

**DEPARTMENT OF INFORMATION SYSTEMS
FACULTY OF BUSINESS**

**REPORT OF A SURVEY ON
INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS (1995)**

by

ELSIE TSANG, HELEN BULL, JANE SHOU

OCCASIONAL PAPER No. 4-1996

November 1996

MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA

Report of a Survey on International Students in the Faculty of Business

Elsie Tsang, Helen Bull & Jane Shou

Department of Information Systems, Victoria University of Technology

ABSTRACT

In August 1995, a survey on international students was conducted on behalf of the Department of Business Computing (currently Department of Information Systems) by the late Jane Shou. The objective of the survey was to help Business Faculty staff better understand the adjustment experience of international students studying at the Victoria University of Technology and enable them to offer better services to these students. Unfortunately deteriorating health prevented Jane from compiling and analysing the data. Jane passed away in November, 1995. Her work was continued by Elsie Tsang and Helen Bull.

INTRODUCTION

An analysis conducted in 1990 of results in a core unit, AE003 offered by the Faculty of Business highlighted the discrepancies in the results between International, 'English as a Second Language', and local students. The analysis showed that International and 'English as a Second Language' students, on the whole, scored much worse than the population set. Programs were introduced to assist these students in their core subject areas.

The 1995 survey (see Appendix 1) sought to identify difficulties encountered by students. It addressed issues relating to the student's fluency with the English language, the source of course information, demographic and sociological factors, including their domicile.

METHODOLOGY

A survey questionnaire consisting of 15 questions was posted to the 196 International students within the Faculty of Business of Footscray campus. The results were tabulated (see Appendix 2) and analysed.

SURVEY RESULTS

Demography and language

88 responses were received. Of the respondents, 50 were females and 38 males. All were full fee paying.

Age distribution

The age distribution graph indicated that 67% of the international students were in the 21 to 25 age group. Percentages in the other age groups declined very rapidly with the mature age group (35 years or over) comprising 1.14%.

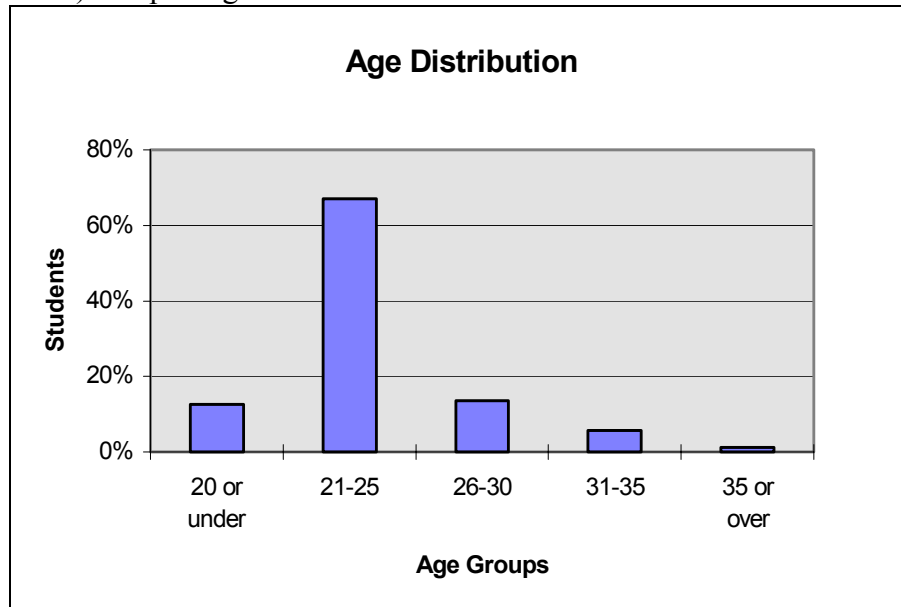


Figure 1: International Students Age Groups

Country of origin

18 countries were nominated with 17 students declining to answer. Two students came from Europe, one from the Pacific Islands and the remainder from Asian countries. Of the Asian countries, the largest number was from Malaysia (17 students), followed by Indonesia (12) and Hong Kong (11).

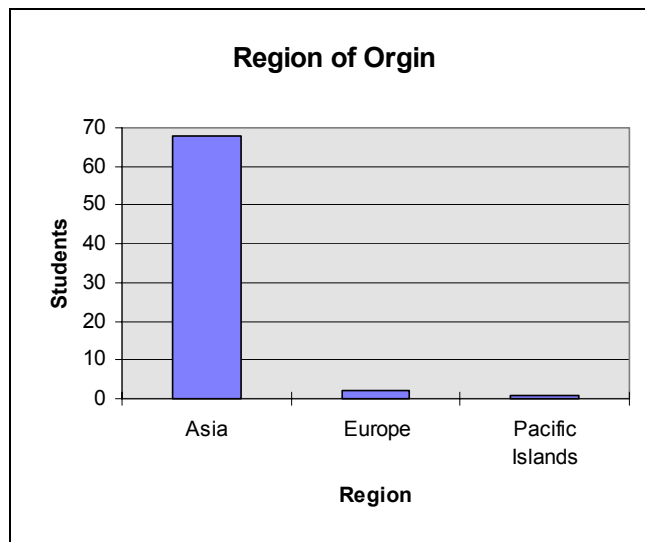


Figure 2: Region of Origin

Languages spoken

Figure 3 identified that the majority of students use Chinese as their mother tongue. The composition of the Chinese language incorporates at least five separate languages with Mandarin predominating. It is pleasing to note that the use of Chinese as a medium of communication was somewhat lower in the student's current place of residence. Overall 62% of students spoke English at their place of residence in Australia. This represents an increase of 43% of students using English as a mode of communication since their arrival in Australia.

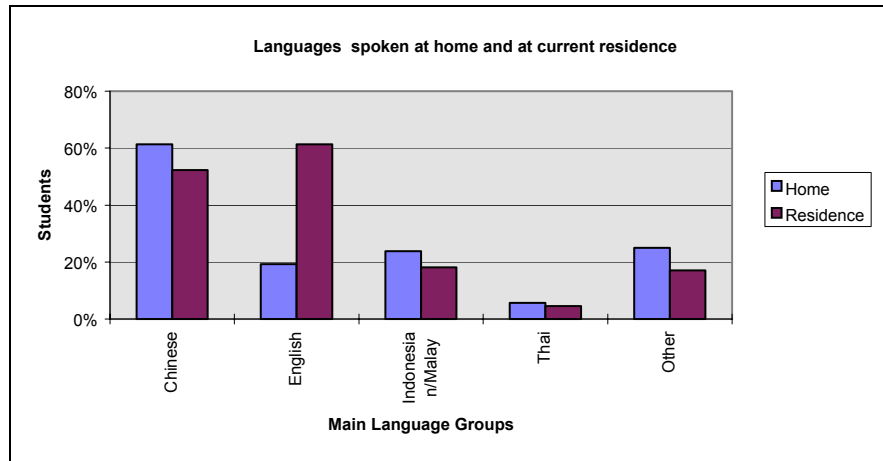


Figure 3: Languages spoken by students at home and at place of residence whilst in Australia.

Note: The total percentage of students is greater than 100% as some students nominated more than one language.

The length of study in Australia since first arrival

There is a fairly uniform spread of students from new arrivals to four years of study as indicated by the straight line on the cumulative length of study graph shown in Figure 4.

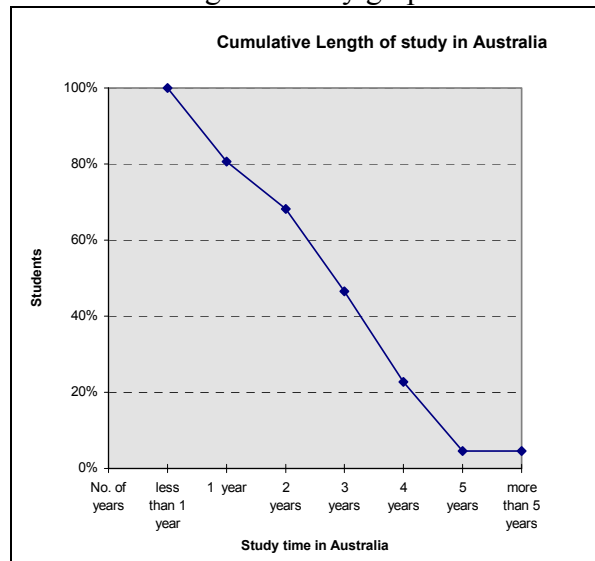
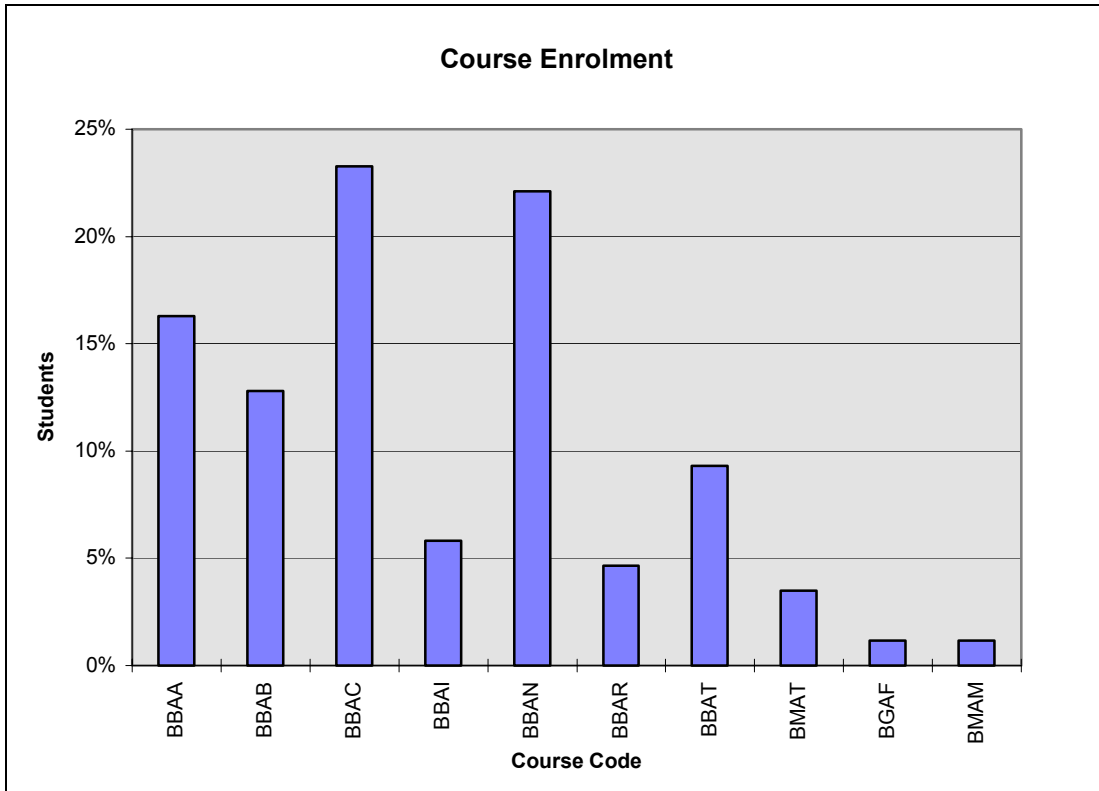


Figure 4: Cumulative length of study in Australia since first arrival.

Course Information

Course Enrolment

The two most popular courses are Catering and Hotel Management and International Trade. Business Computing ranked 6th out of the seven undergraduate business courses.



Course Code	Course Name
BBAA	Bachelor of Business in Accounting
BBAB	Bachelor of Business in Banking and Finance
BBAC	Bachelor of Business - Catering and Hotel Management
BBAI	Bachelor of Business - Business Computing
BBAN	Bachelor of Business in International Trade
BBAR	Bachelor of Business in Retail Management
BBAT	Bachelor of Business - Travel and Tourism Management
BMAT	Master of Tourism Development
BGAF	Graduate Diploma in Finance and Accounting
BMAM	Master of Hospitality Management

Figure 5: Percentage of students enrolled in each of the courses

Reasons for choice of course studied

The two main reasons for choice of course are ‘future job opportunity’ and ‘interest in the course’

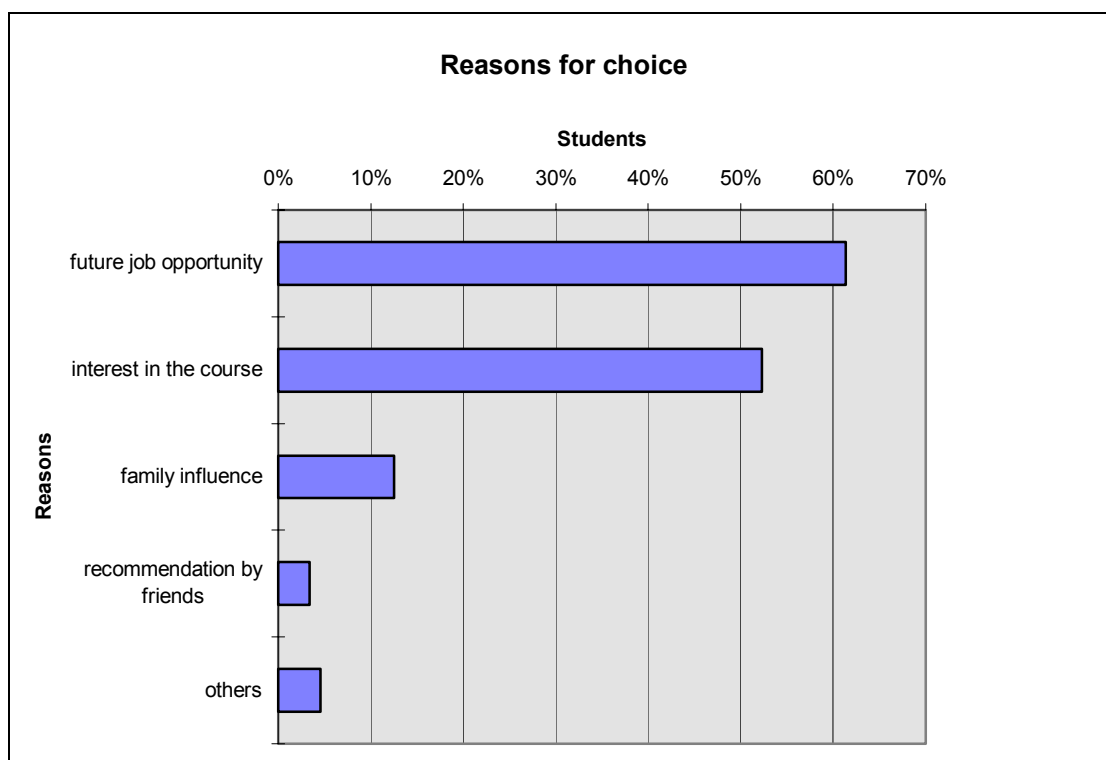


Figure 6: Reasons for choice of course studied

The four students who nominated ‘others’ reasons gave the following comments:

- had studied at TAFE and wanted conversion to a degree at VUT
- VUT seen as offering the cheapest tuition fee in Melbourne
- sponsored from home country
- to study Masters for specialisation in the field

Source of course information

Figure 7 indicated that a large number of students obtained their information from either friends or from their home country. It appears that informal 'word of mouth' generates the bulk of our International students. This throws a heavy emphasis on providing satisfied students now to generate continuity in the future flow of International students to VUT.

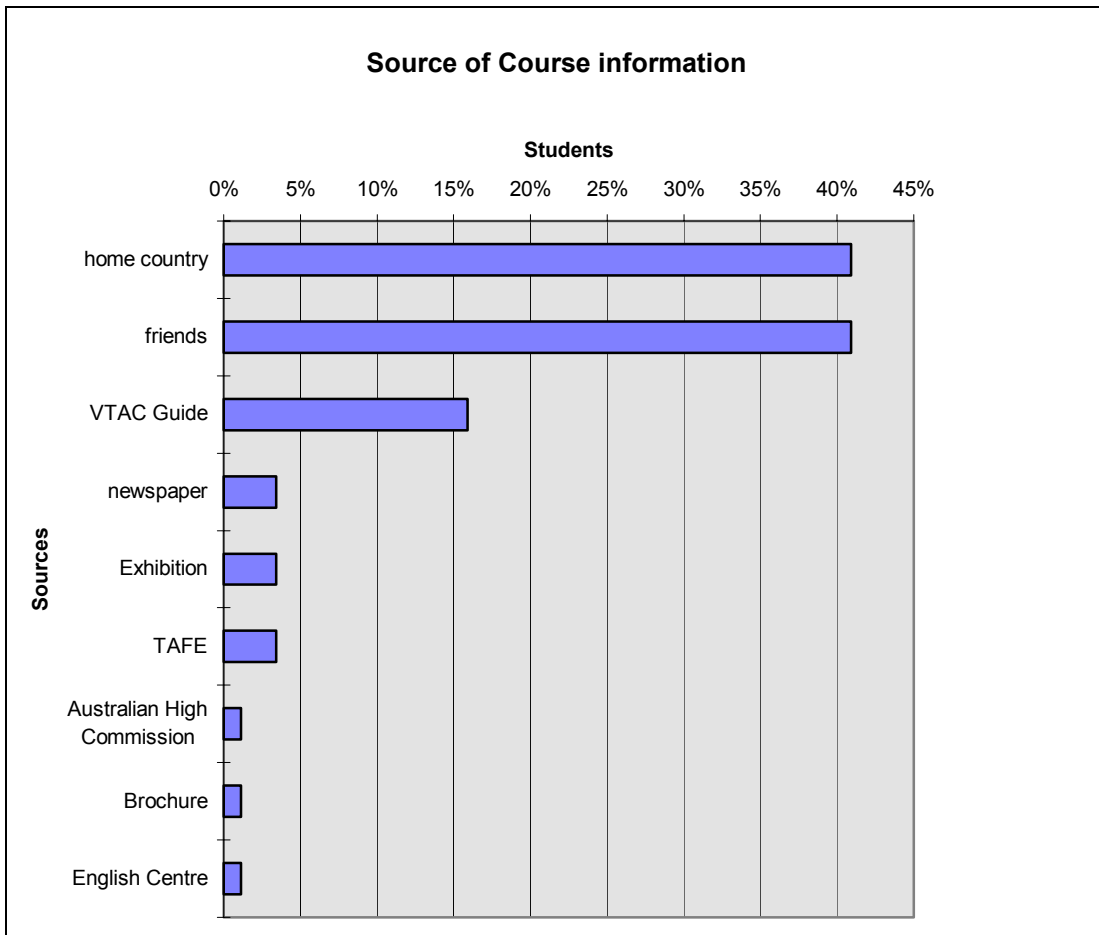


Figure 7: Information Sources

Note: The total percentage of students is greater than 100% as some students nominated more than one source.

Prior access to computers

The survey indicated that the majority of students have had exposure to word processing and spreadsheet packages. However, the depth of their knowledge in these areas was not surveyed and cannot be taken for granted. 13% to 14% had no prior access before their study at VUT.

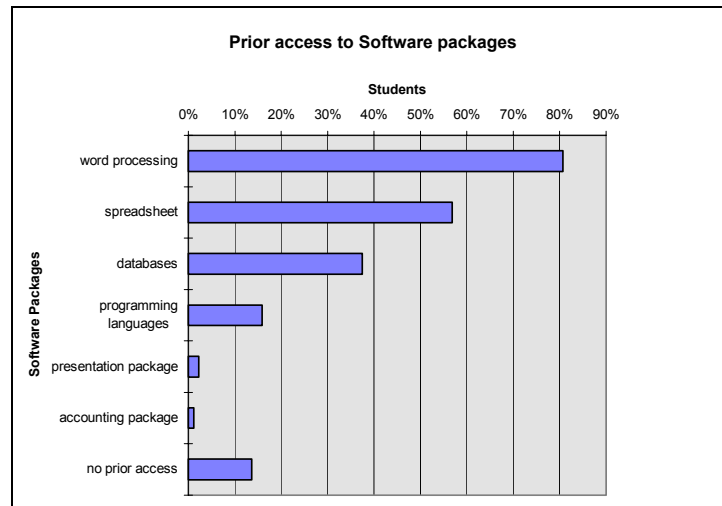


Figure 8: Exposure to software packages prior to study at VUT

Note: The total percentage of responses is greater than 100% as some students nominated more than one software packages.

Accessibility of computers at home

63 students had access to a computer at home, 24 students had no access and 1 student did not respond.

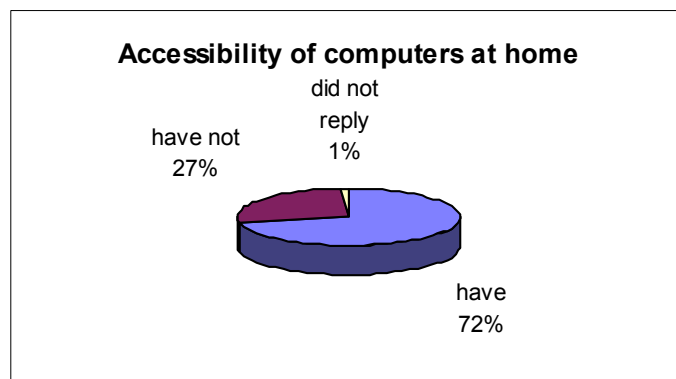


Figure 9: Percentage of students of accessibility of computers at home

Perceived obstacles to study progress

Language is perceived to be the biggest problem. Handling assignments and examinations follow closely behind. It should also be noted that students expressed concern about the lack of guidance in course selection.

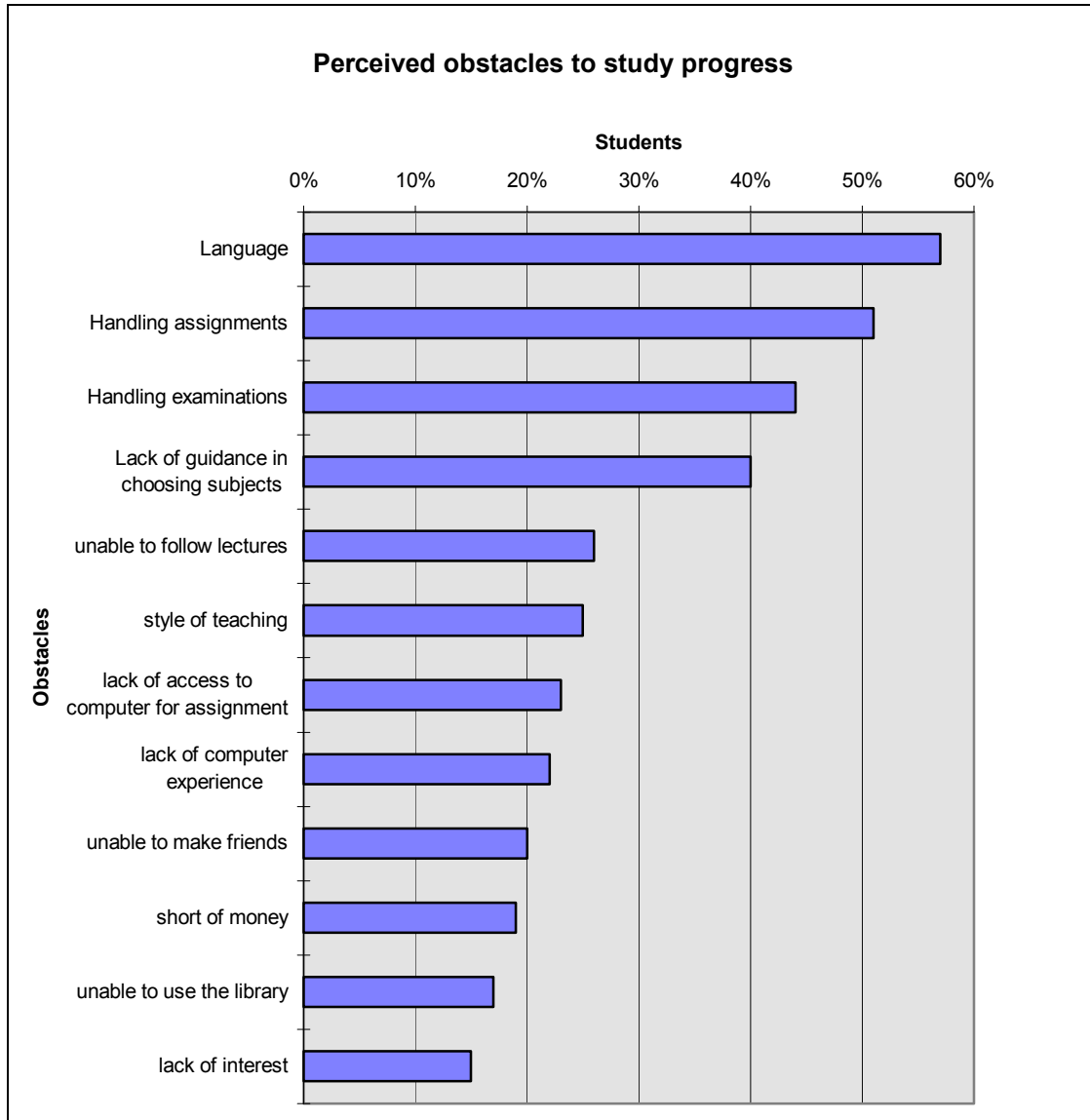


Figure 10: Obstacles identified by students

Note: The total percentage of responses is greater than 100% as some students nominated more than one option

Support sought by students

Four broad areas were identified in the survey. On average students nominated two of the four. The largest response was for academic support in the form of extra tutorials or short courses.

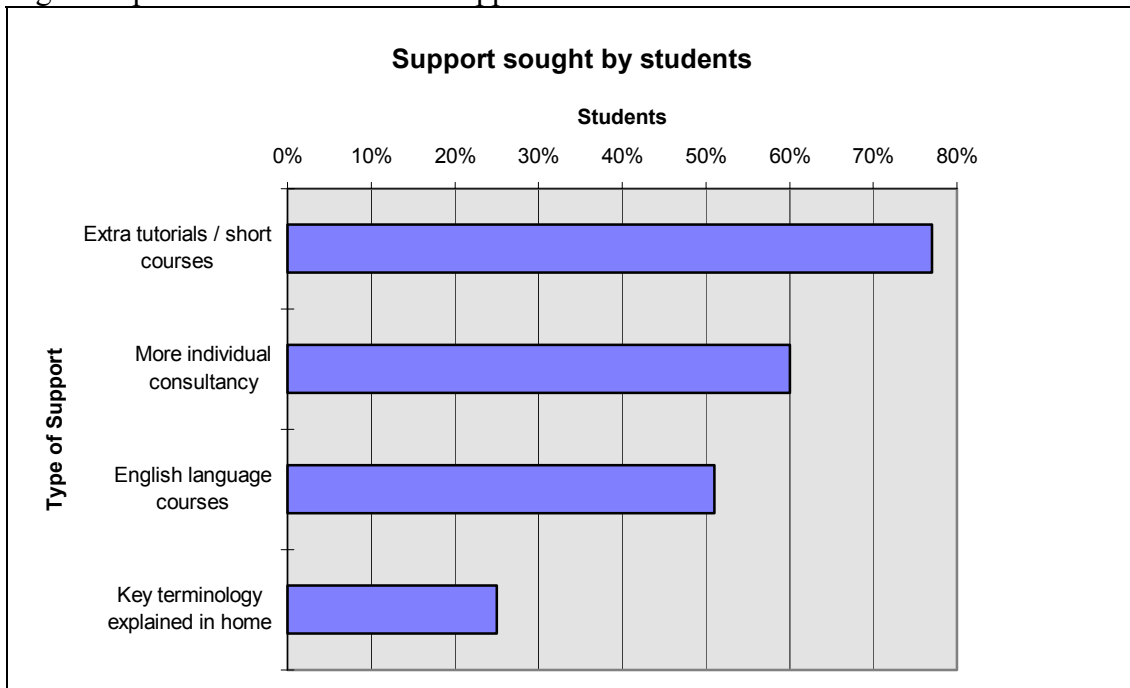


Figure 11: Rank of options for better support to study

Although language has been reported as the greatest barrier to study progress it is interesting to note that students sought support in the form of extra tutorials of short courses and more individual consultancy in preference to English language courses.

Hours spent on revision

One-third of the students spend more than 15 hours per week on revision.

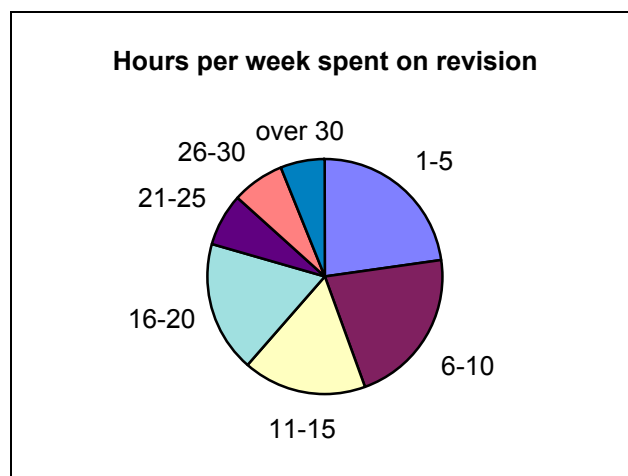


Figure 12: Time spent on revision

Hours spent on assignment work

A quarter of the students spend more than 15 hours per week on assignments. Some students noted that the time spent on assignments varied from week according to the number of assignments due.

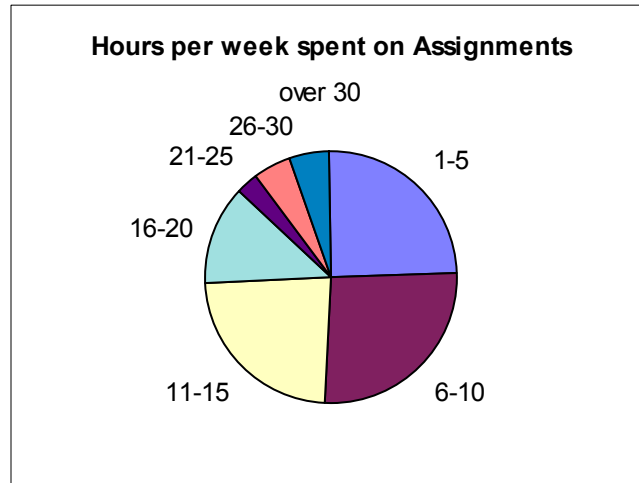


Figure 13: Number of hours per week for assignment

A comparison of the time spent on revision and assignments indicates that there is a tendency for students to spend more time with revision. This is consistent with the students' concern with examinations.

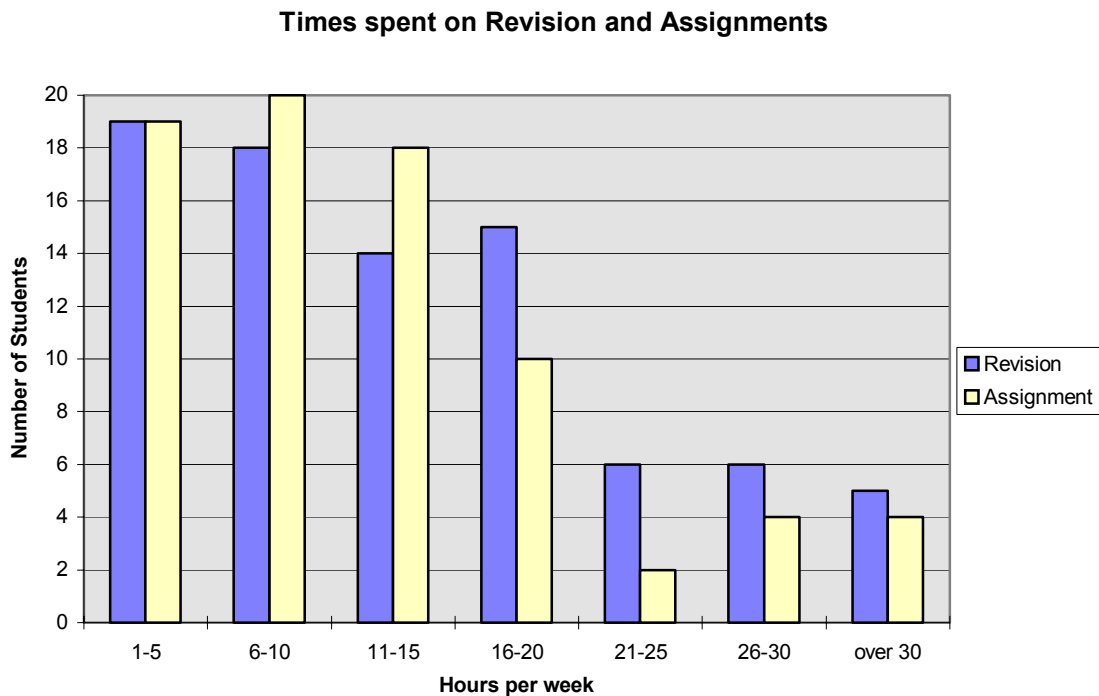


Figure 14: Comparison of hours spent on revision to hours spent on assignments

Awareness of specific services

Figure 15 showed that students were predominantly aware of the specific services provided to them.

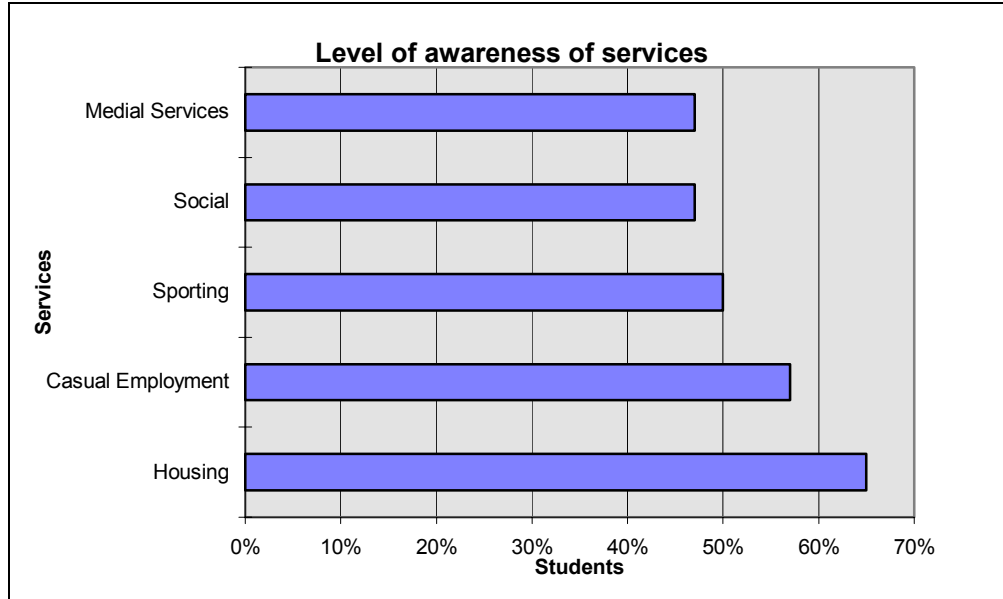


Figure 15: Awareness of specific services

Recommend VUT to friends

When asked if they would recommend VUT to friends, 67% responded positively, 23% negatively and 5% responded both positively and negatively.

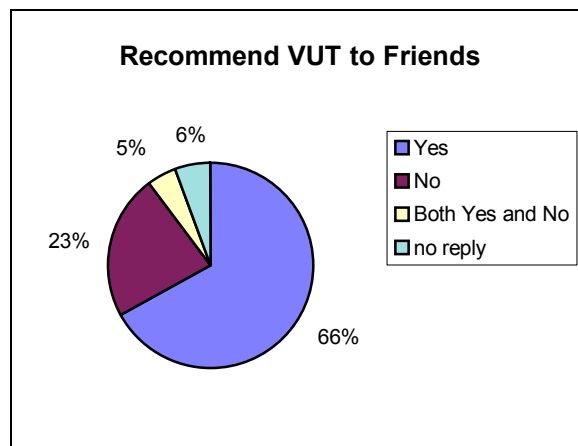


Figure 15: Recommendation of VUT

The 67% who responded positively gave their reasons as:

- cheaper fee
- good reputation in hotel management course
- more multicultural
- a growing university
- staff are kind and sincere
- teachers are helpful to students' problems
- academic standard of VUT was not very high, weak students could cope with the study
- some of the courses are interesting
- flexible choice of subjects

The negatively respondents reasons were:

- lack of facilities supporting study
- lack of care for overseas students
- lack of teaching quality
- lecturers do not show interest in helping students
- computer facilities are far behind that of other universities
- lack of e-mail facility
- campus too far from student village
- the university has a low reputation
- not a popular university
- high tuition fee
- some lecturers showed discrimination against Asian students

The 4 students who chose both 'yes' and 'no' expanded their response with:

yes - for tourism and hotel management as this course is well known
 no - for the other courses less well known

yes - VUT is the only university offering Travel and Tourism degree
 no - because student had difficulty with course and found some subjects irrelevant and uninteresting

yes - teachers are kind and sincere to overseas students
 no - here are too many resist students

yes - the good environment
 no - lack of facilities and equipment.

CONCLUSION

The 88 out of 196 students (44% response rate) who responded represent a strong cross section of gender, age, country of origin, languages spoken and length of stay in Australia, and therefore reasonably reflect the course preferences and attitudes to study of the whole international student body within the Faculty of Business.

It would appear that informal word of mouth rather than formal published materials account for much of the students initial interest in the Faculty's courses. Although it was not surveyed, one could expect that the published materials were of use in any follow-up made by the student.

Of the courses enrolled in, Catering and Hotel management and International Trade together accounted for about 44% of students.

In relation to students' perception of obstacles to study, problems with language ranked over handling assignments and handling examinations. Yet, students sought academic support and individual consultancy over language support.

VUT's attraction for students is attributed to its course offerings, its 'good reputation' in particular in its Hotel Management Course, its multiculturalism and to its 'kind, sincere and helpful' staff. Areas identified for improvement included improving the computing facilities so that every student can use e-mail facility, providing courses for improving language ability, providing guidance in choosing subjects and in providing individual counselling.

APPENDIX 1 Questionnaire

1. Gender
female male

2. Age group
18-20 21-25 26-30 31-35 above 35

3. Current visa status
Australian citizen or Permanent resident
Full fee paying student Please specify the country you come from _____

4. Language(s) spoken at home _____
Languages(s) spoken in the house you are currently living in _____

5. The length of study in Australia since you first arrived in Australia
less than 1 year 1 year 2 years
3 years 4 years 5 years
more than 5 years Please specify the number of years _____

6. The course you are currently enrolled in _____

7. The main reasons for you to choose the current course you are studying
future job opportunity family influence
recommendation by friends interest in the course
others Please specify the reason for the choice _____

8. When did you obtain information about VUT and the course
from home country from friends
from newspaper from VTAC Guide
others Please specify the source _____

9. Have you ever access to computers before your study at VUT ?
No
Yes Please tick the type of software you used. You may choose more than one option that
is relevant to you.
word processing spreadsheet
databases programming languages
others Please specify _____

10. Can you access a computer at home? No Yes
11. What is the main obstacle in the progress of your study at VUT? You may choose more than one option that is relevant to you. Please rank them with numbers (1,3,3, ...).
- | | |
|--|--|
| language <input type="checkbox"/> | lack of interest <input type="checkbox"/> |
| lack of access to computer for assignment <input type="checkbox"/> | lack of computer experience <input type="checkbox"/> |
| handling exams <input type="checkbox"/> | handling assignments <input type="checkbox"/> |
| lack of guidance (in choosing subjects) <input type="checkbox"/> | style of teaching <input type="checkbox"/> |
| unable to follow lectures <input type="checkbox"/> | unable to use the library <input type="checkbox"/> |
| unable to make friends <input type="checkbox"/> | short of money <input type="checkbox"/> |
| others <input type="checkbox"/> | Please specify _____ |
12. Which of the following options would you give better support to your study at VUT? You may choose more than one option that is relevant to you. Please rank them with numbers (1,2,3, ...).
- | |
|---|
| English language courses <input type="checkbox"/> |
| academic support programs (eg extra tutorials, or short courses during breaks) <input type="checkbox"/> |
| more individual consultancy <input type="checkbox"/> |
| key terminologies explained in your home language <input type="checkbox"/> |
| others <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Please specify _____ |
13. How many hours do you usually spend on revision? _____ hours/per week
 How many hours do you usually spend on your assignments? _____ hours/per week
14. Are you aware of the following services provided by the University?
- | | | | |
|--|--|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| housing <input type="checkbox"/> | casual employment <input type="checkbox"/> | sporting <input type="checkbox"/> | social <input type="checkbox"/> |
| medical services (eg. acupuncture, moxibustion, physiotherapy, stress management, etc.) <input type="checkbox"/> | | | |
15. Will you recommend VUT and the course to your friends?
- | | |
|------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| No <input type="checkbox"/> | Please specify the reason _____ |
| Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | Please specify the reason _____ |

Thank you for your time and co-operation!

APPENDIX 2

Table 1: Age Distribution

Age	Number of students
20 or under	11
21-25	59
26-30	12
31-35	5
35 or over	1

Table 2: Country of Origin

Country of origin	No of students
Bangladesh	1
Brunei	1
China	2
France	1
Hong Kong	11
India	1
Indonesia	12
Korea	1
Macau	1
Malaysia	17
Philippines	1
Singapore	4
Sri Lanka	4
Taiwan	5
Thailand	4
United Kingdom	1
Vietnam	1
Western Samoa	1
Unspecified	17

Table 3: Languages spoken by students at home and at place of residence whilst in Australia.

Language	Spoken at Home	Spoken at residence
Chinese		
Cantonese	16	15
Hainan	1	
Hakka	2	
Hokkien	5	2
Mandarian	18	17
Unspecified	12	12
English	17	54
French	1	1
Indian		
Bengali	1	1
Gujarati	1	
Tamil	2	1
Indonesian	14	14
Korean	1	
Malay	7	2
Pakistani	1	
Samoan	1	1
Singhelese	4	3
Swahili	1	
Tagalog	1	1
Thai	5	4
Vietnamese	3	3

Note: The total number of students in Table 3 is greater than 88 as some students nominated more than one languages.

Table 4: Length of study in Australia since first arrival.

No. of years	No. of students
less than 1 year	17
1 year	11
2 years	19
3 years	21
4 years	16
5 years	0
more than 5 years	4

Table 5: Number of students enrolled in the course.

Course Code	Course Name	No. of students
BBAA	Bachelor of Business in Accounting	14
BBAB	Bachelor of Business in Banking and Finance	11
BBAC	Bachelor of Business - Catering and Hotel Management	20
BBAI	Bachelor of Business - Business Computing	5
BBAN	Bachelor of Business in International Trade	19
BBAR	Bachelor of Business in Retail Management	4
BBAT	Bachelor of Business - Travel and Tourism Management	8
BMAT	Master of Tourism Development	3
BGAF	Graduate Diploma in Finance and Accounting	1
BMAM	Master of Hospitality Management	1
	Unspecified	2

Table 6: The reasons for choice of course studied.

Reasons	No. of students
future job opportunity	54
family influence	11
recommendation by friends	3
interest in the course	46
others	4

Table 7: Information sources

Sources	No. of students
home country	36
newspaper	3
friends	36
TAFE	3
Australian High Commission	1
Brochure	1
English Centre	1
Exhibition	3
VTAC Guide	14

Note: The total number of students in Table 7 is greater than 88 as some students nominated more than one sources.

Table 8: Exposure to software packages prior to study at VUT.

Software packages	No. of students
word processing	71
spreadsheet	50
presentation package	2
accounting package	1
databases	33
programming languages	14
no prior access	12

Note: The total number of students in Table 8 is greater than 88 as some students nominated more than one software packages.

Table 9: Obstacles identified by students.

Rank	Obstacle	No. of students	%
1	Language	50	57%
2	Handling assignments	45	51%
3	Handling examinations	39	44%
4	Lack of guidance in choosing subjects	35	40%
5	unable to follow lectures	23	26%
6	style of teaching	22	25%
7	lack of access to computer for assignment	20	23%
8	lack of computer experience	19	22%
9	unable to make friends	18	20%
10	short of money	17	19%
11	unable to use the library	15	17%
12	lack of interest	13	15%

Note: The total number of students in Table 9 is greater than 88 as some students nominated more than one options

Table 10: Rank of options for better support to study.

Options	No. of students	%
Academic support (extra tutorial/short course)	68	77%
More individual consultancy	53	60%
English language courses	45	51%
Key terminology explained in home language	22	25%

Table 11: Number of hours per week for revision

Hours / week	Revision
1-5	19
6-10	18
11-15	14
16-20	15
21-25	6
26-30	6
over 30	5
unspecified	5

Table 12: Number of hours per week for assignment

Hours / week	Assignment
1-5	19
6-10	20
11-15	18
16-20	10
21-25	2
26-30	4
over 30	4
unspecified	11

Table 13: Awareness of specific services

Services	No. of students	%
Housing	57	65%
Casual Employment	50	57%
Sporting	44	50%
Social	41	47%
Medial Services	41	47%

Table 14: Shows number of students would recommend VUT to their friends

Reply	Number of students
Yes	59
No	20
Both Yes and No	4
no reply	5