important question I often raise in this study (especially in chapter 4): if we decide to communicate with international students as with those who do not need help, will they still need it?

7.6 Conclusion

The focus groups with students of Victoria University identified many interesting themes that, when applied in practice, have a great potential to enhance current communication activities of the University. Although the aim of this chapter was not to demonstrate how exactly this

potential can be used (that will be the topic of the final chapter of this thesis), it showed how the students perceive their university and what it means to them to study at VU.

What I saw as the most common theme revisited by the participants was the importance of people at VU. Most of the students agreed that for them, to study at VU, means to be able to interact with people from different cultures and backgrounds, to see the world from a different perspective, to meet other students and make lifelong friends. The "people factor" was also something the students highlighted when talking about the quality of education provided by the University. Again, a majority of them stated that the teaching staff is excellent and that their lecturers are supportive and helpful. Similar qualities applied to administration staff which, especially at the beginning of their studies, convinced students to choose VU simply by interacting with them personally and in a timely fashion. Another dimension of the important role of people at VU lies, according to some participants, in interactive programs that enable students to engage with the University on a professional level (Students as Staff Program). As the students said, this particular approach to student engagement might also serve as something through which VU can distinguish itself from other universities.

VU also has the great potential to become different in terms of being seen as an international institution. To achieve this it needs to make sure that its community of students is diverse – which, however, does not mean being broken up into different isolated groups of students. Unfortunately, as some participants pointed out, the current state shows more segregation than integration between domestic and international students. Domestic students do not feel invited to events organised for or by international students and the multicultural agenda does not create an organic part of the University; what the students would like to see is an ongoing multicultural initiative that would not only shape the university life but also the actual courses.

Among other things, I consider celebrating the diversity of the University's students to be important, and to see international students not as weak or shy, but as capable and open-minded. In addition, the international students of VU are currently the leading brand ambassadors of their university. They tend to be prouder of their University than are the domestic students. This might be caused by the fact that the reputation of VU is better in their home country, but it also may be linked to the investments international students made in obtaining their higher education abroad. As many studies proved, people tend to appreciate things that were difficult to get more than those that were not (Pritchard 2010). This applied especially to international students: they had to find a way to be able to study abroad, they put their efforts (and possibly savings) into coming to Australia and they risked everything and left

everyone they knew behind. VU might thus have become their "dream come true" as they were working hard on even getting enrolled. In other words: the harder the journey, the sweeter the reward. Especially in comparison with domestic students, the journey of international students was more complicated, which now paradoxically "sweetens" the relationship they have with VU – the experienced hurdles and troubles make them prouder of their university.

The pride the students hold for the University could potentially increase if VU paid more attention to the integration of its internal and external communication activities. Communication with the public, students and across particular departments could be better coordinated and integrated within a clear communication strategy, with a congruous voice and message. To achieve that, one slogan could be explicitly formulated. The slogan could then reflect all the good qualities by which VU can differentiate itself from other universities. *Which qualities to choose and what exactly should be the main distinction or the brand essence of VU?* – these will be the leading questions which the next chapter of this thesis will attempt to answer.

8 Action groups with students of Victoria University: students as co-producers of the University's brand

8.1 Introduction

This study prioritizes the distinctive nature of the field of higher education and suggests that the marketing communication of universities should attempt more than just transferring marketing concepts from business sectors. As the previous chapters showed, the greatest potential of universities lies in their students – in their willingness to do things, to contribute their ideas and suggestions but also behavior to the university's development. Given that argument, this research recognizes students not only as members of the university's target audience but especially as co-creators of the university image and identity. The hypothesis here is that students' ideas and suggestions can significantly contribute to the development of the university's communication strategy.[30] This was already demonstrated in chapter 5 in which I showcased a project of Charles University's students who were involved in creating a communication strategy of their university which was later successfully implemented.

This hypothesis was also partially proven by the focus groups conducted with the students of Victoria University. There, the students confirmed that they appreciate interactive programs that enable them to engage with the University on a professional level (such as the Students as Staff program) and they also agreed that this particular approach to student engagement might be so powerful that it can potentially serve as something through which VU can distinguish itself from other universities. Also, most participants were not hesitant to show their pride towards their institution, a crucial criterion for working with students as brand ambassadors.

However, to be able to "proudly represent" their university, some students felt that there are a few things VU should improve – both in terms of the "product" and the marketing communication. Their ideas and opinions alone served as an indicator of the students' willingness to somehow contribute to the university's development. Therefore, to emphasize

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[30] This is also formulated as one of the crucial aims of my thesis which is "to explore the creative potential of students to actively contribute to the development of university marketing."

the creative potential the students have, and to generate even more ideas and suggestions for what VU can change or do better, I followed the focus groups with a set of two action groups that involved the students of VU again. The rationale behind this study also followed the project I conducted at Charles University in Prague. There, working with students majoring in marketing and communication disciplines, we developed a complex communication strategy which was later implemented by the University. Being aware of the process and outcomes of such cooperation, I designed action groups which also involved students who were to actively participate in developing new approaches to communication activities at Victoria University.

The action groups are thus the main topic of this chapter. Specifically, the following section will introduce this methodological tool within the framework of action research (with action groups as its main research tool) which is frequently used in the educational sector. It will also explain how action groups differ from focus groups – and what they have in common. The design, procedures and the participants that shaped both the process and the results of the action groups will be the main topics of the third section of this chapter. The fourth section will then reveal the findings of my study while focusing on the dominating themes brought up by the participants. Here, I will include examples of specific ideas the students had of how to empower the University and its brand. The final section will thus serve as a certain inspirational platform upon which I will build when designing a strategic communication plan for VU (which will be introduced in the final chapter of this thesis).

8.2 Methodological framework of the study

Aside from the participants themselves, the key difference between the focus and the action groups lay in their objectives. While the main goal of the focus groups was to generate feedback from the University's students, the action groups concentrated on the students' *feedforward.* The concept of feedforward has been explained in chapter 5 – to briefly reiterate it: within a process of feedforward, instead of looking back at what a particular organization could have done better or differently, the people involved in this process are trying to actively suggest what kind of steps should be taken to improve the situation. The participants are then actively engaged in the evaluation process as they are giving specific recommendations for future activities. Evaluation is then no longer passive, but a highly *active* pursuit.

That is also the reason why the second study (the first were the focus groups) emphasised the importance of this activity by including it directly in its title. Rather than on passive reactions, the "action groups" are built on the proactive involvement of the participants. More specifically, following the theoretical framework of anthropology and sociology, I see an action group as a group of people who have been brought together to accomplish some task (Macfarlane 2013). By contrast with focus groups, the action groups do not only serve solely as discussion groups, instead, they function as "decision-making units whose decisions govern the process of arrangemental innovation" (Davis et. al. 1971, p. 8).

This methodological tool is widely used in so-called action research. One of the main reasons for the relevance of this particular methodological framework is that action research is predominantly used in the education sector (Torbrand 2014). Here, it usually takes the form of investigation designed for use by teachers to attempt to solve problems and improve professional practices in their own classrooms (Parsons & Brown 2002). More generally, it can also be seen as a process that allows for inquiry and discussion as components of the "research". Often, action research is defined as a collaborative activity among colleagues searching for solutions to everyday, real problems experienced in schools, or looking for ways to improve the students' achievement and motivation (Ferrance 2000). According to Parsons (2013) the role of action research is to increase engagement of the people involved in the particular research and "to reshape teachers' identities and embody their senses of agency" (Parsons 2013, p.135). The concept of agency underlines the methodological approach of this study. While action research can increase "the sense of agency" among teachers or those who conduct the research, my study proposes that it can have the same effect on the research participants. Using this approach, I want to provoke "engaged agency" among students who are involved in this research. The role of this particular method thus lies in empowering research participants – university students, as I will later explain – to voice their opinions and proposals and to think about possible ways how to turn them in to actions. Rather than dealing with the theoretical, action research allows practitioners to address those concerns which are closest to them and which they can influence or change (Ferrance 2000). In other words, action research is a fancy way of saying "let's study what's happening at our school and decide how to make it a better place" (Calhoun 1994). This is the main objective of the action groups that will be analysed within this chapter.

8.3 Action groups with students of VU – participants, design and procedures

Because the method of action groups celebrates the practicality of the researched topics and the proactive involvement of the participants, I decided to run action groups with VU students on the basis of professional brainstorming sessions. Therefore, more than methodology, the action groups served as a creative research technique, whose main objective was to scope new ideas and recommendations for international marketing communication activities at VU. In terms of the location and the duration, following a similar structure to the focus groups, I ran two action groups, each of which took approximately 90 minutes and because the City Flinders Campus proved to serve as a preferable location for the students, both sessions were conducted there.

8.3.1 The profile of the participants

The main objective of this study was to investigate whether and/or how students can contribute their knowledge, skills and ideas to the marketing activities of a university. To allow for more creative, dynamic and proactive discussion, both action groups were run on the basis of a brainstorming session. According to literature and research, the ideal size of a group involved in brainstorming is around six participants (Capper 1998; Andler 2012). This rather small number allows for highly interactive discussion in which participants can exchange all of their ideas. To make sure such a number will be achieved, the size of each action group was set to four to seven participants.

Similarly to the focus groups, both postgraduate and undergraduate students and both international and domestic students were recruited. Emphasising the practical, professional level of the action groups, I decided to recruit students who specialized in marketing or communication disciplines at VU. Therefore, the main recruitment tool I used was by way of direct email sent by VU's marketing lecturers to their students. I was also invited to one lecture and spoke about the action groups there. I believe that the practical overlap of my study served as a great motivation for the students and, because I knew I would want them to actively cooperate, they were also motivated by an incentive in the form of 50 AUD paid for their participation.

In total, eleven students agreed to participate in my study – six students attended the first action group, five participated in the second session. Altogether, there were eight female

and three male participants with their ages ranging from nineteen to twenty-nine years. There was only one international student; the rest of the group was created by the domestic students. For the purposes of ethical research conduct, I provide students with randomly created pseudonyms so that the participants remain anonymous. **Jessica** was the only international student; she came from the USA, was twenty-nine years old and was majoring in Marketing. **Diana** was twenty years old; she, like the other remaining students, was a domestic student and was majoring in Professional Writing. **Sarah**, a twenty-one year old female student, was majoring in PR and Communication. There was also **Thomas**, a twenty year old male student majoring in Professional Writing; **Dylan**, a twenty year old male student majoring in PR and Communication; **Brian,** a twenty-four year old male student majoring in Marketing; **Jane**, a twenty-three year old female student majoring in Public Relations; **Suzie**, a nineteen year old female student majoring in Marketing; **Cleopatra,** a twenty-three year old female student majoring in Public Relations; **Georgia**, a twenty-three year old female student majoring in Public Relations and **Brenda**, a twenty-two year old female student majoring in Public Relations.

The proportion of domestic and international students is significantly different to the preceding focus groups. The dominant participation of the domestic students might be explained by the fact that that communication disciplines do not belong to the most popular amongst international students. As chapter 2 showed, overseas students tend to choose different courses such as Management and Commerce or Engineering and other technologically focused courses.

8.3.2 Design of the action groups

Using brainstorming as a principal platform of the group discussion, the design of both action groups incorporated its commonly used structure. Drawing on *The IAF Handbook of Group Facilitation* (2012), each action group integrated three stages of a brainstorming process: the individual stage, the discussion stage and the reflection stage.

The first, so-called *individual stage*, took place before the action groups started. Here, all the participants received an email informing them about the themes which would be discussed later with the group. This enabled the students to have time to think about the topics and to generate ideas other students can relate to during the later brainstorming. According to Schuman (2012),

> It might be useful to have individuals generate ideas individually prior to sharing those ideas with the group to allow each individual to have a pool of highly available ideas to share in the group process (p. 110).

The email I sent them addressed the topics that were identified as important by the preceding focus groups: the Students as Staff program, VU as an international institution and students' pride and identity.

The second stage of the brainstorming process was in the form of a group discussion. This time, all participants were brought together and they shared their ideas drawing on the individual brainstorming they had done prior to the group session. Here, I worked with the same topics the participants had received via email. I also prepared a set of additional questions which were, for example, as follows: How can VU differentiate itself from other universities? What does VU have that other universities do not? What exactly can VU do to stand out in both domestic and international marketplaces?

The last, reflection stage of the brainstorming process was held after the action groups finished. Drawing again on Schuman,

> A subsequent 'incubation session' in which individuals reflect individually on the exchanged ideas and relate them to their own knowledge structure may allow the generation of a considerable number of additional ideas (p. 110).

Following this view, I sent the participants a follow-up email kindly asking them to reflect on the action groups. Specifically, they were asked about the themes they thought that stood out during the discussion and they were invited to give their individual recommendations on VU's marketing communication.

8.3.3 Conducting the action groups

To illuminate the individual thoughts, ideas and perspectives of all the participants, I tried to facilitate a free-flowing discussion that enabled each student to contribute his or her thoughts and participate in the debate with other students. The discussed topics were built around the themes which were primarily related to the students' experience with Victoria University's

communication activities. The participants were asked a number of questions, but following the rules of a brainstorming session, I encouraged them to freely engage with other students and develop a discussion regardless of the questions. Receiving a list of topics and questions prior the action groups, the students came prepared and had some ideas they wanted to share with the group. Similarly to the focus groups, I told the participants that there no right or wrong answers and I encouraged them to be active with their contributions and not to circulate the content of the discussion outside the group. Both action groups were audio recorded and all the participants were educated about the manner in which the data would be collected before the discussion started (this information was also part of the consent form that all the students signed before their participation in the study).

8.4 The findings

Drawing on the written transcripts I prepared after the conclusion of both action groups, I identified four main themes that structure students' recommendations on how VU can enhance its communication activities and its brand overall: *the campus experience; the students as brand ambassadors; the good initiatives versus poor communication* and *the integrity and consistency of the University brand*. Each theme will be elaborated in the sections that follow.

8.4.1 Theme no. 1: The campus experience

The participants agreed that a good campus must have a good "vibe." Despite the fact that one of the main campuses of VU is located in the city business district, most students said that they do not consider it to be the heart of VU. On the contrary, as their brainstorming suggested, the students think that VU's central campus should somehow incorporate the vibe the suburban campuses have. For example, Sarah recommended the following:

> It's like they've missed here [at VU City Flinders Campus], they've got the location but they've missed the whole vibe completely. In St. Albans, they've got really great facilities and a really good vibe but it's in St. Albans. If you want to be in a university that's standing out and leading the way, focus on your central city campus (…).

Even if the group agreed that VU's relatively remote campuses such as St. Albans or Footscray Park do not have the greatest reputation, there is "something to them". To be more specific, the students complained that the main city building does not have so many places to

interact. "[At VU City Flinders Campus], our only interaction is on the elevator, pretty much", Jessica described. Whereas at Footscray, there is "the whole cafeteria building where there are lots of places to interact", Thomas pointed out. The interactive and "relaxed" space that can be found at Footscray or St. Albans was then something the group repeatedly emphasised – which I interpret as their definition of the already mentioned *vibe*. More specifically, Sarah confessed:

> This campus [the VU City Flinders Campus] definitely feels a lot more different and less engaging than the other ones. Just the fact that you come in and there's an elevator and you just… it's weird. There's no space to relax and sit outside and there's no café that you can go to. At Footscray, there's The Reading Room Café where you sit down and have a coffee.

To create campuses that are interactive and engaging – campuses that have a *vibe* – the students' brainstorming resulted in specific ideas of what VU could try to do. For instance, Jessica said:

> At the end of last semester, for a chance to win money or something [there was a competition], 'give us your suggestions on how to improve the university'. I sent in two suggestions (…). One that I had sent and I did research and everything and I cited my sources and all of that, about if we had some sort of outdoor space in this university that you could sit and study outside. I think there are a couple of levels where there are balconies that are unused. I'm sure there are security issues and stuff like that but there has to be a way to fix that. So I did research on how studying outside is actually really good for you,

Other students liked this idea and they specifically suggested that there could be some new learning space on the roof of the main building at City Flinders Campus. Overall, they found it really important to involve VU's students in designing their campuses and to let their creativity influence the look of both the outdoor and indoor learning spaces. Diana specifically pointed out:

> I'm just thinking of that fountain in St. Albans that's been inactive for ages. (…) I remember a couple of years ago in one of the uni magazines, there was an article written by an engineering or architecture student suggesting how that could be made as a platform, like how it could be utilized. I thought that was a really good idea but it just never.

Also, to make sure that the University and its campuses are engaging, the students' ideas were often linked to the engagement with the community, especially at Footscray Park. Being aware of some of VU's current volunteering activities, the students did not find them sufficient and they specifically recommended that the relationship between students and the

community at Footscray should be more active. For example, the students had an idea to directly incorporate community engagement into their curriculum. Brenda, for example, suggested that

> They can just use, they use us anyway. They can just use the students. You're on the fitness thing so create something for a fitness environment for people in the area to maybe bring up their mood so they're not angry at doing what they are doing.

Other students followed this idea with other suggestions such as giving speeches in the public spaces (instead of being hidden in the classroom within a course of Public Speaking) or working on projects that have a direct impact on the local people. Cleopatra, for example, asked:

> What about linking us with small businesses in the community with Footscray? Because they're doing it with railway stations already and I think they're actually investing money in Footscray. If we could be part of growing the community, investing in people like marketing or businesses, how awesome would that be? We actually had a part of growing someone's business. I think that would be awesome.

8.4.2 Theme no. 2: The students as brand ambassadors

One of the main topics both groups brainstormed was related to VU's values of accessibility, excellence and engagement. Despite the fact that the participants were aware of these values and knew they created the main pillars of the University's communication, they emphasised how important it is to communicate them internally – to build the university brand from the inside out. Specifically, Jessica said:

> I think you have to get students on board with that belief of engagement. I personally am not of that belief at this moment. I come to class, I do well, I'm engaged but my classmates aren't and the coursework is not necessarily excellent. So for me to think and speak positively of VU, I first have to believe it. I don't think that's necessarily the case.

As the students' brainstorming suggested, it is mainly the students who create the university brand – the main power to influence the external image of VU thus lies within them, it lies in the heads of insiders, not the outside public. The main question of both brainstorming sessions therefore was how to achieve this image – how to make sure that the students would

be on the same page or on board with the university brand (after Papandrea 2014). As the participants pointed out, there is a relatively simple answer to these questions: the students should be given enough power to create their own learning experience and they should be able to be the builders, not the spectators of the university brand. However, the students feel it is not what is currently happening at VU, for example Cleopatra stated:

> I feel like we as Communication students are not used. We're doing something at the moment for another company. We're obviously not that interested in it because, to be honest, it's helping them, it's nothing helping us. I want to say, 'I was in a PR campaign for my university'. We're not really being used to our full potential. I feel like that's really sad. That's how I personally feel about it.

When I asked other students whether they would like to be actively involved in VU's communication activities and engage with their university on a more professional level, all of them showed a great interest. Particularly, the students were suggesting what they could specifically be in charge of and how they could contribute their ideas and experiences to the University's brand development: "as a Communication student, I'd really be interested in the position that had a part in the publications of VU. Maybe be involved in the setting up the Student Diary or different brochures," said Diana. Other students also had very specific ideas of how they could be involved, specifically this is what Jessica shared with the group:

> I'd be interested in, which would probably already exist, in 'international student engagement' role, managing and providing the resources for everything you're looking for that's not well communicated, whether it's clubs or leaders of something or whatever.

Other students said they would like to help VU by creating surveys within the university to find out what the students are thinking, initiating campaigns that would involve students coming on board and taking initiative or working with the teachers and coming up with ideas on how to improve the University. Not only did the students think that there was currently no opportunity to be involved on this level, they also felt that their efforts "to do more" are often not appreciated by VU – that their ambitions were not valued by the University. Jessica voiced her concern:

> Here, I feel very much like I get to be the best in my class, frequently. So I do think there's a way if you want to position the university as, *all the fish are welcome in this pond* but you still want to highlight the fact that some people get to be the big fish in the pond, is great. That said,

I do think there should be some rewards for that. I don't feel advantaged at all except that my teachers see that I'm good at what I do and that down the road, they'll write me a referral. But I'm not seeing any, like I said, everyone else is still graduating with the same degree I am.

The impression that there are no "rewards" for high achievers was a belief shared across both action groups. When encouraged to think about specific ways to work with this issue, the students' brainstorming brought up some interesting ideas. Aside from involving high-achieving students in decision-making processes that often happen within the University's management, some students suggested that more attention should be paid to students' portfolios. Cleopatra described for example the positive experience she had in one of her courses:

The whole course was about building a portfolio − I wish we did that in the beginning in my Communication course. Because with my other course, I had a massive portfolio that honestly backed me up when going to an interview and talk about it for hours. With this, I would have to go through my assignments and pick things that I could actually show where the things like focusing and building yourself up individually. A person that has a portfolio at the end of the day, I think that's something we could focus on.

The rest of the group took this insight further and the participants came up with an idea to use the framework of a portfolio as a certain platform where all the students' achievements could be concentrated. Specifically, our brainstorming resulted in suggesting this portfolio to be part of students' *MYVU Portal* in which the students could record the individual projects, essays or presentations they were especially proud of. Possibly, the positive feedback given by their teachers, their volunteering jobs or different extracurricular activities could be included there as well making this a tangible evidence of students' work and engagement.

As the participants said, some students already have their portfolios ready, but those are usually photographers, fashion designers or other artists whose work has some "physical" results. Suzie and Cleopatra therefore argued that every student should be given an opportunity to showcase his or her creative work:

At RMIT, their fashion students, at the end of the year, they showcase all of their work. [But] it doesn't have to be tangible fashion that can be showcased.", "[Yes and] even the photography students get editorial jobs and stuff like that to work on and they get published. We have campaign ideas but they're just sitting there in the vault, just waiting.

Since all of the students involved in the action groups were studying marketing or communication, they said that they would really appreciate if they could directly cooperate with VU's marketing department which could also benefit from their ideas that are basically for free. Brian specifically stated that "the university is not about students, it is the students. I think, yes, there should be a channel for these students to communicate with the Marketing Department." Taking students on board (literally, not only metaphorically) might be therefore a way to differentiate the University's brand from others. "I think that you could also talk about, that it's a way of investing in the students and also saying, 'This is how good we think our students are. We want them to work for us'", emphasised Jane.

It was, however, interesting, that both groups agreed that this kind of student engagement should not be unlimitedly free or spontaneous. Thomas and Brian particularly mentioned that the students should not be given full control, because "they are learning for a reason". To make sure that students' engagement with the university will achieve the desired professional level, the participants suggested the it should mainly be the teachers who would support these initiatives and who would encourage the student to work on the university's development: "it would be great if we were guided by something to teach us how to be a part of it", Diana said.

Also, still emphasising the fact that a brand has to be strong internally in order to work externally, the students stressed that the teachers should also work as brand ambassadors. However, some participants raised their concern that it is currently an issue that deserves more attention. In particular, the students were not sure whether their lecturers are proud to teach at VU, they did not find them fully engaged or committed:

> So there are those kinds of professors and people who are trying to do something. But then, obviously there are those who aren't really there a lot. They only teach one or two classes. What are they going to do? They don't really care that much.

8.4.3 Theme no. 3: Good initiatives, poor communication

To some, the previous sections might seem unfairly critical – is it really the case that VU does not provide pathways for student engagement? That it does not engage with the community? Does it not provide an interactive and inspiring environment? Does it not reward student success? It does all of that and much more, but unfortunately, as our brainstorming revealed, not all of these initiatives are well communicated – there are many activities and events that the

students are simply unaware of. In the words of Diana: "[The VU brand] is all set up with really good intentions and it just fizzles out because it's not acted on." Particularly speaking, the first action group emphasised the importance of students' engagement through university clubs. Despite the fact that there exists a wide variety of clubs which students can join at VU, most of them did not know where to find them. The only international student in the group, Jessica, confessed:

> Even these clubs that we were talking about, the clubs apparently exist. I had no idea. Who do I go to about it? I don't know. Do we have an international ambassador to whom I can say, "Hey, I'm an international student. I don't know where anything is. I don't know." I'm sure there is. Again, they're just floating away. I don't know who's in charge for real.

The rest of the group resonated with this perspective and they said that they would be interested in joining a club if someone told them how and what exactly it was about. Thomas stated:

> If [a film club] was communicated to me like that there was a film club and it said, 'Monday. 5PM. Ironman. Free food.' I'd be like, 'Hell, yeah!' Again, it hasn't been like that. You don't hear anything. So I'm just like, 'Okay, I'm going to come to uni. I'm going to do my work. I'm going to do my time, [laughter] and then I'm going to go home'.

Some students therefore creatively suggested that alongside the course guide that is issued every year, VU could also prepare a club guide that would introduce all the clubs at VU and also inform about the opportunities how to create new clubs or contribute to the program of the already existing ones. Because clubs are not the only way a student can engage with the University, I also asked the students about the "Students as Staff Program".[31] I even sent them an email before the action groups took place so that they had time to think or ask about it. Unfortunately, a vast majority of all participants did not know what this program was about or what it offered. Out of both groups, only Brian was familiar with this initiative:

> I tried [to apply for a job], but have been denied so many times. They never have any jobs. They run it but apparently every job is already filled. The rumour was, if you volunteer a lot, the normal progression is, you volunteer, you become student staff because you've already networked and you know the staff members. From there, a lot of the student staff worked for

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[31]At the time of the action groups, the Students as Staff Program had an active website and seemed to work.

VU either in the Student Service Centre or in other departments. Maybe I bucked the trend but it didn't work out that way for me.

After hearing this, other students felt that it was a shame they did not know about this program. Jessica summarized the whole problem of good initiatives that have poor communication as follows:

What I find is, because it's communicated (in my opinion) very poorly, I don't know who to even talk to about, will there be jobs next semester? I don't see where the accountability link is to where I could go up to someone face to face and say, 'Hey, I'm really interested in this. Can you recommend something else for me until there are jobs?' It doesn't seem like there's really anything there. It's, 'Okay guys, we do this. Let's put it out there'. And then it floats away. It doesn't seem like there's anyone reeling it back in.

Other engagement opportunities that were often discussed amongst the group were those related to volunteering. Emphasising the importance of students being more interconnected with the local community, some participants specifically suggested that VU should make the best out of its location in the Western suburbs. To their surprise, some participants argued that it is something VU is already doing: "Aren't they trying to make Footscray University Town?" Sarah asked. Brian answered her question:

Yeah, that's a weird thing. There are a lot of programs like *Lead for Change*, no, *Lead for U-Day*. It's when they send out a couple of students who volunteered out into the community. They volunteer their time in helping the Boy Scouts, the Food Programs, all those things. So they do happen. The weird thing is that the message isn't getting through to the masses for some reason. I don't know where it's getting…

Our brainstorming then tried to solve why this happens and what can be improved to actually get this message across – to ensure that both the inside and the outside world knows about similar initiatives that help local communities. "I think with that, the focus is more on helping the community rather than helping the community as a representative of VU," said Diana and her view was immediately accepted by the whole group. The students for example suggested that the students who volunteer should wear VU's clothes "because if you're going to be doing something through VU, it's good to show that you're from VU," said Thomas. There were also many other ideas on how to make sure that VU's activities will be talked about – but that will be a topic of the last section.

8.4.4 Theme no. 4: Integrity and consistency of the University's brand

Having a good brand means being distinctive, being different from others – having a clear positioning in the heads of all stakeholders (Budelmann et al. 2010). For this reason, the brainstorming in both action groups was focused on identifying characteristics and qualities that could be specific for VU, through which the University could differentiate itself from other institutions. Most connotations the students voiced were very similar; they agreed that VU is friendly or in students' words "a relaxed kind of a university":

> I really like it here. I actually really like the university and the vibe. It's more relaxed so that's my reason for staying. I have a friend that moved to Monash [University] and she was like, 'I hate it here. Everyone is so snobby. They're so serious. It's not relaxed'. It's just a whole different feel for the university. So I think VU has that going for it.

Other students saw VU's uniqueness similarly: "You feel quite comfortable. If you have a problem or whatever, you feel like you can, that it's okay" or "It feels comfortable (…). I don't feel pressured which you probably would if you went to Melbourne University". Despite the fact that VU's image of a relaxed, friendly and comfortable university often works in its favour, there might be a problem with the consistency of the desired positioning. Since one of its main values is "excellence", by promoting a relaxed approach to education the University creates a certain clash within the essence of its brand. The participants in both action groups identified this as an issue – in particular, they argued that even if it is a good thing to be relaxed, it might have a negative impact on academic standards. Most students raised their concern that they do not feel "pressured" to do more, that studying at VU is sometimes too easy.

Brian commented on this topic as follows: "In Melbourne Uni, if you score below 45, you get kicked out. So that sort of push, but VU is sort of, 'Ugh.'" Other participants saw it similarly: "I am worried that it's too easy. When we actually get out in the real world, it's going to be like, *Oh, well, no*". Basically all students were contributing to the brainstorming with very similar views while emphasising that they are ambitious, they would like to work harder, but that they just do not have the "pressure" on them. Reflecting this *brand inconsistency,* our brainstorming then resulted in suggesting that activities that are normally optional (or extracurricular) could become part of the standard curriculum, making the students more engaged (and pushing them to do more than they would normally). Specifically, we came up with an idea that the agenda of university clubs could be interconnected with some courses.

Yeah, for a little bit of extra points. It would require a lot of staff buy-in which I think would be difficult but I think if you could get some on boarding, even you were talking before about a book club, have books geared around economic principles. Apply it and you could get five extra points in your Economics class or something like that, if they need to be specified.

The main idea behind this new relationship was to emphasise the relevance of the "leisure" activities that are available on campus – to strengthen their meaning and establish a valid position for them in the university life. Pointing out that everything students do during and outside their coursework is logically interlinked would definitely empower the integrity of the University brand – and this interconnectivity could be easily applied to other areas as well. One of these areas is for example the multicultural scope of VU. When asked whether they see VU as a multicultural institution, some students said:

> I don't consider it so much multicultural as international. I don't think the school does much to embrace the cultures. I think they see it as, "We're exporting degrees. So come on, anyone, if you're going to write us a check, by all means, come on in." I don't think the university has much to say…

Despite the fact that another student argued that VU organises events such as Multicultural Day, the rest of the group did not think this was sufficient. Instead, they suggested that there should be something more consistent and ongoing, such as language courses, for example, or international film festivals which could be organised by international clubs of VU. These clubs already exist, but as students confirmed, they are rather limited to selected nationalities and the clubs do not normally engage with each other or with students "outside their circle". Sarah specified this new approach to multicultural engagement as follows:

> During summer when it's a bit warmer out and [at VU] there would be an international film showing. Each club could host a night and have their own food and people could come and it's free. You could get some rice paper rolls or something, that would be a really fun way to engage as well because it brings it up a level than just a stall.

Going back to the Multicultural Day, this event (as well as some others) could also be more consistent with the University brand than it is at this moment. In particular, the students said that because this event is not professionally prepared, it has rather "a high school" standard. Similarly less-than-positive connotations applied to other events and activities run by

VU, with students specifically arguing that they are not relevant to their studies or University life itself. Georgia specified this new approach to multicultural engagement with these words:

> I found that when (and this is just from observation from uni and life in general) there's a social event on, I don't know why, but people are less inclined to go. But if we have a speaker coming, an industry professional or a sports star coming to speak, all the sports students will go and then have drinks afterwards and you get to know one another.

Like Georgia, other students also commented that social events in the form of a *meet and greet* have a certain stigma. When there is no other agenda, but *just come and meet new people*, the students find it awkward. "Especially if you have no friends. Why would you go anyway?" or "Just putting everyone in a room and like, 'be friends'", the students described their perceptions of events that have no concrete program or are not in some way relevant to what they study.

Making student activities at VU more relevant to what the University is about thus became one of the objectives of our brainstorming. Concretely, the students suggested that instead of running activities that are "just for fun", VU could prepare events that have more of a "university feel" or an educational overlap. For example, the action groups talked about trivia nights, educational quizzes or university games in which students from different universities could compete and compare their experiences and knowledge in several academic disciplines (not only in sports). The university clubs could be also enhanced by this more "academic" dimension. The students particularly suggested that there could be film clubs or book clubs which could educate the students in different areas, but would still be education. "[A book club] would interest people from every sphere or background. That would encourage engagement. When people have a mutual interest, they are much more willing to engage with different people anyway," Diana pointed out.

8.5 Discussion and analysis

8.5.1 VU's vibe

When discussing their relationship with VU, students often referred to the "University's vibe." Aside from analysing the vibe in terms of creating resonating international partnerships among universities (Heffernan & Poole 2005), the available literature has not paid much attention to this specific dimension of a campus or university – as to how and what the students *feel* at their

university. Methodologically speaking, I find this phenomenon very important to examine because these "feelings" and "emotions" the students have when simply being on the campus are largely subjective and thus correspond with the interpretive research approach of my study. However or mainly *because of* the subjective nature of the "vibe", it is very difficult to provide it with an exact definition. When describing the university environment or atmosphere, some authors talk about *university culture* (Silver 2010). These authors also emphasise that university culture is created by people (such as students, academics and management) who study and work at a university (Tapio et al. 2011). I want to elaborate on this perspective by highlighting the element of *connectedness* these particular groups feel toward each other and toward their university. As I mentioned earlier, the level of connectedness represents the extent to which students, teachers and other university staff relate to their university – or to the university brand (Blum & Libbey 2004). Out of all elements comprising connectedness (engagement, sense of belonging, social inclusion), "the vibe element" could be explained as a palpable layer of connectedness – as an immediate connection the students feel when being on the campus of their university.

Overall, the students like the University's vibe but only at some campuses. Despite the fact that campuses such as Footscray Park or St. Albans are not in the city centre, both groups felt that they have something the central campus is missing. To some, the city campus seems to be abandoned and its potential does not seem to be used to the fullest. Aside from thinking about the students' need to interact, learn and relax, some participants emphasised how important it is to think about the details that create the overall vibe. Brian explained that the smallest details often make all the difference:

> When you look up here from trains at night, one of the letters from the Victoria University sign doesn't even light up. It's like VICTO__. What university? It's actually so bad because it's so bright and so high, you can see it from so many places.

Enabling students to participate in designing their own learning space is not a detail, but an important attribute that shapes the overall campus experience. Both action groups pointed out that there are many practical ideas the students have which the University could listen to or even use. Encouraging students to creatively contribute to the appearance of the University thus seem to be the way to foster the "ideal" vibe that creates an essential part of the University's brand. As Blume and Libbey (2004) pointed out, active student engagement can have a significant impact on the overall connectedness. When the students actively contribute to the development of their university, they will be more committed and will consider their

university to be their own – they will be more connected to the university because they will have created it. This will effectively influence the overall vibe as it will no longer be dictated by someone else, but by themselves, by their own thoughts, ideas and feelings.

8.5.2 Students as active brand ambassadors

Caring about the brand might be a way through which we can describe the role of a brand ambassador (Thomson & Lorrie 2000). Similarly to the focus groups, the action groups showed that students want to be active and committed brand ambassadors but first, they must feel their commitment is needed and that it will be appreciated. What VU says about itself does not really matter if it does not resonate with reality, if VU does not invest in what makes the brand strong – and that is its students. Sarah summarized the brainstorming on students' engagement with these words:

> Like what we have mentioned before, the students are the first ones that need to change their minds on what VU is about. Now we're informed of all these great places, to become student ambassadors that go out and inform the rest of the student body and let other people know what VU is about and what it offers – that would be a good step.

Therefore – the best way to get students on board with the University's brand is to actually have them on board and provide them with tools and opportunities to actively contribute their ideas, passion and enthusiasm to make VU a better place – a better brand.

It is important to say that VU is very active in terms of student and community engagement but, as the students argued, the University should be also active in communicating these initiatives. Having said that, it does not mean that VU's overall communication is insufficient – on the contrary, as some students remarked, sometimes there is even too much communication: "There's too many emails about things, I get emails from the IT sources. There's so many emails. I don't read them. I just delete them now". Good communication thus, among other things, lies in deciding what deserves to be communicated and what does not.

Currently, it seems activities that would deserve this attention are kept a secret. However, the awareness does not have to be raised by sending thousands of emails every day. Again, as some participants pointed out, the University has its students who, when given enough space and opportunities, would be happy to initiate the required conversation:

I'm on four classes. If I, before each class, wrote on the white board, '*Film Club. Thursday night. Showing: Amelie. Free food, bring your own beverage'*, everyone's going to see it in class even before the teacher erases it to write.

To make this happen, the students have to feel that the clubs are not only there for them, but that they are created by them – that without their work and ideas there would be no clubs at all. The same applies to the whole University.

8.5.3 Students want to do more

There is a certain clash between what the University says and what it does in reality. It says it is excellent, yet many students think it is not demanding and that there is not enough pressure which would make them work hard and try to achieve their best. VU also positions itself as a multicultural institution, but as the action groups identified, there are not many venues for celebrating different cultures or making the best out of their presence at the University. The relationship between the brand and the particular events VU runs is also inconsistent, with some activities being irrelevant or having no additional value that would strengthen the clear positioning of VU.

However, as the action groups showed, it is not something that cannot be fixed. For the University, it would be highly influential to make sure that everything it does has a certain point – that it is meaningful, relevant and logically interconnected with the University's role as well as with its mission overall. A vast majority of students confirmed that they are ambitious and ready to do more. They want to engage in extracurricular activities, but only if they somehow contribute to their professional development – only if they contribute to the university experience. The students think that the university experience should involve leisure time but it definitely should not be limited to "just having fun". This also relates to the concept of connectedness I discussed when analysing both focus groups and action groups.

Researchers who have focused on studying effectiveness of a brand often talked about the importance of brand consistency (Bengtsson et al. 2010), meaning that the brand needs to be apparent in all communication activities the particular institution conducts. I would like to build on this explanation by emphasising that there needs to be an established, logical connection not only among particular communication activities, but also with the participants who are involved in them. First of all, a university needs to make sure the students will see the connection between the activity (event, poster, online presentation) and the brand. However,

this cannot be achieved simply by placing a logo on a banner or having brilliant merchandising. This connection has to occur on a much higher level – there needs to be a connection between the University's promise and its actions; there needs to be a clear connection between what the University says and what it does. My research also suggests that the overall brand connectedness will be supported by student engagement – by creating an active connection between the students and the University. As mentioned during the action groups, the students would be willing to go beyond their duties, they would welcome having more autonomy in terms of being able to create their university. Enabling students to voice their opinions and empowering their voice by translating it into specific actions could thus positively contribute to the relationship between the students and the University (Cook-Sather 2006).

8.6 Limitations of the study

As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, a certain limitation of this study lies in the research sample. As opposed to the focus groups where the vast majority of participants were international students, in the action groups only one international student was present. Even if this was caused mainly by the fact that I recruited students majoring in marketing and communication subjects (disciplines that are not the most popular amongst international students), the whole study might have brought other, different ideas and suggestions had more overseas students been involved in the sessions. I believe this particular study has the potential to be repeated. If such a situation were to occur, I suggest involving more students from overseas. The reason for having a more diverse sample is that international students could bring interesting insights and suggestions in terms of addressing prospective students overseas (being included in this target audience themselves before). Also, as the focus groups revealed, there are university events and activities targeting solely international students. That means there is communication happening only on the university-international student level which a domestic student does not follow. Focusing on these communication activities could potentially help us reveal whether they are effective and whether it would be possible to improve their targeting to domestic students, too. (The previous study as well as chapters showed, international students would appreciate being invited to events that are designed both for international and domestic students – as for example also described in DEEWR 2009).

Another limitation of this study is related to the specific methodology. Similar to a focus group, an action group is a research method that builds on the principles of a discussion (Macfarlane 2013). Since I did not use one-to-one interviews, the participants could hear and

see each other and they often related to or enhanced what other participants said. Despite the fact this is a desired outcome of an action group (Parsons 2013), group opinions and suggestions had a very strong impact on those of the individual. This was interestingly more apparent in the action groups than in the focus groups – especially in the second session. Here, the opinions voiced by one female participant were often immediately accepted by other students. As a result, certain comments are very often repeated throughout the transcript. However, I might have regulated this student's dominant behaviour during the discussion much more than I did, I did not put a special emphasis on her comments within this chapter.

Finally, I want to comment on the purpose of this study. Even if the main aim of the action groups was to provoke a creative discussion, it would be interesting to see some of the participants' suggestions come to pass. The students had many ideas and were not hesitant in their criticism of the University, but it is always easy to say something instead of actually doing it. The main limitation of this study is that it does not test the willingness and the persistence of the students to take their proposals further and turn their ideas into actions. This might be the topic of another study – or ideally, a project conducted by the University.

8.7 Conclusion

Both action groups agreed that there are many good things about their university. Much like the focus groups, the participants often talked about their teachers and they especially appreciated their friendliness and support. When brainstorming distinctive qualities of VU as a brand, the key words repeatedly stated by all the participants were: comfortable, relaxed and friendly. These were also attributes the students felt distinguished VU from other institutions – the fact that they feel good at their university while other students might feel more pressured at different universities.

This good feeling was also something that characterised the students' experience on campus. Some students pointed out that especially Footscray campus has a very good vibe as there are many informal places to interact with other students or teachers. Despite the fact that this suburb does not have a good historical reputation – which might have a negative impact on the image of VU – the students felt that this is where the heart of VU lies, that this is where its soul is. Borrowing Heidegger's term, this may refer to the fact this particular location represents one of the *authentic* characteristics of the University.

There have been many studies analysing the importance of so-called "brand essence" (Barnham 2009) – which captures the brand's core values, qualities or its *authentic* soul as

Heidegger would call it. In order for a brand to manage its essence well, the essence or the soul has to be present in everything the particular organization as a brand is doing. It has to leave a tangible trace in all the activities, projects or messages it produces. Building on what our brainstorming identified, this is something on which VU still has work to do. As the students suggested, the University has to make sure that all initiatives will be somehow related to what the University is really about and what its main mission is.

Therefore, instead of organising events whose only purpose is to get the students together, the action groups emphasised how important it is to always prepare a more specific agenda which will be relevant both to what the students study and to how VU tries to position itself. For example, since the mission of VU stresses the values of multiculturalism, the students said that running one-time events such Multicultural Day is not sufficient. According to their brainstorming, organising events that are more ongoing and well interconnected with the actual curriculum, is possibly the only way to make sure that VU will live up to its stated values and behaviours.

Living up to some values, however, might be a challenge. For instance, the value of "excellence" was not shared unanimously among the participants – they perceived VU rather as a relaxed and comfortable university. Even though these are positive connotations, the students themselves confessed that they are concerned that academic standards at VU might be too low. Instead of appreciating the fact that they "do not have to do much to pass", the students in both action groups identified themselves as ambitious and reacted positively to the idea of being more active in their university life.[32]

When asked about how exactly they could contribute to the University's development, the participants offered several examples of creating communication campaigns, coordinating clubs and events, preparing creative diaries for students and so on. Some participants also emphasised the potential benefits of being somehow connected with the VU marketing department and to be able to put theory into practice – to use their know-how from the field of marketing or communication and apply it to something that would effectively help them as well (being students of Victoria University).

The active engagement of students was an ongoing theme repeatedly emphasised by both action groups. Not only did the participants think the marketing students could be

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[32] This motivation may be influenced by the selected participants – we can argue that students that do not care about their studies or their life at VU would not participate in a time-consuming initiative such as this action group.

somehow involved in doing university marketing, they also stressed that this involvement should be present in other areas too. For example, the action groups came up with ideas such letting students design their own campus, create their own clubs, run activities for local communities or influence the content of their own coursework. And that is exactly where I believe that the soul of the University brand lies. The students are the soul of VU. They want to cooperate with the University, they are ready to do more and they want to do more. Exactly how VU can benefit from this and what kind of venues or platforms it could possibly prepare to empower its students (the soul of its brand) will be the main topic of the next, final chapter of this thesis.

9 Conclusion – putting theory into practice

9.1 Introduction

The main purpose of the final chapter is to answer the research question raised at the beginning of my thesis: "When applying an interpretive communication audit, what are the specifics and characteristics of a university that should be reflected in university marketing?" In order to achieve this, I will try to summarize all the key focus areas of my research. The following section will therefore point out the most crucial theories that have philosophically and methodically framed my project. I will briefly traverse the international context of Australian higher education, identify the main issues of university marketing and I will also canvas the authentic qualities of a university.

I will also talk about the importance of so-called co-production or engagement which will explain the role of students, managers and academics who contribute to the university's development as well as to its image and identity. Last but not least, I will summarize the main outcomes of the interpretive communicational audit of Victoria University (VU) as well as the revelations of the focus groups that were conducted with the students of this university.

The second and last part of the final chapter will be more practical as it will try to put the theory into practice. It is a certain limitation of this chapter – according to scholarly convention, the conclusion of a thesis should only summarize what has already been said and discussed (Evans et al. 2011) and it should not introduce any new ideas. However, while respecting the concept of feeding-forward (Goldsmith 2012, see chapter 5), I want to finish my thesis with specific and practical suggestions on what exactly VU can do to improve its marketing activities. By doing so, I want to also highlight the role of student voice which I have been advocating throughout the thesis: I propose the student voice should not only be listened to, but it should have the power to call for action (Cook-Sather 2006). Building on the ground my study has covered, the creative section of this chapter will therefore include new themes calling for action. I will specifically be suggesting concrete communicational themes and tools VU can use in order to make its brand stand out on the market. Among other things, these suggestions will also draw on brainstorming sessions (or so-called action groups) which I ran with students of VU majoring in marketing and communication disciplines.

9.2   Theory

9.2.1 Internationalization of Australian tertiary education

When compared to other countries, Australia is the third most popular destination for studying abroad. It has a very high proportion of international students with every fourth student studying in the country coming from overseas. According to the 2014 OECD report Australian institutions of higher education host around 6% of the world's foreign students (OECD 2014) which places it in the top three countries with the highest proportion of international students in the world.

The field of higher education – especially its international scope – represents a significant source of income for Australian economy. The international student market is Australia's third largest source of export income and it contributes approximately 16 billion dollars in export income to the Australian economy every year (COA 2013). Because most universities and other institutions do not obtain a full financial support from the state, they have to find independent sources of funding in order to secure their own existence and development. International student tuition fees thus effectively fulfil this need. That explains why most Australian universities continue to be very active in international student markets, with Asia being their main territory. The majority of students studying in Australia come from China (DET 2014a) and other Asian countries. The main reason for targeting this continent is its location (relatively close distance to Australia) and, from the perspective of Asian students and their families, the financial factor also plays an important role as tuition fees in Australian universities are still lower than in the USA (Taylor 2012).

9.2.2 Critique of a futurity assumption in university marketing

The overarching idea of this thesis is that universities are highly complex and distinctive organizations the communication activities of which should project their remarkable character. As chapter 3 showed, some of these unique attributes are often overlooked by university marketing professionals. For example, university marketing campaigns (particularly in the Australian context) are often focused "forward" with the *future* being the main communicational theme through which they address their prospective students (see chapter 3). Current "futuristic obsessiveness" in university marketing is also demonstrated by the slogans universities use to position themselves on the market (see Appendices). The omnipresent

futurity assumption in higher education is the main reason I suggest that universities fail to reflect on their inherent qualities when developing marketing strategies. Doing so only draws the focus to what happens outside the university. From a solely marketing perspective, this creates a certain paradox – by promoting what happens *after* graduation, universities are degrading the university experience itself. As my study showed this might not be clever positioning as many Australian surveys which looked at first year students' expectations proved that what students are really after is a "rewarding and fulfilling experience" (Nelson et al. 2008, p. 6).

The importance of *now*, of the present moment, of an experience, is therefore something I see as a distinctive standard which university marketing should take into account. Chapter 3, which focused on the current "futuristic obsession" that exists in the field of university marketing, listed other key attributes that distinguish a university from other institutions, firms or organizations. What I find especially important to mention is the "reality factor" and the possibilities of *being* which a university offers. To be more specific, my thesis argues that university experience is as real as any other experience a person can have. While some suggest that university tends to "simulate" reality (Jeffs & Smith 2005), I say that it can expose it even further; only a university can challenge us to explore reality from various perspectives, from hundreds of different points of view. At university, we can examine what is real through a prism of history, sociology, chemistry, mathematics or philosophy.

This particular seizing of reality is also supported by the various *possibilities of being* (after Heidegger) a university offers. By studying reality from different angles, by observing the world from someone else's perspective or by listening to other people's opinions, what we are learning the most about is ourselves – we are learning about our idea of being. "Learning how to be" is therefore something I consider to be a distinctive value as a unique selling proposition universities can work with when addressing prospective students.

9.2.3 Students as co-producers of university image and identity

As was shown by the example of the "best practice", which was fully elaborated upon in chapter 5, by giving weight to the student voice, a university can benefit greatly on various levels. To demonstrate the greatness of potential of student voice, and especially student engagement, this thesis included a case study of a unique project created at Charles University in Prague. Here, the students were approached as co-producers of university image and identity and they were given an interesting opportunity to attend a strategic course that was focused on

creating a communication strategy for their University. During this semester-long project, students were contributing their ideas and recommendations of what their University could do better in terms of communication with its students.

In other words, instead of trying to obtain the students' feedback, the approach to students' engagement was built around the idea of being able to give *feedforward*.

As the case study showed, by engaging the students in the process of feeding-forward, they obtain the added value of being able to influence their own education – and effectively the image and identity of the institution in which they are studying. I consider this concept to create a definitive foundation of my entire work. Here, the students are no longer receivers, the education is not a gift or a product and the academics and teachers are not the only creators of the learning experience.

If I were to answer the research question (When applying an interpretive communication audit, what are the specifics and characteristics of a university that should be reflected in university marketing?) by drawing on what my thesis had discovered up to this stage, I would say that ideally, *studying at a university is an active, rewarding experience that helps us to learn how to be ourselves.*

9.2.4 Students, managers and teachers as co-producers of university image and identity

Students are not the only ones who should be active. Teachers, managers and academics have great potential to actively empower the university, its image and its identity. Unfortunately, as available literature shows, the university community is often strictly divided into nearly "hermetic" sub-communities of students, academics and professionals (Amabile et al. 2001) who rarely cooperate on anything other than a curriculum-based level. Their activity – and especially pro-activity – is thus highly limited to and by their given agenda. Simply put, managers manage, students study and academics teach and do their research.

Paradoxically enough, if students want to learn something about management, their university offers them an internship somewhere "in the real world" and literally sends them away (UA 2008). I believe the rationale behind such activities also lies in the futurity assumption I discussed in chapter 3. Focusing primarily on how to prepare students for their future lives, universities run initiatives helping students "get ready" for what comes after they leave school. While there is nothing wrong with putting theory directly into practice, my thesis suggests that work-related learning does not necessarily have to be related only to "the outside"

(understood *future*) world. Universities have various managerial departments to which the students could go and learn directly from the professionals. By doing this, a university would not only enable students to acquire relevant skills at their own institution, but it would also be able to work more effectively with the knowledge and skills the academics have already instilled in their students.

The same approach could be applied to the relationship between academics and management. As my participant observation at Victoria University showed, management representatives rarely seek advice from particular academic departments (see chapter 6). Again, this might be influenced by the common view that the academic world is not the real one (Jeffs & Smith 2005). Even if we could argue that the areas of *how it should be* and *how it is* often do not overlap, being able to put theory into practice is often seen as the desired goal (Black et. al. 2003). The whole concept of university marketing could thus be greatly enhanced simply by making the best of what a university already has: the theory and the practice. My thesis therefore suggests that by allowing students, managers and academics to exchange their ideas, experience and knowledge, a university can obtain a great benefit no other institution could ever have.

9.2.5 Harnessing capabilities of international students

There is another valuable source university marketing can benefit from. Particularly within the framework of Australian higher education, what makes universities especially distinctive is the international study body. As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Australia's university sector is highly influenced by the current trends of globalization and internationalization. Recognizing the economic potential in attracting overseas students, most Australian universities are highly active in the international student markets. However, my thesis proposes that international students not only provide universities with an economic benefit, but they also bring a wealth of cultural capital, rich diversity and potential international connections both for the institutions and the students. Despite the fact that many institutions of higher education are currently running programs that are helping international students "fit in" or integrate within the local communities (Hellstén 2002), by doing so they are not supporting the desired "heterogeneous" character of the student body (see chapter 4). Even if we argue that multicultural diversity is a concept which has the potential to provoke misunderstanding, disinformation or even conflict, in the case of university marketing I believe there are more advantages than disadvantages. As my thesis advocates, international students represent a great

resource of different perspectives, opinions and inspiration and they can positively contribute to the learning process and enhance the experience of all students, regardless of their cultural background or origin (Arkoudis et al. 2010).

In terms of university marketing, by having international students on board marketing professionals can obtain new points of view on their work and they can also attract domestic students by offering them the same benefit. Yet, as available research shows, international students are often understood not as inspirational, but rather as a problematic group of people a university should take care of (for example Hellstén 2002). Yes, there are several surveys showing that it is predominantly the international students who struggle in their first year of study abroad (Lawson 2012). Mainly because of their foreignness, language barrier and initial confusion, they are often labelled as those who rather *can't* than *can.* As chapter 4 showed, some universities run special programs for international students that help them with their "special needs". Even if there is a good intention behind such projects, I consider similar initiatives to have a stigmatizing potential. By listing the possible disadvantages or even disabilities the international students might possess, the universities put overseas students into the category of those local students should help – even if there are many things the international students could help the domestic students with.

Additionally, as several surveys revealed, even if the international students may seem vulnerable and insecure at the beginning of their education journey in Australia, they are focused and motivated, work harder and are less stressed than domestic students (James et al. 2010). Therefore, my study proposes that instead of focusing on how to help international students with their disabilities, the universities should put more energy into harnessing their capabilities. By doing so, the internationalization of higher education might no longer be seen as something that requires reactional strategies (of how to defend both the international and the domestic students) but rather as a stimulating, inspirational process the entire university community can make the best out of. That especially applies to university marketing. If a university is a place where I can learn something about myself, do I not learn it even better when I compare and contrast my ideas, opinions, culture and self with someone who is different?[33]

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[33] When celebrating the diversity of VU's identity, it would be also adequate to acknowledge the local indigenous community. VU campuses are situated on the traditional lands of the Kulin nation, which significantly contributes to the uniqueness of VU's heritage and history. However, I believe that the role of indigenous Australians in the Australian university sector deserves much more than just to be

9.2.6 Interpretive communication audit of Victoria University – the key topics

Victoria University belongs among the biggest universities in Australia. It offers education to nearly 50,000 students with diverse cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. According to my participant observation (and informal interviews with local students, managers and academics), the people who study and work at VU are what makes this university so special. The quality of teaching and student services is of a high quality (VU 2016b). Also, the University is very good at establishing non-anonymous, personal contact with prospective students during both the recruitment and admission processes. Being surrounded by so many technological means of communication, this might be a great advantage for the University – especially when distinguishing it from others.

A similar personal touch or approach is apparent in teaching. Aside from the surveys that are regularly conducted at university (VU 2016b), this can be demonstrated by my personal experience both as a student and as a teacher, too. Teaching different Communication students for two semesters, I obtained an insight in how they see their learning experience and what they enjoy about it. The teachers and other academics often belonged among the main reasons the students enjoyed studying at VU (this was later confirmed both by the focus groups and action groups).

Although it is necessary to acknowledge that my involvement in teaching has given my study a somewhat complex perspective, the discussions I had with my students created a highly valuable experience and inspiration for me. I also discussed my project with other teachers that were not directly involved in my PhD courses. They were very much willing to discuss my research and were interested in its outcomes and possible overlap it may bring to their own teaching or research. Unfortunately, according to their admissions, there are not many opportunities by which they could professionally collaborate with other groups of the University's community. According to what teachers that were somehow involved in marketing or communication studies said, the University managers do not seek their consultancy or advice when dealing with marketing strategies or plans. In other words, there

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mentioned in one chapter. Victoria University's commitment to aboriginal community is demonstrated by the University's Moondani Balluk Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Academic Unit. The Moondani Balluk project pursues political and social justice, equity, and access to education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. However, this particular topic is so robust and complex that it is unfortunately outside the scope of my research.

are not many official platforms upon which they could interact and share their ideas with each other. The division among these groups is apparent and very difficult to cross.

The same thing applies to the group of overseas students. Based on my observations, I think there exists a certain gap which lies between "them" (the domestic students) and "us" (the international students). Even if there may be cultural reasons creating this division, there have not been many university activities that would be successful in bridging this gap. For example, most of VU's international students clubs and associations unintentionally isolate the international students from the rest of the community. There are many events for international students but the way they are promoted demotivates domestic students to attend them. This was also verified by the focus groups when one of the domestic participants confessed that he rarely feels invited if there is an event that is designed "for international students."

9.2.7 VU's students and their interpretations of the University's communication activities

Because I wanted to make sure that my interpretive communication audit would work with more than my own interpretations, I conducted focus groups and action groups with students of Victoria University. In terms of particular topics and themes that were identified by the students, both action groups and focus groups agreed that, for them, to study at VU means to be able to interact with great people. The "people factor" was especially something the students highlighted when talking about the quality of education provided by the University. The participants of the focus groups specifically confessed that they considered the teaching staff to be excellent and some of them mentioned that the interaction with administration staff during the recruitment or admission process was something which later convinced them to study at VU.

The focus groups also pointed out that it is important to harness interactions with the University staff. Some of them mentioned the interactive programs such as the Students as Staff program that enables students to engage with the University on a professional level. To be more specific, the Students as Staff program allows students to become members of the University's administrative, managerial or academic departments and obtain a paid, professional work position. Even if some participants did not previously know about this program, a vast majority of them stated that they would take this opportunity were it given to them.

Also, domestic and international students at VU often work as two separate entities. For example, the International Student Association is open to all the students of VU, yet when asked, the domestic students did not see the reasons they should be part of it. When there is an event organized for or by international students, domestic students do not feel invited. These tendencies could be interpreted as "the majority versus minority" or "the mainstream versus the alternative" relationship. If this is the case, it is even more interesting that the minority generates more positive input for the University's brand than their domestic peers, who constitute the majority of students.

To be more specific, international participants of the focus groups seemed to be "prouder" of their University than were the domestic students. This might be caused by the fact that the local reputation of VU is different to the one the University has abroad. By simply living in Australia (and especially in Melbourne), the domestic students had been influenced by the University's image long before they started studying at VU – whereas the international students see VU as a university that is in Australia, an English speaking country that lies far away from their homes. In other words, we might argue that overseas students hold more positive emotions towards their university than domestic students do because it was very difficult for them to get here. Despite the fact that their individual reasons might be more complicated, it may be possible that the international students are proud of VU simply because they are proud of themselves – of what they have achieved.

9.3 Practice

This part of the final chapter will try to apply the already introduced theory to practice. I will also draw on the outcomes of my interpretive audit, focus groups and action groups which will be later translated into specific ideas and suggestions about what VU can do in terms of its communicational activities. This section thus puts the concept of feeding-forward into action – instead of just evaluating what VU has been doing in terms of marketing communication to date, I will try to provide specific recommendations about what more it can do in the future. This may sound confusing especially in relation to the previous arguments. Earlier I proposed that the future is something university marketers often use to attract students and thus side-track what university can offer at this moment. The concept of feeding-forward I am going to apply in the last parts of this chapter is focused on provoking change in the future. However, its main mission is to generate activity, to foster production of ideas among otherwise inactive players (who are used to giving passive feed-back instead). The final part of my thesis thus

demonstrates one of many possible examples of student co-production that happens *while* at a university. As a student of VU, I would like to use the current opportunity and contribute my research and ideas to university development especially in terms of its communication activities.

9.3.1 VU's communication strategy – recommendations and suggestions

In order to fulfil this mission, the University places emphasis on promoting values of "excellence", "respect" and "access". These values are thus deeply embedded into the University's brand and its overall strategy. However, even if these values are supported by specific exemplary behaviours such as "engagement", "collegiality" and "courage, boldness, innovation and agility", my communication audit showed that there is a certain gap in between what VU says and what it actually does. Therefore, in order to make sure that these values and behaviours are pursued at all levels, this section will introduce some recommendations and suggestions of what could be possibly changed, added or renewed. All of these suggestions will draw on the outcomes of action groups that were conducted with VU's students who, at the time of my research, were majoring in marketing or communication disciplines. Unlike the focus groups, the purpose of action groups was to enable students to come forward with their specific ideas and suggestions of exactly what VU can do in terms of its communication activities. This method thus built on the principle of brainstorming that allowed for creative discussion with the participants.

Before I proceed any further, it is important to note that I am aware of the fact that this section of the final chapter might not follow the expected standards of a PhD thesis. It is not so common for a dissertation to include strategies that try to promote "how things should be done". However, this fact alone speaks for the current situation where students' ideas are to have of the form of passive feedback (in the case of PhD students, an objectivised dissertation) rather than of an active engagement. Therefore, in order to live out the values and emphasize the importance of students' co-production, the final part of my thesis will try to be co-productive. This also goes in hand with one of the promoted behaviours of VU, which is "courage, boldness, innovation and agility". In other words, with a certain amount of boldness and courage, I am going to act innovatively and will approach the conclusive chapter of my thesis differently.

9.3.2 VU's communicational pillars: building a strong university brand

The following section will introduce three communicational pillars I consider most important for building a strong university brand. All areas draw on the participant observation, focus groups, action groups and the entire interpretive communication audit I conducted during the years of 2012 to 2014. These pillars are created by three significant themes: VU's students, the international agenda and the cross-disciplinary collaboration of the University's staff. What all these areas have in common is that their main source lies in people. People who study, work and live at VU are those who make the University special and distinctive. It is the people and their creativity, collaboration and engagement that create the University brand.

9.3.2.1 The first communicational pillar: the students

VU has almost 50,000 students who have the great potential to make VU a respected, accessible and excellent university. As the action groups proved, the students are highly willing to contribute their ideas to the University's development. Therefore, I believe that the current positioning of the University, which is "The University of Opportunity" (VU 2013) could be implemented in more areas than in just giving opportunities to prospective students who are deciding where to apply. It is mainly the University's current students who should be given the opportunity to be involved in, participate in or simply co-produce their own education – and effectively the University's image and identity.

Building on what was said during the action groups, the students want to be more than "just students" – they want to coordinate activities of the University clubs, co-operate on preparing University publications or creating surveys within the University to find out what other students think (see chapter 8). Even if this excitement might be limited to students who are more active (like the students who participated in my studies), it is something the University should pay attention to. In fact, I believe that the initiative of the active students – both domestic and international – is exactly what the University should make the best of. There are many ways, vehicles or tools the University can use to bring attention to the potential of its students. The recent video "Victory is yours for the making" is an excellent example. By highlighting individual stories, the University highlights real people and their experiences, which is highly important both for the students[34] and for the University (see VU's mission).

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[34] As various surveys showed, what students value the most is a "rewarding and fulfilling experience" (Nelson et al. 2008, p. 6).

Therefore, together with the concept of the University of Opportunity, I believe this could be elaborated even further. What I want to suggest is that VU has the great potential to position itself as the University "for the students and by the students". VU could thus set a new, leading example in students' engagement and co-production. Specifically, the University could expand on its already existing Students as Staff program and connect students' educational journey with their working experience. There could be specific working positions at VU's departments that would be offered as internships. Students could be invited to collaborate with professionals (both managers and academics) through whom they could be inspired and learn first-hand how to put theory into practice.

For example, students could be invited to join the marketing department, finance department, legal department or department for international affairs depending on their chosen major or interest. By doing so, they would be able to enhance their career portfolio with concrete, relevant experience. This portfolio could be incorporated directly into the MYVU's student portal where students could track their learning development. Aside from their working experience at VU, the students' portfolio would reflect everything students find important about their university life. Within this portfolio, they would be able to include their extracurricular activities, interesting projects, presentations and other achievements.

It would also bring many benefits to the University. As I mentioned earlier, by organizing internships within the institution, VU would ensure that the investment it has made in their students will be returned (and not given out to external organizations). More importantly, by enabling students to have a direct influence on how the University is run, it would have a significant impact on VU's brand. In such a situation, VU would be able to truly live up to its set values and behaviours. It would be open and accessible – the ideas of the students would be welcome and listened to. It would be innovative and excellent – it would set standards for university marketing (according to my research, no university in Australia offers that its students be directly involved in the university's management). Additionally, by embracing different ideas, perspectives and opinions from the students, it would show respect it holds for them.

The previously discussed video promoting that "victory is yours for the making" could thus have a much broader mission or point. If VU managed to involve its students in "running" the university, the claim of this video could be expanded to "the university is yours for the making". I think that this could work as a highly distinctive positioning for VU.

9.3.2.2 The second communicational pillar: the international agenda

Building on the communication audit of VU (chapter 6), I believe that another pillar of VU's communication stands upon its international agenda. Also, as both focus groups and action groups showed, international students of VU are those who are most willing to "spread the good word" about their university. Moreover, they are proud of VU, which is a very positive relationship the University should harness and nurture.

Additionally, as research has shown (James et al. 2010), international students have the potential to contribute to the diversity of the student cohort and they represent a great source of inspiration and motivation. Since the core of the VU's mission lies in "empowering students from diverse countries and cultures", the positive influence of international students is something that is very important for the University. VU could thus potentially benefit from having the international students "on board" when developing marketing activities, including those that target domestic students. Such activities could tell the real stories of international students, talk about what they have managed to achieve, how many languages they speak, what their culture has taught them and what they have learnt while living abroad. These real, inspiring stories (in contrast to those that highlight what international students cannot do) could serve as great marketing material – a foundation for many interesting campaigns and projects.

In such a scenario, not only would VU be able to "sell" its programs to international students while highlighting their English courses offered solely to overseas students, the University would also be able to promote activities that focus on linguistic interaction between international and domestic students. To be more specific, VU could open courses of Vietnamese language taught by Vietnamese students, one to one conversations in Italian led by Italian students and students from all across the university would be able to learn how to write in Chinese while having Chinese students as their lectors. Multicultural Weeks and similar events could be extended beyond their short-term programs and could become stable parts of the University's curriculum. International trade, cross-cultural marketing or intercultural communication could become subjects that would not only cover theory, but they would be based on real case studies and examples, potentially given by international students present in the class. By doing this, VU would not have to promote itself as an international institution. It would be the international students promoting VU. My thesis thus proposes that international students are the brand ambassadors of Victoria University.

9.3.2.3   The third communicational pillar: cross-disciplinary collaboration

The third pillar of VU's communication lies in its staff, in their knowledge, know-how and experience. The desired behaviour that is outlined in VU's strategic documents (VU 2013) is expressed by Victoria University's community "demonstrating collegiality and teamwork with fellow students and staff" (VU 2013). However, as chapter 6 and the earlier section of this chapter showed, this desired behaviour is not always evident. In fact, the reality often goes against the established standards – when it comes to putting theory into practice, managers and academics simply do not cooperate.

However, it may be caused by the lack of platforms upon which such an exchange could be made. For instance, if managers knew which academics they could approach and how exactly they could go about it, the collaboration could be more effective. To illustrate this with an example, there could be regular meetings or so-called "hubs" that would take place at VU. These hubs would be created around a specific theme. For example, a Marketing Hub would gather academics who teach or do research in the field of marketing as well as managers from the Marketing department of VU. There would always be a specific and updated agenda the hub would follow: the discussion would always draw on current themes, campaign and communication activities of VU.

At these hubs, managers would be able to consult their work with academics – the experts from the field – which would enable them to verify their assumptions or planned strategies. Also, the academics would be able to use these meetings as a great source of practical themes and case studies they would later be able to use as their teaching material. Following the example of "best practice" described in chapter 5, VU could follow-up on these meetings by opening creative courses that would invite students to participate in marketing projects run by the University. Here, the academics (who would be interested in attending the Marketing Hubs) would introduce the relevant topics to the class which would serve them as their study projects. The students, together with their teachers, would be thus implementing the theory they learnt in the course into something that is not only practical, but real, relevant and mainly needed.

Allow me to illustrate this whole process with a concrete scenario. Initially, the marketing department announces that VU should recruit more international students. The reasons behind this demand (whether it is something VU should really focus on, why it needs more overseas students, which markets it wants to target, etc.) will create the main agenda of the Marketing Hub. Here, these particular topics will be discussed both by marketing managers

and academics who work in this field. Their discussion will lead to concretization of the whole theme which will be broken down to more specific and strategic aims such as *recruiting undergraduate students from China* or *raising brand awareness in the UK*.

These themes will be then translated by the involved teachers who will introduce them to their students. Within the curriculum of the creative courses, the students will later prepare a project which would outline exactly how to achieve these goals and objectives. By incorporating similar activities into the university culture, VU's promoted value of collegiality will be embodied to the fullest. The three pillars that can potentially reshape the current structure and façade of university marketing are thus relatively straightforward concepts. Simply by allowing domestic students, international students, managers and academics to collaborate, learn from each other and inspire one another, marketing communication will not only gain valuable internal input, but their external manifestations will be authentic, trustworthy and therefore strong.

9.4   Concluding the concluded – contribution to knowledge

This thesis attempted to provide answers to the following research question: *When applying an interpretive communication audit, what are the specifics and characteristics of a university that should be reflected in university marketing?* In order to answer this question, I set out three principal goals. To demonstrate that my thesis did indeed find the answers for the research question and that it met its set objectives, the final section will address them individually. By doing so, I would like to emphasise the particular contribution to knowledge this research offers.

9.4.1   The first aim: to identify specifics and characteristics of a university that can serve as a valuable source for designing new approaches to university marketing

Despite the fact that the available literature suggests university marketing is about adopting marketing concepts that have proved to work in the commercial sphere (Marginson 1997), my research says that it is the commercial sphere which should learn from universities. However, in order to make this happen, universities must become aware of their unique potential. They

must start to capitalize on what they already have. Instead of looking for the inspiration outside, they should focus more on their internal sources, talents and other gems.

The characteristic I see crucial for developing original marketing strategies lies in what a university can offer to students *at the present moment.* The current marketing practices are often built around the idea that students come to a university in order to increase the prospects of their future employment. However, as chapters 3 and 4 showed, it is also the case that what students demand the most is a rewarding and fulfilling experience (Lawson 2014). At the same time, by drawing attention to what comes after graduation, universities unintentionally side-track what a student can gain *while* studying there.

As my study has shown, there are many benefits a university experience can bring which are not necessarily related to educational curriculum. Both my theoretical and empirical chapters demonstrated that studying at a university is an exciting and probably one of the happiest periods in our lives. We meet our loves and best friends here, we explore previously unfamiliar subjects and areas, we have time and energy for activities outside the prerequisite schedule (this especially applies to international students who spend most of their working-day on campus). University is also a space where we are encouraged to be ourselves. Aside from learning and developing our skills and potential, we are free – or even encouraged – to make mistakes, to try the untried, to explore the unexplored or to question the unquestioned.

All of these possibilities are offered not after we leave the university but once we enter it. In other words, the most valuable characteristics and specifics university marketing can benefit from are those a university provides to students while they are experiencing it. This strongly resonates with another aim my thesis set out to achieve. Here, my thesis explained how important it is to harness and make the most out of students' potential while they are part of a university.

9.4.2 The second aim: to explore the creative potential of students to actively contribute to the development of university marketing

My research project argues that a university is not just a building. It is not a place that only gathers books and knowledge. It is not even an enterprise that changes education into a product and then sells it to potential customers. A university is a diverse community of people who not only teach, study and work there – but they set an example of how such a co-existence can be achieved and what effect it can have on an entire society. In other words, a university sets a benchmark for other communities, institutions and industries. Within the framework of my

research, this also applies to marketing. It is a community that has the great advantage of having both experienced theorists and practitioners working together.

Current practice shows that relationships within the university community are rather unbalanced. More often, it is the academics and managers who are delivering education and "other services and products" and the students are those who are receiving them (Nicolescu 2009; Conway 1994). Building on research on student co-production (Pestoff et al. 2013; Kotzé & du Plessis 2003), this thesis however suggests that students should be approached as "activators" of their learning journey. To address the second aim of this thesis directly: not only are the students willing to overtake the responsibility of their own education, but, as my studies (both focus and action groups) have shown, they also want to actively contribute to development of the university as a whole.

I propose that students' motivation and willingness to "change things around them" should be placed in the centre of attention by all professionals who work and study in the field of university marketing. By involving students in marketing activities, the university will be able to establish a brand positioning that is authentic – that sources from the original, that describes things how they really are and that has the potential to address prospective students because it comes directly from the students. Also, by involving students in practical tasks on campus the university would not focus its communication activities on what students can learn elsewhere. This does not mean that a university should isolate itself from the outside world. However, by promoting activities a student can do on campus, the university can again strengthen its positioning of an institution that does not exist as a stop-over to some better future destination.

For students, it will be a great experience of putting the gained theory into practice – of doing something that does not stay on paper, but has a real impact – something that is meaningful. That is very important for students' engagement, because doing meaningful things is what really makes us happy (Gyatso 2009). In terms of brand building, it is highly beneficial for a university to have happy students on board; as research shows, messages with the highest impact are those that are authentic – that come from "the insiders" (Rosen 2009). In other words, if a prospective student talks to a current student of Victoria University who seems to be perfectly happy with his or her learning experience, there is a great possibility that not only a positive reputation will be strengthen, but it is quite likely it will directly influence the decision-making process of the prospective student.

9.4.3 The third aim: to test the viability of an interpretive communication audit within the university framework while using the subjective insight and experience of the researcher

All research is highly subjective (Gummesson 2003). My thesis argued that, regardless of which research method the researcher chooses, he or she makes a decision of what it is they will actually investigate. Being an international student of Victoria University, I used my own experience and insight as the main research tool. This method gave me a nuanced understanding of the university's social, cultural, economic, organizational and mainly communicational context of such a nature that can come only from personal experience.

Aside from "simply" using my own perspective when studying the research subject, I managed to use various data gathering methods developing a robust empirical foundation for an interpretive research approach. Specifically, guided by the creative course I conducted at Charles University in Prague, I developed a process that moves from the summarized evaluations offered by the students in focus groups to the formative evaluations given by the participants of action groups. This enabled me to see that interpretive methods have the strong potential to add a certain creative scope to a PhD study. Not only can intepretivism emphasise subjective perspectives of the research subjects (obtaining revelations which would not be identified if different methods were used), but these perspectives can also have the power (or the voice) to come to life. In other words, building on my own as well as on students' interpretations, I managed to offer highly specific suggestions on what Victoria University can do in terms of enhancing its communication activities.

My thesis claims that an interpretive research approach implies that there are two crucial groups of methods put in place. First, there is an analysis – this was achieved when I prepared a literature *review* (Chapter 2, 3, 4), *audited* communication activities at VU (chapter 6) and when I gathered *feed-back* in focus groups (chapter 7). The second group of methods used in the interpretive research can be called a *creation*. Here, I *built* on the findings gathered by the analytical methods. I let the students in action groups actually *take action* and articulate their *creative feed-forward* – give their specific suggestions of what VU can improve in terms of communication (chapter 8). Working with their ideas, I also *prepared* a list of *creative proposals* that shows how Victoria University can enhance its marketing activities (chapter 9).

Even if interpretivism is a qualitative research approach that is used in various research areas, its potential not only *to interpret* but also *to create* in the field of higher education

marketing has not been much explored up to this date. That now also gives an explanation as to why my thesis has such an unorthodox format – I tend to use metaphors, give suggestions and propose to universities what they *should* do. After testing the creative scope of interpretive research methods, we can now understand these "moments" not as *deviations* from the chosen research method, but as the *products* of intepretivism.

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APPENDICES

1 The slogans of Australian universities[35]

Table 1.1 List of Australian universities and their slogans as shown on the homepage of their website

Multi-campus	Slogan
Australian Catholic University	• NO SLOGAN
Charles Sturt University	• NO SLOGAN
University of Notre Dame Australia	• NO SLOGAN
Australian Capital Territory	
Australian National University, Canberra	• NO SLOGAN
University of Canberra, Canberra	• NO SLOGAN
New South Wales	
Macquarie University, Sydney	• NO SLOGAN
Southern Cross University, Coffs Harbour, Lismore, Tweed Heads	• IT'S ALL ABOUT U
The University of Notre Dame Australia, Sydney	• NO SLOGAN
University of New England (Australia), Armidale	• NO SLOGAN
University of New South Wales, Sydney, Canberra (ADFA)	• NO SLOGAN
University of Newcastle (Australia), Newcastle, Ourimbah, Port Macquarie, Sydney, Singapore, Tiong Bahru	• NO SLOGAN
University of Sydney, Sydney	• NO SLOGAN
University of Technology, Sydney	• NO SLOGAN

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[35] The slogans as they appear on the universities' official website pages (search conducted in 2013)

University of Western Sydney	• BRINGING KNOWLEDGE TO LIFE
University of Wollongong, Wollongong, Sydney, Shoalhaven, Batemans Bay, Loftus, Moss Vale, Dubai	• NO SLOGAN
Northern Territory	
Charles Darwin University, Darwin and Alice Springs	• CHANGE YOUR WORLD (+ heading statement: "What's your next life?")
Queensland	
Bond University, Gold Coast	• BRINGING AMBITION TO LIFE
Central Queensland University, Bundaberg, Gladstone, Mackay, Rockhampton, Sydney and Brisbane.	• BE WHAT YOU WANT TO BE
Griffith University, Brisbane, Logan, Gold Coast and South Bank (Queensland Conservatorium, Queensland College of Art and the Graduate Centre)	• NO SLOGAN
James Cook University, Townsville, Brisbane, Singapore and Cairns	• NO SLOGAN
Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane	• A UNIVERSITY FOR THE REAL WORLD
University of Queensland, Brisbane, Ipswich and Gatton	• NO SLOGAN
University of Southern Queensland, Toowoomba, Springfield, Fraser Coast and China	• NO SLOGAN
University of the Sunshine Coast, Sunshine Coast	• THE BEST OF BOTH WORLDS
South Australia	
Carnegie Mellon University - Australia, Adelaide	• NO SLOGAN
Flinders University, Adelaide	• INSPIRING ACHIEVEMENT

Torrens University Australia, Adelaide	• AUSTRALIA'S NEWEST UNIVERSITY (opened in 2014)
University College London's UCL School of Energy and Resources, Australia in Adelaide	• NO SLOGAN
University of Adelaide, Adelaide, Waite and Roseworthy	• NO SLOGAN
University of South Australia, Adelaide, Whyalla and Mount Gambier	• NO SLOGAN
Tasmania	
University of Tasmania, Hobart (Sandy Bay & Hobart CBD), Launceston (Newnham & Inveresk), Burnie (Cradle Coast) and Sydney (Rozelle & Darlinghurst).	• NO SLOGAN
Victoria	
Deakin University, Geelong (Waurn Ponds, Waterfront), Melbourne (Burwood), Warrnambool	• WORLDLY
La Trobe University, Melbourne (Bundoora), Albury-Wodonga, Bendigo, Beechworth, Shepparton, Mildura, Mount Buller (former campus)	• MAKE A DIFFERENCE (not explicit)
MCD University of Divinity, Melbourne, (Specialist University)	• WE WALK WITH YOU AS YOU ASK THE ETERNAL QUESTIONS
Monash University, Melbourne (Clayton, Caulfield, Berwick, Parkville), Peninsula, Churchill (Gippsland), Malaysia, South Africa	• "BRILLIANT" (not explicit)
RMIT University, Melbourne (CBD, Brunswick, Bundoora), Vietnam (Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City)	• NO SLOGAN

Swinburne University of Technology, Melbourne (Hawthorn, Lilydale, Prahran, Wantirna, Croydon), Malaysia (Sarawak)	• THINK FORWARD
Federation University, Ballarat (CBD and Mount Helen), Ararat, Horsham, Stawell	• LEARN TO SUCCEED
University of Melbourne, Parkville, Southbank, Burnley, Werribee, Creswick, Dookie	• NO SLOGAN
Victoria University, Melbourne CBD (Flinders Street, Flinders Lane, Queen Street), Footscray Park, St. Albans, Werribee	• NO SLOGAN
Western Australia	
Curtin University, Perth, Sydney, Malaysia (Sarawak), Singapore, Kalgoorlie	• NO SLOGAN
Edith Cowan University, Perth and Bunbury, Joondalup	• NO SLOGAN
Murdoch University, Perth, Rockingham and Mandurah	• NO SLOGAN
The University of Notre Dame Australia, Fremantle	• NO SLOGAN
University of Western Australia, Perth and Albany	• ACHIEVE INTERNATIONAL EXCELLENCE

2 Communication with international students

Video 2.1 Life at VU, video addressed to international students, (vuicommunication 2011)[36]

Life at VU - Fitting In and Making Friends

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[36] Click on the image to watch the video.

Video 2.2 Future Unlimited campaign, addressed to international students (FutureUnlimited 2014)[37]

Video 2.3 Western Sydney University Unlimited campaign – a video featuring a success story of a student with an international background (WSU 2015)

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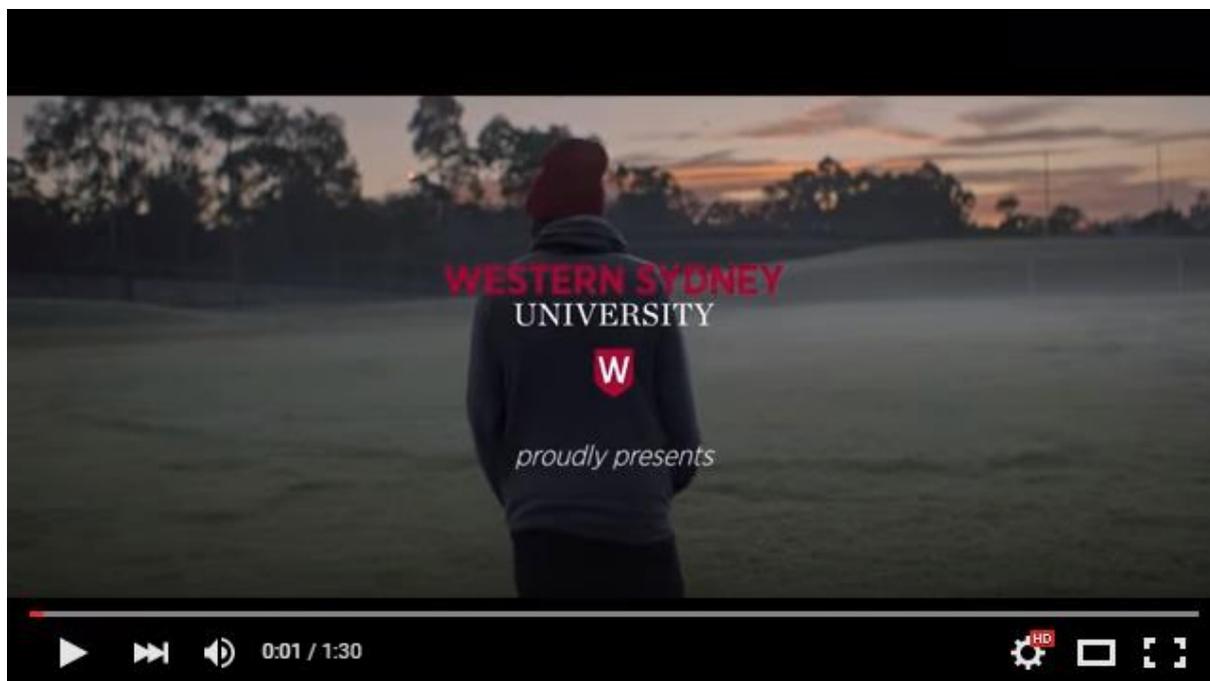
[37] Click on the images to watch the videos.

3 Case study – Best practice, Charles University in Prague

3.1 Survey on students' perceptions of communication activities at Charles University

Graph 3.1.1 Meeting point of Charles University (MCPR 2011)

From your perspective, the central point of Charles University is:

- Student Information Centre 6%
- Club K4 6%
- The university building on Celetna Street 17%
- There is no such thing 71%
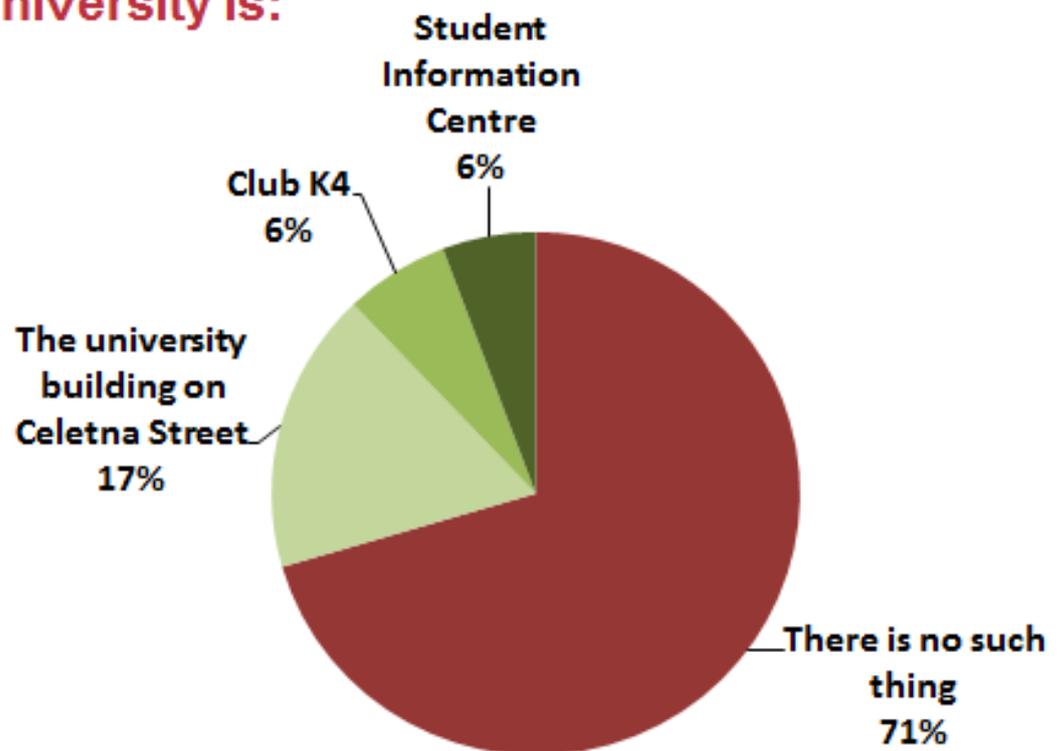
Graph 3.1.2 Student identity (MCPR 2011)

You consider yourself primarily…

a student of
Charles University
15%

a student of my
course
52%

a student of my
faculty
33%
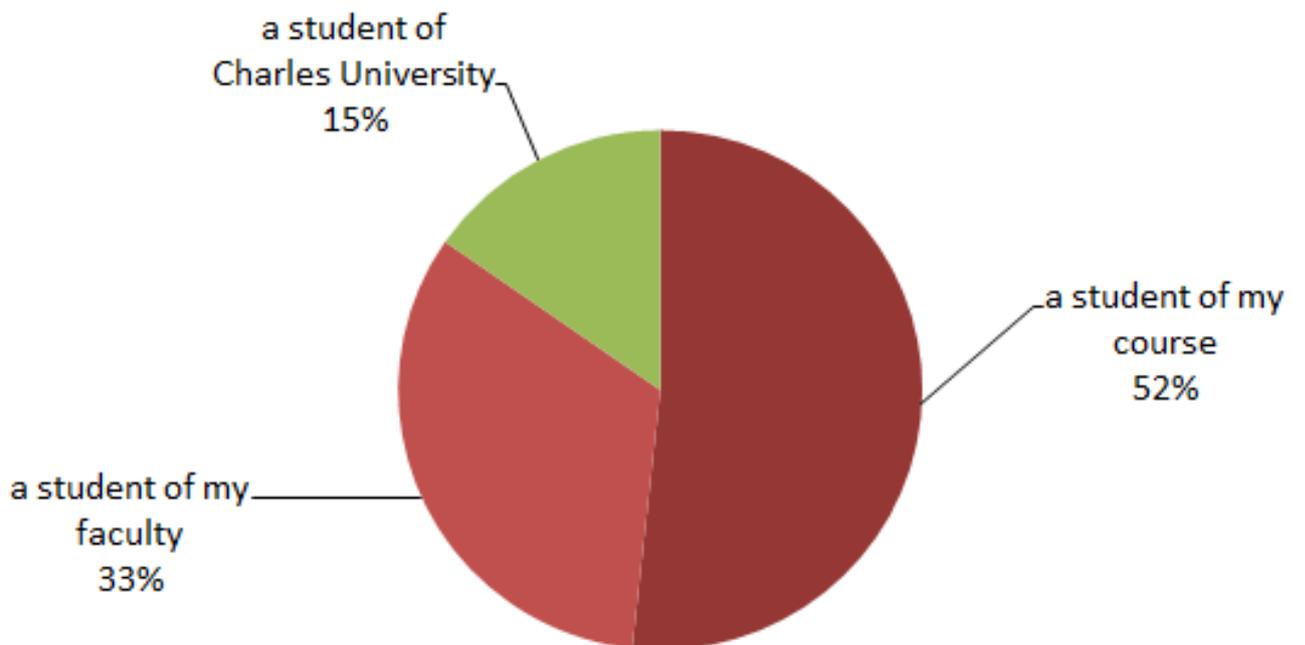
Graph 3.1.3 University magazine – recognition among University students (MCPR 2011)

UNIVERSITY MAGAZINE "FORUM"
1 (bad)…4 (excellent)

„3"
4%

„2"
9%

„1"
2%

Do not know/
do not use
85%
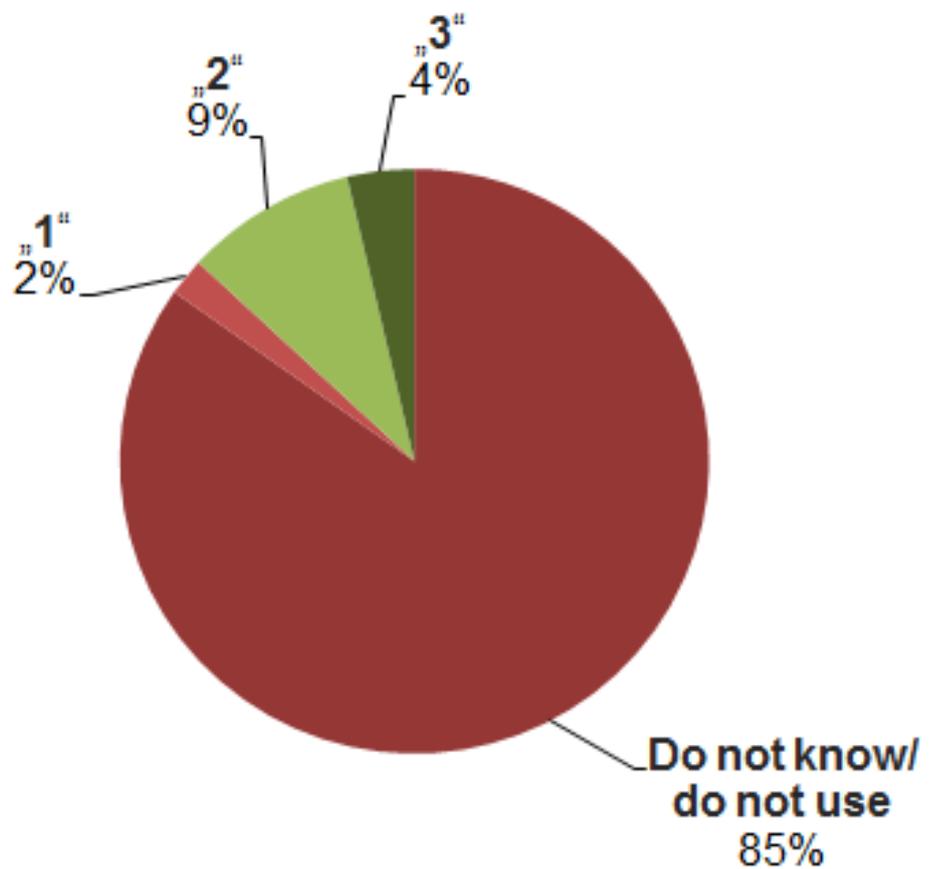
3.2 Survey on public perception of communication activities at Charles University

Table 3.2.1 What the public think Charles University should improve (MCPR 2011)

List the most important things you think that CU should improve.
1. Facilities and equipment (27%)
2. Openness towards public (10%)
3. Website pages (10%)

3.3 Recommendations proposed by Communication strategy of Charles University (suggested changes and later implementation)

Image 3.3.1 University website (main page) – **before** the Unit "Communication Strategy of Charles University" started (MCPR 2011)
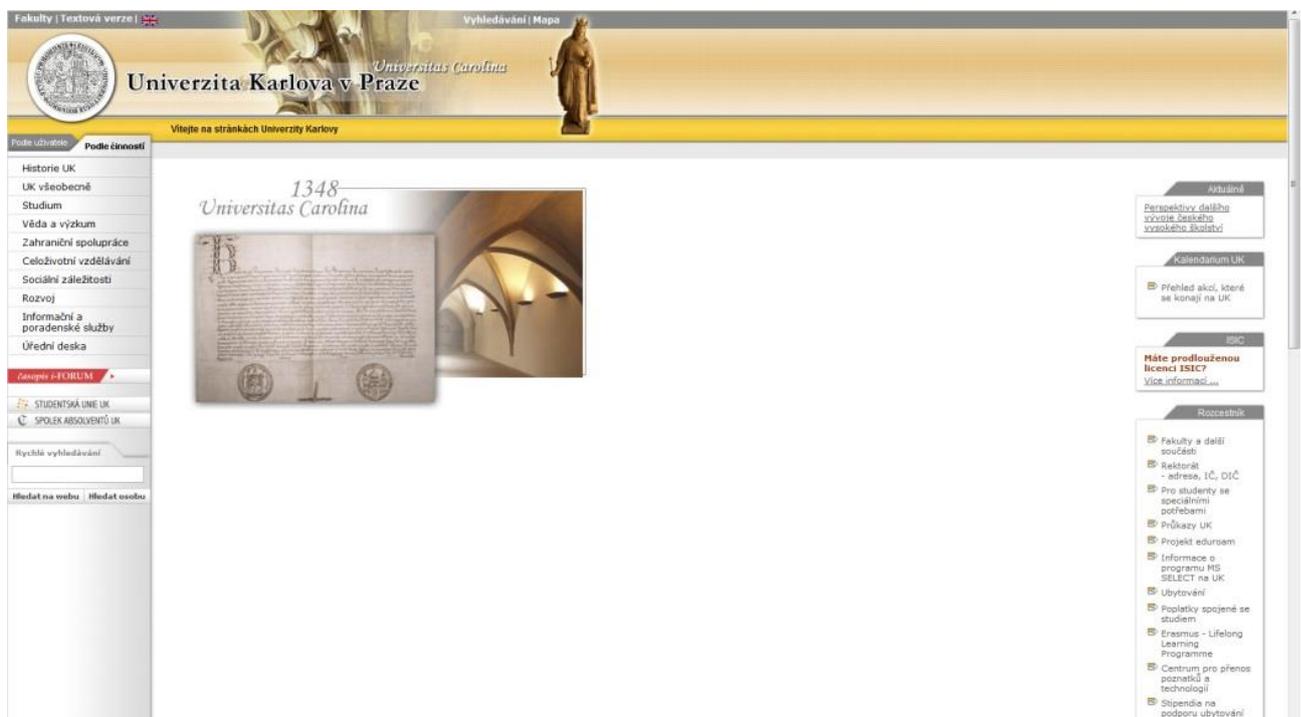
Image 3.3.2 University website (main page) – **after** the Unit "Communication Strategy of Charles University" had finished (UK 2013a)

Image 3.3.3 University's unofficial profile on Facebook – **before** the Unit "Communication Strategy of Charles University" started (MCPR 2011)

Image 3.3.4 University's official profile on Facebook – **after** the Unit "Communication Strategy of Charles University" had finished (UK 2013)

Image 3.3.5 University's presentation at education show Gaudeamus – **before** the Unit "Communication Strategy of Charles University" started (Frolík 2006)

Image 3.3.6 University's presentation at education show Gaudeamus – **after** the Unit "Communication Strategy of Charles University" had finished (Sigut 2011)

Figure 3.4 What students said about the project (conducted at Charles University in Prague)

Šárka Ludvíková, undergraduate student, Marketing Communication and Public Relations major:

Since my entry to Charles University I have been eager to contribute to its development and co-create its positive image. At the same time I knew the university had many weaknesses in its style of presentation and as a student of Marketing Communication I felt the need to do something about it. I was surprised how difficult it was to develop a communication strategy of such a complex institution, but thanks to the great supervision of our project, we finally made it and the results speak for it.

Marek Vohralík, undergraduate student, Marketing Communication and Public Relations major:

The course Communication Strategy of CU was an exceptional opportunity for me. Charles University is one of the most valuable brands not only in the Czech Republic, but in Europe too. I was also highly motivated by our team work. Our weekly brainstorming was not only inspirational but fun. I am glad we created a real project which will help the university's presentation.

Štěpán Soukeník, undergraduate student, Marketing Communication and Public Relations major:

I have got a personal interest in Charles University and its positive image – the better image the university has the better recognition I will get as its student. The course was very intense since we met every week for nearly four hours. But I really enjoyed it. Despite the critical communication audit we made, the university management accepted our objections very well. I hope the project will help the university to be perceived as a modern and friendly university which provides some of the best education in the country.

4 Victoria University – slogans and logos

Figure 4.1 *A new school of thought* – VU slogan used around 2010 (VU 2014d)

Figure 4.2 Turn your passion into profession – VU slogan used in 2012 (VU 2014d)

Figure 4.3 *Grow* – VU slogan used in 2013 (VU 2014d)

5 Victoria University – official online communication

Video 5.1 Victory is yours for the making (VU 2014h) [38]
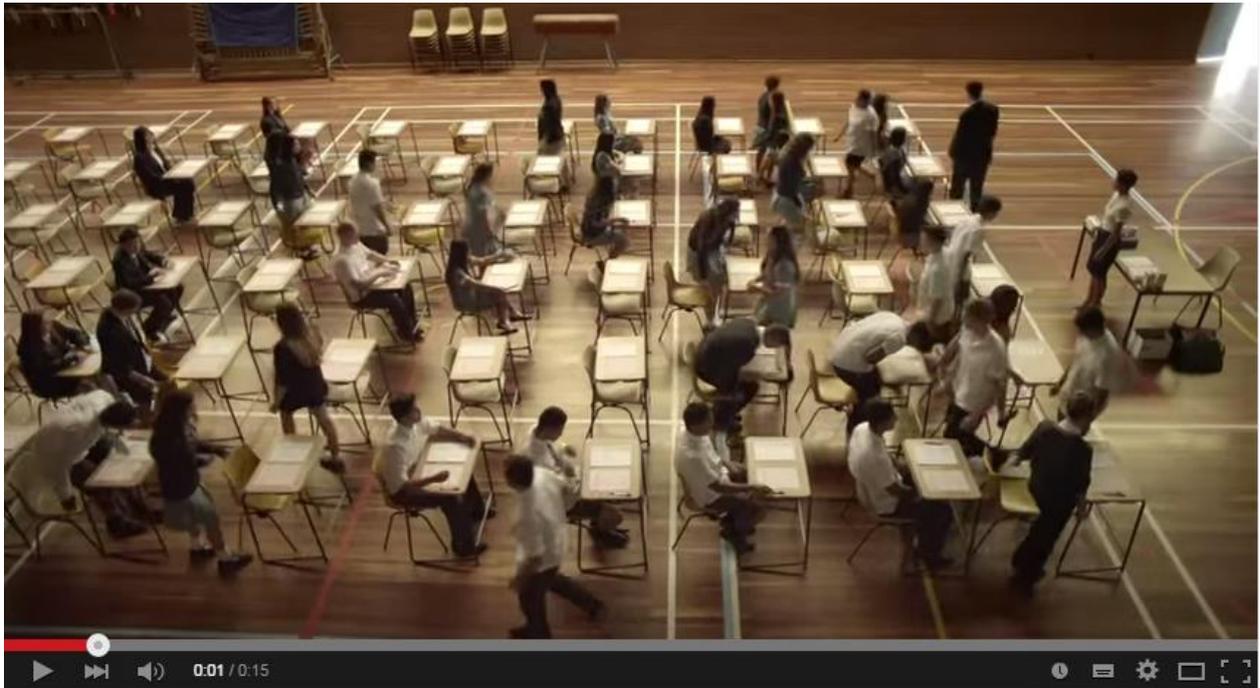
Victory is yours for the making: Find your passion with us

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[38] Click on the image to watch the video.

**Image 5.2** Victoria University website page (VU 2014)
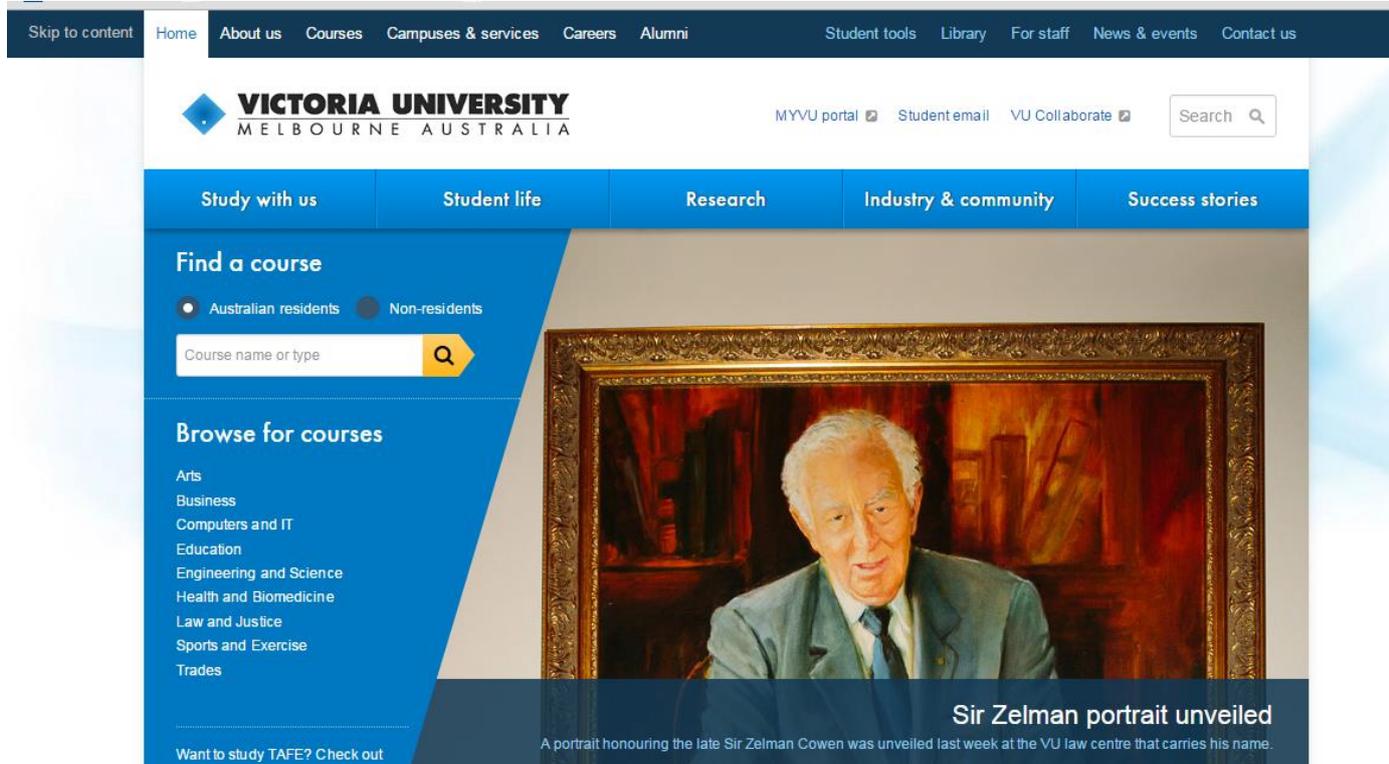
Image 5.2 Victoria University's official Facebook profile (VU 2014d)

6 Arrive and Thrive Brochure (VU 2011)
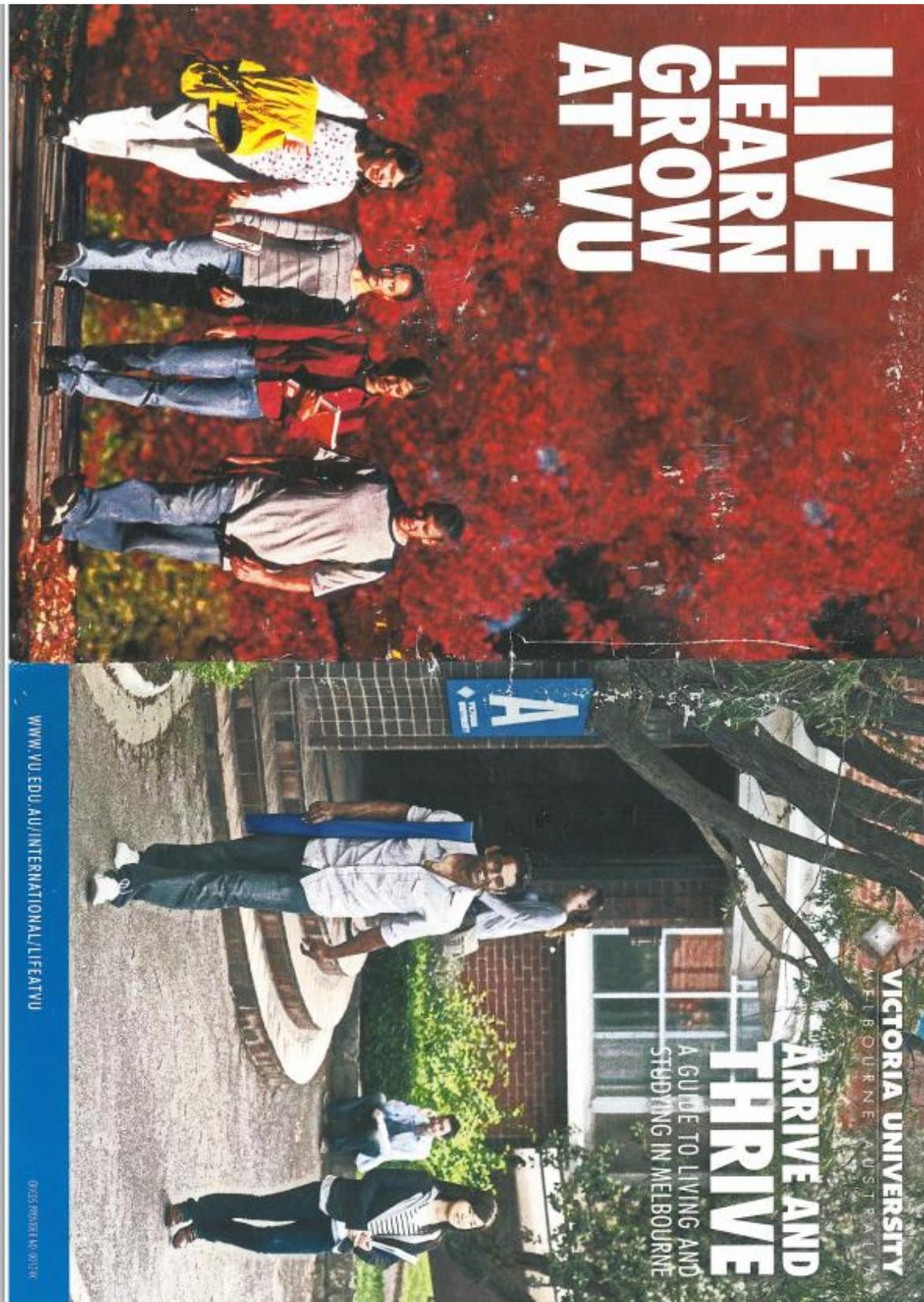
ARRIVE AND THRIVE

On behalf of the International Student Support (ISS) team we would like to welcome you to Victoria University (VU).

As an arriving student you will be exposed to new sights, smells, sounds, tastes and possibly new learning and teaching styles.

Melbourne is an incredibly multicultural city and people may presume that you have been living here for years. So, it will be important for you to frequently introduce yourself to new people, make an effort to form friendships and be ready to try new things and be willing to get involved.

This guide has been developed so that you can thrive upon arrival which means to prosper and be successful. Remember it is always okay to ask questions that will increase your knowledge and understanding.

The ISS team looks forward to sharing in your successes and if you need any help or assistance please do not hesitate in contacting us.

ANY QUESTIONS?

To contact Victoria University International, please refer to the address details on the back page of this guide.
All information was correct at the time of printing June 2011.

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Mixed Sources

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WELCOME TO VU

Congratulations on your choice of studying at Victoria University (VU), a university where students enjoy the opportunity of achieving their goals while developing a desire for lifelong learning.

You have probably been planning your trip to Melbourne for a considerable time and now it has finally happened. We would like to take this opportunity to welcome you to VU and to Melbourne, one of the world's most cosmopolitan cities and Australia's cultural capital.

VU has many services and facilities that will support you during your academic pursuits. We remind you to refer to the publications Your Journey to VU and this Arrive and Thrive guide.

Please take some time to familiarise yourself with the contents of these guides and keep them handy for future reference – and remember, our International Student Support team is more than happy to help any time you need assistance.

We wish you all the best, and may you enjoy your new challenges and thrive in your new environment as you grow, learn and succeed in your academic studies.

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY INTERNATIONAL

VU offers support to all international students in order to ensure that each of you has the best chance of achieving excellence. Victoria University International (VUI) is dedicated to providing students with support. Students can see staff in person at our Footscray Park Campus, Footscray Nicholson Campus, or at the City Flinders Campus in the centre of Melbourne. If VUI is unable to assist it will direct you to somebody who can.

VUI is often the first point of contact for international students. We have a large team of staff members who are ready to assist you with all aspects of studying at VU, including:

- new applications
- visas
- support programs
- changing courses
- further study options
- Overseas Student Health Cover (OSHC)

DESTINATION MELBOURNE

ON-ARRIVAL CHECKLIST

CONTACT HOME
☐ Let friends and family know that you have arrived safely.

FIND APPROPRIATE ACCOMMODATION: TEMPORARY AND PERMANENT HOUSING
☐ Refer to Your Journey to VU guide and the student housing website: www.vu.edu.au/facilities-and-services/housing-services

OPEN A BANK ACCOUNT
☐ Deposit any bank drafts, travellers cheques or cash you have brought with you. Remember to take your passport.

FOOD SHOPPING UPON ARRIVAL
☐ You will find large shopping centres with self-service supermarkets in most of Melbourne's areas. Visit: www.onlymelbourne.com.au to find these shopping centres' locations. The closest location to the Footscray Park Campus is Highpoint Shopping Centre. Melbourne also has large markets full of fresh food, household items and clothing. There is one close to the Footscray Park campus. Login to www.whitehat.com.au/Melbourne/MarketsM/MarketsM.asp for information.

FIND MAPS AND INFORMATION ABOUT MELBOURNE
☐ Want to find a free map of Melbourne or surrounding areas, or not sure what to do on a weekend or if you have some free time? Then head down to the Melbourne Visitor Centre at Federation Square to find out what's on in the city. www.fedsquare.com

FAMILIARISE YOURSELF WITH THE LOCAL AREA
☐ Now that you've found somewhere to live, explore the local shops, eating places, post offices, banks, medical providers, transport options, entertainment options, religious venues, sporting organizations and whatever else interests you.

TRY USING PUBLIC TRANSPORT
☐ Catch a bus, train or tram into the city – known as the Central Business District (CBD) – or to and from your campus. You can use the same ticket on trams, trains and buses. Public transport is fairly reliable and safe to use. The Metlink website explains more and provides timetable and fare information. Check out the Journey Planner function, where you can easily find the right mode of transport for your trip. Visit www.metlinkmelbourne.com.au for information.

EXPLORE YOUR CAMPUS
☐ You can view maps of all VU campuses at www.vu.edu.au/campuses, or you can refer to your copy of the Your Journey to VU guide, which includes maps and travel options for reaching each campus.

EXPLORE MELBOURNE
☐ A free Melbourne City Tourist Shuttle bus visits many of the key tourist attractions and destinations in and around the city. The Shuttle runs every 15 minutes between 10 am and 4 pm daily. You can also explore the city of Melbourne using the free City Circle tram. For the Shuttle Bus visit: www.thatsmelbourne.com.au/gettingaroundthecity/visitorassistance/Pages/TouristShuttle.aspx, and for the City Circle Tram login to: www.metlinkmelbourne.com.au/route/view/1112

ATTEND THE VU INTERNATIONAL ORIENTATION AND ENROLMENT SESSIONS
☐ All the details are in your pre-departure pack or on the website at www.vu.edu.au/international-students/life-at-vu/settling-in

CONFIRM YOUR RESIDENTIAL ADDRESS
☐ Once you have found permanent housing confirm that your mailing address is correct at VU by visiting the MYVU portal at https://myvuportal.vu.edu.au/uPortal/render.userLayoutRootNode.uP to update any changes if necessary.

ORDER YOUR WORLDCARE CARD ONLINE
☐ Register online with OSHC Worldcare for your membership card to be delivered to your permanent mailing address by visiting www.oshcworldcare.com.au

MOBILE PHONE
☐ To find out information about mobile phones including plans, purchasing mobile phones and other details visit: www.phonechoice.com.au or www.comporeplans.com.au

☐ The International Student Support team recommend that you use a pre-paid service that avoids contracts and helps with better budgeting.

PERSONALISE YOUR MOBILE PHONE IN CASE OF AN EMERGENCY
☐ Add under contacts the word ICE which stands for In Case of Emergency. Add a local Melbourne phone number of a friend or someone that can be contacted in case you are in an emergency.

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INTERNATIONAL STUDENT SUPPORT

International Student Support (ISS) is a unit within VU that is dedicated to providing support to onshore international students from the time you accept your offer through to graduation.

The friendly ISS team understands the challenges you face in adjusting to a new culture and environment and is here to make your study experience a positive one. ISS organises such social events as an annual trip to see a game of Australian Rules football and provides students with up-to-date information that may affect your studies.

ISS provides you with the following services:

- Pre-Departure: when you formally accepted your offer we sent you your pre-departure pack

- Orientation: we are providing the international orientation program and support during orientation. By attending orientation you receive an orientation pack that you can use during your studies

- Support: we provide ongoing personal and social support during your stay

- Farewell Program: we conduct a farewell program entitled 'Your Next Steps'

- VU Resources: we provide such resources and assistance as the following booklets:
  – Your Journey to VU
  – Arrive and Thrive
  – Muslim Guide to Living in Melbourne
  – Your Next Steps

We also have a dedicated ISS website at **www.vu.edu.au/international/lifeatvu** to help you through your time studying at VU and living in Melbourne and to enable you to view the booklets listed above.

ORIENTATION

VU conducts orientation for international students each semester. Orientation is a series of events that sets you on the path of your once-in-a-lifetime student journey at VU. Participating in orientation events allows you to find out about the university, campuses, services, and facilities and creates opportunities to meet people and make new friends.

The best way to become familiar with life at VU and to get the most out of your studies is to attend the VU Orientation Program. Please visit **www.vu.edu.au/international-students/life-at-vu/settling-in** for program dates and details.

If you have missed orientation you will need to visit a VU office as soon as you arrive and pick up an orientation pack.

AUSAID INTRODUCTORY ACADEMIC PROGRAM

In addition to attending the orientation program, all new AusAID students must undertake an introductory academic program (IAP) before the start of their first semester. The IAP helps new AusAID students to understand the demands of the Australian academic environment. It focuses on the academic skills required to make a smooth transition to study in Australia, covering:

- orientation and adjustment

- argumentation and critical thinking

- introduction to thesis writing and working with supervisors

- basic research skills, seminar presentation and academic writing

- computer literacy

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY INTERNATIONAL OFFICES

CITY FLINDERS CAMPUS	FOOTSCRAY PARK CAMPUS	FOOTSCRAY NICHOLSON CAMPUS
VU HQ (Arcade) 300 Flinders Street, Melbourne **Phone** 9919 1164 **Email** isst@vu.edu.au **Fax** 9919 1466	Level 1, Room 109, Building M Ballarat Road, Footscray **Phone** 9919 4953 **Email** isst@vu.edu.au **Fax** 9689 5670	Monday and Wednesday, ONLY Room N110, Beanland Building CAMPUS **Phone** 9919 4953 **Email** iss@vu.edu.au

ENGLISH LANGUAGE INSTITUTE

The English Language Institute (ELI) is a part of VU. ELI hosts an orientation program to assist ELI students in their transition to Melbourne.

After completing the ELI program all ELI students should attend the orientation program for their technical and further education (TAFE) or higher education course at the start of the semester.

ENROLMENT

Attending orientation is important. Your faculty also conducts enrolment sessions during orientation week. Your attendance at enrolment is important, as this is the time when you select your units of study. Failure to enrol at the scheduled enrolment session without prior approval may result in a late enrolment fine or inability to enrol in your chosen course and commence with it. Visit **www.vu.edu.au/international-students/ life-at-vu/settling-in** to see when you are required to enrol.

You need to understand that if you do not attend your enrolment session you will need to comply with faculty guidelines in regard to late enrolment.

PLEASE NOTE: You need to be aware that if you arrive after your course commencement date the university may refuse to allow you to commence with your course. This would effectively mean that you would have to defer your studies and return home to wait for the next semester or course intake.

STUDENT ID CARD

When you enrol is the time to make arrangements to receive your Student ID Card, which is also your library card.

YOUR STUDENT VISA AND RESPONSIBILITIES

YOUR STUDENT VISA AND RESPONSIBILITIES

YOUR STUDENT VISA

STUDENT VISA REQUIREMENTS

The student visa that allows you to enter and remain in Australia for the duration of your course and is subject to a number of conditions. These conditions appear on your eVisa or the visa label in your passport as a four-digit numeric code with a brief description. It is your responsibility to make sure that you are aware of these conditions and understand them. If your visa is cancelled as a result of you failing to meet a condition of the student visa, you may be excluded from returning to Australia for three years.

Please refer to the website of the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) www.immi.gov.au for up-to-date information about student visa requirements.

The VISA ALERT icons throughout this section are there as reminders of important visa conditions of which you should be aware.

[VISA ALERT]

TRANSFERRING TO ANOTHER INSTITUTION

If you wish to transfer from VU during the first six months of your principal, or main, course, you must apply for a release letter. The university assesses all release requests according to our international student transfer policy. We do aim to approve all requests whenever possible, but may refuse a request in line with our policy if we believe it is not in your best interests. For more information see www.vu.edu.au/international-students/transferring-and-enrolment-variations/transferring-visa-between-providers for further information.

[VISA ALERT]

CLASS ATTENDANCE

Attending class is important as this will give you the best chance of success in your studies. If you are an English language student, it is a condition

of your visa that you attend a minimum of 80% of your classes. If you do not attend the minimum required classes you may be reported to DIAC and your visa may be cancelled. The University will offer you support and counselling if you are identified as being at risk of not meeting the attendance requirements. Please feel welcome to contact the International Student Support team at any time if you are experiencing any difficulties that may affect your attendance.

It is important to let people know if you are unable to attend class for any reason. If you fail to attend classes for a significant period of time and cannot be contacted, the University may assume that you have stopped studying and proceed to cancel your enrolment. This will also affect your visa.

[VISA ALERT]

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

International students studying on a student visa are restricted from taking leave outside of normal University vacation periods. Leave will only be granted for exceptional circumstances, for example, illness or injury that prevents you from attending classes or extenuating circumstances such as bereavement or serious illness of a close family member. Leave cannot normally be granted retrospectively. You must apply for leave and normally cannot leave unless approval has been granted by the University. Evidence such as doctor's certificates or statements from registered counsellors must be attached to your application for leave. A leave of absence may affect your student visa. It is your responsibility to check the implications with the DIAC.

SATISFACTORY COURSE PROGRESS

An important visa condition for every student is that they maintain satisfactory course progress. Students who fail to maintain satisfactory course progress are at risk of having their visa cancelled.

The University's Student Assessment and Progress policy outlines how the University determines whether a student is making satisfactory progress and any subsequent resolutions. Details about course requirements and assessment are provided to students at the commencement of each study period. Staff at VU want you to succeed and offer a range of support services to help you if you experience difficulties for any reason. It is very common for students, including Australians, to experience learning difficulties when they first attempt studies at university. It is especially important for international students who are experiencing these problems to approach faculty or student support staff for assistance as early as possible to avoid unnecessary difficulties with their student visa.

[VISA ALERT]

PERMISSION TO WORK

Since 26 April 2008 all international students have had limited work rights attached to their student visas. If your visa was granted before this date you need to apply to DIAC for permission to work.

Your student visa only permits you to work 20 hours per week, during the standard teaching periods, which are semesters 1 and 2. You may only begin working after your class commencement date.

You have unlimited work rights during such non-teaching periods as the summer holidays. Visit the DIAC website for up to date advice at www.immi.gov.au/students/students/working_while_studying/how-to-apply.htm for more information about the details in regard to permission to work.

[VISA ALERT]

REDUCED STUDY LOAD

International students are required to enrol on a full time basis. You must apply to undertake a reduced study load and approval will only be granted by the University in certain limited circumstances. For example:

• in compassionate or compelling circumstances.

• when the University has implemented an intervention strategy for students at risk of failing to meet satisfactory course progress requirements

• when an approved deferment or leave of absence has been granted

• Where a required subject or unit is not available in a particular study period

In these circumstances, the University is able to extend your COE or issue you with a new one. If you have been granted a new COE and need to apply for a new visa, you can submit your visa renewal request together with your COE to DIAC, either in person or online if you have a credit or debit card. Go to www.immi.gov.au/students for more information on renewing your visa. It is important that you apply for a new visa before your current one expires.

OVERSEAS STUDENT HEALTH COVER (OSHC)

WHAT IS OSHC?

Overseas Student Health Cover (OSHC) has been designed to reduce the costs of medical and hospital care for international students while in Australia. It ensures that you can have access to appropriate, affordable healthcare, and is compulsory for all international students. Exceptions apply for Norwegian and Swedish students.

VISA ALERT

Every OSHC membership has an expiry date. It is important to make sure that you do not let your cover lapse. Students who do not maintain their OSHC for the duration of their stay in Australia are in breach of their visa conditions and may have their visa cancelled. If you allow your OSHC to lapse you will be required to back-pay premiums for the lapsed period and will not be entitled to any refunds during that time.

CONTACT DETAILS

It is important to make sure that VU has your current Australian residential address and telephone number as soon as you get here. Wherever your address changes you need to inform VU within seven days of the change. If you do not do this you will be in breach of your student visa conditions and risk having the visa cancelled. Confirm and update your address details on the MYVU portal, which is: https://myvuportal.vu.edu.au/uPortal/render.userLayoutRootNode.uP

CHANGING YOUR ENROLMENT

Please note that you will not be able to change your course once you have enrolled until the following

semester. Applications for a change of course preference will be taken up to a week before your scheduled enrolment date.

Once you have enrolled in your course any changes to your units of study must be made using the forms available online at: www.vu.edu.au/forms

The form required for changing your subject or units (if you are a higher education student is the Unit of Study Enrolment Amendment (Higher Education – A13).

Your changes need to be approved by your course coordinator or program manager and lodged by the dates published in the student diary, on notices around the campus, or in the Student Guide at www.vu.edu.au/sites/default/files/student-connections/pdfs/VU-student-guide-2011.pdf

If you do not keep your enrolment up to date you may find that you receive failing grades for those subjects in which you enrolled but that you did not complete. Please be responsible and make your enrolment details are correct.

CENSUS DATE

You can amend your enrolment without academic penalty until the census date in each semester. Amendments made on the Monday of week four of semester 1 or 2 and after, higher education only, are subject to a $46* late amendment fee.

The unit of study's lecturer and course coordinator must complete, sign and approve a Late (Post Census) Amendment to Unit of Study Enrolment – A14 form, before you can submit it to a Student Service Centre. Please note that such amendments are subject to a $67* post-census amendment fee.

PLEASE NOTE: You can only make an addition to your units of study after the census date with faculty approval and on an upfront, full-fee-paying basis. International students must also comply with the census-date requirements, and amendments after the census date incur additional fees.

*Fees correct at June 2011.

IMPORTANT: For the above reasons students should be particularly proactive and make sure that no errors have occurred in regard to their enrolment. All students SHOULD check their enrolment details on MYVU before the census date. For semester 1 enrolments this is 31 March and for semester 2 enrolments this is 31 August.

VISA ALERT

TUITION FEES

It is important to ensure that you pay all course fees by the nominated due date. If you fail to do so you, where you will receive an enrolment in the course may be cancelled, you could incur a late enrolment fine, or be at risk of breaching your visa conditions.

Here is a list of frequently asked questions about fees.

"I have already paid the fees for my first semester of study as a course deposit. When am I required to pay the fees for future semesters?"

Your tuition fees must be paid by the due date indicated on the statement issued to you. Semester 1 fees are usually due mid-February and Semester 2 fees are usually due mid-July.

"How do I pay the tuition fees for my future semesters of study?"

You can pay:

- in person at a VU Student Service Centre
- in person at any Australia Post or the National Australia Bank (NAB)
- over the telephone or internet
- by mail
- by BPay through your financial institution

Details of these payment methods appear on your fee statement.

"Can my tuition fees change?"

Your tuition fees can change if you take longer than anticipated to complete your course, if you enrol

*Fees correct at June 2011.

in greater than a full-time study load, or if Victoria University increases all future tuition fees. Any of these circumstances may affect your fee payments.

If you are transferring from one course to another you will receive a new letter of offer from VU that reflects the approved fees for the year you start your new course.

RE-ENROLMENT AFTER YOUR FIRST SEMESTER

Your faculty co-ordinates all future enrolment sessions. The university expects you to:

- **Go to the nominated location** on the date and time indicated in the information supplied to you, where you will receive an enrolment form;
- **Complete all the white sections on the form;**
- **Remember to organise a proxy to enrol on your behalf if you can't attend personally on the day.** The proxy must bring a completed Enrolment by Proxy A4? form that includes both your and his or her signature with her or him on the day. You can download the proxy form from the Commonly Used Forms webpage, which is at www.vu.edu.au/current-students/student-essentials/commonly-used-forms;
- If you are a higher education or TAFE international student and miss your timetabled enrolment session you will be charged a late-enrolment fine or, a re-instatement fine of $125*.

COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS

COMPLAINTS

VU has an easily accessible and confidential complaints service that it offers to students free of charge.

If you have a grievance against the university and want to make a complaint, the procedure is to make it under the student complaints policy, which provides for the fair and prompt resolution of student complaints and grievances. The policy is available at

www.vu.edu.au/studentcomplaint

It features a three-stage process for resolving complaints that includes informal complaints, formal complaints, and grievances.

At each stage students may seek the assistance and advice of an adviser from the Student Advisory Service. Students also have the option of seeking help from the Ombudsman of Victoria.

A complaint may relate to the performance of administrative, academic, teaching or research functions of the University and/or any matter relating to a student's enrolment at the University including, allegations of discrimination, harassment and bullying. Complaints from prospective students will be handled under the relevant provisions of the University's Admissions Policy.

APPEALS

VU has processes in place to make independent review and appeal decisions about you in relation to:

* Student discipline (including plagiarism)
* Unsatisfactory academic progress or attendance
* Cancellation of your enrolment

You have 20 working days from the date of the letter that VU sends you formally advising you of a decision to lodge an appeal against it. The appeals process begins within 10 working days of the formal lodgement of your appeal.

If you are dissatisfied with the decision VU makes

when you appeal you have the opportunity to appeal externally to the Victorian Ombudsman. The Victorian Ombudsman does not address actual decisions, but focuses instead on whether the appeals process was fair and proper.

See **www.ombudsman.vic.gov.au/www/ html/42-make-a-complaint.asp**

ASSISTANCE WITH YOUR COMPLAINT OR APPEAL

VU provides student advisors who can help you with any complaint or appeal you lodge.

DISCIPLINARY PROCEEDINGS

The university may introduce disciplinary proceedings in cases of student misbehaviour. Student discipline is governed by university legislation and its academic honesty and preventing plagiarism policy.

See **http://gpps.vu.edu.au/studentdiscipline/ cid/1/parent/1/t/studentdiscipline** for further information about how VU manages misbehaviour and issues.

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY'S OBLIGATIONS

The Australian Government wants overseas students in Australia to have a safe, enjoyable and rewarding place to study. Australia's laws promote quality education and consumer protection for overseas students.

These laws are known as the ESOS framework and they include the Education Services for Overseas (ESOS) Act 2000 and the National Code 2007. The University ensures that its courses for overseas students and the services we provide comply with the requirements prescribed in the ESOS framework. VU is also obliged to inform government agencies about certain changes to international students' enrolment and any breaches of a student's visa related to this framework are available at **www.aei.gov.au/AEI/ESOS/QuickInfo/ESOS_ FrameWork_pdf.pdf.**

STUDYING AT
VICTORIA
UNIVERSITY

STUDYING AT VICTORIA UNIVERSITY

ACADEMIC CALENDAR

VU's Academic Calendar contains the important dates relating to your studies during the year and the dates of public holidays. You can view or download the calendar by clicking on Timetables and Calendars on the current students webpage, which is at **www.vu.edu.au/current-students/student-essentials/dates-and-times/academic-calendar**

EDUCATIONAL CULTURE

The Australian education system may be different from the one with which you are accustomed. To begin with, all classes and other university communications are conducted in English, which means that you will be expected to be able to understand, speak and write English.

Classes are usually conducted via a combination of the following teaching methods:

• Lectures: A lecturer presents course information and students take their own notes.

• Tutorials: These are smaller classes or groups that allow students to discuss the lecture material in more detail with tutors. All students are expected to contribute to discussion in tutorials.

• Practical sessions: Certain subjects, such as science, engineering, and art and design conduct some classes in laboratories or workshops, giving students the chance to practise their skills and to receive individual guidance.

Academic staff members will encourage you to participate actively in the learning process. Although memorising facts may form a part of your studies, you will also need to understand principles, think critically, research and analyse information, and be able to solve problems.

Much constructive debate often takes place in classes, and VU generally encourages students to come with an open mind and to be prepared to discuss their ideas and theories. Regular class attendance and punctuality are critically important.

In higher-education courses wide reading from recommended textbooks and other material is usually essential, and you may be expected to complete written assignments, give oral presentations and take part in group projects.

In vocational programs the emphasis is on providing the best combination of academic, practical and communication skills to enhance your employment prospects after you graduate.

In the first week of your course you will receive a unit outline telling you the unit's aims, the lecture program, required reading, due dates of assignments, the way you will be assessed, and similar information. These outlines give you a good idea of what your lecturer expects of you in each unit, and you should talk to him or her if you need anything explained.

The relationship between students and staff is usually informal and it is common to address one another using first names. Your lecturers may be happy for you to contact them via email, a designated office phone number, or by visiting their office location, but it is not appropriate for you to phone or visit them at home.

PLAGIARISM

Plagiarism is using other people's words or ideas and presenting them as your own. Plagiarising someone else's work – whether from books, articles, the internet or another student's essay – is considered cheating and is an offence at VU.

You can avoid plagiarism in a number of ways:

• When you are writing an essay or presentation, put away the books and articles you have used so that you cannot copy any of the material directly from those sources. Write the material yourself – don't patch it together from other sources.

• Use other sources to support what you write yourself, and always acknowledge the source of any material or ideas you are using. Ask your teachers for advice on the preferred referencing style to use in your assignments.

• If you copy something directly, such as when you are quoting an author, you must use "inverted commas" to indicate that the words are not your own.

Please consult your faculty office or go to **http://w2.vu.edu.au/library/referencing** for more advice on referencing and avoiding plagiarism.

ACADEMIC RESOURCES

If you do not ask questions lecturers and staff will presume that you are coping with all elements of student life, so be confident and help yourself by asking questions if you need anything clarified. This is a normal experience for international students when arriving in a new country, which can feel like an enormously different country than the one you left.

It will take time to adjust, so in your best interests we encourage you to be proactive during your transition period to ensure your experience is the best it can be.

It is important to know that your English will indeed improve, so we encourage you to practice English and speak it frequently. What is also important is knowing what academic resources are available for

you. By accessing this information you can support your academic success. For support programs and useful information:
http://tls.vu.edu.au/vucollege/students/index.html

FACULTY CONTACTS

Victoria University is a multi-sector university. If you have any questions relating to your studies please contact either your lecturer, course co-ordinator, or program manager for assistance. You could find information about your course co-ordinator on the appropriate faculty webpage. If your question is a more general one about your overall program you should visit your relevant faculty, **www.vu.edu.au/higher-ed-and-tafe**. If they can't help they'll refer you to someone who can.

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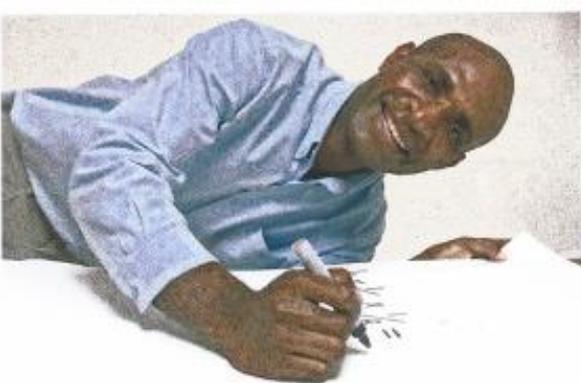
STUDENT ESSENTIALS

BEING PREPARED

When you chose to come to VU you actively prepared by arriving in time to participate for orientation, reading pre-departure guide and visiting the VU website. This has helped you understand more about what life in Melbourne and VU would be like.

VU offers a range of services and facilities to help you to learn, participate and obtain any assistance you need throughout your time in Melbourne. When you have enrolled and begun studying it will be important to be aware of the full range of services and facilities available to you and to use them.

You can use this section of the guide as your quick-reference guide to the best places to find information. It also gives you the opportunity to be fully aware of the services and facilities that you can use to assist you in sustaining your academic development, personal wellbeing and health.

WHERE TO ASK QUESTIONS AND SOURCE INFORMATION

CAMPUS MAPS

VU campuses are located in Melbourne's city centre and across its western suburbs. We have purpose-built learning environments, the latest technology, state-of-the-art laboratories and equipment, a full range of sports and recreation facilities, plus plenty of space to relax and enjoy campus life.

Website: **www.vu.edu.au/campuses**

CAMPUS SHUTTLE BUS

VU operates a free evening shuttle bus from our Footscray Park campus to the Footscray railway station and the Student Village at Maribyrnong. Another service runs between the St Albans campus and the St Albans railway station.

Website: **www.vu.edu.au/safety**

ASKVU

Ask your own question in ASKVU or search the frequently asked questions database.

Website: **http://askvu.vu.edu.au**

MYVU PORTAL

Login to the MYVU Portal for Blackboard, WebCT, MyTimetable, graduation, personal details, fees, examination information and other online facilities.

Website: **https://myvuportal.vu.edu.au**

STUDENT EMAIL

Visit this webpage to find out about the email service, or login to your student email account.

Website: **www.vu.edu.au/current-students/ student-essentials/student-email**

NEWS AND EVENTS

Contains news, opportunities and events that are of interest to students.

Website: **www.vu.edu.au/news-events**

DATES AND TIMES

This section has faculty timetables and the VU academic calendar, which has information about exam dates, census dates, holidays and teaching periods.

Website: **www.vu.edu.au/current-students/ student-essentials/dates-and-times**

ENROLMENTS

All new and returning students need to enrol in order to commence officially or to continue with your studies at VU.

Website: **www.vu.edu.au/current-students/ student-essentials/enrolments**

EXAMINATIONS

If you are required to sit exams for all or some of the subjects you study this section will provide you with all the information you need, including times and locations.

Website: **www.vu.edu.au/exams**

GRADUATIONS

If you have completed or nearly completed your course you must formally apply for an Award (certificate), even if you do not attend the ceremony.

Website: **www.vu.edu.au/current-students/student-essentials/graduation**

STUDENT COMPLAINTS

Visit this section if you want to let us know about a concern or a complaint or if you want to provide a compliment or propose a suggestion about how to improve the way we do things.

Website: **www.vu.edu.au/studentcomplaint**

STUDENT SERVICE CENTRES

VU's Student Service Centres provide you with face-to-face customer service to help you access services, advice and information in an easy and convenient way. The staff at the Student Service Centres can help you with general enquiries, refer you to specific services that you may need, and provide such on-the-spot student-administration services as amending your enrolment details, changing your personal details, accepting fee payments, providing you with your results, and issuing or updating your student ID card. Their website is **www.vu.edu.au/facilities-and-services/student-service-centres**

You can also visit your campus's Student Service Centre for:

* academic transcripts
* a tax invoice
* an application to graduate
* course withdrawals
* enrolments
* fee extensions
* payment for student activities and trips
* VUSU membership
* a campus map and directions around the campus

COMMONLY USED FORMS

During your time at university you may need to fill out forms related to your studies. Such forms may be related to your enrolment, fees or assessments.

Website: **www.vu.edu.au/forms**

SERVICES WHICH CAN OFFER ASSISTANCE IN MANY WAYS:

LIBRARY SERVICES

VU's library services provide students with access to:

* an extensive range of print and electronic resources, including books, journals, periodicals, audiovisual, multimedia, databases, eJournals, eReserve, eBooks and past exam papers
* CAVAL, Australia's inter-university reciprocal borrowing program
* a warm, friendly, student-centred environment with study space
* photocopying, computing, and printing facilities and DVD players for use within the library
* an information-skills training program
* equipment for loan from most campuses, including LCD projectors and digital cameras

Services can be accessed at any of VU's 11 libraries or online at **http://library.vu.edu.au.**

Go to **http://w2.vu.edu.au/library/libraryhours** for details of library locations and opening hours.

My Library allows you to view your library records, renew loans, place holds and access electronic resources. It requires a Library personal identification number (PIN). To login to My Library go to **http://library.vu.edu.au/patroninfo**

BOOKSHOP SERVICES

VU bookshops stock a wide range of products to suit students' needs. These include:

* new and second-hand textbooks
* course notes and study-related publications
* newsagency items, including postage stamps and magazines
* phone cards
* public transport tickets
* stationery and calculators
* VU merchandise
* greeting cards
* giftware
* beauty products
* computer software and hardware

You can also get a great deal on newspaper subscriptions through the Footscray and St Albans bookshops. Go to **www.vu.edu.au/bookshop** to find out more about trading hours, textbook searches and online ordering.

VU COLLEGE

The college provides support for current TAFE and higher education students wanting to develop their skills further by assisting you with advice and resources for your studies.

Website: **http://tls.vu.edu.au/vucollege/students/index.html**

CAREERS AND EMPLOYMENT

You can search for jobs while a student or after you complete your program. VU's Student Career Development Department provides a range of online and face-to-face career and employment services for current students and graduates who have completed their studies during the previous two years. It is an ideal place to start job hunting by preparing yourself for interviews and building your resume.

Website: **https://careers.vu.edu.au/Content/**

STUDENT ADVISORY

Our Student Advisory Service provides a comprehensive information, referral and support service to assist you with your educational experience. Student Advisory is also responsible for administering and responding to student feedback and complaints.

Website: **www.vu.edu.au/advisory**

HEALTH AND PERSONAL SERVICES

The health adviser provides advice, information and referrals about general health, lifestyle, women's and men's health, nutrition, chronic illness, family planning and sexual health, pregnancy testing, injury assistance, and all other health matters.

Website: **www.vu.edu.au/health-services**

CHILDCARE

VU offers child-care services for the children of students and staff. You do need to apply early, however, as demand is high for the limited number of places available.

Website: **www.vu.edu.au/facilities-and-services/children-s-services**

COUNSELLING

The Counselling Service provides high-quality, professional and confidential counselling free of charge to all students of the university.

Website: **www.vu.edu.au/counselling**

DISABILITY

Student equity and disability services can provide information and advice in regard to laws and campus policies that promote diversity and access to education and prevent discrimination and harassment at VU. We offer a range of services and resources to support and help those of you with disabilities or medical conditions to complete your studies and participate in all aspects of university life.

Website: **www.vu.edu.au/facilities-and-services/student-disability-support**

HOUSING SERVICES

VU owns and operates a range of accommodation for students, staff and guests of the university. Housing Services can also provide advice and assistance in regard to searching for housing and information about your rights and responsibilities as a tenant.

Website: **www.vu.edu.au/housing**

FINANCES

If you are having a hard time financially we have professional staff who can provide you with financial and fee-extension advice and assistance with study and living costs.

Website: **www.vu.edu.au/financial-assistance**

COMPUTER AND INTERNET FACILITIES

VU offers its staff and students a rich collection of online resources. You'll have access to computer labs, and some faculties also open them between classes. Some university computers offer internet access for educational purposes. Computer labs, printers and photocopiers are often extremely busy when assignments are due, so be certain to organise your workload to ensure that your deadlines are achievable.

Website: **www.vu.edu.au/it-facilities**

FUN WHILE YOU STUDY

Being at university isn't all hard work. Life on campus can be great fun, too! For more information on activities and events outside of classes, read on.

MELBOURNE OPPORTUNITIES

The opportunities for entertainment and cultural activities in Melbourne are endless. You should investigate to find things in which you are interested. Refer to the options provided to you in the Your Journey to VU guide or stay informed about events organised by the ISS team. These will be on the following links:

www.vu.edu.au/international-students/life-at-vu/life-in-melbourne

www.vu.edu.au/international-students/life-at-vu/during-your-studies

The Melbourne Visitor Centre at Federation Square or the corner of Swanston and Flinders streets is a one-stop shop for discovering what Melbourne and Victoria have to offer visitors and residents. The City of Melbourne operates the centre and its staff can help you with your queries about living and travelling in Melbourne or around Victoria. They will be able to give you copies of information, brochures, what's-on listings, and maps.

Website: **www.fedsquare.com/index.cfm?pageID=145**

You can also get plenty of information from Tourism Victoria's websites:

www.thatsmelbourne.com.au

www.visitvictoria.com

FITNESS CENTRES AND FACILITIES

Campus life is about more than study. You will have plenty of opportunities to take breaks to keep fit and healthy. VU's facilities include:

- fully equipped fitness centres at the Footscray Park, St Albans and Werribee campuses that offer group fitness programs and equipment for individual workouts

- a state-of-the-art 25-metre indoor heated swimming pool at the Footscray Park campus

- a first-class athletics track and rugby field at the Werribee campus

- multi-purpose sports halls at the Footscray Park, Footscray Nicholson and Melton campuses

- tennis courts at the Footscray Park, Werribee and St Albans campuses

- a wide range of sporting and recreational equipment available for hire

Website: **www.vu.edu.au/sport**

REPRESENT VU IN SPORT

VU students are eligible to represent the university in regional, national and international sporting competitions, including the Australian University Games. You can also volunteer your services in a variety of other ways, such as sports administration, managing, coaching and refereeing.

Website: **www.vu.edu.au/sport**

SPORTS CLUBS

VU has plenty of options for staff and students who want to join a sporting club to play in local competitions. You can join a team at an affiliated community club by getting some friends together and forming a new team or by joining an established VU student team.

Website: **www.vu.edu.au/sport**

CLUBS AND SOCIETIES

Joining a university club or society can be a great way to meet new people and make new friends. You can get together with other people studying your subject, or who live near your campus, or who just have similar interests. Many clubs and societies run exciting events, from karaoke competitions to social balls.

Website: **www.vu.edu.au/current-students/campus-life/clubs-and-societies**

LEADERSHIP AND VOLUNTEERING

Challenge yourself, develop confidence, and enhance your leadership, team and interpersonal skills. Would you like to become involved in the community, connect with others at university or make new friends? How about gaining work experience, going on an adventure or just having fun? If you answer yes, come and visit Leadership, Involvement and Volunteer Experience (LIVE).

For more information or questions on opportunities available at VU send us an e-mail at lead@vu.edu.au or join our Facebook group 'take the lead at vu'.

Website: **www.vu.edu.au/student-leadership.**

PERSONAL WELL-BEING

REFLECTION CENTRE

You are welcome to call in at a reflection centre and enjoy a cup of tea or coffee. You can simply choose to relax, or to read or listen to light music, or you might like to develop your creativity through sketching or writing.

The reflection centres are open from 9 am to 5 pm weekdays. They're locations at the Footscray Park Campus, Building M, Room 229 and the St Albans Campus, Building 1L, Room L101.

At other campuses the student lounges provide a space for students to get away from it all. The student lounge locations are:

FOOTSCRAY PARK: Building M, level 0

FOOTSCRAY NICHOLSON: Telford Building, level 1

FLINDERS LANE: ground level

FLINDERS STREET: level nine

KING STREET: level 2

MELTON: Building 3, ground floor

NEWPORT: Building A, ground floor

ST ALBANS: Building 4N, level 1

SUNSHINE: Block E

QUEEN ST (LTO): ground floor

WERRIBEE: Building 1B, ground floor

Website: **www.vu.edu.au/chaplaincy**

CHAPLAINCY

We invite you to take part in VU's chaplaincy services. At Chaplaincy we are pleased to meet people from every faith or no faith.

PLACES OF WORSHIP

You can find places of worship throughout Melbourne, including Christian churches, Islamic mosques, Buddhist and Sikh temples and Jewish synagogues.

The VU chaplain can put you in contact with people of your own faith and give you information about where to go for religious services or worship.

PRAYER ROOMS

VU embraces and celebrates the religious and spiritual diversity of our community. We recognise that some faiths require such religious observance as prayer or other ceremonial activities during hours that the university's programs are conducted. To support this, VU provides Muslim prayer rooms for staff and students. Muslim students are also encouraged to the read the Muslim Guide to Living in Melbourne to help you get the most out of your time and experience here. You can request a copy from a VUI office or refer to the website: **www.vu.edu.au/sites/default/files/international/pdfs/Muslim_Student_Guide.pdf**
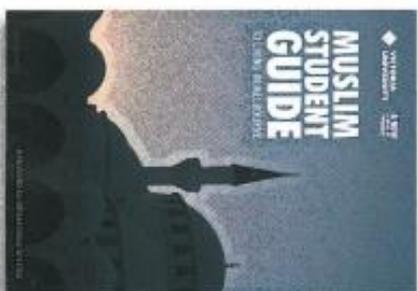
STUDY ABROAD STUDENT
2008 – FROM GERMANY

CHRISTIAN GUETH

Studying overseas gives you a new way of thinking and creates new possibilities for a future working life around the world. It is a great chance to experience new cultures, make friendships and professionally network. The opportunity of getting involved was only limited by myself. Best wishes and enjoy your time like I did.

LIFE IN MELBOURNE

LIFE IN MELBOURNE

PATTERN OF EMOTIONAL HIGHS AND LOWS

Now that you have arrived at VU you are likely to experience a pattern of emotional highs and lows, as you can see in the accompanying graph. Right now you are almost certainly excited about beginning your studies as the next phase of your life and education. These feelings are perfectly normal and people from every culture in the world experience them when they go through such a major transition as entering a new phase of life.

TRANSITION SHOCK

Sometimes this process of going through emotional highs and lows is called culture shock or transition shock. The word shock is there because the symptoms of this state often resemble illness. Some of these symptoms are:

* tiredness
* insomnia
* anxiety
* sadness
* frustration or anger
* overeating or loss of appetite
* drinking or smoking too much
* sadness
* depression

Don't be discouraged if and when you experience transition shock. It is perfectly normal for anyone experiencing great change, and you can deal with it in ways that are already familiar to you. Think back to the other times when you have experienced significant transitions and use some of the same strategies that allowed you to be successful at those times.

TRANSITION

You are likely to welcome some aspects of having arrived in Melbourne and starting your studies at VU, but others may be particularly difficult. To prepare for this change we want you to be aware of some of feelings that you may be experiencing and may also soon experience. You may have already experienced a period of great excitement, which may only increase when you truly taste the freedom of living in Melbourne, attending classes and enjoying the life of an international student. However, you may experience times when you might find it difficult to cope with being away from your home, friends, family, mother tongue, favourite foods, and a variety of other familiar facets of life.

TRANSITION SHOCK

Emotional Highs

Emotional Lows

Pre-departure — Arrival — 1st crisis — Recovery — Normal emotional range
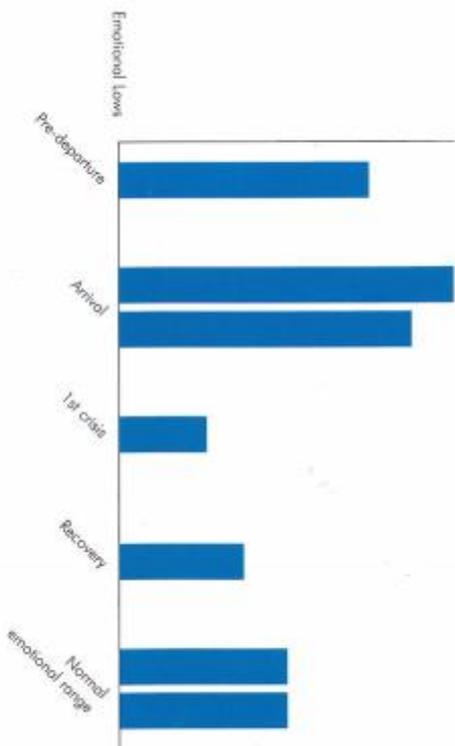
RECOVERY

You need to plan ahead in order to get through transition shock successfully. When people are in the midst of transition shock it is usually particularly difficult for them to think of strategies for escaping it, so already having a plan makes it much easier to begin the process of healing and moving forward into your new life. Some popular strategies for dealing with transition shock are:

* exercise
* exploring a new neighbourhood
* listening to or playing music
* cooking
* keeping a journal
* meditation
* playing video games
* joining a club or sports team
* reading

Just make sure you don't let your comfort activity take over your life so that it prevents you from growing and adapting to your new situation. If you're finding this difficult we encourage you to come and talk to a member of the ISS team to assist you with a strategy.

ISS would like to thank Culture Works for the information on transition.

©2010 Culture Works

SAFETY

CREATING A SAFETY PLAN

Adjusting to a new city will take some time, so being proactive and creating a safety plan is helpful. As a part of your arrival you should:

- create a network of people
- get to know your local area
- familiarise yourself with public transport options
- keep emergency numbers handy

Visit the VU safety website at **www.vu.edu.au/safety** for other helpful information.

CAMPUS SERVICES

Take advantage of VU's campus security and free shuttle bus services from the Footscray Park and St Albans Campus. If you feel you are at risk at any time in the evening you can ask a security guard to accompany you to your car.

The VU Shuttle Bus timetable for Footscray Park is **www.vu.edu.au/safety**

While you're on campus VU's security officers are on hand to assist in all safety matters. Dial **6666** to contact VU Security from any internal phone at any campus. If calling from a mobile or external phone, the contact numbers for each campus are:

CITY FLINDERS	Phone 9919 1103
CITY KING	Phone 9919 7905
CITY QUEEN	Phone 9919 1856
FOOTSCRAY NICHOLSON	Phone 9919 8908
FOOTSCRAY PARK	Phone 9919 4999
MELTON	Phone 9919 7445
NEWPORT	Phone 9919 8325
ST ALBANS	Phone 9919 2110
SUNSHINE	Phone 9919 7318
WERRIBEE	Phone 9919 8211

EMERGENCY SERVICES

If you ever find yourself in an emergency you can call '**000**' and request police, fire or an ambulance. It's a free call and you can dial it from a mobile phone even if you have no credit.

All of these services are provided to assist and help everyone in Australia, including international students. All police, fire and ambulance officers are highly approachable and helpful.

If you would like to speak to someone in your own language ask the operator for a translator who can speak it. If you place a call to any of these services the operator will talk to you and provide assistance until help arrives.

AFTER HOURS ASSISTANCE LINE

VU provides an after-hours service you can use if you require urgent assistance when offices on campus are closed. Call **1800 758 350** for immediate advice and assistance on a wide range of issues including health and safety concerns.

The service is a free call from landlines anywhere in Australia, and a standard call rate from mobile phones.

**If it's late and you need help,
call 1800 758 350.**

This is a special after-hours telephone hotline for international students on our campuses.

SAFETY IN MELBOURNE

Melbourne is a notably safe place to live, but as in most large cities some risks are always present when you are out and about, especially at night. Here are some tips for ensuring your safety:

- Avoid parks, lanes or poorly lit areas at night
- Travel with a friend whenever possible
- Check directions and have your car keys or transport ticket ready before you set out so that you can walk purposefully and not appear vulnerable
- When travelling on a train sit in its first carriage to be near the driver. Press the emergency button if necessary
- Don't hitchhike
- Take care when crossing roads; look to the right and also to the left before you step off the kerb; use pedestrian crossings or traffic lights whenever possible
- When walking or cycling at night wear brightly coloured clothing so that drivers can see you
- Never cross railway crossings when lights are flashing or barriers are in place
- Remember to carry change for parking meters, phone calls and ticket machines on trams
- Do not give out your phone number or personal details freely
- Stay alert when using ATMs
- It's always best to buy your own drinks
- Australians rarely carry much cash, as there's no reason to carry more than $50 with you
- Refer to Your Journey to VU guide for further safety information

FIRE SAFETY

VU would to thank the Community Education Department of the Metropolitan Fire Brigade for providing this information on fire safety.

International students are increasingly appearing in statistics related to fire incidents and deaths in Australia. Sadly, most of these fires are preventable.

You can take some simple steps to reduce the risk of fire in your accommodation, by following these fire-safety tips.

SMOKE ALARMS

When you're sleeping you cannot smell smoke. Smoke alarms save lives. They wake you and alert you to the danger from smoke and fire. You MUST have a smoke alarm where you live. That is the law. All homes must have a smoke alarm on each level. Landlords are legally responsible for the installation of alarms in rental property; tenants are responsible for testing and maintaining them. If you live on campus there will be a smoke alarm in your room. If you live off campus in a house or flat there must be a smoke alarm outside your bedroom.

Look after your smoke alarm; it can save your life.

Test your smoke alarm regularly by pressing the test button

DON'T remove the battery

DON'T take the smoke alarm down

DON'T cover it

If there is no smoke alarm or it doesn't work report it to your landlord

ELECTRICITY

The safe use of electricity assists in preventing house fires.

The improper use of powerboards and double adaptors can lead to fires.

A double adaptor or a powerboard plugged into another double adaptor or powerboard creates a danger of overloading the system. For safety, use a single extension cord rather than joining shorter cords. Leaving an extension cord coiled while in use or placing a cord under floor coverings can cause overheating.

Be careful to keep electrical appliances away from water.

A hair dryer takes time to cool down. For safety, allow this to happen on a non combustible surface before storing it.

Computers, monitors and TVs can overheat and cause fires even when not in use.

They should be turned off after each session. Good air circulation is necessary around TVs and videos. TVs should be turned off at the set, not only with the remote control.

Light globes can become dangerously hot.

It is dangerous to cover a lamp with any type of fabric. The best way to dim a lamp is to use a lower wattage globe.

HEATERS

It's nice to keep yourself warm during cooler weather, but remember that heaters are a major cause of house fires.

- Read and follow your heater's operating instructions
- Keep all clothes and curtains at least one metre from the heater
- Turn off all heaters before you leave your room or go to bed
- Before you go to bed at night or leave your home, ensure that all heaters are turned off at their power source and that all fires are extinguished

CANDLES, OIL BURNERS AND CIGARETTES

Candles, oil burners and cigarettes can all be dangerous fire hazards.

- Don't smoke in bed
- Dampen cigarette butts before putting them in the rubbish
- Make sure your candles are on properly designed candle holders
- Don't leave your room when a candle or oil burner is alight
- Don't go to sleep when a candle or oil burner is alight
- Don't put candles or oil burners near windows; be careful, curtains can catch fire easily
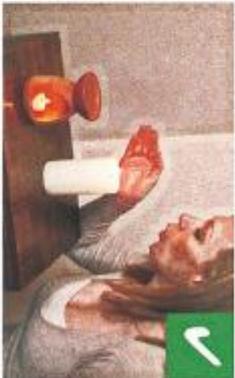
- Hot oils and fats catch fire easily
  – Do not use water to put out an oil fire
  – Use a dry powder extinguisher, fire blanket or saucepan lid to extinguish them if it's safe to do so
- Turn off all cooking appliances before you leave the room or go to bed

COOKING

Most house fires start in the kitchen.

- Prepare food only in the kitchen.
- Always stay in the kitchen while food is cooking

PLAN YOUR ESCAPE

In a Fire:

- Get down on the floor and crawl to the door
- Get out of your room
- Close the door – this prevents smoke and fire from spreading
- Alert others
- When outside stay out
- Call **000**

AUSTRALIAN CULTURE

Culture shock is often caused by stress that results from the uncertainty of being in a different environment.

Many of the differences are obvious, such as climate, food and the absence of friends and family, but many are more subtle and may only become apparent after some time. They include differences in how people make decisions, resolve conflicts, interact and express themselves.

Below are some websites that have pointers about how people tend to act and expect others to act in Australia.

www.australia.com/index.aspx

What you are also probably already quickly learning is that Australians use sayings and words that make no sense to you. These words and sayings are Australian slang. Below is a website that can help you make sense of the new words you will be hearing.

www.koalanet.com.au/australian-slang.html

HEALTH

OSHC Worldcare is VU's preferred provider for overseas student health cover. Your OSHC Worldcare policy number is your VU student ID followed by VU: 300000VU

HOW DO I RECEIVE MY OSHC WORLDCARE CARD?

Your coverage commences from the date you arrive in Australia. You should order your membership card online from the OSHC Worldcare website when you arrive in Melbourne.

Go to: **www.oshcworldcare.com.au** and click 'Students'. If you need any assistance, contact OSHC Worldcare toll-free on **1800 814 781**.

It is important for you to carry your OSHC membership card with you and present it at every medical consultation.

If you require cover before you receive your membership card you can print a 'temporary

Certificate' from the OSHC Worldcare website. This certificate will show your membership details and you can present it when visiting a doctor or enquiring about your health cover.

OSHC WORLDCARE CONTACTS – ON-CAMPUS SUPPORT

OSHC Worldcare representatives are on campus at VU every week to help you with medical expense claims and membership renewals and to answer your questions about health cover. To find out when a representative is on campus visit www.vu.edu.au/international-students/life-at-vu/settling-in

EMERGENCY HELPLINE

OSHC Worldcare offers a 24-hour emergency helpline that includes an interpreting service, legal advice and medical assistance.

Phone **1800 814 781** (free call)

MEDICAL CENTRES

You can find a medical centre close to your accommodation or campus by viewing the OSHC Worldcare website:
https://www.oshcworldcare.com.au/member_student/medical_providers.aspx.

VISITING A DOCTOR

There are plenty of other doctors whom you can visit are located throughout Melbourne.

When making an appointment ask how much they charge for consultations. You will be required to pay the difference between the amount the doctor charges and the amount that your OSHC provider is prepared to reimburse you.

Medical centres usually require payment for consultations before you leave. They then give you a receipt which you will need to present to your OSHC provider to obtain a refund.

MEDICAL EMERGENCIES

If you are severely injured or ill you can access treatment via the emergency or casualty sections at public hospitals. They are usually open 24 hours a day, but you may have to wait a long time for service.

If you cannot get to a hospital in an emergency, telephone **000** and ask for an ambulance.

You can also phone your local medical centre at any hour to see if a doctor is on call in case of emergency.

OSHC Worldcare offers a 24-hour emergency helpline for members that includes an interpreting service. Phone **1800 814 784** (free call).

PHARMACIES

Pharmacies are usually called chemists in Australia. Please note that chemists in Australia cannot fill out prescriptions written by doctors overseas. You will need to obtain a prescription from an Australian doctor if you need medication.

GETTING INVOLVED

It's difficult to know exactly what to expect from university, especially if you've only just started. Part of having a successful transition into your program and developing realistic expectations of what university and life in Melbourne will be like is to have an open mind, to challenge yourself, and to get involved.

You can become involved in many ways, such as by becoming a future orientation host or safety ambassador. Doing that enables you to share your knowledge of life at VU, develop leadership skills, build friendships, learn more about VU and connect with new students.

Getting involved is only limited by your imagination and courage. Unlimited opportunities are just waiting for you to take the first step so you can look, find, get involved and thrive.

TELEPHONE AND WEB REFERENCES

EMERGENCY AND ASSISTANCE TELEPHONE NUMBERS

COMMUNITY NUMBERS

Ambulance – emergency	000
Fire Brigade – emergency	000
Police – emergency	000
AIDS Line – counselling	1800 133 392
Alcoholics Anonymous	9429 1833
Gamblers Anonymous	9696 6108
Gay and Lesbian Switchboard	9663 2939
Victoria Legal Aid	9269 0120
Lifeline Australia	13 11 14
– 24-hour crisis counselling	
Nurse-On-Call	1300 606 024
OSHC Worldcare 24 hour service	1800 814 781
Orygen Youth Health Triage	1800 888 320
Pregnancy Counselling Australia	1300 737 732
SANE Australia	1800 187 263
– mental illness helpline	
Sexual Assault Centre	9635 3610
Centre Against Sexual Assault (CASA) (After hours)	1800 806 292
Women's Domestic Violence	1800 015 188
– 24-hour crisis line	
VU after-hours assistance line	1800 758 350

POLICE STATIONS (GENERAL ENQUIRIES)

Flinders Lane (Melbourne)	9637 1100
Footscray	8398 9800
Keilor Downs (St Albans)	9365 3333
Melton	9747 7999
Sunbury	9744 8111
Sunshine	9313 3333
Sunbury	9744 8111
Werribee	9742 9444

CAMPUS SECURITY NUMBERS

City Flinders	9919 1103
City King	9919 7905
City Queen	9919 1856
Footscray Nicholson	9919 8908
Footscray Park	9919 4999
Melton	9919 7445
Newport	9919 8325
St Albans	9919 2110
Sunshine	9919 7318
Werribee	9919 8211

USEFUL WEBSITES

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY WEBSITES

Victoria University	www.vu.edu.au
Victoria University International	www.vu.edu.au/international-students
Victoria University International Compliance	www.vu.edu.au/international-students/visa-and-enrolment-variations
International Student Support	www.vu.edu.au/international-students/life-at-vu
Safety	www.vu.edu.au/safety
VU Faculties	www.vu.edu.au/higher-ed-and-tafe
Student Essentials	www.vu.edu.au/current-students/student-essentials
MYVU Portal (for online course application, enrolment details, exam timetables and results)	https://myvuportal.vu.edu.au/
ASKVU	www.vu.edu.au/askvu.
Calendar (academic year)	www.vu.edu.au/current-students/student-essentials/dates-and-times
Commonly Used Forms	www.vu.edu.au/forms
Library	http://library.vu.edu.au/
Student Email	www.vu.edu.au/current-students/student-essentials/student-email
Services and Programs	www.vu.edu.au/students
Study Skills and Academic Support	http://tls.vu.edu.au/vucollege/students/index.html
Careers Advice and Employment Assistance	www.vu.edu.au/facilities-and-services/employment-services
Noticeboard for Students	www.vu.edu.au/current-students/student-essentials/noticeboard-for-students
Student Complaints	www.vu.edu.au/studentcomplaint
Examinations	www.vu.edu.au/exams
Sport and Fitness	www.vu.edu.au/sport
Student Leadership	www.vu.edu.au/student-leadership

LIFE IN AUSTRALIA

Department of Immigration and Citizenship	www.immi.gov.au
Student Visas	www.immi.gov.au/students
Consular Representatives	www.dfat.gov.au/embassies.html
Australian Taxation Office	www.ato.gov.au
Employment and job searching	www.workplace.gov.au
Fair Work Ombudsman	www.fwo.gov.au/Pages/default.aspx
Rights at Work	www.job-watch.org.au

LIFE IN MELBOURNE

Out and about in Melbourne	www.visitmelbourne.com
Out and about in Victoria	www.visitvictoria.com
Things to do in Melbourne	www.thatsmelbourne.com.au
Water Safety	www.watersafety.vic.gov.au
Weather Information	www.bom.gov.au
White Pages (residential, government and business telephone numbers listed alphabetically)	www.whitepages.com.au
Yellow Pages (business telephone numbers listed by categories)	www.yellowpages.com.au

GETTING AROUND

Addresses and Maps	www.whereis.com
Metlink – trains, trams and buses	www.metlinkmelbourne.com.au
Vline – regional and interstate transport	www.vline.com.au
Night Rider Bus Service	www.metlinkmelbourne.com.au/timetables/nightrider
VicRoads (driving licence and car registration information)	www.vicroads.vic.gov.au

HEALTH AND WELLBEING

OSHC Worldcare	www.oshcworldcare.com
Multicultural Centre for Women's Health	www.mcwh.com.au
The Melbourne Sexual Health Centre	www.mshc.org.au
Beyond Blue	www.beyondblue.org.au
Healthy Eating Tips	www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcarticles.nsf/pages/Healthy_eating_for_children_and_adults

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