Chapter 1
Introduction and Overview

Introduction

The aim of this study is to identify and investigate factors which influence student satisfaction with the non-academic support services of the University of New England (UNE), a regional Australian university, and suggest ways to improve the levels of student satisfaction. Understanding these factors from the perspective of the ‘voice of the customer’ can provide guidance to providers of student services and suggest where they might concentrate their efforts for quality improvement. As identified by Yeo (2008 p171) in a discussion about service quality and the interrelation between customer perception and expectations in higher education,

Quality improvement is no longer an organisational buzzword that resides in the practices of quality control circles. It goes beyond examining products and processes as influencing final outcomes that would contribute towards the competitive advantage of organisations. Increasingly, ‘quality’ has become a subjective term that is not solely determined by tangible satisfaction; it is concerned with customers’ expectations and perceptions.

Australia currently has 37 public universities, two private universities and approximately 150 ‘other’ providers of higher education (Bradley 2008). The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations 2007 statistics (DEEWR 2007) indicate the total number of students in higher education in Australia is on the increase. In 2007, the total number of students was 1,029,846, an increase of 4.7% on the 2006 enrolments. The majority of students (approx. 73.5%) were domestic and the international student cohort increased by almost 9% on the previous year (273,099 in 2007). It is anticipated international student enrolments will continue to grow into the future. Retention rates are one of a range of performance indicators for institutions in the higher education sector.
The retention rate for a given year, as defined by the Australian Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), equals the number of students who commenced a bachelor course in year (x) and continue in year (x+1) as a proportion of students who commenced a bachelor course in year (x) and did not complete the course in year (x) (DEEWR 2008). Understanding the factors that contribute to successful retention is therefore significant to the higher education sector.

The roles perception and experience play in forming positive attitudes of service quality and customer satisfaction are important in understanding the relationship between higher education institutions and their students. There is, however, limited research into how university student perceptions of quality services are established and how these are linked to satisfaction and ultimate retention (Athiyaman 1997; Gabbott et al. 2002; Marzo-Navarro et al. 2005).

The relationship between students’ satisfaction and their educational experience is of growing interest to providers of higher education (Yeo 2008; Athiyaman 1997; Aldridge and Rowley 2001; Hill et al. 2003). Changes in student demographics, the impact of globalisation, the consumerisation of education and the pace and scope of technological change are ‘engendering a new reality for higher education and for institutions that provide this service’ (Marzo-Navarro et al. 2005 p53). Within this changing context, higher education providers are challenged to deliver, measure and improve levels of student satisfaction. Researchers are generally agreed multiple factors shape overall student satisfaction with their educational experience, including the perceived quality of the study environment, teaching staff and teaching methods, research capability and the level to which institutions engage with their learning communities (Hill 1995; Rowley 1997; Aldridge and Rowley 1998; Harvey 2003). The way in which non-academic support services contribute to attitudes of satisfaction is not as comprehensively reported.
The increasingly competitive higher education sector is placing pressure on institutions to work proactively to attract and retain students (Hill 1995; Elliott et al. 2002; DeShields et al. 2003; Ham and Hayduk 2003; Yeo 2008). Higher education organisations are being forced to move from a product focus (producing graduates) to a market focus (delivering against the expectations of consumers) (Sirvanci 2004) and to develop a customer friendly attitude in a society where customer sovereignty (McCrindle 2006 p 40) is aggressively exercised. Failure to meet the needs of new and existing customers may result in traditional universities becoming less relevant to students. Within this context, this study aims to redress the lack of attention given to the provision of non-academic support services delivered as part of the total university offering.

Scott (2006 p17) observes,

*While classroom instruction is obviously an important part of the learning environment provided by universities, it is far from the sum of the university experience for students. [I]t is not just the social milieu that contributes to the overall environment of a university... student administration systems, the library, learning resource quality, IT facilities, student support units, food and facilities all play a role in building up a context conducive to engagement in productive learning and supportive of retention. What is particularly irritating to students... is when these 'enabling' services work in contradiction to what is happening in the educational area, when they fail to deliver what is anticipated or give them the 'run-around'. Clunky student administrative systems, inaccurate enrolments and fees invoicing, failure to follow through on enquiries, staff who are unresponsive or who say 'that's not my job'—these all attract considerable “needs improvement” comments from students...It is the total university experience that shapes students’ judgments of quality and influences retention and productive learning, not just what happens in the traditional classroom.*

‘Non-academic’ support services will henceforth within this thesis be referred to as ‘support services’.
Focus of the Study

The central argument tested in this research is that student attitudes of satisfaction are influenced by the total university experience and support or 'enabling' services contribute significantly to the determination of satisfaction. Concentrating on this theme, five primary research questions guided the study. These are:

1. To what extent are students aware of the range of support services available at the university?
2. To what degree do perceptions of service quality inform student attitudes of (dis)satisfaction?
3. To what degree does 'lived experience' of services provided during their candidature inform student attitudes of satisfaction?
4. What key factors influence satisfaction with support services?
5. How might the university assure and sustain high levels of student satisfaction?

The purpose of these research questions is to identify which needs, if met, contribute to customer satisfaction and if unmet, contribute to dissatisfaction. The notions of customer satisfaction and perceptions of service quality are familiar to most service industry practitioners. This familiarity may result in assumptions influencing the way in which concepts are understood. The following underlying assumptions, which were identified by the researcher through discussions with staff and from workplace experience within the study setting, will be interrogated through this project:

1. There is a general assumption within university communities that students are aware of (and therefore make informed decisions about accessing) the range of available support services and programs;
2. Student attitudes of satisfaction are influenced by the experiences of others and the observed treatment of peers and the word of mouth experiences of others influence the way in which individual attitudes of satisfaction are determined; and
3. Satisfaction is a direct result of a ‘lived experience’. A student will form their attitude of satisfaction or dissatisfaction based solely on their own experience of service.

The Research Approach

A mixed method survey was administered, using both qualitative and quantitative items to explore three basic issues. Broadly, these were service recognition, whether perception or ‘lived experience’ influences attitudes of satisfaction and what factors influence satisfaction with service delivery. Quantitative measurements were used to explain which specific attributes contribute to attitudes of satisfaction and the qualitative data sought to detail and describe the experience of the attributes.

The electronic survey instrument was distributed to all students, excluding those in their first year of studies. The field setting for this project was a regional university with a significant majority of the student population studying via distance education. To ensure the data collected were representative of students’ diversity views, it was necessary to use instruments which were accessible to all students and where the potentially large volume of data was collated in a format that facilitated ease with analysis. The electronic survey was designed to meet these requirements.

The results of the research survey have been referenced against the feedback afforded by other data available within UNE, including course experience questionnaires and service quality complaints. Full details of the methodology are included in Chapter 4.

What follows is an outline of the domestic context for the research project. Further developed in this contextual setting is an examination of a number of international forces which have impacted on the higher education sector in Australia. The effect of these forces on Australian higher education providers is summarised by Scott (2006 p.IV) as being,
the need to secure new sources of income to manage increasing competition, to deal with a growing student consumer rights movement and associated expectations and demands, to respond to much closer scrutiny, and keep up with rapid, ongoing developments in IT.

Setting and Domestic Context

The setting for the study is the University of New England, which is a medium-sized university situated in Armidale in regional New South Wales (NSW). The New England University College was originally established in 1938 as a college of The University of Sydney. In 1954 the college became the (autonomous) UNE, making it the oldest regional university in Australia.

The UNE offers both undergraduate and post-graduate courses to a total student population of approximately 18,000 students (17,934 in 2008) (UNE 2008). Traditionally, the university has been well regarded as a leader in Distance Education but in recent times this position has become eroded by competition from a range of providers (Charles Sturt University, University of Southern Queensland and The Open University in particular). Situated inland and mid-way between the two capital cities of Brisbane and Sydney, UNE continues to attract a significant proportion of its on-campus student numbers from NSW, with over 70% coming from regional and remote locations. Approximately half of the on-campus population lives within the residential college system on the campus grounds. The distance education cohort, however, is significantly Sydney based (25%) and the largest proportion of students (approximately 70%) is aged 25 or older (as at 28/11/08, UNE Statistics at a Glance accessed 10/5/09). Many of these students combine the dual demands of work and study and their level of engagement with the university is sometimes hampered by the multi-dimensional nature of their lives. These factors contribute to a diverse and dispersed student community and the student experience consequently ranges from an on-campus residential environment to the
distance education students who may not have an ‘in-person’ interaction with the university community.

Despite this disparity of experience, UNE consistently rates well for educational experience, as surveyed through the National Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) (Graduate Careers Australia 2009). The CEQ provides data on student satisfaction with overall course experience. Administered by Graduate Careers Australia (GCA), it is currently the only national survey of its type in Australia. Introduced in the 1990s, the survey originally gauged student satisfaction against academic criteria. The criteria still include: teaching quality; graduate satisfaction; overall graduate rating; academic services; entry flexibility; and Indigenous participation. The original CEQ did not ‘account for the social dimension of the student experience and the learning climate that is very much a product of a mix of student attitudes, outlooks and behaviours’ (Scott 2006 p3). While this may be considered a deficiency of the survey in today’s higher education market place, it is more accurately reflective of the focus in higher education at its time of development. In 2000 a review of the CEQ resulted in the inclusion of optional items which include five items related to support services for students. These five items, known as the Student Support Scale (SSS) are primarily concerned with facilities and services which contribute to the learning environment. Specifically, the five items are:

1. The library services were readily accessible;
2. I was able to access information technology resources when I needed them;
3. I was satisfied with the course and careers advice provided;
4. Health, welfare and counselling services met my requirements;
5. Relevant learning resources were accessible when I needed them (Scott 2006 p60).

Many universities use the CEQ as an indicator of quality; however, the figures and ratings produced through the CEQ relate to student experiences eighteen months prior to the
publication date (Graduate Careers Australia 2009). They are neither timely nor sufficiently detailed to provide input into current quality issues and as such do not provide individual institutions with the depth of information which would contribute significantly to a business recovery approach to identifying deficiencies in satisfying student expectations. The GCA (2009) acknowledges:

Respondents would have based their opinions on their experiences of the three, four or more years previous to [the date of the survey]. In that period, course managers could have been acting on prior CEQ feedback and fine-tuning their programs. So, for some courses at some institutions, the latest CEQ figures might not be a timely reflection of student experience, lacking the detailed items required to allow deeper analysis of issues specific to the institution. However, it has always been argued by the GCCA¹ that the instrument represents a macro-level overview of teaching quality and should form part of a suite of instruments used within an institution.

In the case of UNE, student satisfaction with overall experience is consistently rated as ‘high’. This is supported by the attainment of ‘five out of five stars’ for satisfaction for eight out of the last nine years (http://www.une.edu.au/vc/). The role played by support services and their contribution to the student experience, however, is largely under-explored.

The belief that context is important in shaping customer satisfaction is more commonly reflected in marketing environments. Parasuraman and Zeithaml (in Weitz and Wensley, 2006 p340) observed ‘customers use more than just the service outcome or ‘core’ in assessing service quality. Customer assessments are also influenced by the service process and the peripherals associated with the service’. For the purposes of this research, customer satisfaction relates to specific service transactions, while service quality is a general attitude relating to an assessment of the service provider’s overall excellence or superiority.

¹ The Graduate Careers Council of Australia (GCCA) renamed to become Graduate Careers Australia (GCA)
The higher education sector in Australia is being required to a greater extent than ever before to respond to quality expectations from the Federal Government and student consumers. The Australian Government has undertaken a number of reviews of higher education since the mid 1990s. These have included the West Review (1998), the Kemp Review (1999), a 2000 Senate Inquiry, *Universities in Crisis* (Senate 2001) and most recently, the Bradley Review (2008). These reviews examined funding arrangements for public higher education, research funding and infrastructure and the capacity of existing systems to meet the nation’s higher education demands.

In 2002 the Government launched its *Crossroads Review of Higher Education* ([http://www.backingaustraliasfuture.gov.au/pubs.htm#1](http://www.backingaustraliasfuture.gov.au/pubs.htm#1)) followed by the 2003 *Our Universities: Backing Australia’s Future* which detailed the Federal Government’s higher education reform package. This package signalled significant changes to teaching and learning, research, funding, regulatory frameworks. In 2005, the Australian Government initiated a review of the ‘criteria which regulate and define universities and other providers of higher education’ (DEST 2005 p1). This review highlighted the funding arrangements of the higher education sector and the co-existence of public and privately funded institutions, competitive environments and student entitlements. UNE, like other public higher education institutions, has been required to adapt to this changing environment to remain a viable participant in the sector. Most recently, the Bradley Review of Higher Education (2008) examined multiple aspects of the higher education sector in Australia. ‘The review was established to address the question of whether this critical sector of education is structured, organised and financed to position Australia to compete effectively in the new globalised economy’ (Bradley 2008 Executive Summary p1). This review focused on areas such as the:

- definitions of the functions and characteristics of higher education;
- relationship between higher education and labour market and industry needs;
participative characteristics of higher education in Australia, particularly as it relates to access and student participation and success;

quality of the student experience and how this can be measured nationally;

quality measurement of learning outcomes and the relationship between higher education and other education and training sectors;

internationalisation of education;

higher education’s contribution to Australia’s economic, social and cultural capital; and

resourcing of higher education in Australia.

The review panel recommended reforms to the financing and regulatory frameworks for higher education in Australia. Of specific relevance to the issue of student engagement, satisfaction and retention are the recommendations the Australian Government:

- require all accredited higher education providers to administer the Graduate Destination Survey, Course Experience Questionnaire and the Australasian Universities Survey of Student Engagement (AUSSE) from 2009 and report annually on the findings. (Bradley 2008 Recommendation 7 Chapter 3.4).

- adopt a framework for higher education accreditation, quality assurance and regulation featuring student engagement Comparative information about institutional performance on the Course Experience Questionnaire and the Australasian Survey of Student Engagement should be published on the Going to Uni website as well as broad details of actions taken by institutions to address issues identified through student feedback (Bradley 2008 Recommendation 19 Chapter 3.4).

Reviews such as those mentioned above and the dialogue resulting from the discussion papers, reports and recommendations all contributed to the scrutiny of funding arrangements for universities and the role of competition between providers. The Australian Vice Chancellors’ Committee (now Universities Australia) noted in 2003,
Australia, like the USA, the United Kingdom and other OECD countries before it, appears to be heading for a period of tightening of government budgets for education. A first reaction in some countries of saying “Receiving less, we’ll do less” has been declared unacceptable by governments for obvious political reasons. Other proposals to increase the class size or the teaching duties of teaching staff are considered unacceptable by teachers, students and employers as being detrimental to the quality of education. There is, however, continuous political/social pressure to explore all reasonable alternatives for the delivery of higher education services which cannot be ignored.

In Australia, there is a ‘belief that only the free market can ensure both quality and efficiency’ (Baldwin and James 2000 p139). The higher education sector is not a free market even though it is a highly competitive one. The Government has the capacity to exert substantial pressure on higher education providers and it is likely these pressures will continue while ever universities are substantially dependent on government funding. Integral to these government initiatives is the establishment of quality frameworks which will contribute to institutional sustainability.

In 2000, the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) was established to conduct regular audits of each university. Audits are undertaken every five years and assess the individual university against its own stated goals and mission. Benchmarking individual institutions and establishing a framework of best practice is one response to the quality expectations of external stakeholders.

The multiple demands of structural and fiscal reform are set against an increasingly competitive marketplace and have presented the need to better understand and respond to the desires of potential and existing students. The domestic environment for Higher Education is further impacted by international forces including globalisation, technological advancement and the consumerisation of education. Changes on both the domestic and
international fronts resulted in a paradigm shift within education and it is unlikely the conditions and expectations of the past will be restored.

Globalisation has resulted in greater and more diverse competition within the higher education sector as a result of the greater accessibility to both markets and consumers. ‘Australia’s higher education export industry contributed some $1.1 billion to Gross Domestic Product in 2002, with overseas enrolments growing by 286% from 1994 to 2003’ (DEST 2005 p12). Furthermore, it is estimated education services represent Australia’s third-largest export industry (Bradley 2008).

Accessibility, due in part to government changes in free trade arrangements and the technological advancements of recent years, has combined to erode the traditional boundaries which confined educational institutions to specific locations. This has resulted in the need for institutions to develop understandings of cultural differences, different financial structures and a range of differing legal and regulatory systems (Robbins and Barnwell 2002 p306). Education providers and students no longer need to be co-located and it is likely the internationalisation of education will continue into the immediate future. As a result, higher education providers will need to review their practices to keep pace with the impact of globalisation (Johnson and Deem 2001 p13). The global dimensions of higher education, and the effect they have on relationships between institutions was highlighted in the 2006 Australian Government discussion paper, *The Bologna Process and Australia: Next steps*. This paper makes clear the possibility of alignment between the European and Australian higher education systems. Changes such as these very clearly place the Australian higher education sector into direct comparison and competition with a global market. Currently the USA, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and New Zealand are the top 5 exporters of education (Gabbott 2002) but market demands on an international scale result in institutions identifying consumers and
targeting educational programs at geographically and culturally diverse populations. These changing expectations are not isolated to the Australian context. Marzo-Navarro et al. (2005) for example, have discussed the same issues as they relate to the higher education sector in Spain. ‘One of the ongoing struggles for any profession is maintaining relevance in a world in which technical, economic and social changes are continually shifting individual and organisational values, perspectives and priorities’ (Okes 2006 p36).

Higher education needs to become customer friendly in an environment where the customer is now influenced by globalisation, multiculturalism, rapidly changing social conditions and the demands created by mass higher education opportunities.

A consumer oriented society brings increased pressure for organisations to deliver the services the customer wants. Student customers are in a position to ‘shop around’ and from within the sector it is clear universities are seeking new ways to create alternative delivery methods for courses, rolling enrolments and flexibility in the structure of degrees, to meet the needs of a changing student demographic and thereby to differentiate their offerings. Traditionally the majority of Australian undergraduate students has been in the age cohort of 18-22, attending a three- or four-year course on a full-time basis (AVCC 1996). In recent times it has become more common for students to be over the age of 25, attending courses part-time and combining work, study and possibly family commitments. Such students are more likely to define quality education in terms of having their career or personal satisfactions met. It has been suggested the ‘mature part-time student(s) may have more complex reasons for higher motivation such as changing family roles and relationships’ (Hill et al. 2003 p19) and this motivation influences higher levels of satisfaction. Whether this statement is true or not, what is discernable is the changing nature of the student in higher education.
Consumer protection legislation, such as the Australian Trades Practices Act or state based fair trading legislation, is likely to apply more accurately to universities in a commercially competitive environment (Katter 2003 p7). Katter (2003 p8) suggested the term trade or commerce in the Queensland Fair Trading Act refers to ‘any business or professional activity’ and it would be difficult to argue higher education is not a professional activity. ‘As students perceive their role more as clients rather than students, their willingness to litigate for perceived or actual misrepresentation or defects in the delivery of services increases’ (Katter 2003 p1) and this changes the traditional relationship between students and institutions. In Australia, the Higher Education Support Act 2003 (HESA) heralded this change. As a result of this legislation, universities now set the 'student contribution' level and the Commonwealth provides loans (HECS-HELP) for students to meet these charges. This had the effect of changing the student-university relationship to one where universities are now effectively suppliers of services to customers for a fee.

Student demographic factors and the employment and economic climate of the day clearly have an influence on the way in which students want to study. These factors do vary over time, thus requiring institutions to be flexible and speedy in their response to change. As students pay more towards the cost of their education, they will adopt the role of paying customers and their demands for relevant courses, delivered in a convenient manner, with clearly focused career earning potential will increase (AVCC 1996).

The consumerisation of education has been further influenced by the increasing options for study being delivered through technological change. The pace of technological change means it is almost impossible to predict what technological forces will impact on the delivery of higher education in the long term. What is predictable, however, is that the
use of technology will reshape how, where and when educational services are delivered. Technology has broken down the geographic boundaries for universities and it is likely this trend will continue, especially for those institutions that adopt ‘virtual learning environments’. Currently, universities experience increased competition as a result of the technological ease with which services can be accessed and compared and the traditional infrastructure of bricks and mortar is being replaced to some degree by technological infrastructures. As Morgan suggested over fifteen years ago (1992 p29), ‘many organisations don’t need to be places anymore’ and exploiting technological advantages will be fundamental to future successes. The challenge for higher educational providers will be to reconceptualise the higher education experience and to adapt strategies from the services, marketing and commercial sectors to the changing environment.

**Significance of the Study**

Aldridge and Rowley (2001 p55) have suggested ‘each year significant numbers of students withdraw from higher education at considerable institutional and personal cost. For a responsible institution, each withdrawal poses the question ‘why?’ Within this context, the ability to understand and respond to the needs of students is fundamental to improving levels of satisfaction and retention. Increased retention rates are especially relevant to smaller institutions in regional locations as competition for declining student numbers increases. This study is therefore significant in establishing research based indicators for the successful delivery of support services which enhance the student experience. Regional institutions do not have the traditional prestige of their metropolitan counterparts, the community infrastructure which results in student employment and professional opportunities or the financial resources to aggressively market and promote their course offerings. The capacity of regional institutions to attract and retain students in the future will be heavily influenced by repeat business (as a result of an initial
satisfactory experience) and word of mouth recommendations of satisfied current and graduated students. As identified by Marzo-Navarro et al. (2005 p60),

The satisfaction of students with the education service they receive may help the university to improve or maintain its prestige, and thereby its number of students. In an era when demographic recession is already being noted in the number of university enrolments, it is vitally important to have some element that assures the survival of the organisation.

The findings reported here are limited to the role support services play in the determination of student satisfaction. The study does not include the role of the academic experience, apart from some unsolicited references by student respondents to academic service (as opposed to quality teaching).

**Structure of the Thesis**

In Chapter 2 a conceptual framework will be introduced which guides the direction and analysis of the study. To reduce ambiguity, the key terms and concepts which will be discussed in later chapters will be defined. A review of the current literature develops the themes pertinent to this study in Chapter 3. This review focuses substantially on the role of the student customer, determinants of satisfaction and perceptions of quality. Attention is given to the role of support or enabling services in the higher education experience and identifies what body of knowledge currently exists in this field. Chapter 4, Methodology, outlines the research strategy adopted and the way in which the qualitative and quantitative data were collected. The results of the administered survey and the findings from a grey data search are presented in Chapter 5. Chapter 6 presents recommendations for future action and will assess whether or not the original argument and underlying assumptions of the research have been confirmed.
Chapter 2
Concepts and Key Terms

Conceptual Framework

Kano’s Model of Customer Satisfaction (Kano et al. 1984) provides the conceptual framework for the study. Most businesses and organisations accept that high levels of customer satisfaction strongly indicate future success. An increase in customer satisfaction results in increased customer loyalty and retention and good word of mouth recommendations (Matzler et al. 1996; Bhattacharyya et al. 2004; Helgesen and Nesset 2007; Bartikowski et al. 2003). In a competitive commercialised environment, therefore, these results are additional insulation against changing market conditions, and organisations which seek to deliver high levels of customer satisfaction need to be willing to understand and respond to the expectations of their customers. Sauerwein et al. (1996) suggested it is essential to understand,

*Which products and services can be used to obtain a high level of customer satisfaction? Which product features have a more than proportional influence on satisfaction, and which attributes are an absolute must in the eyes of the customer?* (p313).

Professor Noriaki Kano, a Japanese researcher, developed a customer analysis model which encourages organisations to prioritise customer needs according to their impact on customer satisfaction. His ‘Theory of Attractive Quality’ has ‘gained increasing exposure and acceptance, and it has been applied in product development, strategic thinking, business planning and service management’ (Nilsson-Witell 2005 p153 citing Watson 2003). Kano diagrammatically represents and classifies customer needs according to the degree to which these needs impact on customer satisfaction. An adapted version of this Model of Customer Satisfaction provides a conceptual framework in this study for
identifying, measuring and increasing student satisfaction. The Theory of Attractive Quality has identified three types of requirements which influence customer attitudes of satisfaction. These are classified as ‘must-be’ requirements, performance or ‘one-dimensional’ requirements and attractive requirements or ‘delighters’ as indicated in Diagram 1.

**Diagram 1**
Customer Satisfaction Model, adapted from Kano, 1984

‘Must-be’ requirements are the essential customer expectation of a product or service. Failure to fulfil these basic expectations will result in dissatisfaction. Delivering the ‘must-be’ requirements or needs, however, does not result in satisfaction - it simply results in a lack of dissatisfaction. The ‘must-be’ requirement of attending university is the learning opportunity which results in the attainment of a recognised and accredited educational qualification. This requirement is generally implied, not often expressed explicitly and is the expected outcome of enrolling at a university. If the expected teaching quality and
opportunities for learning are not delivered and/or the accredited qualification is not obtained, then the student customer is not satisfied. The customer takes for granted this will be achieved. However, fulfilment of this expectation will not necessarily increase their attitude of satisfaction.

‘Performance' or ‘one-dimensional' requirements are needs which have a linear effect on customer satisfaction and can result in either satisfaction or dissatisfaction. These performance needs are sometimes also referred to as ‘more is better’ factors. That is, the more the specific needs are met, the more satisfied the customer becomes. These requirements are transactional, tangible and directly related to the customers’ needs. Many customers have a conscious list of requirements or expectations that are often established through word of mouth recommendations, advertising and promotional activities of the organisation. For example, from a student perspective, institutions promote a supportive educational environment. Specific requirements such as personal contact with teaching staff, special provisions for students with a disability, career development support, learning support or library support are a one-dimensional response to a specific student’s needs. The degree to which these expectations are met will directly influence the student’s attitude of satisfaction and if these expectations are not met, then the student will become dissatisfied. This dissatisfaction is often exposed through formal complaints to the institution or on returned survey forms aimed to measure satisfaction.

As represented by Diagram 1 above, the fulfilment or non-fulfilment of these requirements directly impacts on the student’s attitude of satisfaction. It is this aspect of the Kano framework which identifies the niche role of support services in the higher education experience. ‘One-dimensional’ requirements significantly influence attitudes of either
satisfaction or dissatisfaction and organisations should be guided by the ‘voice of the customer’ in determining which of these requirements will be fulfilled.

**Attractive attributes or ‘delighters’** have the highest level of influence on the satisfaction levels of customers. Fulfilling these requirements can result in significant satisfaction. The lack of attractive requirements however does not result in dissatisfaction. A product or service which ignores the attractive requirements but fulfils the ‘must-be’ and ‘one-dimensional’ expectations may be ‘perceived as average and therefore interchangeable’ with other similar services (Matzler et al. 1996 p8). Attractive attributes do not cause dissatisfaction when absent but do result in satisfaction when they are present. These attributes are generally not expected by the customer but when they are present they result in ‘delight’. ‘Delighters’ are the instances of ‘going the extra mile’ and delivering a specific, unexpected customer tailored response.

Competitive customer orientated businesses prioritise and consistently deliver against ‘must-be’, ‘one-dimensional’ and ‘delighter’ attributes. Based on the Kano model, the first priority is to identify and fulfil ‘must-be’ requirements. This is simplified in the higher education sector by the specific product offerings. Customers go to a university to obtain an educational qualification. Institutions which consistently deliver good teaching and research opportunities will meet the basic customer needs. The second priority is to identify the ‘one-dimensional’ requirements. Identification of these requirements needs to come from the ‘voice of the customer’. Steady and direct increases in customer satisfaction are achieved by responding to this voice and failure to listen to the voice of the customer will see some institutions delivering services which are at odds with the expectations of the student-customer. The third priority provides the opportunity to create an exceptional experience. Identifying ‘delighter’ requirements and strategically delivering a small number of ‘delighters’ within the lifecycle of the student-customer can
result in competitive advantage. One simplistic definition of delighters has been offered as ‘a delighter’ = expectations + 1 (ChangingMinds). This approach posits that customer expectations can deliver positive results for organisations and surpassing the expectations of the customer can result in unexpected delight, which significantly influences attitudes of satisfaction.

The Kano model is dynamic and organisations which adopt this approach need to be attuned to the changing market expectations. Customers’ perceptions of service attributes and service quality vary over time (Nilsson-Witell 2005) and even if a service at first is surpassing expectations, over time the same service will become expected. Quality attributes can and do change over time - that is, a successful attribute follows a life cycle from being indifferent, to being attractive, to being one-dimensional and, ultimately, to being a ‘must-be’ item. Over time, as the value of a one-dimensional attribute becomes accepted by consumers, it becomes a ‘must-be’ item (Lofgren and Witell 2008). Kano used the example of television remote controls to demonstrate this point. When first introduced, the remote control was a differentiating factor in the sale of television sets. Over time, the remote control has become an expected attribute, the absence of which results in dissatisfaction (Nilsson-Witell and Fundin 2005). The delighter has become a must-be attribute and the provider now needs to identify other unexpected ‘delighters’ through which to promote the product as being exceptional. It is this transformational element of the delighters that contributes to continuous improvement in organisations seeking to deliver high levels of customer satisfaction.

This project is significantly focused on identification of the requirements which impact on student attitudes of satisfaction and the Kano customer satisfaction model provides a framework through which to do this. The key terms and concepts are discussed below to further clarify the context for the project.
**Key Terms and Concepts**

The concept of the customer in education while not widely accepted, is nevertheless gaining currency within the Australian higher education sector. The reluctance to accept this notion is partially evident by the hesitation of many in the sector to adopt a market-driven managerial perspective or even to accept marketplace language. In an effort to identify the key themes which contextualise student satisfaction in higher education current nomenclature will be examined and the definitions as they apply to this paper will be presented below.

**Consumers and customers**

For the purposes of this paper, the term consumer is used as a non-specific label which relates to anyone who engages in an exchange of goods and services for money. Consumers are further defined as potential purchasers of goods and services and the nature of their transactions is usually defined by a monetary value. The transformation of a generic consumer to a specific 'customer' is related to the pattern of their 'buying behaviour'. A customer responds directly to the experience of the consumer transaction and it is the post-transaction response of (dis)satisfaction that results in repeat engagement with the provider.

A customer is defined in terms of specific organisations and transactions. The term 'customer' typically refers to an individual who regularly purchases from the same outlet (Loudon et al. 1993). One becomes a customer of an organisation by regular transactions with that organisation. Student customers can be defined as individuals who have a transactional relationship with the institution: that is, they are currently or previously enrolled students of a specific institution, for a specific course of study. From the university’s perspective, the consumer exists, pre-enrolment and the customer, post-enrolment. Career markets and course expos, for example, are typically attended by
student consumers, those exploring the sector for educational options. These consumers become customers of a specific institution once they have entered into the transaction of enrolment.

The student customer

Haines (2000 p12) in his discussions about strategic planning and management advises:

*Every organisation should ask, and be able to answer, these three critical questions:*

1. *Who are our real customers?*
2. *What do they really want (including those things they don’t even know about yet)?*
3. *How do we give them value added in whatever they want?’*

The higher education sector is slowly coming to realise these questions are as relevant to the provision of education as to the provision of other goods and services. Customer identification in the Higher Education sector however is not straightforward. Universities need to differentiate between customers (both internal and external) and stakeholders in order to establish clear direction and targets for quality efforts (Sirvanci 2004 p383). Student customers, internal customers, government stakeholders and research partners are all important in the relationship between institutions and their constituencies. Despite the importance of these relationships, aligning the business of education to customer expectations is not a traditional perspective for universities. The basic identification of the student as a customer, and the understanding that this requires quality efforts to realign service delivery to meet customer expectations, will require a paradigm shift for the higher education sector in Australia.

In 1996, Tiano, a senior consultant with Digital Equipment Corporation suggested in an AVCC publication *Exploiting Information Technology in Higher Education* (AVCC 1996) that the higher education sector in Australia needed to move towards a stronger customer
focus. As represented by Table 1 below, this shift necessitates a deeper understanding of the complex customer relationships and the changing student, structural, cultural and global priorities which shape customer satisfaction in higher education. The language of the new paradigm for higher education includes terms such as market value, competition, student-customer, market-centric and market-funded. These terms signal a fundamental attitudinal and transactional shift for higher education providers. While some institutions use customer oriented terminology, such as customer service centres, customer relationship management systems and customer feedback mechanisms, the recognition of universities as service providers is not generally reflected in the way they go about their business. As recently as 2005, DeShields and colleagues were suggesting universities should ‘align their organisational structure, processes and procedures to become more customer-oriented’ (DeShields et al. 2005 p128). The Bradley Review in Australia (2008) has very clearly positioned the student at the centre of a customer-oriented system of higher education. Bradley suggests the Australian higher education sector should ‘provide students with increased opportunities to decide for themselves what and where they will study through an entitlement’ which has been described as a voucher system for study and that government funding should be ‘driven by student demand’ (Bradley 2008 Recommendation 25). Education as a product of customer demand is at odds, however, with many of the traditional views within the education sector.

The shift towards consumer sovereignty in higher education has been on the agenda for over a decade. The Australian Vice-Chancellors’ Committee in 1996 warned that as students pay more towards the cost of their education, they will more fully adopt the role of paying customers and their demands for relevant courses, delivered in a convenient manner, with clearly focused career earning potential will increase (AVCC 1996). As
paying customers, students will expect their higher education transaction to leave them satisfied.

Table 1

Old versus new paradigms for higher education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Old Paradigm for higher education</th>
<th>New Paradigm for higher education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Take what you can get</td>
<td>Courses on demand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic calendar</td>
<td>Year round operations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University as a city</td>
<td>University as an idea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terminal degree</td>
<td>Lifelong learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University as an ivory tower</td>
<td>University as a partner in society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student = 18 to 25 year old</td>
<td>Cradle to grave students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Books are primary medium</td>
<td>Information on demand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenure</td>
<td>Market value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single product</td>
<td>Information reuse/info exhaust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student a 4 year revenue source</td>
<td>Lifelong revenue resource</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competition is other universities</td>
<td>Competition is everyone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student as a ‘pain’</td>
<td>Student as a customer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delivery in a classroom</td>
<td>Delivery anywhere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-cultural</td>
<td>Global</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bricks and Mortar</td>
<td>Bits and Bytes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single discipline</td>
<td>Multi-discipline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institution-centric</td>
<td>Market-centric</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government funded</td>
<td>Market funded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology as an expense</td>
<td>Technology as differentiator</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Tiano 1996

The role of the student in higher education is complex and multi dimensional. Svensson and Wood (2007) suggest:

*Students are seen as customers of knowledge at many universities. Likewise, universities regard themselves as suppliers of knowledge to these customers. In extension, many universities go a step further and regard their students as collaborators in the quest for knowledge* (pp17-18).
Simultaneously students are regarded as customers, with purchasing power and choice; clients whose relationship is subordinate to the professional academic; and often as a product, to be shaped by the university into a graduate. The construct of each of these roles has an implied differential status. The customer has a level of consumer sovereignty which influences the way in which universities go about their business; the client is less powerful than the academic, akin to the type of master-servant relationship of an apprenticeship and the student-product is comparable to a mechanistic production system, where the input-output transformation occurs almost in spite of the desired wants and satisfactions of the student. The student-client and the student-product are both passive participants in the education transaction. In an environment where consumer sovereignty is being robustly exercised, this passive perspective of the student leaves the university vulnerable. In each case, this classification will influence the way in which the university engages with the student and this in turn will influence the student’s satisfaction with his or her university experience.

**Satisfaction and dissatisfaction**

Loudon et al. (1993) suggest a customer may be either satisfied or dissatisfied as the result of a specific transaction. Product or service expectations and an evaluation of alternative goods and services on offer occur prior to consumption (p579) and the level of (dis)satisfaction is influenced by these pre-existing attitudes and expectations of the customer. Higher levels of satisfaction may be indicated if for example, the customer has a favourable attitude to the supplier. They explain,

> The interaction between expectations and actual product performance produces either satisfaction or dissatisfaction. However, there does not appear to be merely a direct relationship between the level of expectations and the level of satisfaction. Instead, a modifying variable known as disconfirmation of expectations is thought to be a significant mediator of this situation (1993 p580).
Hill (1995) defines disconfirmation as the ‘disparity between a consumer’s expectations and perceived service performance’ (p13). Disconfirmation can be either a negative or positive variable (Loudon et al. 1993 p580) and disconfirmation of a customer’s expectations is a strong determinant of satisfaction or dissatisfaction.

Satisfaction refers to the customers’ assessment that they have been adequately rewarded in a ‘buying’ situation for the sacrifice or investment made (Loudon et al. 1993 p579). Satisfaction, therefore, is a post consumption evaluation, ranked against the consumer’s expectations. Disconfirmation of high expectations, resulting in dissatisfaction with the transaction, will have a negative impact on future transactions. Customers may in fact develop low expectations of future transactions and this makes them vulnerable to approaches from other sector competitors. Additionally, they are likely, through word of mouth communications, to discourage others from seeking the goods or service. Ultimately, dissatisfaction may result in complaints.

The cycle of consumption as represented below in Diagram 2, is based on the ‘purchase evaluation process’ presented by Loudon et al. (1993 p570). This cycle relies heavily on the predictable quality of goods and services which are responsive to consumer expectations. Kano’s model suggests this cycle of consumption is also mirrored by the evolving nature of consumer expectations. Customers who experience a ‘delightful’ service (at the point of consumption) may have their expectations positively disconfirmed and subsequently form an expectation of high quality service and a willingness to enter into future service encounters.
As illustrated in Diagram 3 below, post-consumption, what were unexpected expectations (delighters) have now become expected service deliverables (must-haves) for future encounters. It is the continuous improvement implications of this cycle that can influence the creation of perceived service quality.
What is quality?

Defining and measuring quality in higher education is a contemporary phenomenon but there is no agreed common definition of what constitutes ‘quality’. Traditionally, the word quality was associated with ideas of ‘excellence or outstanding performance’ but in recent times this definition has been reconstructed to reflect ‘fitness for purpose’ (Woodhouse 1999 p29). ‘Fitness of purpose’ is associated with understanding customers’ needs and it allows businesses and organisations to articulate their purpose and objectives and to measure their success according to how well these objectives are met. This is a concept equally applicable to public and private sectors.

Hoyer and Hoyer (2001) present a series of articles (representing the views of Crosby, Deming, Feigenbaum, Ishikawa, Juran, Pirsig, Shewhart and Taguchi (hereafter cited as Hoyer and Hoyer 2001). These readings provide a range of definitions and perspectives on what constitutes quality. Quality implies a relative worth and it is generally agreed the customer or consumer determines that worth (Hoyer and Hoyer 2001 citing Feigenbaum 1983; Ishikawa 1983; Deming 1988). Feigenbaum maintains quality ‘must-be’ defined in terms of customer satisfaction; Ishikawa suggests quality is equivalent to customer satisfaction; and Shewhart defines quality as both subjective (based on customer expectations) and objective (properties of the product, irrespective of customer expectations) (Hoyer and Hoyer 2001; Nilsson-Witell 2005). Juran, however, observes a ‘practical definition of quality is probably not possible’ (Hoyer and Hoyer 2001 p57).

Within this context, customer satisfaction is often used synonymously with quality (Sirvanci 2004 p383) and terms such as customer, constituent, consumer, client, agent or patron are all used interchangeably in the discussion about quality. Definitions of quality range from ‘quality-as-accountability’ to ‘quality-as-transformation’. What is generally agreed, however, is that the concept of ‘quality’ is multi-dimensional and has both an
attitudinal and transactional element. The transactional element does not necessarily relate to money but rather it relates to the transformational nature of a customer–based interaction. As described by Greenwood et al. (1990 p2),

A customer is any person who receives your output. You are a customer when you receive input from someone. You then perform a series of value added tasks that transform the input you receive into your output.

Deming (Hoyer and Hoyer 2001 p55) maintains '[q]uality can be defined only in terms of the agent' and so the attitudinal elements of quality rely heavily on understanding the needs and desired satisfactions of the consumer as they relate to products or services. Quality organisations understand the needs of the customer and are predisposed to work towards meeting these needs. This attitude of customer focus needs to exist at all levels of the organisation for sustained quality to become a central objective.

Quality is assessed by the customer through both objective (hard) and subjective (soft) dimensions (Shewhart in Hoyer and Hoyer 2001 p58). The objective dimension is the product characteristics as they conform to pre-identified standards and is generally measured through statistical tools and monitoring. The subjective dimension is what the customer wants and this generally relies on a more holistic approach to quality management (Teicher et al. 2002 p384). This subjective approach to quality focuses on the human elements and relates to customer satisfaction. Rowley (1997 p7) suggests '[pe]rceived quality is a form of attitude, related to, but not the same as, satisfaction, and resulting from a comparison of expectations with perceptions of performance'. Similarly, Hill (1995 p16) defined quality as 'the degree and direction of [the] discrepancy between consumers’ perceptions and expectations'. The distinction between perceived quality and customer satisfaction is blurred and therefore the definition of student satisfaction is problematic.

**Student satisfaction**
There are variable definitions of customer satisfaction with both goods and services. There does not appear to be, however, a common definition of what constitutes student satisfaction. Gabbott et al. (2002) suggest a ‘mix of client and product perspectives’ is ingrained in the missions of most universities. Much of the literature equates student satisfaction with perceived quality of teaching and student satisfaction scales have traditionally focused on teacher qualifications, availability of faculty staff and perceived quality of the education received. Gabbott et al. (2002 p171) describe this when they comment,

The services students receive in the universities are complex and multi-faceted. The quality of education undoubtedly plays a great role in students’ satisfaction and should be the prime concern of universities. However, other determinants of student satisfaction include the quality of the learning environment, access to up-to-date technology, quality of library services, availability of quality student services and the student orientation of the institutions.

The Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) which purports to measure student satisfaction in Australia essentially focuses on academic service delivery and Hill (1995) has reported no meaningful performance indicators exist in the United Kingdom to measure student satisfaction. There is a growing trend, however, to take a more holistic view of satisfaction and to recognise higher education providers do not merely provide academic services (Hill 1995 p16). Part of this shift in opinion is based on the concept of education as a professional service and satisfaction as a reaction to the service delivery. The discussions about perceived service quality and customer satisfaction are intertwined. For the purposes of this project, the definitions proposed by Bitner will be adopted (Hill 1995 citing Bitner 1990). Bitner suggests customer ‘satisfaction assessments relate to specific service transactions, while service quality is a general attitude relating to the service provider’s overall excellence or superiority’ (p13). This definition takes a holistic view of the student as customer and acknowledges that a range
of service encounters with administrative staff, academic staff and support services staff will contribute to overall attitudes of satisfaction. This definition resonates with the researchers’ experiences of students and service delivery in higher education and for this reason forms a basis from which to determine the elements of service delivery that contribute to student satisfaction. In summary, the key definitions which will be used during the execution of the project are:

- the student is a customer;
- customer satisfaction relates to specific service transactions;
- service quality is an overall attitude relating to the service provider’s perceived excellence;
- quality is the relative worth of goods or services determined by the customer; and
- student support services are determined to be the peripheral service elements of higher education.

What follows is an examination of the concepts and key terms defined above through a review of the literature.
Chapter 3

Literature Review

Introduction

This literature review reveals that the concepts of service delivery and customer satisfaction in higher education are evolving in response to changing sector conditions (AVCC 1996). The disciplines of educational policy and management, marketing and management, service management and consumer behaviour, all contribute to this state of flux. The review of current journals indicates each of these fields has focused on particular aspects of service delivery which may inform the higher education sector in Australia. The literature related to these topics is international, but many of the issues being addressed are similar and the changing contexts for educational providers and consumers comparable. The discussion that follows concentrates primarily on articles which relate to quality management efforts in higher education, the role of the student as a customer (and the ‘voice of the customer’) and creating customer satisfaction in higher education.

Background

In an increasingly competitive higher education marketplace, the relationship between students’ satisfaction and their education experience is of interest to providers of higher education (Aldridge and Rowley 1998; Aldridge and Rowley 2001; Bennett 2003; Helgesen and Nesset 2007; Hill et al. 2003; Yeo 2008). To successfully attract and retain students, providers must first understand the needs and expectations of students and then identify ways in which to meet and ultimately exceed these expectations (Parasuraman 2004). There is evidence that multiple factors shape student satisfaction and the ‘voice of the customer’ can provide guidance to the providers of higher education on where to concentrate their quality improvement efforts. The literature related to service
quality, quality management and customer satisfaction are relevant to understanding the relationship between higher education institutions and their students.

The discussion about quality management and the deployment of quality improvement methodologies in higher education has gained momentum in recent years. This has coincided with the shifting paradigms in education delivery (Tiano in AVCC 1996) both in Australia and internationally. Hill (1995), Rowley (1997, 2000), Johnson and Deem (2003), Fundin and Bergman (2003), Hill (2003), Sirvanci (2004) and Lilja and Wiklund (2006), have contributed to this body of information.

The relationship between ‘perceived service quality’ and ‘customer satisfaction’ has been explored by researchers such as Bitner (1990), Athiyaman (1997), Rowley (1997) Aldridge and Rowley (1998), Gabbott et al. (2002), and DeShields et al. (2005). The role of the customer and ‘listening to the voice of the customer’ to create customer satisfaction has also been investigated by Hill (2003), Johnson and Deem (2003), Harvey (2004) and Svensson and Wood (2007).

The concept of the student-customer is contentious and this is reflected in the literature. There is a dearth of research on the role of the student-customer. The literature does present equally conflicting opinions. For example, Snare (1997), Johnson and Deem (2003), Harvey (2004), Sirvanci (2004), Hirt (2007) and Svensson and Wood (2007) all present alternate perspectives on the role of the student.

For the purposes of this chapter, the work of Herzberg (1959), Kano (1984) and others will provide the basis of a conceptual bridge between marketing and higher education literature. The ‘voice of the customer’ is regarded as the cornerstone of quality customer service and Kano’s model helps to capture this voice (Bhattacharyya and Rahman 2004). The substantial literature related to the use of Kano’s (1984) questionnaire and
techniques for the measurement of the product and service attributes are not included in this review. This study utilises the Kano model as a conceptual framework. The measurement of product and service attributes is a logical future application of this model.

**Quality Management in Higher Education**

Lilja and Wiklund (2006 p310) argue:

*Modern Quality Management has been continuously evolving in response to the changing demands of business. The increasingly intense competition has accordingly caused a shift in interest from the original producer's point of view...towards the customer's point of view, recognizing quality as a subjective matter....*

This evolution is evident where the changing demands within the higher education sector directly influence the way in which institutions consider elements of educational delivery (Woodhouse 1999; Baldwin and James 2000; Johnson and Deem 2003). This market-driven approach has previously been considered the domain of business, but the emergence of the ‘new managerialism’ in higher education has seen the ‘not for profit’ sector adopt characteristics of the ‘for profit’ sector (Svensson and Wood 2007; Johnson and Deem 2003). Fundin and Bergman (2003) argue, ‘knowing what is delightful, what is satisfying and what is dissatisfying to your customer is highly critical for success in the increasingly competitive marketplace of today’ (p55). Development of responsive customer orientated environments has not been embraced widely by the higher education sector and such institutions have not kept pace with other organisations and businesses in development of quality management (Sirvanci 2004 p382). Baldwin and James (2000) and Sirvanci (2004) suggest higher education providers are not able to be responsive to changing conditions because deep-rooted traditions of higher education institutions result in resistance to change. Baldwin and James (2000) suggest that in Australia, it is the Commonwealth Government which has ‘attempted to transform the Public Sector by
imposing market-based models of competition and efficiency (p139). Whatever the impetus, higher education institutions are increasingly interested in the engagement and retention of students and to this end they are focusing more attention on the factors which result in student satisfaction (Rowley 1997; Aldridge and Rowley 1998; Hill 2003; Wiklund et al. 2003). Quality improvement concepts have been applied for many years within the ‘for profit’ sector. These concepts however are less familiar terrain for many higher education providers.

The concept of Total Quality Management (TQM), for example, is vague and difficult to define (Wiklund et al. 2003). TQM has been variously described as a system, a technique, a management paradigm (Sirvanci 2004) and even just a ‘buzzword’ (Wiklund et al. 2003 p99 citing Deming 1994). What is generally accepted is that concepts such as quality improvement, continuous improvement and TQM are more relevant to today’s providers of higher education. ‘Identification of customers and products, specifying a customer-driven definition of quality and introducing a managed quality culture’ (Wiklund et al. 2003, p106) are all issues being addressed within higher education sectors, irrespective of the labels being applied to these quality efforts. If ‘the difference between quality and satisfaction mirrors management versus customer concerns’ (Iacobucci et al. 1995 p296) then the TQM focus needs to be on the ‘managerially controllable aspects of the service delivery system’ (Iacobucci et al. 1995 p296). Some elements of TQM, such as continuous quality improvement and quality assurance systems, have been adopted by higher education providers in the United Kingdom, Australia and the United States of America. Higher education providers, however, have difficulty applying TQM techniques because of problems related to:

the limited scope of the definitions of quality; identification of what is the product and who are the customers; defining organisational objectives with clarity; measuring and controlling processes related to teaching and learning; and
exploring the role students play in their own learning (Wiklund et al. 2003 pp100-101).

Role of the Student as Customer

Customer identification in the higher education sector is complicated. Universities need to differentiate between customers and stakeholders in order to establish clear direction and targets for quality efforts (Wiklund et al. 2003; Sirvanci 2004; Svensson and Wood 2007). In addition, the ‘consumer environment’, is not a concept with which universities traditionally align themselves. This lack of awareness is contrary because ‘…though the successful completion and enhancement of students’ education are the reasons for the existence of higher education institutions, …administrators tend to focus disproportionately more time on programs for attracting and admitting students rather than managing enrolments’ (DeShields et al. 2005 p129 citing Zemke 2000). Student retention is one measure of customer satisfaction (DeShields et al. 2005 p132) and the need to manage ‘enrolments from the point of initial student contact to the point of graduation has become increasingly important’ (DeShields et al. 2005 p130 citing Seymour 1993; Hill 1995). Managing the full life-cycle of the student customer is increasingly important in a competitive and consumer orientated higher education marketplace (Hill 1995; DeShields et al. 2005). The relationship between student retention and student satisfaction is interdependent (DeShields et al. 2005) and it may be argued the future business of higher education institutions is significantly affected by creating satisfied student customers (Ham and Hayduk 2003).

Sirvanci (2004 p381) suggests customer loyalty, in a marketing sense, does not apply to higher education. ‘If students are considered as customers, this concept makes sense only when they make donations as alumni’. This is a narrow interpretation of the student customer role. A contrary opinion is that student loyalty is positively related to student satisfaction and the link between (student) customer satisfaction and the performance
(profitability) of a business unit forms the cornerstone of the marketing concept (Helgesen and Nesset 2007 p127). It has further been suggested ‘withdrawal from a course could be viewed as an extreme form of disloyal behaviour’ on the part of the student (Aldridge and Rowley 2001 p57). Hennig-Thurau et al. (2001 p332) suggest student loyalty and consequent ‘long-term relationships with students may provide some sort of strategic competitive advantage; gaining new students is generally more cost intensive than maintaining existing relationships, and cost-reduction efforts are generated over the relationship life cycle’.

The word of mouth recommendations from satisfied students have a direct implication for future business and ‘in a competitive market …satisfaction may influence a student’s desire to attend or defect various higher educational institutions’ (Ham and Hayduk 2003 p223). Conversely, dissatisfied students who withdraw from studies ‘may generate negative word-of-mouth publicity for their ex-university…hence damaging its reputation’. ‘In a competitive situation, universities with low retention rates are likely to lose students to institutions that have actively addressed the issue’ of negative student experiences (Bennett 2003 pp123-124). For this reason, it is critical that higher education providers accept the ‘customer’ relationship exists with their students and work towards a level of customer satisfaction which contributes to stronger retention rates.

This concept of the student customer is not universally accepted in the higher education sector. While ‘most administrators tend to perceive students as customers of the faculty in the classroom, many faculty staff resent this metaphor as being ‘too commercial’ (Sirvanci 2004 p383). Students are invariably referred to as ‘stakeholders’, ‘customers’, ‘clients’…’however the essential questions of whether students see themselves as ‘customers’ or feel enabled to exercise their right to ‘voice’ and ‘choice’ remain largely unexamined areas of policy and institutional practice’ (Johnson and Deem 2003 p297).
As they relate to quality in higher education, Harvey (2004) has defined stakeholders as those groups that have, inter alia, an interest in the quality of provision and standard of outcomes. These include government, future employers, students, academic and administrative staff, institutional managers and governing bodies, prospective students and their parents and local communities and taxpayers (Harvey 2004; Rowley 1997). Student customers, internal customers, government customers and research customers are all important in the relationship between institutions and their constituencies and their experiences may influence perceptions of quality (Rowley 1997). Rowley (2000) makes the distinction between citizens, customers and consumers in her discussions about service delivery in libraries. She provides the following definitions which are relevant to the higher education sector:

- Citizens generally have rights of access to public services...Most citizens do not exercise these rights most of the time but they still expect the service to be available to them when they need it
- ‘customer’ is the generic term for any stakeholders, individuals or groups for whom the organisation in some way provides a good or service
- Consumers are users of the service.

The definition of the customer above (i.e. any stakeholders, individuals or groups for whom the organisation in some way provides a good or service) is adopted for the purposes of this study.

Sirvanci (2004 p383) debates whether students should be treated as customers and argues they may be accurately identified in a number of ways. He suggests the role of the student in higher education may be as part of a product-in-process model; as an internal customer for non-academic facilities; as a labourer in the learning process; or as an internal customer for the delivery of course materials. Snare (1997) presents a contrary opinion about the student-as-consumer. He acknowledges ‘students exchange
money for knowledge’ and this model requires that institutions be responsive to consumers who comparative shop for the ‘best education’. He argues this analogy ‘lowers quality, refocuses valuable resources, encourages passive learning, and undermines social and civic values’ (Snare 1997 p122). His essential argument is that a consumer model establishes the expectation students can buy rather than earn a degree, thereby devaluing the process of learning. The argument that professionals (academic staff) are best equipped to define the needs of the student and to develop appropriate service provision is however, questionable.

The historical ‘contract’ between the student and institutions of higher learning is based on a model of professional authority. However, the idea of the ‘student customer’ generates and legitimates new, external specifications and directions for professionals’ work, yet the student identity, students’ rights and status in relation to the professional, and definitions of students’ needs become subject of contest between professionals and managers (Johnson and Deem 2003 p297). The role of students as ‘a present if abstract concern’; where, from an academic-manager perspective, they are variously described as a source of irritation, as a burden or as a resource to be remodelled and the idea of the student-consumer, is largely resisted by those in the higher education sector (Johnson and Deem 2003 p310).

Svensson and Wood (2007 p18) argue that students are not customers and the use of marketing metaphors in higher education misrepresents the true relationship between students and universities. They argue that the use of marketing terminology to describe the university-student relationship results in misunderstanding and misconceptions based on misleading terminology and contradictory vocabulary (Svensson and Wood 2007 p18). The conflicting vocabulary and definitions of the role of the student reflects the multiplicity
of perspectives within the higher education sector. Sirvanci (2004 p38) warns ‘without a well-defined customer and a customer focus, quality efforts may easily be diffused’.

Johnson and Deem (2003) posit the role of the service recipient (in this case the student) is predicated by the form of ‘new managerialism’ adopted by the organisation. ‘New Managerialism’ is a concept that has seen the merging of public and private sector management approaches. It is notably focused on how publicly funded institutions are managed to achieve efficiency, effectiveness and excellence (Deem 2001 p10).

The related concepts of ‘new managerialism’ and ‘academic capitalism’ (Deem 2001 p12) have contributed to finance driven decision-making, social and cultural changes and intensified competition for students in the higher education sector and have helped to re-conceptualise universities as income generating units (p13). Rowley (1997) suggests ‘new managerialism’ has been responsible for introducing a culture of contracting with customers and this has embedded the concepts of purchaser and provider in higher education (p12). The existing informal and formal contracting in higher education includes but is not limited to, student charters, learning contracts, and in Australia, contracts for student learning entitlement and commonwealth supported places (including HECS and Fee Help). To be effective, the service contract between students and the institution should be based on the concept of mutual obligation and should include formal, informal and psychological aspects (Rowley 1997). The service contract which is understood by and meets the needs of both parties offers one way to manage customer expectations and to generate positive quality judgments (p13).

The participative role the student plays in the educational service experience has an additional implication for perceptions of satisfaction and quality. The student-provider relationship is also influenced by the student-student relationships. Rowley (1997 p10) suggests student-student interactions may:
Significantly affect customer satisfaction, and the recommendations that students make to their friends, family and colleagues...Service suppliers need to appreciate what strategies can be adopted to manage, or to influence positively, the way in which students affect one another’s experience of higher education.

This opinion has contributed significantly to how the key research questions were formulated for this study. One of the issues to be addressed through the research questions is the degree to which students or other customers may influence perceptions of service quality and any resultant attitudes of satisfaction.

Despite the lack of consensus about the label attached to the role of the student, what is generally accepted is that managing service quality is predicated by understanding what the consumer wants. ‘Knowing what customers expect is the first, and possibly the most critical, step in delivering service quality’ (Hill 1996 p12 citing Zeithaml 1990 p51). Johnson and Deem (2003 p290) suggest that despite the higher education policy in the United Kingdom emphasising the student, this emphasis is more heavily focused on the student as a time or resource implication rather than as an individual consumer. It is their opinion that ‘senior manager-academics need to spend more time with and listening to students’. The same could be said of all individuals who work with students. This notion of responding to the ‘voice of the customer’ is strongly represented in the literature by Hill et al. 2003; Johnson and Deem 2003; Bhattacharyya and Rahman 2004; Harvey 2004; Svensson and Wood 2007). Harvey (2003 p5) argues the student perspective is beneficial to institutions because ‘it is the view of the person participating in the process, the learner; it is direct; and it can provide ratings on a range of items relevant to prospective students’ (2003 p5) and provides the opportunity for quality improvement. Similarly, Sirvanci (2004) asserts customer focus is an essential element of total quality management. A contrary view is that the student-as-consumer model of education is harmful, as it encourages passive learning and furthers the concept that degrees can be
‘bought’ not ‘earnt’ (Snare 1997; Svensson and Wood 2007). Snare further contends ‘the consumer approach results in concentrating valuable resources on image making and/or making students feel good’ (1997 p122). These opposing views well reflect the opposing discourses in the higher education sector.

The tensions between a traditional view of the ‘apprenticeship relationship in which quality is determined by the master’ (Snare 1997) and the student-as-customer view, are reflected in the way in which institutions respond to changing market conditions. The literature which is highly critical of marketing metaphors and the student-customer descriptor (Svensson and Wood 2007; Snare 1997) appears to be more closely aligned with the traditional paradigm of higher education and herein lies the challenge for the sector. It appears that efficient and effective quality improvement programs could be jeopardised, without clear and agreed definitions of roles and responsibilities of stakeholders in higher education. The difficulty in defining the role of the student in the higher education relationship is further complicated by the abstract nature of services.

**The Nature of Services**

The characteristics which differentiate services from goods are: ‘intangibility, perishability, inseparability of production and consumption and heterogeneity’. Hill further describes ‘the wil-o’-the wisp’ nature of service quality as being ‘like beauty in the eye of the beholder, in other words it has different meaning for different people’ (1995 pp10-11). This creates a specific challenge for those organisations attempting to create consistent levels of service quality which will result in customer satisfaction, but as Rahman (2004) states, ‘the importance of pursuing customer gratification as marketing strategy can hardly be over-emphasised’.

Owlia and Aspinwall (1996) suggest most quality attributes of services in higher education ‘cannot be seen, felt or touched in advance; production and consumption of the service
are inseparable because personal contact (e.g. between students and lecturer) plays an important role; and quality varies markedly in different circumstances’ (p13). This interplay of activity and personal contact suggests service may be experienced differently depending on the individual participants in the service exchange (Yeo 2008).

Johns suggests many authors assume that ‘(1) Service personnel are there to deliver core services; and (2) the interpersonal interaction they provide is the main contributor to customer satisfaction with the service’ (1999 p963) but ‘in fact, “service” personnel are often incidental to the core service’. The human interaction aspect of service delivery is heterogeneous - each interaction is unique due to the unique expectations of both the consumer and the service provider (Hill 1995) and this ‘places the front-line employee in a position of power relative to the service organisation’ (Johns 1999 p963).

Customer perceptions of a quality relationship between the service recipient and the service provider may in fact provide a de facto benchmark for the quality of the service itself (Rahman 2004). Service personnel are therefore critical to the customer’s encounter and the way in which the customer’s ultimate attitude of satisfaction evolves and in complex organisations, such as universities, the number of participants in the service exchange varies. Students receive services from a range of personnel and their transactions are often interdependent or overlapping. Observations made from the ‘insider perspective’ suggest this is a critical aspect of service delivery in higher education that is vulnerable. In an environment where there is no shared perspective on the status of the student, the level of customer-centric ‘service ethic’ (Johns 1999) may result in variable levels of customer service. The perceived quality of services depends significantly on the consistency of the values and beliefs of the staff and the organisation (Johns 1999). This variability influences service expectations and the perceived quality of service delivery. Johns (1999 p964) suggests service interactions may be controlled by
“ritualising” or “scripting” the service interaction or by disseminating organisational values so that the customer is able to form realistic expectations of the service encounter. This can be achieved through published organisational goals and visions, by establishing service charters and by establishing minimum standards for service interactions. One of the difficulties of matching service standards to customer needs, however, is that the abstract nature of ‘services’ makes it difficult for the customer to evaluate a service before it is consumed. It is therefore difficult for the service provider really to know if their service is likely to meet the needs of potential customers (Hill 1995 p10).

Rowley (2000), Aldridge and Rowley (2001), Helgesen and Nesset (2007) suggest the literature on customer loyalty offers a framework for customer relationship management and ‘managers might find the perspective offered by the loyalty literature to be a useful basis for moving towards targets for enhanced customer loyalty, associated positive attitudes and behaviours and a more secure client base’ (Rowley 2000). Hennig-Thurau et al. (2001 p333) point out, however, there is ‘no generally accepted model of the student loyalty process’.

The loyalty antecedents identified by Rowley are cognitive (rational decision making based on information), affective (feelings about the product or services) and conative (those concerned with behavioural disposition) antecedents. Identifying generic factors of service delivery, which acknowledge the customer loyalty antecedents and therefore positively impact on the service experience, is one way to work towards customer satisfaction.

**Dimensions of Quality**

Owlia and Aspinwall (1996) present a comprehensive discussion about the various dimensions of quality which contribute to customer satisfaction. Within these discussions
a number of general dimensions of quality are identified, so acknowledging the multi-dimensional nature of quality.

These include:

- technical quality (what is provided), functional quality (how it is provided) and corporate image (Owlia and Aspinwall 1996 citing Gronroos p12) (Walker 1995);
- physical quality, interactive quality and corporate quality (Owlia and Aspinwall 1996 citing Lehtinen and Lehtinen);
- quality and outcome and process quality (Owlia and Aspinwall 1996 citing Ghobadian).

The multi-dimensional nature of quality means it is necessary to focus on both the service provider and service recipient’s role in the provision of service quality. While there is extensive literature on service quality, there is ‘little published work…related to quality dimensions in public services and, in particular, higher education’ (Owlia and Aspinwall 1996 pp12-13).

Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985) identified the key elements of service quality as reliability; responsiveness; understanding customers; access; competence; courtesy; communication; security and tangibles. Their works provide a basis for measuring customer satisfaction with services by assessing the gap between service expectations and service experience. Owlia and Aspinwall (1996 p18) compiled a list of service quality dimensions in higher education, based loosely on the work of Parasuraman, Zeithaml, Berry and others. This expanded list includes: reliability; responsiveness; understanding customers; access; competence; communication; credibility; security; tangibles; performance; completeness; flexibility; and redress.

The elements canvassed in the survey for this paper were a hybrid of these earlier works. Aldridge and Rowley (1998 p198) suggested in 1998 ‘there has been a wider acknowledgement that the totality of the student experience of an institution is a useful
perspective to adopt in student satisfaction and marketing perspective’. A decade later, literature related to the role student support services play in contributing to student attitudes of satisfaction with their total higher educational experience is limited. While quality of education is an obvious dimension of student satisfaction, ‘other determinants of student satisfaction include the quality of the learning environment, access to up-to-date technology, quality of library services, availability of quality student services and the student orientation of the institution’ (Gabbott et al. 2002 p171). Hill, Lomas and MacGregor (2003 p18), in a study of students’ perceptions of quality in higher education, reported students identified that an accessible student support unit was a necessary element for a quality education experience. Dhillon et al. (2008 p283) also identified that services which support the academic and personal development of students contribute to the quality of the students’ learning experience and to their educational achievement and are influential in forming perceptions of quality. Limited scholarly attention has been paid, however, to the value afforded by quality support/administrative services in the higher education sector.

‘Customers’ experience of service includes both the core benefit and the performance, but it is not limited to these formal elements. Finding and approaching the service, departing from it and interacting with other customers may not be in the provider’s service concept, but nevertheless contribute to the customer’s experience’ (Johns 1999 p966). The term ‘service-scape’ has been used to describe the environmental factors of the service encounter and whether these are scripted, contrived or uncontrollable, they all contribute to the customer’s overall service encounter (Johns 1999 p967). The elements which contribute to the service encounter are multiple and each has the capacity to leave a positive or negative perception of service quality on the consumer.
Determinants of Service Quality

In a review of the literature, Johnston (1995) presented a summary of determinants of service quality as identified by a number of different authors. He identifies specific elements of service may result in either satisfaction or dissatisfaction, that is, they are either satisfiers or dissatisfiers in the service transaction. He refers to a ‘zone of tolerance’ (p53) whereby customers will accept as satisfactory a range of performance. Performance which falls outside this zone however has an impact on perceived service quality. ‘Most writers agree that customer expectations are rarely concerned with a single aspect of the service package but rather with many aspects’ (p54) of the service transaction. Table 2 below, configured from the information outlined by Johnston (1995 pp54-55), illustrates the range of opinions about the factors which determine service quality. There are observable commonalities within these classifications but the degree to which these elements contribute to satisfaction or dissatisfaction is not made clear.

Johnston’s (1995) research classified eighteen determinants and the results suggest the tangible elements of comfort, cleanliness, aesthetics, security, flexibility and access appeared to have little impact on perceived service quality. His findings that the absence of a ‘helpful, caring, friendly and committed approach in staff’ does not result in dissatisfaction but ‘their presence appears to delight ’customers (Johnston 1995 p63) is consistent with Kano’s Theory of Attractive Quality. The elements generally associated with ‘good service’, such as reliability; responsiveness; personal attitudes of staff (empathy and friendliness for example) are basic attributes which should be achievable within each service transaction. Johns (1999 p961) is critical of lists of service quality determinants or elements (referring to the work of Johnston and Parasuraman et al. various dates), because while they take account of the delivery/performance issue, they do so by looking at intangibles at the expense of the tangible elements of service delivery.
Table 2
Determinants of Service Quality [Source: Johnston (1995)]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Determinants of Service Quality</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parasuraman et al. (1985)</td>
<td>Ten determinants</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| | 1. Access  
| | 2. Communication  
| | 3. Competence  
| | 4. Courtesy  
| | 5. Credibility  
| | 6. Reliability  
| | 7. Responsiveness  
| | 8. Security  
| | 9. Understanding  
| | 10. Tangibles |
| Berry et al. (1985) | Five dimensions which were incorporated into the SERVQUAL instrument. |
| | 1. Tangibles  
| | 2. Reliability  
| | 3. Responsiveness  
| | 4. Assurance  
| | 5. Empathy (in order of importance) |
| Johnston (1990) | Twelve determinants |
| | 1. Access  
| | 2. Appearance/aesthetics  
| | 3. Availability  
| | 4. Cleanliness/tidiness  
| | 5. Comfort  
| | 6. Communication  
| | 7. Competence  
| | 8. Courtesy  
| | 9. Friendliness  
| | 10. Reliability  
| | 11. Responsiveness  
| | 12. Security |
| Johnston/Silvestro (1990) | Added five extra dimensions based on customer perspectives to the above |
| | 1. Attentiveness/helpfulness  
| | 2. Care  
| | 3. Commitment  
| | 4. Functionality  
| | 5. Integrity |
| Walker (1990) | Based on Berry’s earlier work |
| | 1. Product reliability  
| | 2. Quality environment  
| | 3. Delivery systems that work  
| | 4. Good personal service |
| Gronroos (1990) | Six criteria of perceived good service |
| | 1. Professionalism and skills  
| | 2. Attitudes and behaviour  
| | 3. Accessibility and flexibility  
| | 4. Reliability and trustworthiness  
| | 5. Recovery  
| | 6. Reputation and Credibility |
| Gronroos (1990); Armstead (1990); Albrecht and Zemke (1985) | All suggest that recovery from errors or mistakes is an important dimension |
Most of this research, undertaken in the 1980s and 1990s, is relevant to in-person services and the determinants are essentially focused on the intangibles of the service interaction. ‘The word “service” commonly carries a connotation of interpersonal attentiveness’ (Johns 1999 p963) and the introduction and expansion of electronic services in the higher education sector in more recent times may have an influence on the relative importance of some of the elements identified. Presumably, good personal service, attentiveness and clean and tidy environments would be as applicable (with obvious adjustments) to an on-line service as they would be to an in-person service. As a result of the increased role of technology in service delivery, Parasuraman (2004 p50) refined the SERVQUAL instrument to better reflect the dimensions relevant to measuring quality with e-services. These dimensions included access; ease of navigation; efficiency; customisation/personalisation; security/privacy; responsiveness; assurance/trust; price knowledge; site aesthetics; reliability; flexibility; and efficiency.

This list illustrates the similarities between the dimensions used to measure quality of in-person and e-services dimensions and is particularly relevant to higher education institutions who offer mixed modes of service delivery. Library services have led the field to date in this area (as illustrated by the work of Parasuraman and colleagues). As more students study on-line or at a distance remote from the campus, it will become increasingly important to ensure all forms of service delivery are considered a part of quality efforts. Parasuraman (2004) warns ‘e-service quality, as perceived by users involves much more than having a state-of-the-art web site’ (p52). This recognises the multi-dimensional nature of services should not be overlooked simply because of the lack of physical proximity between the service provider and the service recipient.
Herzberg and Kano

The principles of Kano’s Theory of Attractive Quality (Kano et al. 1984) ‘provides insight into which quality attributes fall into which quality dimensions [and] offers a better understanding of how customers evaluate a product or offering’ (Lofgren and Witell 2008 p59). Since its introduction in 1984, this theory has been applied across disciplines including strategic thinking, business planning and product development (Lofgren and Witell 2008). Kano (and colleagues) published their original works in Japanese. Apart from the original 1984 paper, which provided the source of the Kano Diagram presented in Chapter 1, the papers reviewed for this section are all English-based. This decision was made for ease of access to publications. Two comprehensive reviews of literature related to Kano have provided a sound basis for this section. These are Lofgren and Witell’s Two Decades of Using Kano’s Theory of Attractive Quality: a Literature Review and a Centre for Quality Management Journal Special issue on Kano’s methods for understanding customer-defined quality (1993) by Berger et al. Lofgren and Witell (2008 p63) also restricted their review to English language publications (apart from Kano’s original presentations) and in their literature review suggested:

It is possible that this restriction excluded worthwhile publications in other languages, especially in Japanese. This is also a strength, however, since it provides an overview of how the theory of attractive quality has been used and interpreted by the international research society.

Kano’s work was based on the earlier work of Herzberg whose Two Factor (Motivator-Hygiene) Theory suggests there are two distinct sets of factors for job satisfaction and job performance. Herzberg identified that one set of factors can cause satisfaction while a second set of factors can cause dissatisfaction (Berger et al. 1993; Nilsson-Witell and Fundin 2005; Lofgren and Witell 2008). The two factor types are ‘motivators’ and ‘hygiene factors’ (Kondo 2000; DeShields 2005; Nilsson-Witell and Fundin 2005).
Hygiene factors, if present, ensure no dissatisfaction develops. Their presence however does not result in satisfaction. Motivators, if present, will result in increased satisfaction. Their absence however does not necessarily result in dissatisfaction. This theory, originally developed to explain factors which contribute to employee (dis)satisfaction has also been applied to customer satisfaction and specifically student satisfaction (DeShields 2005). Simplistically, Herzberg’s model of motivation suggests satisfiers are factors that make people feel good and are closely related to self-actualisation needs; and dissatisfiers make people feel bad and are generally the result of factors external to the individual. ‘Strategies to manage dissatisfaction may focus on removing problems and barriers to a satisfactory student experience. Strategies to manage satisfiers must-be more imaginative; students seek a positive experience, which may extend as far as invoking delight and enjoyment’ (Aldridge and Rowley 2001 p56-57).

The identification of separate scales of satisfaction and dissatisfaction has attracted some criticism. Others researchers such as Oliver (1993 in Nilsson-Witell 2005 p154) and Kano et al. (1984) expanded this two factor theory to suggest some factors have more than a proportional effect on attitudes of customer satisfaction. Oliver (1993) identified bivalent satisfiers (which can create either satisfaction or dissatisfaction), monovalent dissatisfiers (which cause dissatisfaction when absent) and monovalent satisfiers (the ‘extras’ that result in satisfaction when present). Oliver and Kano suggest a customer can be both satisfied and dissatisfied with a product. Some researchers had previously treated customer satisfaction as a one-dimensional construction, but others have observed any product or service ‘designed to satisfy only ‘must-be’ requirements would not satisfy mainstream consumers (Berger et al. 1993 p25). Kano and colleagues (1984) influenced by the work of Herzberg developed the ‘Theory of Attractive Quality’ based on the belief that quality is not a one-dimensional construct (Lofgren and Witell 2008). They identified three primary (and two secondary) dimensions which have different impacts on
customer (dis)satisfaction and they presented both a theory and a methodology for the application of the theory (Lofgren and Witell 2008 p60). The three primary dimensions which influence customer satisfaction are classified as ‘must-be’ requirements; performance or one-dimensional requirements; and attractive requirements or ‘delighters’. Kano and colleagues described two additional attributes. These are neutral and reverse attributes. Neutral attributes bring neither satisfaction nor dissatisfaction while reverse attributes bring more satisfaction if absent than if present (Tontini 2000 p603). These additional attributes have not been taken into consideration for the purposes of this study. The number of attributes and the labels attached to each varies in the literature (Lofgren and Witell 2008 p.602).

The Kano model can help businesses find which requirements they must fulfil (basic), which requirements they should be competitive with (performance) and which requirements bring a differential in the eyes of the customer (excitement). Tontini (2000) suggests that the Kano model ‘takes into consideration the asymmetrical and non-linear relationship between performance and satisfaction’.

The must-be requirements or the basic attributes of Kano’s model are similar to the hygiene factors described by Herzberg (Wu 2004 p3). The customer takes these for granted and is very dissatisfied if these are not fulfilled. The one-dimensional or performance attributes are explicitly demanded by the customer and the higher the level of fulfilment, the higher the customer’s satisfaction (Matzler et al. 1996). Kano et al. suggest the attractive attributes or ‘delighters’ have the greatest influence on customer satisfaction: when fulfilled they deliver customer satisfaction but their absence does not result in dissatisfaction (Matzler et al. 1996; Lilja and Wiklund 2006; Kondo 2000; Lofgren and Witell 2008). Both Herzberg and Kano agree satisfaction and dissatisfaction are not at opposite ends of the same continuum. That is, the opposite of satisfaction is no satisfaction, not dissatisfaction.
Kano’s Theory relies on understanding the needs and expectations of the customer and an acknowledgement that expectations do not remain static. This alerts organisations to the need to be regularly consulting with their customer base about their needs and expectations. According to the Kano approach, quality attributes can be identified through the ‘voice of the customer’. Basic needs are generally not explicitly expressed but can be identified by issues of dissatisfaction which result in complaints; performance or one-dimensional needs are generally explicitly expressed by the customer and may emerge from unfulfilled basic needs of customers or expectations previously set by external communications such as publicity or word of mouth recommendations; and delighters which are unexpected by the customer but highly satisfying when delivered.

Nilsson-Witell and Fundin (2005) raise the issue of the changing customer perceptions of service attributes. ‘When a new service is introduced on a market, there are some service attributes that might make the service encounter delightful, but over the service life-cycle the role of the expectations of a market may change’ (p153). Quality attributes evolve from being indifferent, to attractive, to one-dimensional, and finally a must–be element (Nilsson-Witell and Fundin 2005; Lofgren and Witell 2008). This dynamic nature of service attributes coaxes organisations into a continuous quality improvement culture. Rust and Oliver (2000) question, however, whether delight is a suitable goal to strive for.

*If a customer is delighted, would expectations not be raised, making it harder to delight the customer the next time? In other words, there may possibly be no lasting psychological gain from delighting the customer, while costs in the form of design enhancements and/or delight programs are increased. Such a scenario would make the long-term business advisability of customer delight highly questionable* (p86).

Customers who have experienced delight will have this as an expectation for future encounters and by word of mouth recommendations based on the initial delightful
experience, greater numbers of consumers will have an expectation of the enhanced experience. Hence, the ‘delighter’ becomes an expected part of the service delivery into the future. Rust and Oliver (2000) also ask, how long one delighting moment can sustain the customer’s interest (p88) and if the cost of creating ongoing innovative and unexpected satisfiers is warranted? They maintain however, that ‘[d]elight programs are likely to be profitable if customer satisfaction can be maintained at the higher expectation levels caused by assimilated levels of delight’ (p92). This suggests creating episodic instances of delight will not result in sustained customer satisfaction if they are delivered in isolation from a campaign of continuous quality improvement.

Quality and Satisfaction

Quality and satisfaction are often used synonymously in the literature and some writers have suggested they should be considered as separate constructs, while others believe they should be considered as factors that interact (Parasuraman et al. 1991; Bitner et al. 1997; Nicholls et al. 1998).

Parasuraman et al. (1991), Hill (1995) Athiyaman and others agree consumer satisfaction is a result of a specific service interaction while perceived service quality is an overall attitude. Athiyaman (1997 p539) states,

Perceived service quality is defined as an overall evaluation of the goodness or badness of a product or service. In other words, it is an attitude. Consumer satisfaction is similar to attitude, but it is short-term and results from an evaluation of a specific consumption experience.

In the literature, the distinction is made between satisfaction and service quality (Parasuraman et al.1991; Cronin and Taylor 1992; Hill 1995; Rowley 1997; Aldridge and Rowley 1998) with suggestions that perceived quality is the difference between consumer expectations and the consumers’ experience of the service received. This perspective
has developed into the ‘perceptions minus expectations (P-E) conceptualisation of service quality referred to as ‘gap theory’ (Hill 1995 p11). Managing service quality therefore can be seen to be the management of customer expectations of the service and their perception of the service delivery. There is a ‘chicken-and-egg’ debate about whether perceived service quality leads to customer satisfaction or whether customer satisfaction leads to perceived service quality (Hill 1995). Danaher and Mattsson (1994) agree there is a distinction between service quality and satisfaction. They suggest the evaluations of individual service transactions are defined as satisfaction judgments and perceived service quality is ‘similar to an individual’s general attitude towards the service firm’ but there is little difference between the satisfaction construct and the description of an attitude (1994 p5). Iacobucci et al. (1995 p296) suggest ‘perhaps the difference between quality and satisfaction mirrors managerial versus customer concerns; a manager and service-providing firm tries to provide “high-quality” service, and a customer experiences the service encounter and is “satisfied” or not. They make an interesting observation that ‘a firm may provide “high quality” service that nevertheless does not “satisfy the customer” because the properties improved on do not matter to their consumers’ (p296). If ‘quality’ is defined in terms of the customer expectations and perceptions, it appears logical that the efforts to improve ‘quality’ be based upon those elements which are informed by the ‘voice of the customer’. The ‘voice of the customer’ is a term which is used frequently in the literature to describe the self-expressed expectations, needs and perceptions of the customer (Hill 2003; Johnson and Deem 2003; Bhattacharyya et al. 2004; Harvey 2004; Svensson and Wood 2007).

The first hand accounts of customer needs are used to identify the key drivers of customer satisfaction (Brassard et al. 1994 p258) and listening and responding to the customer recognises the customer is more than just the receiver of goods and services. In a review for the International Journal of Service Industry Management, Bitner et al.
(1997) outline a chronology of literature which relates to customer contributions and roles in service delivery. They identify a number of authors who have advocated the use of 'organisational socialisation' as a means of ensuring realistic expectations are formed by customers. In the higher education sector, ensuring student expectations of services are realistic from the outset of their studies, allows them to set realistic goals. The concept of 'organisational socialisation' acknowledges the customers are contributors to their own consumer satisfaction and as active participants they also contribute to the ongoing quality of the product. 'Effective customer participation can increase the likelihood that needs are met and that the benefits the customer is seeking are actually attained.' This is particularly relevant in education services 'where the service outcome is highly dependant on customer participation…The customer is an integral part of the service and unless he/she performs his/her role effectively, the desired service outcome is not possible' (Bitner 1997 pp197-198). Organisational commitment is a related concept which is presented in the literature pertaining to student satisfaction and retention (Bennett 2003). Successful student participation in education is dependant on a level of commitment from the student to develop and maintain a positive relationship with the education provider. Bennett (2003 p130) suggests a student’s commitment to the institution (referred to as organisational commitment) is the ‘relative strength of an individual’s identification with and involvement in’ the organisation and it results from satisfaction with the relationship.

Wiklund et al. (2003) make a distinction between the student as an active participant in the learning process and the student as a product or customer. They agree that measuring student satisfaction is a central theme of Total Quality Management in higher education (Wiklund et al. 2003 p101). Reconstructing the role of the student into an active participant, with a level of influence about the way in which educational services are delivered is at odds with the practices within a hierarchical environment, such as the traditional higher education sector.
There is discussion in the literature about the concepts of service quality and consumer satisfaction (Hill 1995; Bitner et al. 1997) and how, if at all, they relate to higher education. (Rowley 1997; Aldridge 1998; Gabbott et al. 2002; Hill 2003; DeShields et al. 2005). Hill, Lomas and MacGregor (2003) have explored students’ perceptions of quality of higher education in an attempt to ascertain which factors are most influential. Danaher and Mattsson (1994) ‘believe that the summation of all the service encounters is evaluated by the customer and not just the interaction with the service provider’ and the process, as such may play a greater role than the actual outcome in determining the overall satisfaction’ (p5). This is supported by student reports that context specific factors such as quality of the lecturer, student engagement with learning, social/emotional support systems, library and IT resources are significant in determining overall satisfaction. Hill et al. (2003) refer to the work of Rickinson (1998) who suggests student support units need to be actively promoted to students who are vulnerable in their studies and it is not enough simply to have them available. As reported by Hill et al., Rickinson suggests ‘the help they received to adjust and adapt to new challenges enabled them to take back control that they had temporarily lost’ or in fact had never achieved (in the transition from secondary school to higher education). They report ‘students also valued the institution support networks’ but these ‘networks must-be available and accessible for all students and personnel must-be proactive with teachers to ensure those in need are supported’ (Hill et al. 2003 pp18-19).

Harvey (1995) (cited in Aldridge and Rowley 1998) maintains interconnectedness exists between a student satisfaction approach and the development of a culture of continuous quality improvement. Aldridge and Rowley (1998) refer to the negative outcomes of poor service as dissatisfaction, disconfirmation and dissonance and they advise service providers in higher education to adopt a negative quality model. They suggest higher education providers should respond to incidents which may lead to dissatisfaction as they
occur. ‘On occasion, individual incidents may lead to dissonance and the formulation of a complaint. Continued poor quality will on the other hand, lead to disconfirmation’ (p 203).

Loudon et al. (1993 p583) suggest dissonance:

- occurs as a result of a discrepancy between a consumer’s decision and the consumer’s prior evaluation;
- is influenced by a wide range of conditions;
- is uncomfortable to the consumer who will be motivated to reduce the discomfort; and
- individuals who experience dissonance will avoid similar situations in the future.

Effective complaints handling, genuine complaints resolution systems and the ability to effectively respond to negative incidents can go some way towards reversing this type of outcome. The issue of service recovery, of being able to acknowledge and rectify mistakes or errors without increasing customer dissatisfaction is discussed by a number of authors (Fundin and Bergman 2003; Johnston 1995; Walker 1995). It is suggested negative feedback and complaints provide the ‘means for generating new offerings of attractive quality’ (Fundin and Bergman 2003 p56) and,

Service policies/procedures that address compensating consumers for a lengthy wait, complimentary upgrades if core performance is inadequate, or engendering contact employees to make satisfying customers a priority can often go beyond a customer’s expectations (Walker 1995 p12).

This application of Kano’s theory to complaints handling should be of particular interest in fast-changing environments such as higher education. Customers complain when they are dissatisfied with a product or a service and the number or percentage of complaints is one indicator of customer dissatisfaction (Kondo 2000 p648). Ishikawa (1990 cited in Kondo 2000 p648) argues negative service experiences can be converted into positive perceptions of quality through appropriate responses. Quality can be either backward or
forward looking, referring to the positive or negative context. Backward looking quality refers to flaws, errors and deficiencies that when present, result in dissatisfaction (and resulting complaints). Forward looking quality represents those elements that result in customer satisfaction. These can be paralleled with Herzberg’s Two-factor Theory of motivation (hygiene and motivators) and Kano’s ‘must have’ and ‘attractive quality’ elements. ‘…Must-be quality is often expressed in terms of indicators such as the defect rate, rework rate and number of customer complaints’ (Kondo 2000 p649). Effective complaints handling should, however, result in business improvements which respond to the basic needs of the customer. Basic needs or ‘must-be’ quality is often obvious but attractive quality is often hidden (Kondo 2000). Both types of needs however are best informed by the ‘voice of the customer’. Jacklin and Robinson (2007) citing the work of O’Rourke (1999) have suggested student complaints should be considered as ‘canaries in the mine’. That is, a complaint should not be treated as an individualised problem, rather it should be considered as a potential indicator of a more widespread issue which may affect the experiences of numerous students.

**Summary**

The review of literature presented above developed the themes pertinent to this study. These included: quality management in higher education; the role of the student as a customer; the determinants of service quality; the theories of Herzberg and Kano; and the concepts of customer satisfaction and perceptions of quality. From these theories an analytical framework is developed and initially presented in Chapter 1 and further developed in Chapter 5.

Quality management theories and models which have evolved in response to changing commercial and competitive environments were presented as relevant to the changing higher education environment. Lilja and Wiklund (2006 p55) for example, suggest the ‘increasingly intense competition has accordingly caused a shift in interest from the
original producers’ point of view...towards the customers’ point of view, recognizing quality as a subjective matter’. The themes of satisfaction and quality were examined. The determinants of customer satisfaction were presented as multi-dimensional and satisfaction defined as transaction specific. Perceived service quality was broadly represented as an overall customer evaluation of a service being the comparison between service expectations and service delivery. The concept of the ‘Voice of the Customer’ was demonstrated to be significant in understanding what constitutes quality service and how it contributes to an attitude of satisfaction. The concepts of customer satisfaction and dissatisfaction were accepted as not being the opposite ends of the same continuum and the theories of Herzberg and Kano illustrated that not all service attributes have the same degree of influence in creating satisfaction. The literature confirmed the importance of understanding the factors that contribute to student satisfaction. To this end, higher education providers need to be engaged emotionally with students and the delivery of high quality, relevant student support services is one way in which to do this. Rahman (2004 p433) advises:

It may not be enough to merely satisfy customers by meeting their basic spoken requirements under the extant highly competitive environment. One main reason is that nowadays there are so many similar services for customers to choose from that...ordinary or non-outstanding products or services may not attract their attention...A strategy for achieving ‘sustainable competitive advantage’ could be to delight customers and to exceed their expectations on a perpetual basis.

The following Chapter outlines the research method adopted to provide data which would contribute to an understanding of the factors which contribute to students’ attitudes of satisfaction with university support services. The methods adopted have been informed by the literature and are employed to examine service recognition, whether perception or lived experience influences attitudes of satisfaction and what factors influence students’ satisfaction with support service delivery.
Chapter 4

Methodology

Introduction

The research method adopted for this project was designed to provide data which would reveal the major factors which contribute to students’ attitudes of satisfaction with university support services. The field setting for this project was a regional university with a significant majority of the student population living remote from the campus. The total student population is diverse and to ensure the data collected were representative of the diversity of student views, it was necessary to use instruments which were accessible to all students and where the potentially large volume of data was collated in a format that facilitated ease with analysis. The role of the practitioner as researcher will be introduced at the beginning of the chapter. This is followed by details about the choice of methodology, the sample, survey responses and survey instrument, The data from Service Quality complaints and Course Experience Questionnaires are presented as one method of establishing face validity. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the ethical considerations relevant to the choice of methodology.

As identified by the review of literature in Chapter 3, ‘The Voice of the Customer’ is a significant element in understanding what constitutes quality service and how this contributes to attitudes of satisfaction. This theme underpins the choice of methodology for the research project. Also discussed in this chapter is the issue of a ‘practitioner as researcher’ and any real or potential biases which may be inherent in this situation, justification for the choice of methodology, the sample demographics, responses from students and the chosen data analysis techniques.
Practitioner as Researcher

The researcher, for any project is subject to external influences which may affect their objectivity. The researcher holds dual privileged ‘insider’ status being both a worker with a level of power and authority to influence the organisational context of student services; and a student who is exposed to the experiences being explored in the project. As a result, personal observations and knowledge gained from extensive experience in student services in the higher education sector formed an integral part of the data collection and analysis. The privileged insider perspective is also referred to as the ‘practitioner as researcher’ (Armsby 2000) and the multiple perspectives that result from these circumstances can represent both constraints and opportunities during the conduct of a research project (Armsby 2000; Merriam et al. 2001; Costley and Armsby 2007). As identified by Armsby (2000),

*the increased access to people [and] documents… needs to be declared and the work based learner is both helped and hindered by his or her organisational context. But the context is part of the reason for the research and hence cannot be denied.*

This research project was conceived as a result of the researcher’s status as an employee of the University and was designed to enhance the understanding of how students construct attitudes of satisfaction with student services in the higher education sector. The objective to be able to make recommendations about how services can be delivered to students with an appropriate customer service focus is also significantly influenced by the privilege of the insider status.

Merriam et al. (2001) suggested the ‘practitioner as researcher’ is potentially influenced by a myriad of organisational and individual relationships as well as the external influences of the research community. They argued these influences may result in a lack of objectivity, bias in the research and the researcher may be ‘too close to the culture to
be curious enough to raise provocative questions’ (Merriam et al. 2001 p411). The following diagram, modified from Armsby’s ‘Influences on the Worker Researcher’, (http://www.middlesex.ac.uk/wbl/research/docs/SEDAch3.pdf) illustrates the extended network of potential influences on this project. The construction of the diagram provided an opportunity for the researcher to reflect on the influences at play and to recognise the existence of multiple perspectives.

Diagram 4
Influences on the Practitioner as Researcher

As represented above, the ‘practitioner as researcher’ was potentially influenced by: peers from both the student and work environments; the organisational culture and structures of the institution including the expectations of line managers and senior managers; the customers of the work environment; and the influence of the trends and opinions within the wider higher education sector. Significantly, the researcher received support from associates in the execution of the project. This can be attributed to the fact
the project was undertaken at a time where student engagement and retention was seen as a contemporary issue by both students and staff in higher education.

Costley and Armsby (2007) warn the extended network of influential relationships, unless safeguarded against, may potentially result in subjectivity but there are always elements of subjectivity where interpretation is involved. To guard against real or potential bias, the practitioner-researcher formally observed administrative protocols from the ethics approval stage, through data collection and data analysis. Costley and Armsby (2007 p141) cautioned the:

Conventional approach to ethics, where access to people, information, and the organisation itself would need to be carefully negotiated, is compromised because of the position of the practitioner-researcher within the organisation.

For the purposes of this project, the research ethics approvals included administrative approval from the institution to gain access to student contact details and access to the Service Quality Unit’s complaints data. This formal approval was sought early to ensure the boundaries between work and research were clearly defined (especially because both Student Services and the Service Quality Unit fall within the researchers’ portfolio of responsibilities at the institution being studied). Access to the Course Experience Questionnaire was sought separately. The review of literature was also used by the researcher to ensure contrary views were accessed and personal and professional assumptions were challenged during the project.

The insider perspective can strongly influence the choice of methodology (Armsby 2000; Merriam et al. 2001) and it can also influence the validity of the findings. Merriam et al., (2001 p406) explain:

All researchers begin data collection with certain assumptions about the phenomenon being investigated, situations to be observed, and people to be
interviewed. The more one is like the participants... the more it is assumed that access will be granted, meanings shared, and validity of findings assured.

This has been demonstrated throughout the execution of this project. The responses from the sample group resonated with the researcher as a result of the shared understanding of the context and the specific issues being canvassed.

**Choice of Methodology**

A methodology which allowed for the broadest ‘voice of the customer’ to be heard was considered to be most relevant for this project for a number of reasons. Firstly it was considered richer data could be obtained from a wide range of customers; and secondly, the multi-dimensional nature of customer satisfaction and perceptions of quality would be best represented by those involved directly in the service transactions. It is virtually impossible to define quality in terms of a single characteristic or customer (Hoyer et al. 2001 p55 citing Deming 1988) and this multi-dimensional nature of quality is highly relevant to the Higher Education sector because the complexity of the university environment means measurement of quality must-be undertaken across a range of variables and cannot be determined through quantitative measurements used in commercial operations such as sales, profitability or market share. Reliance on the ‘voice of the customer’ is also consistent with the Kano Theory of Customer Satisfaction which provides the conceptual framework for the research and which relies on the identification and prioritisation of the range of customers’ needs and expectations.

Owing to the nature of the data sought as indicated by the foci of the research questions, the methodology chosen incorporated both qualitative and quantitative techniques. There was no suggestion in the literature that the singular use of qualitative or quantitative techniques would best serve the needs of the project. Quantitative research seeks to explain social phenomena primarily through objective measurement by de-emphasising
individual judgments (Firestone 1987 pp18-19). Qualitative research is more concerned with understanding the phenomenon being studied through the perspectives of the research participants (Firestone 1987 p16). As discussed by Firestone (1987 p16):

*Each method type uses different techniques of presentation to project divergent assumptions about the world and different means to persuade the reader of its conclusions. Yet they are not antithetical. They present the reader with different kinds of information and can be used to triangulate to gain greater confidence in one’s conclusions.*

Johns (1999 p968) for example, argues ‘it seems likely that the present widely espoused tradition of positivist, “scientific” research will be inadequate for probing the subtleties of customer perceptions’ and a more appropriate way ‘may be the analysis of rich qualitative data’.

The decision to use a mixed-method data collection technique was made to provide richer data which would contribute to a greater depth of understanding of the issues being canvassed. Additionally Firestone (1987 p21) suggests, ‘where studies using different methods have similar results, one can be more certain that the findings are not influenced by the methodology’. The mixed method approach allowed the abstract nature of quantitative methodology to be enhanced by the ‘soft’ descriptive data identified through quotes and personal commentary of respondents. To this extent cross-validation of data was possible.

For the purposes of this study, quantitative measurements were sought to explain which specific attributes contribute to attitudes of satisfaction and the qualitative data sought to detail and describe the experience of the attributes. The researcher considered accessing the ‘voice of the customer’ was best achieved through qualitative means. Three basic issues were explored during data collection. Broadly, these were service
recognition, whether perception or lived experience influences attitudes of satisfaction and what factors influence satisfaction with service delivery\(^2\).

An analysis of data already gathered by the institution through service complaints and the Course Experience Questionnaire was carried out in an attempt to determine if there were additional factors identified by students which led to overall satisfaction or non-satisfaction with support services and to support or contradict the findings as represented by the survey outcomes. Data from student complaints for 2006-2007 via the University’s Service Quality Unit were examined to establish whether the attributes which result in dissatisfaction and subsequent complaints are similar to the factors which influence satisfaction as identified through the survey. In addition, the positive/negative comments aggregated data collected from the Course Experience Questionnaires (CEQ) for UNE between 1999 and 2004 was reviewed.

**The Sample**

The target population consisted of undergraduate and postgraduate students who had been enrolled for at least one year. Valid email addresses for 10,475 students were supplied through the University’s student administration database, Callista. The email addresses were those supplied by the student on their enrolment records. Of the 10,475 eligible target populations only 3,080 had recorded their UNE email account as their only email contact. Of the remainder, 1,029 students submitted an alternative UNE account (possibly staff members or students with duplicate accounts) and the rest supplied an alternative commercial email account.

The lack of a consistent approach to the use of electronic communications represents a limitation to the use of electronic surveys and also presents limitations for the findings. It is difficult to predict if the commercial email account is operational or no longer in use; if

\(^2\) The full survey instrument forms Appendix 2.
the mailbox is full; or the regularity with which students access these accounts. For these reasons, it was decided the email address supplied by the university would be used to distribute the survey.

The sample included both undergraduate and postgraduate students, all modes of study across all disciplines of study. The decision to use the total student population (excluding students who had been enrolled for less than one year) was based on the perceived limitations of using focus groups or a smaller sample group which may not have been representative of the geographically and demographically diverse student population.

The Responses

The survey resulted in 892 responses out of the 10,475 students who were sent questionnaires. While this was a good raw number of respondents, the response rate (compared with total student numbers) was relatively low (9%). It is acknowledged the low response rate also has limitations on the findings. Leedy and Ormrod (2001 p221) suggest that a sample size of 400 would be adequate for a population over 5,000 and as such the response rate was considered adequate. Despite the fact the University has an expectation all students have access to an internet-enabled computer the use of an internet based survey of the population is not strictly random. Those students without internet access during the period of time of the survey were unable to be sampled. Additionally, it is well accepted on the campus surveyed not all students utilise their official email account. This is evident in daily transactions with students and it is assumed a significant proportion of the non-responses can be attributed to this. Despite these limitations the electronic survey respondents proved to be largely representative of the total student population with regard to the variables of gender, age, mode of study and age groupings. The University has approximately 37% male and 63% female

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3 As at January 2009, the University has notified all students of the expectation that they will communicate via their official student email account only.
students. Of the students 72% are 25 years of age or older, 78% of students study off
campus and 22% study on-campus (UNE 2008). As represented in Tables (3) and (4)
below, respondents approximately mirrored this distribution and for this reason, the
results may be considered representative of the views of the student population.

Of the 892 respondents, 16 did not state their course of study. Of the remainder,
respondents represented all faculties and study programs spanning undergraduate,
postgraduate course work and higher degree research students. The student respondent
demographics are presented below in table format.

Table 3
Respondents to the Survey: By Gender and Age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>%Total Sample</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>277</td>
<td>31.10%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>611</td>
<td>68.50%</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>% Total Sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-25</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>39.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-33</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>17.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34-40</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>14.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41+</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>28.40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4
Respondents to the Survey: by Mode of Study and Living Location

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mode of Study</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>% Total Sample</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>On Campus</td>
<td>267</td>
<td>29.90%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off Campus</td>
<td>621</td>
<td>70.00%</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Living Location</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>% Total Sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>On Campus</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>14.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off Campus in Armidale</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>19.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elsewhere</td>
<td>582</td>
<td>65.20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One specific demographic variable canvassed was for disabilities. This was chosen
because of the relevance of disabilities to issues of access to services. The responses
indicated 5% of the sample identified as having a disability. There does not appear, however, to be significant differences in the responses between students with or without a disability. Similarly, the mode of study (on- or off-campus) appears to have had no significant influence on the responses.

The survey instrument

Through the use of Perseus® software, a web-based survey instrument was created. The instrument was administered to a pilot group of six volunteer staff members to test for flaws. Based on the feedback from the pilot group, minor adjustments were made to the text. The instrument was then administered to participants and the responses were automatically collected in two formats, Microsoft Excel® and SPSS®. This method was chosen for the convenience of distribution and for the ease with which the data were able to be collated and analysed.

A hyperlink to the survey was emailed to all students in their second year or more of study. The survey was undertaken in the first term of the academic year and as such, it was considered too early for first year students to have familiarised themselves with the range of services available, to have accessed multiple services or to have formed reliable opinions about service delivery. Dhillon et al. (2008 p286), in their research into the effectiveness of support services identified it was appropriate to canvas the opinions of students who were at the ‘institutional experiences’ stage (referring to Tinto’s (1993) work on student attrition) with at least one year’s experience of the institution and its services. New students’ first impressions are collected through a survey administered by the institution during Orientation but these were not utilised for the purposes of this project. The invitational email advised students that participation was voluntary and all responses were anonymous. The survey was accessible for four weeks, including the mid-term

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4 Information letter is provided in Appendix 3
Easter break. It was hoped additional responses would be received if accessible during a non-teaching period but it is not possible to track the timing of responses. While this was not considered a limitation for this project, valuable user trends may have been collected had the survey had a time stamped ‘audit log’ embedded in its design. This is a consideration for future surveys. In total, 892 students responded while 102 email non-delivery notifications were received as well as nine ‘out-of-office’ responses.

Students were asked to supply general demographic details such as gender, age, mode of study and degree program. The survey instrument provided them with a series of questions with ‘radio button’ response choices. It is generally acknowledged the size of the questionnaire can have significant impact on response rates and ‘[s]urvey saturation has led to declining response rates matched by rising student and academic cynicism about their relevance, legitimacy and impact and, as a consequence, producing unreliable and often misleading results’. For this reason the numbers of questions were kept to a minimum.

**Reliability**

As represented below in Table 5, the reliability analysis indicates the survey is reliable with a Cronbach’s Alpha total of .914.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cases</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valid</td>
<td>892</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excluded</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>892</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Reliability Statistics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cronbach’s Alpha</th>
<th>N of Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>.914</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Four primary questions were asked and respondents were provided with two opportunities to provide free-text comments. The four questions related to service recognition and whether students considered the University provides an appropriate range of services; evaluation of each service used by the student; whether perception or lived experience influences attitudes of satisfaction and what service delivery attributes influence satisfaction. The labels used to identify services were purposefully not defined and university divisional names were not used. Rather, broad service types were included in the survey. This reflects the approach taken by Jacklin and Robinson (2007 p116) who recorded they had ‘purposely referred simply to ‘support’, without specifying any particular kinds or sources of support in order to take as wide a view as possible’ in their questionnaire related to satisfaction with support services. Kano et al. (1984; 2001) suggests we need to know what is important to the customer so we can deliver what they want. To this end, students were asked on ‘closed’ items to indicate how well they agreed with the following statement for each of the services listed.

The university provides appropriate support with:

1. Accommodation
2. Administrative services
3. Career service
4. Complaints handling
5. Computer services
6. Counselling
7. Disability services
8. Equity services
9. Health service
10. Learning support
11. Library services
12. Personal/professional development
13. Social life
14. Sporting facilities
15. Work experience
Responses were assessed on a five point Likert scale where one (1) represented strong agreement and five (5) strong disagreement.

The support services included in the survey were loosely based on those identified by Hill (1995), Harvey (1995) and Aldridge and Rowley (1998). The latter compared the lists of services used by both Hill (1995) and Harvey (1995) and commented that, ‘whilst there are similarities, there are also differences, which are, to some extent, determined by the facilities offered by the specific organisation’ (1998 p199). The services canvassed through the survey instrument are fairly standard across universities in Australia and represented the core support services at UNE. Support services regularly survey client satisfaction but as identified by Aldridge and Rowley (1998) surveys of the service experience provided by higher education institutions are relatively recent and while some surveys are reported, it would appear many are used as in-house feedback tools.

Respondents were asked to indicate which of the identified services they had used and to evaluate how satisfied they were with the service experience. Responses were assessed on a five point Lickert scale where one (1) represented very satisfied, two (2) satisfied, three (3) Neutral, four (4) not satisfied and five (5) dissatisfied.

To identify the role perception, lived experience and word of mouth comparisons play in forming attitudes of satisfaction respondents were asked for Yes/No responses to a list of five statements. These statements were designed to determine if satisfaction is solely based on lived experiences (either positive or negative) or if perception and peer experiences are influential in establishing attitudes of satisfaction.

The statements were:

1. Overall I am satisfied with the level of student support service delivery at UNE.

2. My satisfaction/dissatisfaction with student support services is based on personal experience.
3. My satisfaction/ dissatisfaction with student support services is based on the experiences of my student peers.

4. Other students have experienced poorer customer service that I have.

5. I have experienced poorer levels of customer services than other students.

Rowley (1997 p7) suggests ‘[p]erceived quality is a form of attitude, related to, but not the same as, satisfaction, and resulting from a comparison of expectations with perceptions of performance’. Similarly, Hill (1995 p16): defined quality as ‘the degree and direction of [the] discrepancy between consumers’ perceptions and expectations’. Testing for such discrepancy was undertaken by comparing the perceived importance (expectations) of services and the evaluation of such services (lived experience). This section of the survey tool was focused on identifying the significance of perception in shaping attitudes of satisfaction. Specifically, how influential the experiences of others are in shaping attitudes of satisfaction.

As suggested by Harvey (2003 p8) importance and satisfaction ratings were incorporated into the survey in an attempt to provide key indicators of what students regard as important in their total experience. Harvey presents a satisfaction/Importance grid as one option through which to measure what is important to students and what contributes to increased satisfaction. The selected methodology for this project, however, does not incorporate Harvey’s grid. Having asked what services were important, students were then asked to rate their satisfaction with any of the services they had used.

In an attempt to further define the service delivery attributes that influence attitudes of satisfaction with support services, students were asked to rate the importance of a range of attributes. The service delivery attributes canvassed were:

1. Provider courtesy

2. Timely response from provider
3. Easy to locate relevant assistance
4. Convenient operating hours
5. Service reliability (accuracy of information)
6. Easy access to service online/telephone
7. Easy access to service in person
8. Staff are easy to talk with and willing to listen

These service delivery attributes were assessed according to a five point Likert scale where one (1) represented Very important and five (5) represented Not at all important. Descriptive analysis was performed on this data. Statistics for each attribute were cross-tabulated and tabled for all the cases with valid data in the specified range(s) for all variables in each table to determine if the mode of study was a significant variable in factors which influence satisfaction. Rankings were able to be ascertained for all attributes.

Survey Outcomes

Harvey (2003) suggests that survey saturation can result in students becoming cynical about surveys and ‘it is counterproductive to ask students for information then not use it. ‘Students become cynical and uncooperative if they think no one really cares about what they think’ (p19). For this reason, students were advised by the researcher at the beginning of the survey instrument that ‘…Specifically, I hope to achieve a clear understanding of what factors shape satisfaction; what influences satisfaction; and what factors affect student perceptions of satisfaction with student service provision. I hope that my findings will help to understand better the factors that will assist services at UNE to more effectively meet the needs of students’. Responses from students indicated they had read, understood and responded positively to this undertaking e.g. ‘I just filled in your
survey...hope it is not too late!! Good luck with it...it was a good survey that could really make a difference at UNE’ (Male student via email).

Aldridge and Rowley (1998 p197) observed ‘there remains some resistance to the completion of an electronic questionnaire’ and they recommended both paper and electronic mediums should be used. Almost a decade later, this may be still the case and specific research into this issue is needed. Students today are however generally more computer literate and the level of access to internet enabled services such as retail, banking and social networking has significantly increased in the last ten years. The increased familiarity with web-based activity was a consideration in choosing only one medium for the survey instrument. One student contacted the researcher as they were unable to access the web survey and an emailed survey instrument was provided. The decision to use an electronic medium was based on three factors: (1) the University is moving to an electronic platform and so the medium is consistent with the electronic learning environment: (2) the dispersed nature of the student population (approximately 80% of students do not attend the campus) meant that an electronic survey was more economical in both time and costs and: (3) an electronic survey allowed ease of administration of both the survey and the responses. In hindsight, focus groups of students may have provided further qualitative data but the logistics of coordinating representative samples for such a dispersed student population was a disincentive to use this technique. Further research in the area of this study would do well to adopt this approach.

‘Students’ views on all aspects of their Higher Education experiences are now being canvassed and regarded as essential to the measurement of quality in universities’ (Hill 2003 p15) and to this end, two ‘open’ free text items provided opportunity for respondents to add qualitative data. These items were What other factors influence your level of satisfaction with support services; and Add any other comments you would like to make.
about student services at UNE. These items delivered a high level of qualitative data and the richness of the free text data was surprising. Respondents provided eight hundred and seventy six separate items (876) of comprehensive feedback and a number took the opportunity to email the researcher direct with additional commentary. This was interpreted by the researcher as indicative of the level of interest of the students and the level of importance they attached to having their voice heard.

Johns points out ‘many customer–based studies of service quality are based upon survey techniques, so the quality of the findings is heavily dependent upon the quality of the questionnaire design. As a result, much…research may be asking questions based upon inappropriate assumptions which do not correspond to those of individual customers or even of market segments’ (1999 p965). Face validity is present in a survey when the users agree the items and the scales are pertinent and relevant to their needs and result in useable information. In an effort to establish face validity, the survey responses have been referenced against the substantive issues which resulted in student complaints to the UNE Service Quality Unit (SQU) during 2006-2007 and the positive/negative comments provided by UNE students in the Course Experience Questionnaires for the period 1999-2004.

Comparisons with Service Quality Complaints and Course Experience Questionnaires

The SQU classifies its complaints into broad categories and sub categories. This categorisation allows trends in complaints to be monitored and for the purposes of this research, provides an additional source of data related to attributes of service delivery which result in dissatisfaction (as measured by a formal complaint). Individual complaints were not accessed and this element of the research relied on the interpretation of substantive complaints issues made by the staff of the SQU. The categorised complaints
were reallocated into domains which broadly correspond to the service attributes canvassed through the research survey. The domains analysed were reliability of service and service errors, timeliness, courtesy, friendliness and general behaviour of staff and unfounded complaints. In most cases the categorisation was a simple task. The one category which provided some challenges was ‘unfounded’ complaints. Unfounded complaints are those complaints which, after investigation, are deemed to have no merit. However, the unfounded complaints, while not substantive in nature, can be an indicator of perceived service deficiencies or dissatisfaction and for this reason they were kept in the analysis. The frequencies of complaint issues were recorded in a Pareto Chart to provide a clear visual definition of the characteristics that contribute to dissatisfaction.

The Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) is the only national survey of the student experience which is based on a common set of questions. Over the last ten years all graduates in Australia have been issued with the survey, four months after graduation (Scott 2006). This survey provides the opportunity for graduates to rate a standard set of course experience items and to provide free text comments about ‘the best aspects (BA) of their university course experience and those most needing improvement (NI). It is estimated that at least 300,000 students have written over half a million ‘best aspects’ and ‘needs improvement’ comments on the CEQ since it was first distributed in the early 1990s,(Scott 2006 piv). At the local level, these comments are classified into broad categories and the report related to these categories was reviewed by the researcher. Again, the researcher did not access original questionnaires but relied on the categories determined by the Planning and Institutional Research Unit of UNE.

The findings from the survey will be reported in Chapter 5 (Discussion) within the context of testing the argument that ‘student attitudes of satisfaction are influenced by the total university experience and that support or ‘enabling’ services contribute significantly to the
determination of satisfaction’. Student responses to the primary research questions will be reported individually. Specifically:

1. Are students aware of the range of support services available at the University?
2. To what extent does perception inform student attitudes of (dis)satisfaction?
3. To what extent does lived experience inform student attitudes of satisfaction?
4. What factors influence satisfaction? and
5. How might the university assure and sustain high levels of student satisfaction?

Additionally, the findings will be reported against the assumptions identified in Chapter 1. These assumptions are:

1. The general assumption within university communities that students are aware of the range of available support services and programs;
2. Student attitudes of satisfaction are influenced by the experiences of others.
3. Satisfaction is a direct result of a lived experience.

To this end, the primary data from the sample were summarised through descriptive statistics and graphically reported to allow quick visual comparisons and the free text comments from respondents were classified into broad categories and have been used to provide a qualitative dimension to the responses.

**Ethical Considerations**

The basic principles of ethical research were explicitly considered in the design and execution of this study to ensure the rights of the research participants were protected. These included voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity. An informational letter⁵, sent to students with the survey instrument covered each of the ethical considerations and explained the purpose for which the data was being collected. Students were advised participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw from participation at any point. This was especially relevant because the researcher holds a

⁵ Full Informational Letter forms Appendix 2.
position of authority relative to student access to administration and support services at the University. Students were informed the researcher was an employee of the University. The procedures involved in participating in the research were explained and informed consent was affected by students proceeding with the online survey. Confidentiality was observed, no identifying information disclosed and all participants remained anonymous throughout the study. The survey instrument did not require name, email addresses or any other specific information that could identify specific respondents. In reporting the qualitative responses, broad demographics of gender, age, disability, mode of study and course of study are reported. Due to the size of the student population and the raw number of respondents, it is unlikely any individual respondent could be identified via these details. Where respondents contacted the researcher direct with additional unsolicited information, personal details were removed from any data provided.

The survey delivered both qualitative and quantitative data which resulted in an understanding of the student centric perspective on quality of service and attitudes of satisfaction with services in the University. These data are presented in the following chapter and they form the basis of the recommendations in Chapter 6.
Chapter 5

Discussion of the Research Findings

Introduction

This Chapter reports the results of the data collected. The central argument put to the test in this research is student attitudes of satisfaction are influenced by the total university experience. The data collected represents the ‘voice of the customer’ (student responses) and is reported against each of the primary research questions. The findings will be reported in two parts - Part A reports on the findings from the administered survey and Part B reports on the findings from an analysis of data from student complaints for both 2006 and 2007. These data were collected via the University’s Service Quality Unit and the positive/negative comments aggregated data collected from the Course Experience Questionnaires (CEQ/PREQ) for UNE between 1999 and 2004.

In the following discussion the assumptions: students are aware of the range of available support services and programs; student attitudes of satisfaction are influenced by the experiences of others; satisfaction is a direct result of a lived experience, are held up to scrutiny. Alongside the quantitative data, the ‘voice of the customer’ as revealed through the qualitative data collected will be presented thematically with illustrations from direct quotes alongside the quantitative data.
Part A

Student awareness of support services

Service recognition was measured by asking students to indicate if they believed appropriate services existed at the University. Current services were listed but no definition of these services was provided. No definitions or divisional labels were used in an attempt to establish if students recognised the elements of service delivery as opposed to the divisional name or location of services. For example, recognition of library services was included in the survey instrument. On the campus however, there is a number of libraries that augment the main library (Dixson Library), including a Law Library and Curriculum Library. Additionally, many of the residential colleges have ‘libraries’ for the use of their residents. The focus of this section of the survey was not on specific outlets but on the recognition of the mix of service types and the perceived importance of having such services available.

The mix of services was based loosely on previous studies related to student satisfaction in higher education (Hill 1995; Aldridge and Rowley 1998). Service recognition, or the degree to which students are aware of the range of support services available, was measured by asking the students if the University provides an appropriate range of services. It was assumed the neutral responses would indicate students either had no knowledge of the services or the services were not relevant to their individual needs. A contrary opinion about neutral responses in surveys has been expressed by Lofgren and Witell (2008) who contend ‘skeptical (sic) answers are often an indication of inadequate expression of the questions’ (p71). The reliability of the neutral responses was therefore checked against the free text comments which supported the original assumption that

---

6 Services surveyed were: Accommodation; Administrative services; Career service; Complaints handling; Computer services; Counselling; Disability services; Equity services; Health service; Learning support; Library services; Self-development; Social life; Sporting facilities; Student involvement in the life of the university; and work experience
students were unaware of or saw no relevance in the services surveyed. Dhillon et al. (2008) in a United Kingdom study, similarly found ‘there is considerable variation in students’ awareness of available support systems and in their ability to access appropriate support’ (p286) and ‘few students are aware of institution-wide support services such as counselling and the careers service’ (p291). The figure below represents the volume of neutral responses to the question related to service recognition, in descending order of recognition.

Figure 1
Neutral Responses to Service Recognition

Voice of the customer
The comments below illustrate the point that students chose to record a neutral response because the service(s) in question were not relevant to their circumstances.
- As an external student my neutral response has been because I don't use or need the majority of services you have listed. (Male; 18-25; No disability; Off-campus; BA Honours-Philosophy)

- I have put a neutral response re some services as I haven't really had any exposure to them. (Female; 41+; No disability; Off-campus; Bachelor of Laws)

- I clicked "neutral" if the question was irrelevant to me. (Female; 41+; No disability; Off-campus; Bachelor of Arts).

As represented below in Figure 2, library services, accommodation, IT/computer services, administration services and learning support (including direct support by academic staff) were the services most frequently recognised by respondents. Students agreed or strongly agreed the University provided appropriate support services in these areas. However, there was generally a poor level of recognition of all other support services.

**Figure 2**

**Levels of Service Recognition**

---

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Services</th>
<th>Recognition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Library services</td>
<td>800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodation</td>
<td>700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer services</td>
<td>600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative services</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning support</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sporting facilities</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social life</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student involvement in the life of the university</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-development</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career service</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability services</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselling</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equity services</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health service</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complaints handling</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work experience</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work experience</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Library Services

Library Services demonstrated the highest level of service recognition (84%). This was combined with a satisfaction rating of 77%. This was not a surprising result. All students, whether on- or off-campus need to access the library for their studies and it should be expected the level of recognition is high. Library services could be categorised as a ‘must-be’ requirement and students would most likely feel dissatisfied if these services were not offered. As indicated in Figure 3 below, students expressed strong appreciation for the library services and they indicated through their free text responses that the calibre of these services contributed to their sense of engagement with the institution.

**Figure 3**

Levels of Satisfaction with Library Services

---

*Voice of the customer*

The sample of free text comments below supports the high level of ‘very satisfied’ ratings for library services.

- *We all love the new computer set-up in the library (you can tell because it's packed every break between classes)* (Female; 18-25; No disability; On-campus; PhD)
- *Having dealt on a small basis with the local university library, I feel that the service I have felt from UNE (as a distance education student) is definitely better than that*
offered by the local university (Female; 34-40; Off-campus; No disability; Bachelor of Arts/Bachelor of Commerce)

- As an external student …I don't feel like a “real” student, except for the great library service (Female; 41+; No disability; Off-campus; PhD)

- The library provides an outstanding service especially to external students. They are always very prompt with photocopying, borrowing etc. (Female; 41+; No disability; Off-campus; Bachelor of Arts)

- Great to have access to electronic information held by library services (e.g. Journals). (Male; 41+; No disability; Off-campus; MBA)

- Dixson Library staff are wonderful...well trained and always willing to help. (Female; 18-25; No disability; On-campus; PhD).

As demonstrated by the selected comment below, negative responses suggested other issues related to library use (such as financial constraints) were concerning the student.

I am dissatisfied about the library services for external students borrowing books. I believe there should be a reply paid postage for returning text books, as the cost of this is expensive (between 5 - $15) per book. (Female; 18-25; Off-campus; Bachelor General Studies/ teaching).

Accommodation Services

Of the respondents, 14.9% (133) live in University residences and overall, a significant 63% of respondents believed the University provided appropriate accommodation services. The reported levels of satisfaction were based on feedback from both On-campus students and off-campus students many of whom use residences during residential schools. The lack of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with accommodation services was primarily expressed by mature-aged off-campus students who require accommodation during residential schools. This dissatisfaction seems to be related to the lack of information regarding the accommodation services.

Figure 4 below depicts the overall high level of satisfaction with accommodation at the University.
Voice of the customer

The perceptions of students concerning accommodation services are represented by the following selected comments:

- The accommodation at [Specific College] is excellent, the staff both admin and kitchen are lovely and nothing is a bother to them. (Female; 41+; No disability; Off-campus; Bachelor of General Studies/Bachelor of Teaching)

- As an external student it is important to me to be made welcome and be shown where to go for classes and how to get to your room in whichever college you happen to be staying in. (Female; 41+; No disability; Off-campus; course not specified)

- [Students] need information on figuring out the different levels of accommodation for externals at the different colleges…will you have to share bathrooms, what will the food be like, what are the rooms like, etc. (I gave up and stayed in a hotel). (Male; 41+; No disability; Off-campus; Grad Dip Ed)

- When staying at [specific college] last residential [I] found conflicting information re access to the computer room, which was very frustrating. (Female; 34-40; No disability; Off-campus; Nursing).
Computer/ IT Services

The respondents agreed the university provided appropriate Computer/ IT services. Of the respondents, 54% who had accessed these services reported feeling satisfied/very satisfied with the IT services. Negative comments and dissatisfaction were primarily from off-campus students who rely more heavily on this service than their on-campus counterparts. The variation in levels of satisfaction is indicated by Figure 5 below.

Voice of the customer

Students rely heavily on computer based transactions with the University. They consequently expressed strong opinions about the standard of IT services. Interestingly, there were no comments recorded by students of Computer Science (and associated courses) on the provision of IT/computer services.

- Services overall very good, though some aspects could be improved (such as web based information [which] can be hard to find at times). (Male; 26-33; No Disability; Off-campus; Grad Dip. Social Science)
- Compared to other experiences with other universities, UNE falls behind in student services/ support, particularly in the computer area. (Female; 26-33; No disability; Off-campus; Dip Ed)
- **The level of computer support is pathetic and I am very disappointed in this** (Female; 26-33; No disability; Off-campus; Dip Ed)

- **As I am off-campus and an external student we have experienced GREAT difficulties with access to computers etc now that study guides are CD format** (Female; 26-33; No; Off-campus; Bachelor of Nursing Studies)

- **Internet/ WebCT support has been very minimal** (Female; 26-33; No disability; Off-campus; Graduate Diploma/Social Studies).

**Learning Support**

Learning Support, including direct support by academic staff returned good levels of service recognition. As indicated by Figure 6 below, the majority of students (62%) who had used the Learning Support services were satisfied or very satisfied with their experience. Over one quarter of students (27%) however recorded a neutral response and the free text commentary suggested that this may be due to a lack of awareness of the services available. Figure 6 below represents the distribution of responses regarding Learning Support.

**Figure 6**

**Learning Support**

Voice of the customer

- *I have personally used… academic skills …and found they were absolutely excellent.*  (Female; 41+; No disability; Off-campus; Bachelor of Psychology with Honours)
UNE should also have a better academic support network (Male; 18-25; No disability; On-campus; Bachelor of Laws).

Administration Services

As indicated by Figure 7 below, 57% of respondents reported feeling satisfied or very satisfied with the administrative services On-campus. 21.5% recorded a neutral response and 21.5% responded feeling no satisfaction (neither satisfied nor dissatisfied responses). The negative comments included for this section were frequently based on perception/experience of others. This is an area where the University could intervene to create more positive perceptions. The degree to which perception influences attitudes of satisfaction is discussed in detail later in this section.

Voice of the customer

The selected comments below illustrate the range of student perceptions about administrative services.

- The staff I have dealt with have been prompt and courteous and extremely helpful. (Male; 41+; No disability; Off-campus; Graduate Diploma in Humanities)
- I know of my friends who have been told the wrong information (by the Student Centre) and then been told the services say they did not make any mistake. (Male; 18-25; No disability; Off-campus; Bachelor of Nursing)

- Almost everyone who has mentioned an encounter with the Student Centre to me has recalled it unfavourably. (Female; 18-25; No disability; On-campus; Bachelor of Business/Bachelor of Arts).

**Other Services**

Despite the low levels of service recognition, in general, students who had accessed other support services such as personal counselling, career development, equity and disability services reported feeling satisfied or very satisfied with the service they had received.

*Counselling and careers and the equity office have assisted me greatly, I would like to commend them for all their help.* (Female; 18-25; Yes disability; On-campus; Bachelor of Arts).

The very high level of ‘neutral’ or ‘not answered’ responses indicates students are not aware of the support services provided. This sends a clear message to the institution about the need to promote the availability of the full range of services to all students. This is supported by the extent to which respondents commented on accessibility to information. Respondents identified information, which allows them to identify services or information they need is not easily located. This is summarised by one respondent who said,

*UNE has all relevant services but after orientation there is no follow up, you can’t even locate some other services. How well are you doing is up to you, nobody will say you can improve better than this if you can do A, B and C.*  (Male; 34-40; No disability; On-campus; Bachelor of Communications).

In the case of off-campus students, a lack of engagement with the campus, to the degree they do not believe the advertised services relate to them, is an issue worthy of further investigation.
Voice of the customer

The selected comments below demonstrate that students do not understand the availability of services on offer.

- It's good to see [from the survey instrument] that there are services available for students. I'd like to see more targeted promotion and better access for undergrads, especially for services such as health care, sporting facilities, learning support and social support. (Female; 26-33; No disability; On-campus; PhD)
- Poor service to external students - we pay the same money for our courses as internals and get very little in terms of services, support or learning materials for the money. (Female; 26-33; No Disability; Off-campus; Arts/Law)
- Student services are for internal students; there are no considerations made to external students; I do not feel like a 'part' of the university. (Female; 34-40; No Disability; Off-campus; Bachelor of Nursing).

Developing the ‘informational capital’ of students so they are aware of the services and support which is available is a strategy that should continue throughout the student lifecycle. Person et al. (2006) suggest that while social capital is critical to educational success, it is equally critical that relationships which create and communicate obligations and expectations, information, and social norms are established between the student and the institutions. Informational capital contributes to student success by equipping the student with ‘instrumental’ information, such as information on coursework, careers, and services as well as information on administrative requirements and the behavioural expectations of the institution.

Does lived experience inform student attitudes of satisfaction?

In an attempt to determine if perceptions or lived experiences informed student attitudes of satisfaction with support service, students were asked to rate five statements. These were:

1. Overall I am satisfied with the level of student support services delivered by UNE;
2. My satisfaction/dissatisfaction with student support services is based on personal experience;

3. My satisfaction/dissatisfaction with student support services is based on the experiences of my peers;

4. Other students have experienced poorer levels of service than I have; and

5. I have experienced poorer levels of service than my peers.

As represented below, 72% of respondents stated overall they were satisfied with the delivery of support services. This overall level of satisfaction is mirrored by the Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) data for the University which has consistently returned positive satisfaction ratings from graduated students. The survey undertaken for this project was contemporary to the student’s experience while the CEQ data is collected four months after graduation. It is possible that an overall attitude of satisfaction (post graduation) is less specific than measured satisfaction during the service transaction (i.e. the lifecycle of the student) and more research needs to be undertaken in this area.

As seen in Figure 8 below, generally students rated their satisfaction with the services they had used as very satisfied or satisfied. This is a positive indicator for any future service quality efforts as it indicates the institution does not need to significantly change the quality of service delivery.
Voice of the customer

As demonstrated by the comments below, the ‘helpfulness’ of services was highlighted as important. The comments from respondents suggest students experience satisfaction when specific services meet specific needs.

- **Flexibility, depth of knowledge of the person/provider of the services** - especially when I am trying to achieve a particular outcome and the person/provider has suggested a different/better/speedier/more effective path to the same end, rather than merely focusing on the request in front of them (Female; 34-40; No disability; Off-campus; Bachelor of Psychology Honours)

- When I lived on-campus I used a lot of services and I found them extremely helpful (Female; 18-25; No disability; Off-campus; Bachelor of Science)

- **Helpfulness and practicality of information** [influenced my satisfaction] (Female; 18-25; No disability; On-campus; Bachelor of Environmental Science).

As represented in Figure 9, a significant 88% of students claim their attitude of satisfaction or dissatisfaction is based on their lived experience of services.
This opinion was supported by free text comments such as:

- I am consistently amazed by the resources provided by the UNE Library. Every request, no matter how obscure, has been satisfied and within an impressively short time (Female; 41+; No disability; Off-campus; Master of Arts (Honours))

- The Student Centre and its operations are very impressive. From my experience the correspondence received is timely and always accurate. The centre is available during convenient hours to take calls directly from students - and from my experience, all my questions over the telephone have been answered promptly (Male; 26-33; No disability; Off-campus; Bachelor of Laws).

As indicated by the cross-tabulation below, there is no significant difference in the responses between the on- or off-campus student cohorts. This suggests that overall, the service offerings and the service experiences of students are satisfying and there are no major inconsistencies between the two modes of study. This is significant feedback for an institution which offers mixed modes of study.
Table 6
Satisfaction based on personal experience by mode of study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I am studying:</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On-campus</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>267</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off-campus</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>564</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>621</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>789</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>892</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The extent to which perceptions inform student attitudes of (dis)satisfaction

As reported above, student responses to the administered survey indicate most students base their attitudes of satisfaction on their own experiences. However, consistent with Rowley’s (1997) findings, the data also identifies the experience of peers and other customer-customer relationships influence perceptions of service quality. This influences the overall attitudes of satisfaction. The influence of word of mouth recommendations (either positive or negative) should therefore be taken seriously and acted upon. This includes dispelling myths about perceived service deficiencies. As one student commented:

*Highly negative experiences, such as the appalling rudeness of admin staff or the overt impression that UNE staff must think students are an unimportant nuisance leave a lasting impression that is reinforced by talking to other students about their experiences. This must surely create a problem as even one or two negative experiences outweigh a dozen positive ones, even though the average level of service is acceptable* (Male; 18-25; No disability; On-campus; Business/Law).

Approximately one third of respondents (34%) indicated they base their attitude of satisfaction on the experiences of others. As indicated by Figure 10 below, perception influences attitudes of satisfaction for a significant number of students.
Voice of the customer

- Everyone I talk to about the student centre has similar stories about how bad their service is (Gender not disclosed; 18-25; No Disability; Off-campus; Environmental Science).

Table 7
Satisfaction/dissatisfaction with student support services based on the experiences of my peers by mode of study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>My satisfaction/dissatisfaction with student support services is based on the experiences of my peers. 1 = Yes; 2=No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am studying:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off-campus</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On-campus</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As indicated by the cross-tabulation above, the role perception plays in creating an attitude of satisfaction is stronger for the on-campus students than it is for those studying off-campus. As off-campus students have fewer opportunities to discuss general service transactions, the role that word of mouth recommendations or negative feedback pay is limited. This provides an opportunity for the institution to increase positive perceptions for
off-campus students without the interference of individual ‘war stories’ being shared between students. Further research into on-line environments and student satisfaction needs to be undertaken to determine what impact increased on-line activities such as social networking and bulletin boards will have on this domain of influence.

It appears from the data indicated in Figure 11 the majority of students (78%) do not believe their own experiences have been worse than the experiences of their peers.

**Figure 11**

*Personal experiences*

![Bar chart showing personal experiences](chart.png)

Comments such as, *I’ve heard [about] worse cases than what I have experienced* (Male; 26-33; No disability; On-campus; PhD), illustrate the role perception plays in influencing the negative assessment of perceived quality of service.

The perception that others are treated better however was also illustrated by a comment about college life:

*The services in the colleges are very good. Students who are living in College get much more support (both financial and emotional), university related information and resources (e.g. internet, furniture) than those of us living in outside accommodation* (Female; 18-25; No disability; On-campus; Bachelor of Education).
This comment is clearly based on a perception that others (that is, those students living in the colleges) are better treated than those not living in the colleges. The statement is not factual yet it represents a strong perception. The positive promotional activities from the residential system or word of mouth recommendations from resident students may have influenced this type of opinion.

As illustrated below however, the mode of study did not significantly influence the way in which students responded to the statement, *I have experienced poorer levels of customer services than other students*. Students, irrespective of their mode of study, perceive they have not fared worse than ‘others’.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 8</th>
<th>Personal experience and mode of study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I have experienced poorer levels of customer services than other students. 1= Yes; 2= No</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am studying:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On-campus</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off-campus</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Opinions were equally distributed however about the statement ‘other students had experienced poorer customer service than I have’. This may be a reflection the statements were ambiguous or an indication students do not fully interrogate their perceptions about comparative service quality.

As illustrated by the Table below, students who study on-campus are more likely to believe other students have experienced poorer customer service than they have. This further supports the suggestions it is the peer to peer recommendation or condemnation that influences attitudes of (dis)satisfaction.
It is significant that the perception others have fared worse is strong (50%). This suggests more effort could be allocated to creating positive perceptions and further investigation into the influence of personal attitudes of optimism and pessimism on the service encounter is required. Figure 12 below illustrates the equal distribution of student opinions.

**Figure 12**

Experience of others (b)

Voice of the customer

How others are treated obviously impacts on the perceptions about quality service and satisfaction and this is further illustrated by comments from respondents such as:
- Many other students I have spoken to have had the same experience (Male; 34-40; No disability; Off-campus; Bachelor of Arts)

- Witnessing or word of mouth concerning other people and how other people seem to be treated [influences my attitude of satisfaction] (Female; 18-25; No disability; On-campus; Bachelor of Urban and Regional Planning).

If both lived experience and perceptions of service quality significantly influence attitudes of satisfaction, then the promotion of good news stories, publishing positive feedback to satisfaction surveys and dispelling any inaccurate perceptions about service delivery should go some way to increasing attitudes of satisfaction. This is supported by Hill (1995 p13) who suggests:

… Some of the factors which can influence consumer expectations and which are relevant in the context of higher education include: word-of-mouth communications, personal needs of consumers, past experience of the service (or a related service), and external communications from the service provider.

What factors influence satisfaction?

The majority of respondents identified general standards of service as being very important to their levels of satisfaction. Students strongly rated as very important or important basic service attributes such as fair treatment, provider courtesy, access to online and telephone services and convenient operating hours. Fulfilling these types of ‘one-dimensional’ or ‘performance’ attributes can deliver steady and direct increases in customer satisfaction.

As represented in Figure 13 below, timeliness, courtesy and ease with which services can be located were considered very important elements of service by the respondents. No-one responded that timeliness was not important at all and only 2 students responded it was not very important to them.
Voice of the customer

- Timely response to queries [is important to me]. As I am an external student and live overseas, this is crucial (Female; 34-40; No disability; Off-campus; Bachelor of Commerce)

- Timely communication of administrative issues or delays (Male; 34-40; No disability; Off-campus; Bachelor of Urban and Regional Planning)

- I would like to strongly emphasise the need for timely response by student services. The length of time that it takes for information to be processed leaves many students unnecessarily stressed, thereby influencing their lives and the lives of those around them. (Female; 18-25; No disability; On-campus; Bachelor of International Studies)

- Given I study off-campus and work full time I rely on timely and accurate information and support (where needed) (Female; 26-33; No disability; Off-campus; Bachelor of Arts).

As indicated by Figure 14, virtually all respondents indicated fair treatment was an important factor in their attitude of satisfaction. Only twenty-eight (28) neutral responses were recorded and no student responded that fairness was not very important or not important at all. ‘Fairness’ is an intangible attribute but some efforts in promoting rules, regulations and guidelines and providing opportunity for complaint resolution when these
principles are not adhered to can go some way to establishing a culture of fair and equitable service delivery.

**Figure 14**

Fair Treatment

Respondents clearly believe it is important that service personnel are easy to talk to and they have a ‘willingness to listen’. As represented by Figure 15, respondents rated these attributes as very important or important and no students indicated these attributes were not very important or not important at all.

**Figure 15**

Staff easy to talk with
Voice of the customer

The selected comments below reflect the expectation students have of being truly listened to during a service transaction.

- [I expect that] The provider is willing to listen and comprehend … about the background of the request from the student. i.e. if a student has a request, for them to try and understand the reasoning behind it (Female; 18-25; No disability; Off-campus; Bachelor of Livestock Science)
- A willingness to really listen and understand the issues and provide genuine support (Female; 41+; No disability; On-campus; Bachelor Environmental Science/Law)
- Being listened to and being treated as an individual not just a student number (Female; 41+; No disability; Off-campus' Bachelor Arts/Teaching).

This type of feedback suggests students need to be valued individually and the staff need to treat each encounter as unique.

Respondents also indicated provider courtesy is important to students. This can be expanded to include appropriate communication, a non-officious tone and treating all enquiries respectfully.

**Figure 16**
Provider courtesy

![Provider courtesy chart](chart.png)
Voice of the customer

The selected comments below strongly represent the opinion of respondents that provider courtesy is an important factor which contributes to satisfaction.

- "**Courtesy, timeliness of responses and the willingness to be of assistance are important to me. I feel quite angry when I ask for help and the person who is meant to be assisting me is either condescending or rude**" (Female; 18-25; Yes disability; On-campus; Bachelor of Arts)

- "**Courtesy of support staff is invaluable! Overall tone of communication; reliability of information provided; co-ordination of advice from different administrative bodies**" (Male; 18-25; No disability; On-campus; Bachelor of Education)

- "**Courtesy is the biggest factor for me, if I have a problem I am reluctant to contact the uni because of past experience**" (Female; 41+; Yes disability; Off-campus; Bachelor of Arts).

As identified in Chapter 1, the student population at UNE is predominantly off-campus. These students are typically mature aged, have work and family commitments and they interact with the university differently to those students who study and/or live on-campus. It is therefore important to understand if the needs for on- and off-campus students may be different. Accessibility to services, convenient operating hours and the availability of telephony and online services were all rated as important by significant numbers of respondents.

**Figure 17**

Ease of access online/telephone

![Ease of access online/telephone graph](image-url)
Voice of the customer

The majority of students rely heavily on online services. The selected comments below reflect positive perceptions about access to online services.

- I appreciate being able to access support services and information online and being able to take care of administrative and other matters online myself. I find the UNE website reasonably good in this regard (Female; 34-40; No disability; Off-campus; BA Honours)

- I am amazed at how much is online now for external students and it is very helpful. (Female; 34-40; No disability; Off-campus; Bachelor Arts).

While recognising the importance of online information, some students commented that ease of navigating web pages is also an important consideration:

- UNE online is occasionally difficult to navigate around to get the correct information efficiently (Male; 34-40; No disability; Off-campus; Bachelor of Arts).

Accessibility to services through convenient operating hours and access to personal service is rated as important by students. Flexible operating hours which take into consideration the diverse needs of the student customer, should therefore be considered.

Figure 18 and Figure 19 below indicate the level of importance attributed to these deliverables.

Figure 18
Convenient Operating Hours
A number of students specifically mentioned the ease with which information is located as being important to them. This is especially true for students who are geographically distant from the campus. ‘Signposting’ both physically and in electronic services is essential if students are to become more self-managing during their educational experience. The ease with which services are able to be located is indicated by Figure 20 below.
Voice of the customer

- **Accessibility** - ease of getting the information I need and answers when I need more or for complex issues (Male; 18-25; No disability; Off-campus; Bachelor Arts/Law)
- **UNE has a high percentage of external students yet telephone hours of student services do not take into account that many external students work and cannot be home during business hours** (Female; 41+; No disability; Off-campus; Bachelor Social Science (Hons)).

Service reliability, including the accuracy and consistency of information provided was rated as being very important in creating an attitude of satisfaction with service delivery. Johnston (1995), referring to the work of Berry et al. (1985) cites ‘reliability’ as the single most important dimension of service quality. Hill (1995), Owlia and Aspinwall (1996), Parasuraman (2004) and others agree reliability is a desired quality service attribute. Reliability includes consistency of performance and it positively reflects a level of credibility and dependability (Hill 1995). Students offered numerous comments to support this opinion. Figure 21 below indicates the degree to which students consider reliability to be an important element in service delivery.

**Figure 21**

**Service reliability**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5 Not important at all</th>
<th>4 Not very important</th>
<th>3 Neutral</th>
<th>2 Important</th>
<th>1 Very important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Voice of the customer

- Can I get the information I want when I want it and be assured of its accuracy? Am I made aware of other facilities or factors that may be of importance that I do not currently know about? (Female; 34-40; No disability; Off-campus; Master of Business Administration)

- Overall tone of communication; reliability of information provided; co-ordination of advice from different administrative bodies (Female; 41+; No disability; Off-campus; Master of Arts (French))

- Time and accuracy are the main things! (Female; 18-25; No disability; On-campus; Bachelor of Education)

- Consistency; in the answers and guidelines provided. (Female; 18-25; No disability; Bachelor of Arts/Teaching)

- Accuracy of information and the friendliness of the admin and service provider (Female; 26-33; No disability; Off-campus; Course not disclosed).

As noted in Chapter 1, student demographics in Australia (as in other countries) have changed dramatically in the last decade. Students now have increased pressures to work and to fund their own education. This has resulted in an increase in part-time students and less time for social engagement. First time students are older and many have multiple family, work and study commitments. This is particularly true for students who study via distance education. As indicated by the figure below, the majority of students are not aware of opportunities to engage in social activities, nor are they aware of opportunities to become involved in the life of the university. The high neutral ratings by respondents, as indicated in Figure 22 below, would appear to reflect this.
The changing dynamics of student participation, combined with the introduction of voluntary student unionism (VSU) has resulted in a definite shift in the way in which students engage, both with their peers and with the institution. Despite there being no question regarding voluntary student unionism, approximately 3% of total respondents commented on the perceived effects of VSU on the delivery of support services. These comments were from both on- and off-campus students. While a number of the comments were factually inaccurate (based on the assumption all student services were funded through student contributions and a belief the services therefore no longer existed after the introduction of VSU), it is assumed the opinions have been based on perceptions and not lived experience of services not being available. The obvious exceptions to this are those social services (such as the student Bistro) and other social groups that were directly funded by the former students’ association.

Voice of the customer

- What student services? Since VSU…near everything has been shut, sold or made more expensive! LISTEN! If the student does not feel supported, they go elsewhere. Then the UNE loses out simply because student numbers decrease, which results in units being dropped therefore academic staff numbers drop because there are not as
many students...can you see where this is leading? (Male; 34-40; [Not Answered]; Off-campus; Bachelor of Arts)
- VSU has had an overall negative impact on UNE student services. (Female; 18-25; No disability; On-campus; Bachelor of Communication Studies)
- Student service at UNE has changed somewhat since VSU ... but the university still provides effective and suitable service to UNE students (Female; 18-25; Yes disability; On-campus; Bachelor of Arts);
- Services should be broader and not just for 18 year olds, who have just left their family home. A university is not only about partying and graduating to find a job. It's about socialising, developing interests and widening one's horizons, by trying out different things that don't necessarily involve sports. a wider variety of activities would also attract more students, which I am aware, is nearly impossible due to VSU now (Female; 26-33; No disability; On-campus; Bachelor of Asian Studies).

Student engagement, both academically and socially, is an important element in student satisfaction and retention and students supported this by their comments.

The survey included two opportunities for free text comments and it is through this mechanism that some very rich data was received and the voice of the customer was clearly heard. Respondents clearly articulated what factors influenced their attitudes of satisfaction and off-campus students sent very strong messages to the institution about their sense of belonging to the university community:

Voice of the Customer

As reflected below, the promotion of available services, especially for off-campus students, was strongly recommended by students.

- Availability [of services] for external students. Good information about what is available and how to get access to it (Female; 34-40; No disability; Off-campus; Honours in Philosophy)
- Availability - a lot of services aren't available to external students particularly during residential schools (Female; 41+; No disability; Off-campus; Bachelor of Nursing Studies)
- **Knowing what services are available is important, I could have better used services over the years had I known about them (especially for externals).** (Female; 18-25; No disability; Off-campus; Bachelor of Natural Resources)

- **As an external student I am not made aware of all the services available with UNE or if I am able to use them. There are no alternate services available for Off-campus students and if there is they do not tell us about them.** (Female; 18-25; No disability; Off-campus; Bachelor of Science/ Education)

- **An understanding and recognition of external students i.e. tailoring services to the needs of external students rather than attempting to deliver services in the same way as they are to [On-campus] students.** (Female; 41+; No disability; Off-campus; Bachelor of Social Science Honours).

Postgraduate students very strongly indicated they did not feel engaged with the wider university community.

- **As far as I'm concerned there is no such thing as UNE student services. They do not tell/provide them for PhD students let alone external ones.** (Female; 26-33; No disability; Off-campus; PhD)

- **At a post graduate level there are few support services available for external students. Services/information made available to internal students is not accessible to externals despite requests for participation in information sessions etc via teleconference/videoconference links. Presentation materials are not supplied on line, therefore external students do not receive the same level of assistance/support as internals.** (Female; 41+; No disability; Off-campus; Psychology PhD).

**How does mode of study affect the factors that influence satisfaction?**

The general standards of service identified as being very important to the students' levels of satisfaction were cross-tabulated to determine if mode of study was a significant variable. Statistics for each table are based on all the cases with valid data in the specified range(s) for all variables in each Table. The responses were interval-scaled: 1= Very important; 2= Important 3= Neutral; 4= Not important; 5= Not at all important.
As expected, basic service attributes such as provider courtesy were considered equally important to on- and off-campus students.

**Table 10**
Provider courtesy and mode of study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I am studying:</th>
<th>How important is provider courtesy in influencing your attitude of satisfaction?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On-campus</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off-campus</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The timeliness of responses was equally important to on- and off-campus students. As indicated in Table 11, only two students rated this as not important and none rated it 'not at all important'. What is not clear, is whether the 'timeliness' of responses is different for in person and online services. This is an issue worthy of future research, especially as greater numbers of transactions with students become internet based.

**Table 11**
Timeliness and mode of study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I am studying:</th>
<th>How important are timely responses from the provider in influencing your attitude of satisfaction?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On-campus</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off-campus</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 12 indicates the ability to easily locate relevant assistance was considered less important by off-campus students than by on-campus students. This may have reflected an ambiguity in the use of the term 'locate' with off-campus students interpreting this in a physical sense. As one off-campus student commented, however:
Accuracy of information is probably the most important [attribute for off-campus students] and ability to find information easily. One stop shopping would help, at the moment there seem to be a lot of pages with similar but not identical information and some info seems to slip between the cracks (Female: 41+; No disability; Off-campus; Bachelor of Arts).

Table 12
Ease of access and mode of study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I am studying:</th>
<th>How important is easy to locate relevant assistance in influencing your attitude of satisfaction?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On-campus</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off-campus</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Convenient operating hours were equally important to on- and off-campus students. As noted by one student,

Being an external student, the possibility of calling or needing assistance AFTER business hours [is important] (Female; 34-40; No disability; Off-campus; Bachelor of Laws).

Table 13
Operating hours and mode of study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I am studying:</th>
<th>How important are convenient operating hours in influencing your attitude of satisfaction?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On-campus</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off-campus</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Service Reliability was considered equally important to on- and off-campus students. As represented below, no students rated this as ‘not important’ or ‘not at all important’.
Table 14
Service reliability and mode of study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I am studying:</th>
<th>How important is Service reliability in influencing your attitude of satisfaction?</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On-campus</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>267</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off-campus</td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>473</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>621</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
<td>681</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>892</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** No responses for 4 = Not important and 5 = Not at all important

Table 15 demonstrates easy access to services online or via telephone was reported as being equally important to on- and off-campus students.

Table 15
Access to online/telephone by mode of study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I am studying:</th>
<th>How important is easy access online/telephone service in influencing your attitude of satisfaction?</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On-campus</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>267</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off-campus</td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>434</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>621</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>15</td>
<td>563</td>
<td>254</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>892</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As reflected in the table below, easy access to service in person was not as important for the off-campus student population. This was expected due to the geographic distribution of students studying away from the campus. Service delivery models need to respond to the equitable access to services and this could have implications for the way in which in-person services are delivered.
Table 16
Importance of access to services in person by mode of study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I am studying:</th>
<th>How important is easy access to service in person in influencing your attitude of satisfaction?</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On-campus</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>267</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off-campus</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>29</td>
<td></td>
<td>621</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>352</td>
<td>291</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>29</td>
<td></td>
<td>892</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Staff who are easy to talk with and willing to listen was considered equally important by both on- and off- campus students. Off-campus students perform many transactions with the institution via the telephone. It is therefore especially important quality telephone communication standards are established.

Table 17
Importance of staff easy to talk with by mode of study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I am studying:</th>
<th>How important is it that staff are easy to talk with and willing to listen in influencing your attitude of satisfaction?</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On-campus</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>267</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off-campus</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>401</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>621</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>603</td>
<td>242</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>892</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fair treatment was considered (very) important by all respondents. As indicated by Table 18 below, no students rated fair treatment as ‘not important’ or ‘not at all important’. What students consider ‘fair treatment’ to mean however was not clarified.
Table 18
Importance of fair treatment by mode of study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I am studying:</th>
<th>How important is fair treatment in influencing your attitude of satisfaction?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On-campus</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off-campus</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In general, the service attributes tested were equally important to students, irrespective of their mode of study. The obvious exception, ‘in-person’ service, is not an option for most students who are remote from the campus. This simplifies the approach to service quality improvements for the institution and while ‘one size fits all’ is not being advocated, consistent service standards could successfully be applied across the board.

Summary of Part A

The survey provided both quantitative and qualitative data related to the elements of service delivery that inform the students’ attitude of satisfaction. Students’ views are regarded as essential to the effective monitoring of quality in higher education (Hill et al. 2003 p15) and the strong voice of the customer throughout this survey has indicated specific elements of service delivery that can be addressed to better meet the expectations of the student population. The overall rating of satisfaction with the university experience was high and so any efforts to address the perceived service deficiencies identified by students should result in increased satisfaction. Broadly speaking, the data collected indicated:
1. Students are not aware of the full range of support services available at the University. Those students who study off-campus appear to be less well informed than their on-campus counterparts and do not feel connected to the life of the institution to the same degree. They therefore feel the services available are not necessarily targeted at them.

2. It appears perception plays a significant part in informing student attitudes of (dis)satisfaction. Of the respondents, half identified their attitude of (dis)satisfaction has been influenced by observing or hearing about how others had been treated. They are also influenced by the word-of-mouth recommendations or condemnations of their peers.

3. Student attitudes of satisfaction are significantly informed by their lived experience of services. The way in which they are treated during one transaction influences their expectation of future service encounters.

4. Students have clearly defined the service attributes which are significant to their attitudes of satisfaction. These include basic attributes which are within the reach of all service providers.

In an attempt to validate this feedback, complaints (that is, the result of dissatisfaction) and post-transactional feedback via the Course Experience Questionnaires were also examined and the findings reported in the following section.
**Part B**

**Service Quality Complaints 2006-2007**

The SQU classifies its complaints into broad categories and sub categories. For the purposes of comparing student feedback from the survey with actual complaints, the categories of complaint were realigned to match the elements of service canvassed in the survey. According to the Kano Model of Customer Satisfaction, dissatisfaction which results in complaints is a direct result of failing to deliver the ‘must-have’ attributes. As illustrated by Figure 23 below, the types of issues which resulted in formal complaints are consistent with the elements of service, identified by students as being important in forming their attitudes of satisfaction with service delivery. These three categories, plus an additional ‘unfounded’ complaints category are discussed below.

**Figure 23**

*Complaint Types 2006-2007*

1. Reliability of service including errors in the execution of process, gaps in business processes, knowledge of staff, and consistency of information and advice accounted for the majority of complaints and corresponds to the responses in the survey. These issues could be reasonably addressed by formalised business procedures and staff
development and training. The lynch-pin in addressing these failures of process however, is the need to embed a strong culture of respect for the customer. Students made comments such as,

Basically the reliability of services is the most important thing [in creating an attitude of satisfaction] (Female; 34-40; No disability; Off-campus; Bachelor of Commerce).

2. The second category of complaints was timeliness of responses. These complaints include incidents of failure to respond to requests, delays in delivery of service and the total absence of service when required. As customers, students have an expectation services will be forthcoming when needed. While logistically, the delivery of services 24/7 may not be possible, clear communication to students about hours of operation and methods of communication (via the web, telephone or face to face) could minimise the expectation gap for some of these incidents. As noted by student feedback,

Being an external student, the possibility of calling or needing assistance AFTER business hours [is important] (Female; 34-40; No disability; Off-campus; Bachelor of Laws).

3. The third category included courtesy, friendliness and general behaviour of staff. Complaints in this domain related to the dismissive behaviour of some staff, perceived lack of interest by staff and general issues about communication between students and staff of the institution. The substantive issues of the complaints in this category are echoed by survey respondents who said,

- The friendliness on the other end of the telephone when you are an external student! [is important] (Female; 26-33; No disability; Off-campus; Bachelor of Education)
- As an external student it is very difficult to achieve the level required when staff and lecturers do not return emails or telephone calls (Female; 41+; No disability; Off-campus; Bachelor of Health Management).
4. A fourth category of ‘Unfounded complaints’ has been included in this summary as an indicator that perceived service issues, not necessarily substantiated complaints may also be an example of lack of satisfaction on the part of student customers. In each of the unfounded complaints, students had perceived an issue existed and they were so dissatisfied with the response of the institution they felt compelled to complain. These unfounded complaints can be attributed to an expectation gap between a student customer’s expectations not matched by the service experience. This is one area of service delivery which can be addressed by published service charters, clear service guidelines and accessibility of policies and procedures by students.

The results of the examination of the complaints received from students between 2006-2007 concur with the elements of service delivery required to create satisfaction as indicated by student feedback. Two separate methodologies report reliable levels of service, timeliness and courtesy are ‘must-have’ attributes of a quality service delivery model for students.

At the conceptualisation stage of this project, it was assumed the responses to the Course Experience Questionnaires for the University would deliver strong data about the elements of student support service delivery that influence students’ satisfaction with their overall university experience. For this reason, the aggregated data for UNE for the period 1999-2004 was interrogated.
UNE CEQ Aggregated data 1999-2004

The ‘comment’ classifications used for the CEQ data include only one section for ‘services’. This domain is used for comments which relate to IT and computer facilities, library resources and assistance, accommodation and other student support facilities. This list of ‘services’ is roughly comparable to the list of services canvassed in the research survey.

The optional Student Support Scale of the CEQ asks graduates to rate five very broad statements. These are:

1. I was able to access information technology resources when I needed them
2. Relevant learning resources were accessible when I needed them
3. Health, welfare and counselling services met my requirements
4. The library services were readily accessible
5. I was satisfied with the course and careers advice provided.

Negative comments are the responses by graduates to the question in the CEQ “what aspect(s) of your course are most in need of improvement”? Figure 24 below illustrates how the 8676 valid negative comments during the aggregated period were distributed between overall comments and those related to services. The negative comments for services primarily related to administration and library services. Virtually no comments are reported as relating to other types of support services. Conversely the valid positive comments received and indicated in Figure 25 also related to administration and library services.
The CEQ data is used nationally to determine and promote the extent to which students experience satisfaction with their educational experience. At a local level, from the limited number of comments overall and specifically, the limited number of comments about support services, it is difficult to determine how, if at all, the experience of support services influences overall attitudes of satisfaction. The data collected is not useful for support service improvement plans.
In the only comprehensive study of national responses in the CEQ, Scott (2006) contends ‘it is clear … ‘context counts’ and it is the total experience that shapes students’ judgments of quality, encourages engagement in productive learning and facilitates their retention’.

**Relationship between the research findings and the Kano Model**

The research findings indicate a strong link between the ‘one-dimensional’ requirements of the Kano Model and the service attributes identified by students as being important to their attitudes of satisfaction. Competitive customer orientated businesses identify and deliver against ‘must-be’, ‘one-dimensional’ and ‘delighter’ attributes. According to the Kano Model, the first priority is to identify and fulfil ‘must-be’ requirements. These are self-evident, not expressed and without them, the customer will not be interested in the product or service (Matzler et al. 1996 p18). For the purposes of this project, the ‘must-be’ requirements are determined to be the successful delivery of teaching. The second priority is to identify the ‘one-dimensional’ requirements as identified as being important to the student-customer. Steady and direct increases in customer satisfaction are achieved by responding to this voice and this project has focused on accessing the ‘voice of the customer’ to determine the ‘low hanging fruit’. That is, the most accessible basic attributes will result in satisfaction. The third priority provides the opportunity to create an exceptional experience. Surpassing the expectations of the customer can result in unexpected delight which significantly influences an attitude of satisfaction. Identifying ‘delighter’ requirements and strategically delivering a small number of ‘delighters’ within the lifecycle of the student-customer can result in competitive advantage. This research has provided an opportunity for listening and activating the voice of the customer by concentrating on the one-dimensional and delimiter attributes of service delivery in higher education.
One-dimensional Attributes

Students have identified clearly that support services are important to their total university experience. These services are required in response to specific needs which may occur at any stage of the student lifecycle. Students have furthermore identified the way in which these services should be delivered. One-dimensional requirements of service delivery include:

- Reliability of service including the accuracy and consistency of information
- Timeliness of responses to requests for service
- Courtesy and generally good standards of behaviour of providers of services
- Ease with which services can be located and accessed.

Universities have the capacity to set service targets and strive to achieve these expectations and it is logical to address these attributes before focusing on attractive attributes or ‘delighters’ which have been described as ‘going the extra mile’. If the institution delivers consistently high levels of service and becomes engaged with the student population, it becomes simpler to identify small and unexpected ways of ‘delighting’ the student customer.

Respondents to the survey identified specific instances where they were ‘delighted’. As defined in Chapter 1, ‘delighters’ are the instances of ‘going the extra mile’ and delivering a specific, unexpected customer tailored response. In the instances below, the service provided was specific to the individual student’s needs and demonstrated a capacity by the institution to be flexible:

- Understanding that a distance education student will have unique circumstances and that the university has the flexibility to deal with those situations [is important to me]. UNE has been outstanding in this regard, particularly with respect to last minute changes to examination supervisors. UNE has always in my experience been willing to look outside the box to find solutions to the distance education student's problems, rather than simply
reading a narrow definition of the rules and regulations (Male; 34-40 years; Off-campus; Law)

- UNE generally *makes me feel part of the university, part of the family if you like and that's very important to me in terms of my study*. It is also a factor in my undertaking graduate studies in Law then returning to successfully complete a Masters Degree and now undertaking my Doctorate at UNE. Academic support (from supervisors for Honours, Masters and now PhD) is outstanding (Male; 41+; Off-campus; PhD - Law and Social Science)

- *Have had wonderful assistance from student services… I was about to resign from my arts degree. Her [Name of staff member] encouragement during a sad time in my life made me reconsider resigning from my degree. I have re established myself and feel I am back on track.* (Female; 41+; Off-campus; Arts).

Opportunities for delighting the customer can emerge when service providers treat the customer as a valued individual. In a bureaucratised large organisation, such as a tertiary institution, creating a delightful experience may be as simple as adopting personalised approaches to service delivery.

**Summary of Part B Findings**

The survey findings in Part B reported both quantitative and qualitative data related to the specific elements of service delivery that inform students’ attitudes of satisfaction. The Kano Model of Customer Satisfaction identified dissatisfaction which results in complaints is a direct result of failing to deliver ‘must-have’ and ‘one-dimensional’ service attributes. In an effort to determine if the lack of ‘one-dimensional’ attributes, as defined by the student customer, does in fact result in complaints, an examination of complaint types and the results of post-transactional feedback were compared to the earlier findings. An examination of Service Quality complaints indicated the attributes identified by student complainants include:

- Reliability of service including the accuracy and consistency of information
- Timeliness of responses to requests for service
- Courtesy and generally good standards of behaviour of providers of services
- Ease with which services can be located and accessed.

These attributes are consistent with the survey findings and suggest a strong, steady and direct increase in customer satisfaction can be achieved by responding to the ‘voice of the customer’. Respondents to the survey identified specific instances where they were delighted. As defined in Chapter 1, ‘delighters’ are the instances of ‘going the extra mile’ and delivering a specific, unexpected customer tailored response. As reported by students, this may be as simple as adopting a personalised approach to service delivery. Support services, as indicated by the feedback from students to the administered survey and as reflected in the literature related to other research projects, are significant in the determination of satisfaction. For this reason, it would seem appropriate that institutions find ways to more effectively measure student satisfaction with support services and to respond to the voice of the customer.

Recommendations flowing from the findings are offered as options for increasing student satisfaction with support services in the tertiary sector. As represented by Diagram 3 below, these recommendations are based on the following: the consumption cycle (presented in Chapter 2) which suggests the timing of opportunities to create satisfaction; Kano’s recommendations to meet the ‘must-have’ requirements first and then identify and deliver strategically managed ‘delighters’; the feedback from ‘the voice of the customer’ about the factors which result in satisfaction; and the benefit of the insights gained from the relevant literature. The recommendations apply to pre-consumption or the stage at which service expectations are formed, during the consumption transaction where the service deliverables are exposed and at post-consumption where the service
expectations are confirmed or disconfirmed and where attitudes of (dis)satisfaction are established.

Diagram 5
Amended Consumption cycle

Confirmation/disconfirmation
Seek regular feedback on service to ensure expectations are met

Satisfaction/dissatisfaction
Publicise satisfaction. Remediate dissatisfaction

Service expectation
Develop and publish clear standards for service

Consumption

The recommendations which will be discussed in detail in the next and final chapter (Recommendations and Conclusion) fall into five broad categories. These are:

R.1 Increase levels of service recognition by all students;
R.2 Develop the organisational socialisation of students;
R.3 Establish and monitor service standards;
R.4 Create opportunities for ‘delight’;
R.5 Create positive perceptions of quality service delivery.
Chapter 6
Conclusion and Recommendations

Introduction

This Chapter revisits the research questions which guided the study and draws the threads of the research together. It also offers recommendations for enhancing the student experience of service delivery, reflects on the value of the Kano theory as an analytical framework, and suggests some possible areas for future research.

The research project aimed to investigate the extent to which student attitudes of satisfaction are influenced by the total university experience and whether support or ‘enabling’ services contribute significantly to the determination of satisfaction. The survey method adopted for this project provided data which delivered the broadest ‘voice of the customer’. The objectives were to understand the perceptions of the student about the provision of non academic services and to make recommendations about how services can be delivered to students with a higher quality of customer service focus.

The survey technique sought responses to items stemming from the five primary research questions; through a review of service quality complaints by students; and by examining student feedback via the national Course Experience Questionnaires. The findings from the research were linked with the relevant literature in order to see what common themes emerged.

The five research questions which guided the project were:

1. To what extent are students aware of the range of support services available at the University?
2. To what degree do perceptions of service quality inform student attitudes of (dis)satisfaction?
3. To what degree does “lived experience” of services provided during their candidature inform student attitudes of satisfaction?

4. What factors influence satisfaction with support services?

5. How might the university assure and sustain high levels of student satisfaction?

The validity of three underlying assumptions was also examined. These were:

a) There is a general assumption within university communities that students are aware of the range of available support services and programs;

b) Student attitudes of satisfaction are influenced by the experiences of others. That is, the observed treatment of peers and the word of mouth experiences of others influence the way in which individual attitudes of satisfaction are determined; and

c) Satisfaction is a direct result of a lived experience. A student will form their attitude of satisfaction or dissatisfaction based solely on their own experience of service.

**Key Conclusions**

The findings indicate clearly that support services contribute to the determination of satisfaction with the university experience. This finding is supported by the literature pertaining to consumer satisfaction and service quality which indicates that it is the overall encounter with the service provider that is influential in developing an attitude of satisfaction. Specifically, students have an expectation that the University will provide a range of services which support their learning. Furthermore, they desire such services will be timely and responsive to their needs, reliable and delivered in a friendly manner.

The literature suggests ‘there is limited empirical research into student perceptions of quality (Hill et al. 2003 p15; Gabbott et al. 2002 p171) but it seems it is the quality of
personal interactions that ‘leads to the quality of the learning experience’ and while ‘this may be difficult to quantify…it is immediately recognised by students who experience it’ (Hill et al. 2003 p19). The findings from the research clearly supports this.

This suggests universities should seriously canvas student expectations and build quality support services that respond to these expectations (Yeo 2008). Student retention is one indicator of customer satisfaction (DeShields et al. 2005 p132) and in a competitive higher education sector, the need to manage student relationships from the point of initial student contact right through to the point of graduation has become increasingly important (Hill 1995; DeShields 2005 citing Seymour 1993 p130). This approach considers the full customer life cycle and implicates universities in adopting an approach of continuous quality improvement.

Internationally, the higher education sector has moved into a more competitive environment than ever before and the way in which institutions respond to students and prospective students will have a definite impact on the sustainability of individual institutions. A growing body of research suggests the social adjustment of students may be an important factor in predicting retention and academic performance may only contribute to 50% of student attrition (DeShields et al. 2005 p131). The quality of support service delivery therefore impacts significantly on the student experience. Good quality support services and programs, delivered from a customer-centric position influence the way in which the student customer assesses their total university experience. Ham and Hayduk (2003) encapsulate this when they say, ‘in a competitive market…satisfaction may influence a student’s desire to attend or defect various higher educational institutions’ (p223).
**Student awareness of the range of support services available at the University**

Findings indicate students generally are poorly informed about the suite of support services available at their university. This was established by the high level of 'neutral' responses to service recognition questions and supported by the qualitative responses to free text options. Services such as Library, IT and Administration had higher levels of service recognition compared to personal services. These services could be classified as core or essential to the students’ educational experience. The significance of IT and informational services will continue to increase as flexible delivery and e-learning options increase. The consequence is communication lines will need to be better developed to meet the academic, administrative and personal needs of students.

**How perceptions of service quality inform student attitudes of (dis)satisfaction**

Findings also indicate perceptions significantly influence student attitudes of (dis)satisfaction. Perceptions about how peers have experienced service can either positively or negatively influence perceptions of service quality and attitudes of satisfaction. Approximately one third of students responded their perception of how others are treated influences their own attitudes and expectations of service. Managing perceptions of service delivery and service quality is therefore significant in creating a positive environment which contributes to student attitudes of satisfaction.

**To what degree does “lived experience” of services provided during their candidature inform student attitudes of satisfaction?**

‘Lived experience’ of service encounters significantly informs expectations of future service experiences according to the findings of this study. The majority of students (88%) formed an opinion about the standards of service delivery based on their own experiences. The ‘lived experience’ of service can affect attitudes of satisfaction either
positively or negatively and this informs expectations of future service delivery. Thus, there is a clear need for establishing and delivering minimum standards of service for each encounter and addressing negative service experiences promptly. Such actions can positively support the service experiences of students.

**Factors that influence satisfaction with support services**

Factors of service delivery which positively influence attitudes of satisfaction were identified as: reliability and accuracy of service; friendliness and general courtesy of staff; timeliness of responses; ease with which services can be accessed (especially, on-line and telephone); and convenient operating hours. These factors, which need to be reinforced and sustained, were identified from responses to the survey questions, free text comments from students and a review of the domains of services which resulted in complaints. Significantly, respondents identified a need for their individual needs and circumstances to be considered in service transactions. This was strongly represented through the free text comments of students (voice of the customer).

The findings of the research (dis)confirmed the researcher’s initial assumptions in the following ways:

**Awareness of the range of available support services and programs**

The assumption that students are aware of the range of available support services was disconfirmed. The research indicated a low level of service recognition which suggests service personnel should not take for granted that students are aware of the total suite of offerings available to the university community.

**Student attitudes of satisfaction are influenced by the experiences of others.**

The assumption that the observed treatment of peers and the word-of-mouth experiences of others influence the way in which individual attitudes of satisfaction are determined
was strongly confirmed and provides an indicator for future actions. Observed negative service experiences and negative feedback from peers was identified as being significantly influential in forming attitudes of satisfaction and setting low expectations for future service encounters.

**Satisfaction is a direct result of a lived experience.**

The assumption that a student will form their attitude of satisfaction or dissatisfaction based on their own experience of service was confirmed. Students primarily base their expectations and attitudes of satisfaction on lived experience but (as identified above) the experience of their peers is also influential in informing attitudes of satisfaction.

The data collected strongly suggest student satisfaction in higher education is worthy of serious attention. The scholarly literature points to this need and identifies a number of relevant domains. These include: the relevance of quality management in higher education; the role of the student as a customer; the determinants of service quality; the theories of Herzberg and Kano; and the concepts of customer satisfaction and perceptions of quality. Kano’s Theory of Attractive Quality suggests ways to address both positive and negative service elements and strongly suggests the basic elements of service (‘must have’ attributes) as well as those elements that create ‘delight’ should be addressed.

The work of Rowley (2000) identified the loyalty antecedents which can provide a good framework on which to base customer satisfaction strategies in higher education service delivery. The loyalty antecedents are defined as cognitive, affective or conative and Rowley (2000) suggests these elements should be considered when developing strategies to increase student satisfaction.

Specifically,
- **Cognitive antecedents**- rational decision making based on information.
Promotional materials which establish strong brand images and expectations can encourage customers to value and to develop positive attitudes towards services for students. It is essential the strong brand images represent the full student demographic- thereby acknowledging their stake in the educational partnership.

Student feedback, gathered through the survey instrument, supports this approach. A mature-aged, female, off campus student responded:

*As a general comment, I am continually bemused that the image which UNE consistently presents of its student body is bright young people studying internally on the leafy campus - look at any of the glossy pictures on the study guides and other material. However, according to UNE’s own stats on its website, I am a much more typical student - external, female and middle-aged. I do my uni work on trains, at kid’s soccer matches or during my son’s training at the local velodrome...In my opinion, unless UNE stops treating externals as invisible it will inevitably lose students to other institutions.*

- **Affective** antecedents- those concerned with feelings about the product or services. Institutions which have large cohorts of students studying part-time or at a distance can develop strategies which demonstrate the institution is aware of meeting the emotional needs of students. This can be reinforced by highlighting non-standard business hours (during intensive on-campus schools for example), 24/7 access to information and services and efficiencies such as quick turn around times for requests for information or services as meeting the emotional needs of students. Additionally, monitoring and responding to the emotional needs of students can create affective antecedents of loyalty.

- **Conative** antecedents- those concerned with behavioural disposition. As described by Rowley (2000) ‘most people are creatures of habit and only change their behaviour or switch to another service outlet, if some environmental factor provokes the change: inertia is significant’. This suggests universities should keep inertia at bay by the
delivery of ‘delighters’ which continue to raise the bar of student expectations about services. Identifying generic factors of service delivery which acknowledge the customer loyalty antecedents and therefore positively impact on the service experience is one way to work towards customer satisfaction.

Recommendations

The insights gained during the research have guided the following recommendations.

R.1 Increase the levels of service recognition by students.

R.1.1 Support services that contribute to student academic success should be appropriately maintained and promoted within universities as a matter of priority and their fitness for purpose reviewed from time to time. As suggested by Dhillon et al. (2008 p284), universities ‘need to champion the importance of such services in enhancing the experience of being at university’, and they ‘need to develop support that promotes the intellectual, personal and academic development and achievement of students from diverse backgrounds’. Students have identified that they value and expect ancillary services which support their educational experience and institutions should therefore acknowledge this expectation as part of the ‘must-have’ attributes of their service offering and resource services accordingly. The generally poor level of recognition of support services by students contributes to a belief that such services are not available.

R.1.2 Institutions should develop and implement a promotional strategy for support services. Student expectations of support services can be positively formed by appropriate promotional activities. As discussed by Hill (1995 p12), ‘it is generally agreed most consumers enter a service encounter with some form of expectations, ranging from the ill-defined in unfamiliar situations to the well-defined in familiar ones and expectations can be positively influenced by ‘external communications from the service provider (for example, printed advertisements, TV commercials, brochures, and oral promises from
service provider employees’ (Hill 1995 pp12-13). As identified in the literature about loyalty antecedents, promotional materials should be used to establish strong brand images which encourage student customers to value available services.

As suggested by the ‘Voice of the Customer’,

- [The university needs more] publicity - knowing they [services] exist contributes [contributes to attitudes of satisfaction] (Male; 41+; No disability; Off-campus; Master of Laws).
- I think more advertising would help the wider student community, to hear about the services provided (Female; 18-25; No disability; On-campus; Bachelor of Languages).

R.1.3 Develop a strategy for off campus students which specifically addresses the challenges of delivering support services from a distance and recognises the diverse needs of this cohort. Students who study at a distance are less well informed than those students who have physical access to the campus. Promotional activities should explicitly state the relevance and availability of services for the off-campus segment to address the perceived disparity of service delivery between on- and off-campus students. This is essential for those institutions that define themselves as providers of quality distance education. Service providers should adopt a ‘universal delivery’ model whereby all services are accessible in multiple forms by all students.

Voice of the Customer

- [Promote] availability [of services] to external students. Good information [is needed] about what is available and how to get access to it (Female; 34-40; No disability; Off-campus; Honours in Philosophy);
- When attending residential schools it would be good to have details or a web link to what areas/services will be open so that appointments could be made (Female; 41+; No disability; Off-campus; Bachelor of Education).
R.2  **Develop an organisational socialisation strategy for students.**

Organisational socialisation has been defined as the ‘processes by which individuals acquire skills, knowledge and attitudes relevant to their functioning as consumers in the marketplace’ (Hill 1995 p15). Increased levels of organisational socialisation result in more accurate expectations of service deliverables. An organisational socialisation strategy which makes students partners in the service delivery can be developed by regularly seeking feedback; registering and responding to complaints; and by promoting business improvement strategies that emerge as a result of student complaints. Organisational socialisation contributes to the self-management skills of students in a changing learning environment by informed and strategically delivered information dissemination.

R.2.1  **Invest in the Informational Capital of the Student Population.** Informational capital contributes to student success by equipping the student with ‘instrumental’ information, such as information on coursework, careers, and services as well as information on administrative requirements and the behavioural expectations of the institution. As suggested by Bitner et al. (1997), the participative role of the student customer needs to be supported through ‘customer education, effective and realistic expectation setting, and other efforts by providers to facilitate customers in their roles’ (p203).

Universities could adopt a coordinated approach to communicating with students about service related matters. This may be established by creating a communication regime which includes communicating more effectively with the student population, especially during periods of change. Students clearly indicated they respond well to:

- **Feedback and frequent updates** (Male; 41+; No disability; Off-campus; Research Masters of Science)
- **Timely communication of administrative issues or delays** (Male; 34-40; No disability; Off-campus; Bachelor of Urban and Regional Planning).

In practice, this has been observed as a positive strategy through complaints to the Service Quality Unit. Complaints clearly decrease when the University communicates about problems as they occur. At UNE, 2007-2008 for example was a significant period of change in information technology services, with the university moving more towards an on-line delivery model. A measurable decrease in complaints (approximately 20%) about lack of IT access, constraints around on-line learning and technical problems decreased as a result of formal communication from the institution about the IT issues as they occurred.

R.2.3 **Close the expectation gap through a published Student Charter of Rights and Responsibilities.** Consumer sovereignty, an element of the ‘for profit’ sector is encroaching into the changing higher education sector. The corollary of consumer sovereignty is consumer responsibility and one way of consolidating the participative nature of the student customers’ relationship with higher education providers is through the development of a service charter. Service charters which include rights, responsibilities and mutual obligations within an overall strategy to build ‘informational capital’ may contribute to perceived service quality. If, as suggested through the literature (Hill 1995) dissatisfaction is a mismatch between expectation and experience, then universities can to some degree manage this equation by contributing to the development of achievable expectations. The development and publishing of a Student Charter of Rights and Responsibilities could positively contribute to this management strategy. This form of service contract ensures that student expectations of services are realistic and it establishes achievable service standards against which to evaluate service quality (confirmation of expectations).
R.2.4 **Deliver clear communication about service offerings during Orientation and the initial transition period for new students is another way in which real expectations can be established at the beginning of the student lifecycle.** Ham and Hayduk (2003 p239) suggest ‘students can have their perceptions altered through freshman orientation sessions or a discussion of expectations at the first class of each course in which the student enrolls’. This works to close the gap between expectation and perceived service quality. Contextualising the orientation messages into course and unit introductions, into on-line unit support information and through student-staff interactions establishes non-divisional and consistent messages about what support is available to students. It is recommended ‘induction and information about student support services should be much more of a process than an ‘event’ which happens in the first few days of their contact with the university’ (Dhillon et al. 2008 p291).

**R.3 Establish and monitor service standards**

R.3.1 *Establish a service guarantee for students.* The items of the Service Guarantee should be included in the Student Charter as the institution’s commitment to quality service provision. Reliability of service, for example, was rated very highly by students as a contributor to satisfaction. Service standards which result in a consistent level of service delivery for telephone services, responses to email or web communications, accessibility times and channels and advertised availability of services are simple strategies which could be easily adopted and which have been identified as significant determinants of service satisfaction.

R.3.2 *Service personnel should be trained and supported to develop appropriate customer service skills.* The literature has identified satisfaction and perceptions of quality service are developed through a comparison of the service expectations with the service transaction and the impressions of the ‘service-scape’ (Johns 1999 p967) are influential in creating attitudes of satisfaction and perceptions of quality. The service-
scape includes the way in which service personnel interact with customer. In an environment where the adherence to service standards is in its infancy, the scripting and ritualizing of transactions (Johns 1999 p964) may be an appropriate way to introduce minimum level of service. Commitment to the modelling of organisational values, by service personnel; explicit dissemination of service offerings (what we do, what we don’t do); agreed service standards such as response times, quality of outbound communications (in all mediums); and agreed rituals surrounding service delivery (such as value adding: 'Is there anything else I can help you with today?'), can contribute to perceptions of quality. These techniques have the added advantage of allowing the customer to form realistic expectations of the service encounter, thereby minimizing the expectation gap.

R.3.3 Evaluate service quality through a variety of customer satisfaction instruments. Measurement of service quality should be ongoing and should contribute to a culture of continuous business improvement. The measurement of student satisfaction and perceived service quality in higher education is currently considered as ad hoc. Harvey (2003 p6) identifies satisfaction surveys in higher education generally relate to institution-level; faculty-level; program-level, module-level and teacher appraisal by students. He suggests, however, that institution-wide feedback about the quality of the students’ total experience is of increasing interest (p7). It may be an overall assessment of attitudes of satisfaction, as currently performed in Australia through the Course Experience Questionnaire (post graduation) is less specific than measured satisfaction during the service transaction (i.e. the lifecycle of the student) and more research needs to be undertaken in this area.

At the institutional level, the Service Charter can form the basis of service quality reviews (Aldridge and Rowley 1998), allowing the organisation to measure how well it is achieving its own stated targets for service delivery. The results of these evaluations should be
published and referred upwards within the organisation. Recommendations for remedial action should be acknowledged and acted upon and similarly, published so the student customer is confident their feedback is valued and the ‘voice of the customer’ is being listened to. As recommended by Parasuraman (2004 p51) to excel in service delivery, providers must understand the users’ expectations and how well these are being met; use multiple methods to hear the voice of the customer; and remove organisational barriers that lead to poor service.

R4 Create opportunities for ‘delight’

R.4.1 Establish a ‘sense and respond’ culture of complaint. Kano’s theory suggests organisations should get the ‘must have’ requirements right as the first step in creating episodes of delight. Basic needs are identified by issues of dissatisfaction that result in complaints. If complaints do occur, providers should be fastidious in responding to them. Appropriate complaints resolution can contribute to an attitude of satisfaction and perceived quality (Fundin and Bergman 2003; Johnston 1995; Walker 1995). The resolution of student complaints should be used to improve services and this type of quality assurance mechanism should be anchored to a business improvement framework which specifies quality targets. It has been suggested a ‘sense and respond’ approach to quality ensures organisations who are able to identify ‘what is working and what is not…can leverage successful efforts and use failures as learning opportunities’ (Okes 2006 p40). Kano identified performance or one-dimensional needs as emerging from two possible sources: basic needs which have previously been left unsatisfied; or expectations that have been set by external communications. These needs are identified through the ‘voice of the customer’. Kano’s third quality attribute is attractive quality or ‘delighters’ and these are the episodes of ‘going the extra mile’ to create unexpected but highly satisfying experiences for customers.
R.4.2  Create a service culture that ‘goes the extra mile’. The simplistic definition of \( \text{delight} = \text{expectation} + 1 \) (ChangingMinds) suggests engaging with and understanding customer expectations (and then finding unexpected opportunities to surpass these) is the critical first step in creating opportunities for delight. Effective student support services, which are responsive to the needs of the student population, should contribute to greater student customer satisfaction. Innovative student-centric programs and personnel who are prepared to ‘go the extra mile’ will create episodes of delight for students. The creation of episodes of ‘delight’ has the dual opportunity of satisfying individual students and creating a positive flow on effect for others. Rowley (1997 p10) suggests that,

\[
\text{service suppliers need to appreciate what strategies can be adopted to manage, or to influence positively, the way in which students affect one another’s experience of higher education.}
\]

R.5  Create positive perceptions of quality service

R.5.1  More effort should be allocated to creating positive perceptions of service quality. As indicated through the research, attitudes of satisfaction are significantly influenced by the perceptions of peers. To this end, the institution should promote good news stories about customer experiences, especially the experiences of ‘delight’ and remediate negative perceptions through appropriate communication with the wider university community. This can be achieved through peer to peer testimonials which promote the positive real experiences of students, thereby reinforcing the perception of quality service delivery.

The recommendations above are all predicated on the assumptions institutions have a desire to increase student satisfaction and retention; appropriate resources will be allocated to re-engineer the way in which existing services are delivered; and the will of staff to commit to a culture of continuous improvement is strong.
Value of the Kano Theory as an analytical framework

The Kano Customer Satisfaction Model (1984) provides a useful basis for identifying the different attributes which contribute to an exceptional customer experience. The model recognises that the customer experience is dynamic with customer expectations of service attributes changing over time. This element of Kano’s work requires a genuine commitment to continuous improvement and has particular relevance to the changing higher education sector. This project adopted the customer centric approach of the Kano model and focused on listening to the voice of the customer to identify, categorise and understand the service attributes of student support services. It did not apply the Kano questionnaire to measure effectiveness of service attributes however this would be a logical next step for future action.

It is simplistic to suggest the Kano model offers the answer to the very complex questions of customer satisfaction in higher education. Rather, it illustrates the relationship between customer satisfaction and the performance of a product or service. This relationship differs from attractive to one-dimensional and to must-be attributes. Kano’s model provides an effective approach to categorizing customer attributes into different types. A competitive strategy for developing products and services should take into account these three categories (Shen and Tan 2000 pp1143-1144).

While service providers would ideally like to be offering ‘attractive quality’ attributes because they contribute disproportionately to customer feelings of satisfaction (Lilja and Wiklund 2007 p668), it is equally important to also address the ‘must-be’ and ‘one-dimensional’ attributes identified by Kano to minimise opportunities for customer dissatisfaction. To achieve this balance, higher education providers need to understand the expectations and needs of their student base. It is not enough to simply offer a range of support services and presume they are effective in contributing to a positive student experience. Institutions cannot ‘rest on their laurels’ and assume the services they have in place or the way in which services are delivered will remain static. Yeo (2008 p276)
has warned service quality in higher education ‘should be evaluated continuously to avoid a situation of familiarity saturation where continuous improvement may be hampered’.

The key value of the Kano Model is the suggestion that the voice of the customer is critical to the success of a product or service. This has the potential for the higher education sector to adopt a framework for student-centric service interactions and is critical to the success of quality efforts. Quality services which deliver customer satisfaction should:

- Deliver all ‘must-be’ attributes;
- Maximise the one-dimensional or performance attributes; and
- Deliver as many instances of delight as practicable within the customer lifecycle.

**Suggested future studies**

As already indicated, survey method was used to collect both qualitative and quantitative data from students. A more comprehensive in-depth qualitative approach which explores the individual experiences of students should provide a greater depth of descriptive data about what influences attitudes of satisfaction and why. Specifically, issues around the role perception plays in forming positive attitudes and expectations may be more thoroughly dealt with through focus groups or a grounded theory approach.

More research is needed into the way students form expectations of their university experience and the motivators that encourage them to engage with and continue in higher education. As the delivery of education is influenced more by technological opportunities, research into the support needs of students within an e-university environment will be important. This information would more accurately inform strategies to effectively engage with potential students at the pre-consumption stage of the student life cycle.
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Appendices

Appendix 1 Approvals

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

MEMORANDUM TO:  Dr D Riley/Professor K Harman/Ms R Leece
                   School of Professional Development and Leadership

This is to advise you that the Human Research Ethics Committee has approved the following:

PROJECT TITLE:  What factors contribute to student attitudes of satisfaction with support services in the higher education sector? A case study at the University of New England.

COMMENCEMENT DATE:  22/12/06
COMMITTEE APPROVAL No.:  HE06/188
APPROVAL VALID TO:  22/12/07
COMMENTS:  Nil. Conditions met in full.

The Human Research Ethics Committee may grant approval for up to a maximum of three years. For approval periods greater than 12 months, researchers are required to submit an application for renewal at each twelve-month period. All researchers are required to submit a Final Report at the completion of their project. The Progress/Final Report Form is available at the following web address: http://www.une.edu.au/research-services/ethics/hrec_pages/final_report.doc

The NHMRC National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans requires that researchers must report immediately to the Human Research Ethics Committee anything that might affect ethical acceptance of the protocol. This includes adverse reactions of participants, proposed changes in the protocol, and any other unforeseen events that might affect the continued ethical acceptability of the project.

In issuing this approval number, it is required that all data and consent forms are stored in a secure location for a minimum period of five years. These documents may be required for compliance audit processes during that time. If the location at which data and documentation are retained is changed within that five year period, the Research Ethics Officer should be advised of the new location.

From: Pearson
Secretary

22/12/06
Appendix 2 Informational Letter

School of Professional Development & Leadership

Armidale NSW 2351 Australia

Telephone (02) 6773 2043  Facsimile (02) 6773 3363

Dear Student

I am a Masters in Administrative Leadership (Honours) student at the University of New England and I am currently undertaking a research project about student satisfaction with support services delivered through UNE. I am also an employee of the University.

The purpose of this project is to investigate which factors contribute to the collective student perspective on the quality of student service delivery at a regional university. Specifically, I hope to achieve a clear understanding of what factors shape satisfaction; what influences satisfaction; and what factors affect student perceptions of satisfaction with student service provision. I hope that my findings will help to understand better the factors that will assist services at UNE to more effectively meet the needs of students.

You have no obligation to be involved in this research and this email simply serves as an invitation to participate. The UNE Student Centre has supplied email contact details on a confidential basis and this information may not be forwarded on or sold or otherwise disclosed or used for any purpose other than to contact participants for this research study. Completion of this on-line survey should take you about 15 minutes.

Please note that your participation is entirely voluntary and that you can withdraw from the survey at any time.

I will, of course, be very grateful if you choose to take part.

Rhonda Leece

Researcher
Appendix 3 Survey Instrument

About you:
Gender:
☐ Male
☐ Female
Age:
☐ 18 – 25
☐ 26- 33
☐ 33 – 40
☐ 40 +
Do you have a disability?
☐ Yes
☐ No
I am studying:
☐ On- campus
☐ Off- Campus
I live:
☐ On- campus
☐ Off- Campus in Armidale
☐ Elsewhere
☐ Please state your course of study: ____________________________________________________________
1. To what extent are students aware of the range of support services available at UNE?

Please indicate (☑️) how well you agree with the following statement for each of the services listed.

The university provides appropriate support with:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accommodation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Administrative services</td>
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<td>Career service</td>
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<td>Complaints handling</td>
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<td>Library services</td>
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<td>Self-development</td>
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<td>Social life</td>
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<td>Sporting facilities</td>
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<td>Student involvement in the life of the university</td>
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<td>Work experience</td>
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</table>

2. What perceptions and experience inform student attitudes of satisfaction with support services?

Please indicate (☑️) if you agree with the following statements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall I am satisfied with the level of student support service delivery at UNE</td>
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<tr>
<td>My satisfaction/ dissatisfaction (delete which ever is not applicable) with student support services is based on personal experience.</td>
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<tr>
<td>My satisfaction/ dissatisfaction (delete which ever is not applicable) with student support services is based on the experiences of my student peers.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other students have experienced poorer customer service that I have.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I have experienced poorer levels of customer services than other</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Overall I am dissatisfied with the level of student support service delivery at UNE.

3. **What personal experience do students have of support services?**

Please indicate (✓) the services you have used and then rate how satisfied you were with the experience.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>✓</th>
<th>Very Satisfied</th>
<th>Satisfied</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Not Satisfied</th>
<th>Dissatisfied</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accommodation</td>
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<td>Administrative services</td>
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<td>Career service</td>
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<td>Library services</td>
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<td>Personal/professional development</td>
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<td>Social life</td>
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<td>Sporting facilities</td>
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<td>Work experience</td>
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</table>

4. **What factors influence satisfaction with support services?**

How important are the following factors in influencing your attitude of satisfaction with student support services:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>✓</th>
<th>Very important</th>
<th>Important</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Not very important</th>
<th>Not at all important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Provider courtesy</td>
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<td>Timely response from provider</td>
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<td>Easy to locate relevant assistance</td>
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<td>Convenient operating hours</td>
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<td>Service reliability (accuracy of information)</td>
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<td>Easy access to service online/telephone</td>
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<td>Easy access to service in person</td>
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</table>
5. **What other factors influence your level of satisfaction with support services?**

6. **Add any other comments you would like to make about student services at UNE?**

Thank you for your assistance with this questionnaire.