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## Are they being served? Student expectations of higher education

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## Are they being served? Student expectations of higher education

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The current climate in tertiary education places students as primary consumers. As such, students are becoming more conscious of their customer rights and of gaps between their expectations of service delivery and the reality of that service. Not only does this service gap present a quality assurance challenge for universities, it is also likely to contribute to student withdrawal. In week one of the first semester 2001, a sample of 56 first year psychology students volunteered to complete the SERVQUAL questionnaire (Riddings, Sidhu, & Pokarier, 2000) to assess their expectations of university in terms of academic and Administrative staff. The process was repeated in the final week of semester based on the reality of their experience. Results indicate there is a significant difference between students' expectations and their reality, with expectations being higher. In order to locate these results in context, a number of interviews were conducted with second to fourth year psychology students to identify their experience with the School of Psychology. These results indicate a very high level of satisfaction with the School of Psychology but less satisfaction with the wider university experience in terms of logistical issues. Naturally no assumptions of generalisability are made from this study as the purpose was to elicit detailed information pertaining to the School of Psychology at one specific university. Implications from this study are discussed and avenues for further research explored.

### Introduction

Australian universities have undergone a major transition in the past decade as they have moved from public to a greater emphasis on private funding, and re-invented themselves as business enterprises. While universities may still view themselves as bastions of education, they are undoubtedly also businesses subject to the same market forces as any other (Bryant, Scoufis, & Cheers, 1999). As such, they are under increasing pressure to "demonstrate quality outcomes, excellence, and cost effectiveness" (Bryant et al., 1999, p.1). Consequently, higher education institutions are being forced to address quality assurance issues as core business in much the same way as any other organisation (Yorke, 1999).

Furthermore, students are viewing themselves as consumers and are demanding value for money in their education (Nelson, 2002). In addition, as a result of the shift towards mass higher education and equity access, the profiles of both students and universities in Australia have changed (Abbott-Chapman, Hughes & Wylde, 1992; Anderson, Singh, Stehbins, & Ryerson, 1998; Astin, 1993). Combine these factors with the new federal funding arrangements that focus on student completions rather than enrolment and there is an impetus for universities to investigate the reasons for student withdrawal in Australia.

The idea of a 'service gap', as described by Parsuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, (1985), has provided a research construct in the business sector to assess customer satisfaction against customer expectations (Long, Tricker, Rangecroft, & Gilroy, 1999). The assumption underlying the service gap is that disappointment and perhaps resentment will result if expectations are not met. This might well be regardless of the fact that the service meets or exceeds world best practice criteria. If the consumer has different expectations, he or she will experience dissatisfaction. Likewise in the higher education setting, students arrive with a set of expectations or assumptions of what they think their university experience will be like (Cheng, & Tam, 1997; McInnis, Hartley, Polesel, & Teese, 2000; Sander, Stevenson, King, & Coats, 2000). If the reality of their experience is different to those expectations, the potential for disappointment, and perhaps withdrawal, is increased.

There is a growing body of literature that suggests students are not well informed about the nature of the course they have chosen and future employment opportunities derived from it (McInnis et al., 2000; Peel, 2000a; Pargetter, 1999). Students are unaware of the demands of higher education in terms of workload, independent learning, and access to resources (Pargetter, 1999, 2000; Peel, 2000; Yorke, 2000). It would appear that the person-environment fit is an important variable in terms of

student retention, as the incompatibility between student expectation and university experience is a primary cause of attrition (Tinto, Goodsell-Love, & Russo, 1993).

Institutional commitment to students is identified in the literature as being critical to retention (McInnis et al., 2000). Questionnaires of students withdrawing from courses suggests that those who feel isolated or disconnected from the institution are more likely to withdraw than those who feel a sense of belonging or sense of community with the institution and its occupants (Peel, 2000a; Tinto et al., 1993; Tinto, 1995). The other issue highlighted by withdrawing students was the lack of integration between students and lecturers outside of the classroom environment (Tinto et al., 1993). Many students felt ignored by lecturers and inhibited about contacting them even about academic issues. With up to 14% of withdrawing students describing staff as uncaring and indifferent to the needs of the students, there is an emphasis on the need for institutions to establish connections with enrolling students (Tinto et al., 1993). What this research suggests is that students had anticipated an environment substantially different to what they experienced and this gap led to feelings of isolation, dissatisfaction, and discontent resulting in the student withdrawing from university.

Edith Cowan University (ECU) is located in the Western Australian capital of Perth. In its strategic plan (ECU, 1998) the university recognises that Australia's future prosperity is inextricably linked to the intellectual capacity of the Australian people and, as a result, demand for higher education will increase. In order to meet the challenges presented by these factors, the university needs to understand the expectations of its students in terms of their university experience. Any gap between student expectations and their reality could potentially lead to students withdrawing from the institution and therefore impact significantly on available funding.

The School of Psychology (SoP) at ECU undertook the present study in order to explore the relationship between student expectations of the school and their reality as a means of refining the transition programme it was developing. The transition project was initiated in 2000 as a way of addressing attrition among first year students. It was seen as an extension to the existing Peer Mentoring Project (PMP) that had proved highly successful in reducing attrition since its inception in 1999 (Drew, Pike, Pooley, Young, & Breen, 2000; Breen, Cohen, Drew, Haunold, Pike, & Young, 2001). The rationale behind the current study was that if the services and supports the school was incorporating into the programme were different to the supports students expected or needed there was the potential for the transition project to fail in its aim. Therefore, it was prudent to examine any potential service gap between the expectations of first year psychology students and their reality.

## Method

### Design

First year psychology students were asked to complete the SERVQUAL questionnaire in the first week of semester (Time 1) in terms of what they expected from teaching and Administrative staff within the SoP. This process was repeated in the final week of semester (Time 2) with students completing the same questionnaire in terms of the reality of their experience. In addition, a number of semi-structured interviews were conducted with second to fourth year psychology students to develop a deeper understanding of the undergraduate experience from students who had faced and overcome the difficulties experienced by first year students.

### Materials

The SERVQUAL, developed at Queensland's University of Technology by Riddings, Sidhu, and Pokarier (2000), was used for the quantitative stage of the study. The SERVQUAL is a single page questionnaire, which can be used for both teaching and Administrative staff, with 20 questions rated on a 7 point Likert scale. Two versions were developed, one assessing students expectations to be Administered at Time 1 - week one of semester 1 (see Appendix A), and the other to assess the student experience at Time 2 - week 14 semester 1(see Appendix B). Questions such as: "When staff promise to do something by a certain time, they should do so."; "These staff should be dependable."; "These staff should get adequate support from the university to do their jobs well." are intended to tap into a range of student/staff expectations. The same questions are used at time 2 but the words are adjusted to reflect the experience. So the previously mentioned examples would be adjusted to read as: "When staff promise to do something by a certain time, they do so" "These staff are dependable" "These staff get adequate support from the university to do their jobs well". Additional demographic

information was also sought, and this part was amended to include information thought to be relevant by the research team.

### Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were recorded using audiotapes, which were later transcribed verbatim. To ensure consistency the same researcher, conducted all the interviews. Participants were interviewed individually using a semi-structured interview schedule as suggested by Patton (1990) with additional probes being used to explore issues raised by participants and of interest to the research team. The interviews were conducted in the psychology building familiar to students.

### Participants

Having been informed of the study, 56 first year psychology students volunteered to complete the questionnaire during the first Research Methods 1 lecture. There were 41 female and 15 male students and they ranged in age from 17 to 47 years ( $M = 26.82$ ,  $SD = 8.95$ ). In addition 31 second to fourth year students also volunteered to be interviewed when tutors showed overheads outlining the study in tutorials and called for volunteers. Five participants were male and 26 were female; no other demographic data were collected. The gender imbalance of both samples is a general trend among undergraduate psychology students.

### Procedure

The researcher addressed first year students during their initial Research Methods 1 lecture held during the first week of semester one 2001. The nature of the study was explained to students in terms of them having input into the development of the transition project. They were told that for the School of Psychology to adequately meet the needs of first year students in terms of providing support services for them, it needed to fully understand what students required. It was stressed that the process was voluntary and anonymous, as they were not required to include their name or student identity number on the form. Students completed the questionnaire at the end of the lecture and handed the forms to the lecturer to be passed on to the researcher.

During the first week of semester, second, third, and fourth year students were asked to volunteer for the interviews. Due to the nature of the research, students were assured that no one other than the primary researcher would know their identity. This was to allow students the security of being able to tell their stories without fear of being disadvantaged if their experience of the SoP was negative. A total of 31 students agreed to be interviewed over the course of the semester

Prior to each interview beginning, students were once again assured of anonymity beyond the primary researcher and advised that the interview would be tape-recorded and then transcribed. Students were advised to be careful about making statements that could identify them on the tape, and that if they inadvertently said anything they did not want included to let the researcher know and the offending section would then be omitted from the tape prior to it being transcribed.

At the end of semester (week 14) the researcher again addressed the first year students in the Research Methods 1 lecture and invited their participation in the final stage of the study. This required students to again complete the SERVQUAL but in terms of the reality of their experience.

### Results and discussion

#### SERVQUAL

Data from the time 1 (week 1 expectations) SERVQUAL were entered into SPSS for Windows version 10 and analysed using a 2x20 MANOVA with repeated measures. The MANOVA indicated a significant difference on 8 of the 20 items (Items 1, 2, 6, 14, 15, 18, 19 and 20) between Administrative and teaching staff and these are shown in Table 1. Item 1 refers to the comfort of the physical facilities; students indicated this was significantly more important for teaching staff than for Administrative staff ( $p = .038$ ). It is possible to conjecture over the reasons but whether this would be fruitful or beneficial is doubtful - it probably reflects a perception of a role hierarchy between teaching and non-teaching staff. Item 2 refers to the need for staff to have the latest equipment and was again in the favour of teaching staff ( $p = .011$ ). Item 6 states "when students have problems these staff

should be sympathetic and reassuring". Students thought this was more applicable to teaching staff than Administrative staff ( $p=.002$ ) and might be suggestive of similar motivations to those of item 20.

Table 1: Items with statistical significance time 1 (expectations) administrative versus teaching staff

Item	Mean	SD	Direction
Item 1 The physical facilities are pleasant/comfortable	6.12	1.01	Administrative
	6.17	1.00	Teaching
Item 2 Staff members have up to date equipment	6.54	0.72	Administrative
	6.70	0.58	Teaching
Item 6 When students have problems these staff are sympathetic and reassuring	5.99	1.02	Administrative
	6.24	0.87	Teaching
Item 14 Students are able to trust these staff	6.24	1.20	Administrative
	6.39	1.21	Teaching
Item 15 These staff should have the knowledge to answer student questions	5.83	1.37	Administrative
	6.25	1.10	Teaching
Item 18 These staff should not be expected to give students individual attention	3.40	1.89	Administrative
	3.00	1.86	Teaching
Item 19 These staff do <b>not</b> know the needs of students	4.69	1.65	Administrative
	4.55	1.76	Teaching
Item 20 These staff should not be expected to understand the learning needs of students	3.32	1.90	Administrative
	2.57	1.87	Teaching

\*  $p < .05$     \*\*  $p < .01$     \*\*\*  $p < .001$

Item 14 pertains to students' ability to trust staff and it was seen to be more important to be able to trust teaching staff than Administrative ( $p=.029$ ). Again, perhaps, this suggests that students expect to have a closer or more personal interaction with teaching staff than Administrative. It also identifies a lack of knowledge of the role played by the Administrative staff in terms of student support and access to records. Item 15 refers to staff having accurate knowledge to answer student queries and again this was seen as applying more to teaching than to Administrative staff ( $p= .000$ ). It is likely that this question was interpreted by students to mean knowledge about course content rather than other aspects of student and university interaction.

Item 18 says staff should not be expected to give students individual attention. Surprisingly it was felt that this was more applicable to Administrative staff ( $p=.002$ ), perhaps as a recognition that Administrative staff have more diverse duties and therefore it is unreasonable to expect individual attention from them. It also indicates a lack of understanding of the demands placed on teaching staff as it suggests that the function of these staff is to serve the needs of students - individually if necessary. Item 19 (It is unrealistic to expect these staff to know what all the needs of students are) was significant ( $p=.03$ ) in favour of teaching staff, suggesting that students do not expect teaching staff to understand their needs outside of the teaching role.

Finally, item 20 is also a negatively worded assertion that says staff should not be expected to understand the learning needs of students. Not surprisingly, students rated this in favour of Administrative staff ( $p=.000$ ), which again by definition suggests that teaching staff members are expected to understand the learning needs of students. This might mean that students expect a degree of latitude or consideration of individual circumstances from teaching staff and could be interpreted as meaning the students expect to become familiar with staff and to have staff know them and their situation on an individual basis.

The SERVQUAL administered during the Research Methods 1 lecture in week 14 used the same items as in time 1 except that the language was changed slightly to reflect the reality of their experience, rather than for their expectations. For example, item 1 in Time 1 was worded "the physical facilities *should be* pleasant/comfortable" and at time 2 this was changed to read "the physical facilities *are* pleasant/comfortable. Nine items reached significance at time 2 between teaching and Administrative staff (items 6, 7, 8, 14, 15, 16, 18, 19, & 20). Details of these items are shown in table 2.

Table 2: Items attaining significance in time 2 administrative versus teaching staff

Item	Mean	SD	Direction
Item 6 When students have problems these staff are sympathetic and reassuring	4.86	1.4	Administrative
	5.54***	1.12	Teaching
Item 7 These staff are dependable	5.13	1.52	Administrative
	5.64**	1.14	Teaching
Item 8 These staff provide their services at the time they promise to	5.43	1.29	Administrative
	5.79**	1.09	Teaching
Item 14 Students are able to trust these staff	4.82	1.57	Administrative
	5.45***	1.36	Teaching
Item 15 These staff have the knowledge to answer student questions	4.84	1.71	Administrative
	5.82***	1.08	Teaching
Item 16 These staff are always polite	5.29	1.58	Administrative
	5.86***	1.19	Teaching
Item 18 These staff do not give students individual attention	3.30	1.58	Administrative
	2.84**	1.62	Teaching
Item 19 These staff do not know the needs of students	3.48	1.58	Administrative
	2.93***	1.63	Teaching
Item 20 These staff do not understand the learning needs of students	3.30	1.64	Administrative
	2.63***	1.50	Teaching
* p< .05    ** p< .01    *** p< .001			

These results suggest that students have very specific views of the staff with whom they interact, with clear distinctions being made between the roles of Administrative and teaching staff. Overall, there is a very positive perception of staff within the School of Psychology. This was also supported by comments made during the interviews.

"In this building [SoP] if you go to the office they do their best"

"staff had time to talk to students"

"staff were friendly"

"I got a lot of support from one of the lecturers - they are not here to fail us and I think that was really encouraging"

Teaching Staff Time 1 (expectations) versus Time 2 (reality)

Details of the significant items are presented in Table 3. Expectations were significantly different to the reality on 14 items. That is, when students were asked at Time 1 (week 1) to complete the questionnaire asking what do you think it will be like, their responses were significantly higher than

Time 2 (week 14) when they were asked what is it really like. There was an exception to this trend with Item 3 (staff members are well dressed and appear professional), which was rated more highly in Time 2 than Time 1, which suggests teaching staff present a more professional image in reality than that expected by the students. Item 1 (the facilities are pleasant/comfortable) was rated significantly lower in Time 2 than Time 1 suggesting that students view the facilities used by teaching staff as less pleasant/comfortable than they had expected. Item 12 (these staff are not always willing to help students) and Item 19 (staff do not understand the learning needs of students) are both negatively worded statements. Students disagreed with item 12 in both data collection times, but they disagreed to a significantly higher degree in Time 1 compared to Time 2. This indicates that although students, on the whole, feel that teaching staff members do help them when necessary, their reality was significantly different to their expectations suggesting that they expected to receive more help and assistance than they received.

Table 3: Items with statistical significance for teaching staff time 1 (expectations) versus time 2 (reality)

Item	Mean	SD	Time
Item 1 The physical facilities are pleasant/comfortable	6.18***	1.06	1
	5.21	1.31	2
Item 2 Staff members have up to date equipment	6.71***	0.53	1
	5.32	1.11	2
Item 3 Staff members are well dressed and professional	4.96	1.24	1
	5.82**	0.97	2
Item 4 Staff members keep convenient office hours for all students	5.86**	1.20	1
	5.02	1.47	2
Item 5 When staff promise to do something by a certain time, they do so	6.52*	0.76	1
	5.59	1.26	2
Item 6 When students have problems these staff are sympathetic and reassuring	6.16*	0.89	1
	5.54	1.16	2
Item 7 These staff members are dependable	6.39**	0.80	1
	5.64	1.14	2
Item 8 these staff members provide their services at the time they promise to	6.41**	0.78	1
	5.79	1.10	2
Item 9 These staff keep their records accurately	6.66***	0.55	1
	5.63	1.21	2
Item 12 These staff are <b>not</b> always willing to help students	1.84*	1.06	1
	2.71	1.63	2
Item 13 These staff are too busy to respond to student requests promptly	3.36	1.61	1
	2.68*	1.40	2
Item 14 students are able to trust these staff	6.55***	1.36	1
	5.44	1.15	2
Item 17 These staff get adequate support from the university to do their jobs well	6.70***	0.91	1
	5.04	1.18	2
Item 19 These staff do not know the needs of students	4.77	1.64	1
	2.93***	1.63	2



\*  $p < .05$     \*\*  $p < .01$     \*\*\*  $p < .001$

Item 19 was rated with a mean score of 4.8 in Time 1, suggesting that students agreed that teaching staff do not know the needs of students; but in Time 2 it had a mean of 2.9, indicating that students disagreed with the statement and feel teaching staff do actually understand their needs. Given that item 20 specifically talks about the learning needs of students and item 19 is somewhat ambiguous as to which needs it is referring to, it is possible that students interpreted the item to be needs other than learning. Therefore, the results could be interpreted as meaning that students *did not expect* to have teaching staff understand needs other than those pertaining to the course, but that they found the opposite to be the reality, in that teaching staff *did understand* student needs outside the ambit of learning. Item 17 (these staff get adequate support from the university to do their jobs well) was rated more highly in Time 1 than Time 2, indicating that students do not believe that teaching staff members receive adequate support from the university to enable them to do their jobs properly.

Generally speaking, the results confirm that there is a significant gap between the expectations students have of teaching staff when they enrol and the reality of their experiences. In most cases their expectations are higher than the reality but on occasion the reality is better than they anticipated. These results do not imply a lack of care or commitment on the part of teaching staff; rather, it suggests a lack of knowledge on the part of the student in his or her understanding of the roles of teaching staff prior to commencement. The significant result of item 17 also suggests there could be greater support from the university to assist teaching staff.

Administrative staff time 1 (expectations) versus time 2 (reality)

Significant items are shown in Table 4. As was found with the analysis comparing teaching staff, student expectations of Administrative staff differed from their experience once semester started. Fifteen items were significantly different in Time 2 compared to Time 1. For the most part, the results were highly similar to those for the teaching staff, with one omission (item 13) and two additional items (items 15 & 16). It is possible that students have interpreted the term 'Administrative staff' to mean all university Administrative staff, not just those in the School of Psychology.

Table 4: Items attaining statistical significance for administrative staff time 1 vs time 2

Item	Mean	SD	Time
Item 1 The physical facilities are pleasant/comfortable	6.21***	1.04	1
	5.16	1.40	2
Item 2 Staff members have up to date equipment	6.55***	0.69	1
	5.16	1.23	2
Item 3 Staff members are well dressed and professional	5.00	1.24	1
	5.80**	0.98	2
Item 4 Staff members keep convenient office hours for all students	5.89**	1.20	1
	5.02	1.50	2
Item 5 When staff promise to do something by a certain time, they do so	6.54***	0.76	1
	5.30	1.35	2
Item 6 When students have problems these staff are sympathetic and reassuring	6.04***	0.91	1
	4.86	1.42	2
Item 7 These staff members are dependable	6.29***	0.87	1
	5.13	1.53	2
Item 8 These staff members provide their services at the time they promise to	6.34***	0.86	1
	5.43	1.29	2
Item 9 These staff keep their records accurately	6.62***	0.59	1

	5.34	1.46	2
Item 12 These staff are <b>not</b> always willing to help students	1.88***	1.01	1
	2.85	1.61	2
Item 14 Students are able to trust these staff	6.41***	1.06	1
	4.82	1.57	2
Item 15 These staff have the knowledge to answer student questions	5.79**	1.37	1
	4.84	1.71	2
Item 16 These staff are always polite	6.30***	1.08	1
	5.29	1.58	2
Item 17 These staff get adequate support from the university to do their jobs well	6.59***	0.87	1
	4.91	1.24	2
Item 19 These staff do <b>not</b> know the needs of students	4.80	1.65	1
	3.48***	1.58	2
* p< .05    ** p< .01    *** p< .001			

#### Interviews

Four major themes emerged from the semi-structured interviews: *instrumental*, *expectations*, *student role* and *emotion*. The largest theme was labelled *instrumental* and covered issues such as enrolment procedures, computer access, university infrastructure, opening times and how and where to access information. It dealt largely with factors out of the control of the students and which caused a degree of angst for students. Typical comments included:

"I didn't know where to go to get help or advice"

"Administrative focuses on bureaucracy rather than the individual needs of students"

"People are paying a lot of money for this and we are supposed to be accredited and equipment just doesn't work" "I didn't find there was much information regarding orientation or the purpose of this degree, where it can lead"

"I don't think I have got a handle on how the library works. It changes every so often and the system had a lot of glitches"

"Getting the modem pool has taken hours to achieve because you need the help line several times until you get it working"

"I think that even for one night a week if things stay open until 6.15-6.30pm it will accommodate [part time students]"

In *expectations* students spoke of a range of issues including tutors, work load, isolation, and university culture and the range of comments indicated that while the expectations of some students were met, others found their experience of university to be different from what had been anticipated. "I certainly had my expectations more than met regarding that first semester."

"My expectations were met because of the availability of the tutors here and the time the lecturer would give after the lecture."

"It was a lot more difficult than I thought. It was completely different to anything I had done before."

"I was lucky in that I knew someone who had done first year and I knew what was expected."

"I found it quite isolating at first because of my age."

The range of *emotions* that students experienced was also indicative of the diversity in the student population. Some spoke of being overwhelmed by the experience, others indicated depression; some even spoke about levels of fear. In contrast some students found the experience of university to be thrilling and exciting.

"I was very scared though, I was glad mum came, just scared of the whole university experience"

"It was pretty terrifying"

"I liked the stimulation"

"The sheer numbers of people as well I find intimidating"

"I felt so honoured to be here, I felt so thrilled and excited"

A number of students spoke about their *role* on campus as students. They saw themselves as being responsible not only for their own learning but also for the planning of their course, anticipating potential problems, and overcoming difficulties. However, they also spoke about not knowing what to expect from university, describing it as "fear of the unknown"

"Anticipate possible difficulties and plan to alleviate them"

"I liked that we were treated as if we were to just get on with it ourselves, we had to take responsibility for our learning"

"Being single minded about the goals you set for yourself"

## Conclusion

Clearly there is a difference between student expectations of university and the reality of their experience. This is illustrated not only by the SERVQUAL results but also the interview data. However, rather than this outcome being an indication that the SoP is failing to meet the needs of students, it appears as if students have unrealistic views of university life. The SERVQUAL results suggest that students anticipate having close contact with their lecturing staff to the degree that the lecturer would know each student and his or her personal situation. This is supported by the significant difference of item 18 for teaching staff from Time 1 to Time 2. Given that a first year psychology cohort will comprise approximately 300 students this expectation is completely unrealistic. Even the most caring and supportive academic could not hope to get to know each student by name and understand his or her particular circumstances.

The interviews elicited a range of views and opinions from students that also support this interpretation, although it would appear that in this context students were talking about their entire university experience and not limiting it to just the School of Psychology. In terms of the *instrumental* factors, students were unaware of support services available to them, how or where to access information, what employment opportunities were available to them on graduation, or even how to find their way around the campus. This lack of understanding of the most basic operations of the university implies that students anticipate being given more practical assistance once they arrive on campus. At the same time, students are recognising the need to be self-directed and take responsibility for their own learning. These two aspects appear at first to be contradictory but it could be interpreted that while students expect to be self-directed learners, and for the most part are willing and enthusiastic about being so, they need and expect instrumental support from the university in order to achieve this.

This means that students need to have facilities and resources available to them at times that are convenient to students not just the university. In terms of quality assurance it might be necessary for the university to re-evaluate how it allocates resources, such as staff, to accommodate the diverse needs of the student population. With more part-time students, or students that undertake both full-time study and employment, there is a greater need for more flexible opening times for the library,

student central, and other support services accessed by students. Alternatively, the university needs to find *reliable* alternative forms of delivery that allow students to access information outside normal business hours. Similar results have been found during the evaluation of the PMP (Breen et al, 2001).

If the logistical processes were organised to operate smoothly, without inconvenience to the student, this would allow them to concentrate on learning. This in turn would relieve pressure on lecturing and Administrative staff because students would not be constantly seeking assistance for these types of issues. One respondent put it quite succinctly:

I can't believe that for the number of years that this university has been going that they still can't get enrolments right and room allocations, its pretty simple stuff. I can speak from experience: I have never had these problems at other universities. It is not rocket science; there is no need for it and all that winds up happening is that people get stressed and they don't like it and they're worrying about things that they shouldn't have to worry about. It has nothing to do with their studies.

These results also suggest a lack of preparation on the part of the students prior to arriving at university. For school leavers, this could be due to a lack of experience in dealing with logistical issues on their own, but it also suggests that they are not receiving adequate information from schools, career advisors, or other sources while they are making their post secondary education decisions. Therefore, there is room for greater liaison between schools and universities to prepare school leavers more appropriately for their university experience and thereby to bring their expectations closer to the reality. This issue is already being addressed by the SoP as part of the transition project.

Unfortunately addressing the expectations of other student groups is not as straightforward as they are not identifiable in advance. Perhaps, as all university applications are handled via the Tertiary Institutions Service Centre (TISC), a package could be developed that outlines the roles and responsibilities of students and universities. Orientation programmes could be scheduled to accommodate individuals who work or have child care commitments, and should address issues such as way finding, computer access and other student concerns as well as ensuring that all students have access to a mentor, at least in the first semester.

Given the scope and range of responses from students regarding issues outside the ambit of the SoP, there appears to be a degree of misunderstanding on the part of the students in the study as to which entity was under investigation. The SoP had intended to gain information about how students viewed the activities of the School, however, it would appear that students have answered based on their experience of the university as a whole. While this too is valuable information that can inform future development of university-based services, the SoP needs to identify specific information about the assistance its students require. Therefore, the research team has decided to develop a Q-sort from the interview data and the literature and to assess the degree of service gap among its students using a gap analysis technique. In addition the SERVQUAL will be repeated in first semester 2002 with more specific instructions indicating it is the School of Psychology rather than the university as a whole that is of interest. Clearly it is not possible to generalise these results to other universities or even to other schools or departments within our own university. What this study does do is provide a detailed understanding of the student population within own school with a view to developing more salient student support services as well as providing accurate information to students during orientation relevant to the roles and responsibilities of staff and students within the school.

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3. Staff should be well dressed and appear professional.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
4. Staff should keep convenient office hours for all students.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
5. When staff promise to do something by a certain time, they should do so.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
6. When students have problems these staff should be sympathetic and reassuring.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
7. These staff should be dependable.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
8. These staff should provide their services at the time they promise to.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
9. These staff should keep their records accurately.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
10. These staff should not be expected to tell students exactly when services would be performed.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
11. It is not realistic for students to expect prompt service from these staff.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
12. These staff do not always have to be willing to help students.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
13. It is okay if these staff are too busy to respond to student requests promptly.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
14. Students should be able to trust these staff.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
15. These staff should have the knowledge to answer student questions.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
16. These staff should always be polite.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
17. These staff should get adequate support from the university to do their jobs well.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
18. These staff should not be expected to give students individual attention.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
19. It is unrealistic to expect these staff to know what all the needs of students are.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
20. These staff should not be expected to understand the learning needs of students.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

## Appendix B

This survey deals with your experiences of the *School of Psychology*. All responses are anonymous so you do NOT need to record your name on the survey. Please complete the student profile below and then turn over and complete the questionnaire on the reverse side.

PLEASE COMPLETE ALL THE QUESTIONS ON BOTH SIDES OF THE FORM

Age (in \_\_\_\_\_ years):

Mode of entry TISC application \_\_\_\_\_  
 (tick): Advanced standing previous degree \_\_\_\_\_  
 STAT \_\_\_\_\_  
 TAFE \_\_\_\_\_

Other (specify)

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Gender:	Female	Male
Mode of study:	Full time	Part time
Are you an international student?	Yes	No
Are you of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander origin?	Yes	No
Do you have a disability, or long term medical condition, which may affect your studies?	Yes	No
Do you speak a language other than English at your permanent home residence?	Yes	No

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION!

Show the extent to which you think the *School of Psychology* does possess the features described by each statement. Do this by picking one of the seven numbers next to each statement. If you strongly agree that the *School of Psychology* does possess a feature, circle number 7. If you strongly disagree that the *School of Psychology* does possess a feature, circle 1. If your feelings are not strong, circle one of the numbers in the middle. There are no right or wrong answers. *Please answer each question only in terms of the staff within the School of Psychology.*

Experiences	Administrative Staff							Teaching Staff						
	SD	SA	SD	SA	SD	SA	SD	SA	SD	SA				
1. The physical facilities are pleasant/ comfortable.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. Staff have up-to-date equipment.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. Staff are well dressed and appear professional.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. Staff keep convenient office hours for all students.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. When staff promise to do something by a certain time, they do so.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6. When students have problems these staff are sympathetic and reassuring.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. These staff members are dependable.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8. These staff provide their services at the time they promise to.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9. These staff keep their records accurately.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10. These staff do not tell students exactly when services would be performed.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
11. Students do not get prompt service from these staff.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1	2	3	4	5	6	7



- |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 12. These staff are not always willing to help students.                        | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 13. These staff are too busy to respond to student requests promptly.           | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 14. Students are able to trust these staff.                                     | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 15. These staff have the knowledge to answer student questions.                 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 16. These staff are always be polite.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 17. These staff get adequate support from the university to do their jobs well. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 18. These staff do not give students individual attention.                      | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 19. These staff do not know the needs of students.                              | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 20. These staff do not understand the learning needs of students.               | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |