International Students

Australian Academic Environment

Studying in Australia may be different compared to your home country. International students often find it takes time and effort to adjust to the academic culture and environment in Australia. Some of the main features of studying at University level in Australia are listed below, along with tips on where to get support while you are adjusting.

Independent learning
In Australia, students are expected to be independent learners. This means that students are responsible for completing the readings, undertaking research, managing time and meeting deadlines themselves. You may find there are fewer hours of class than you are used to, and more time for self-directed study.

Critical thinking
Instead of just repeating and memorising information, students are expected to actively think about and carefully analyse it. You will need to develop and support your own opinion about a topic, based on your readings and research, and to evaluate and compare your opinion with that of others. Critical thinking is an important skill you will use and develop, no matter which field you are studying.

Academic integrity
Students need to produce their own work, and need to clearly show where they have used any ideas or information from others. Your School or College will have clear rules about referencing, or the way you need to identify your sources, such as textbooks or journal articles. Using others’ work without referencing is called plagiarism, and Australian Universities have very strict rules about and penalties for this.

Interaction
Teaching staff are usually called lecturers or tutors, and most of them will expect students to address them by their first names. Students show respect and commitment by being polite, being on time and participating. There are different kinds of classes, including lectures for large groups of students, classes with smaller
numbers called tutorials or workshops, and practical sessions called laboratories or labs. Most classes have opportunities for questions, and active discussion, including challenging ideas, is expected in tutorials.

**Group work**

Working in groups is an important part of most courses. You may need to work with other students on tasks in class or on major projects or assignments. You will need to develop teamwork skills and learn ways to manage the challenges of working with a group of different people. These skills are extremely valuable, as virtually any work you do after leaving university will require strong teamwork skills.

**English language**

Studying in English can be an exciting challenge. You may find that you need to keep developing your grammar and vocabulary as you learn the concepts and communication styles of your chosen field. It may take more time to do the reading. Being surrounded by Aussie English can also be a challenge – some students may find it takes time to be able to join conversations with their classmates, or follow the lectures. The good news is that with a small amount of effort, you will be able to develop your skills and confidence in communicating in English while you are here, and these intercultural communication skills are highly valued by employers.

**Examinations**

Australian universities have very strict rules about exams. There are rules about attendance, punctuality, materials you can or cannot bring with you, and interacting with other students. If you break any of these rules, even by accident, there will be a penalty. Penalties can include failing the exam or the unit, or even exclusion from the university, so they can have a serious effect on your studies. The rules may not be the same for all units, so make sure you find out about and follow the rules for your exams.

**Asking for help**

Students should never hesitate or feel embarrassed about needing help, because part of being a successful independent learner is asking for help when needed. It's always best to ask for help as soon as you face difficulty or are unsure about something, because the earlier you ask, the more options you usually have.

When you have questions about your units, you should talk to your lecturers or tutors, because part of their role is to provide guidance and feedback to students. For different challenges or difficulties, there is a range of other services available to support you while you are studying.

If you are ever unsure about who you can ask for help, contact the International Student Advisers.