


HELPING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS FEEL AT HOME IN THE LIBRARY

Before I came to my current job, I worked in library services at a small higher education institution located in the heart of downtown Sydney. It was here I developed an understanding of the needs of international students with English as a second language when it comes to higher education library services, especially in the areas of information literacy and facilities. Growth in international student enrolment in Sydney offers continuous and fresh insight into how people from overseas respond to Australian library services, and how we can create a framework of quality customer services tailored to their needs.

In a boutique setting, assisting students individually can lead to greater satisfaction with library services and better learning outcomes. Students from different nationalities have preferred forms of communication with library staff. Some tend to communicate via online and email enquiry, while others choose face-to-face interaction. The approachability of staff, and their ability to reach out to students who may be cautious about how they can utilise services is key to promoting the resources and services available in libraries.

Aside from casual instruction, having formal individual and small group information literacy sessions at flexible times is beneficial. Most international students enrolled in small higher education institutions do not fit into the traditional student stereotype and have demanding work priorities that often compete with study. International students in high-density urban areas are highly dependent on library space for study. Providing both silent and group study space is essential. Cultural differences inform different study styles and despite the availability of student common areas, overseas students new to the country, like library patrons everywhere, see the library as a communal space.

I like to see the library as a communal space for international students, where they can feel comfortable studying and approaching staff and services but also feel appreciated for their courage to live, study and work in Australia, away from home. Library staff should be trained to be culturally competent in anticipating the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse groups in the hopes of enhancing library services for international students. 

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