

Australasian Survey of Student Engagement Institution Report









Overview

This 2008 AUSSE Institution Report provides information for stimulating evidence-based conversations about students' engagement in university education. We present the AUSSE Institution Report in a ring binder because it brings together a range of different materials on student engagement. We hope that this collection grows as your conversations about engagement take shape. The AUSSE is conducted by, for and with participating institutions. The intention is to provide institutions with new and significant perspectives for quality management and enhancement.

Report sections

Introduction Overview

Report sections

AUSSE 2008 institutions

Acknowledgments

AUSSE team and resources

Background Introduction

Key AUSSE benefits Overview of the AUSSE

Student Engagement Questionnaire (SEQ)

Overview of the SSES

Staff Student Engagement Questionnaire (SSEQ)

The research and enhancement cycle

A valid and efficient sample

Reports Respondent characteristics

Response categories

Item statistics Scale statistics Subgroup statistics

Enhancement Establishing student expectations

Engaging students in the AUSSE

Developing institution-wide approaches to student engagement

Enhancing interactions between students and staff Broadening staff involvement in student learning Benchmarking for continuous improvement

Monitoring quality data over time Learning about student engagement

Attachments ACER overview

AUSSE 2008 brochure

Student Engagement Questionnaire (SEQ) Staff Student Engagement Questionnaire (SSEQ)

AUSSE 2008 institutions

In total, 29 higher education institutions participated in the 2008 AUSSE. This includes 23 from Australia and six from New Zealand – four more than in 2007. In addition, ten institutions participated in the Staff Survey of Student Engagement (SSES). These institutions are shown with '(SSES)' in the following table.

Australian institutions

Australian Catholic University

Central Queensland University (SSES)

Charles Sturt University

Deakin University

Flinders University

Griffith University

La Trobe University (SSES)

Macquarie University (SSES)

Murdoch University

Queensland University of Technology (SSES)

Southern Cross University (SSES)

Swinburne University of Technology

University of Canberra

University of New England (SSES)

University of Newcastle (SSES)

University of Queensland

University of South Australia (SSES)

University of Southern Queensland

University of Tasmania

University of Technology Sydney

University of Western Australia (SSES)

University of Wollongong

Victoria University

New Zealand institutions

Massey University
UNITEC New Zealand
University of Auckland
University of Canterbury
University of Waikato
Victoria University of Wellington (SSES)

Review of this list indicates that it covers the range of each country's universities. This is important, as it facilitates the production of meaningful benchmarks and provides a solid foundation for cross-institutional conversations.

Acknowledgements

A very warm thanks is offered to students and staff who responded to the 2008 AUSSE and SSES. Student participation is critical for student engagement.

Engagement depends on institutions putting in place the conditions that facilitate people's involvement in education. A warm thanks to those institutions that took part in the 2008 AUSSE.

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) team at Indiana University in the USA have played a highly supportive and significant role in the AUSSE. Particular thanks to Associate Professor Alexander McCormick, Professor George Kuh, Dr Robert Gonyea, Mr Todd Chamberlain, Dr Tom Nelson Laird and Dr Jillian Kinzie. In addition to their more general guidance, items in questions 2 to 11 and 14 to 16 in the Student Engagement Questionnaire have been used with permission from The College Student Report, National Survey of Student Engagement, Copyright 2001–07 The Trustees of Indiana University. Also, items in the Staff Student Engagement Questionnaire have been used with permission from the Faculty Survey of Student Engagement, Center for Postsecondary Research, Copyright 2001-08 The Trustees of Indiana University.

The AUSSE is overseen by an Advisory Group, and special thanks is offered to: Professor Tom Angelo (LaTrobe University), Professor Sam Ball (Technical Adviser), Dr Marcia Devlin (Deakin University), Professor Martin Hayden (Southern Cross University), Professor Kerri-Lee Krause (Griffith University), Dr Stephen Marshall (Victoria University of Wellington) and Professor Geoff Scott (University of Western Sydney).

AUSSE team and resources

A team of research and support staff manage the AUSSE at ACER. The team brings together individuals with considerable expertise in the design and management of large-scale surveys.

Dr Hamish Coates is the AUSSE Project Director. The 2008 AUSSE team included Mr Stefan Nesteroff, Mr David Rainsford, Mr Ling Tan, Mr Rob Jinks, Mr Jim Carrigan, Ms Wendy McGregor, Mr Craig Grose and Ms Ali Radloff.

This AUSSE Institution Report forms part of a suite of AUSSE resources. Other key resources include the Australasian Student Engagement Report, AUSSE Research Briefings, the AUSSE Administration Manual, data files, AUSSE Enhancement Guides and workshops and meetings.

For further information about the AUSSE, please contact:

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A vital new perspective

Introduction

'Student engagement', defined as students' involvement with activities and conditions likely to generate high-quality learning, is increasingly understood to be important for higher education quality.

The concept provides a practical lens for assessing and responding to the significant dynamics, constraints and opportunities facing higher education institutions. It provides key insights into what students are actually doing, a structure for framing conversations about quality, and a stimulus for guiding new thinking about best practice.

Although central to many aspects of education, information on student engagement has not been readily available to Australasian higher education institutions. Existing collections tend to focus on satisfaction with provision and the broader aspects of the student experience. The lack of information on student engagement has limited the potential to plan and improve key aspects of student learning and development.

Student engagement is an idea specifically focused on students in higher education and their interactions with their institution. The idea touches on aspects of teaching, the broader student experience, learners' lives beyond university, and institutional support. Students lie at the heart of conversations about student engagement; conversations that focus squarely on enhancing individual learning and development.

The concept of student engagement is based on the premise that learning is influenced by how an individual participates in educationally purposeful activities. While students are seen to be responsible for constructing their knowledge, learning is also seen to depend on institutions and staff generating conditions that stimulate and encourage involvement.

This perspective draws on decades of empirical research into higher education student learning and development. In addition to confirming the importance of ensuring appropriate academic challenge, this research has emphasised the importance of examining students' integration into institutional life and involvement in educationally relevant, 'beyond-class' experiences.

Measures of student engagement provide information about individuals' intrinsic involvement with their learning, and the extent to which they are making use of available educational opportunities. Such information also provides information on learning processes, is a reliable proxy for learning outcomes, and provides excellent diagnostic measures for learning enhancement activities.

Key AUSSE benefits

Several characteristics distinguish the AUSSE as a highly valuable quality enhancement activity in Australasian higher education.

Robust technical properties

- Psychometrically validated instruments
- Efficient and robust sampling strategy
- High-quality analysis and reporting practices

Significant new perspectives

- Evidence on student learning processes and institutional supports
- Proxy measures of key learning and development outcomes
- 'Learner-centred whole-of-institution' perspective
- Index of students' involvement in study

Quality-assured approach

- One of the world's most advanced institutional research activities
- Central management and collaboration with institutions
- Standardised survey support materials
- Quality-assured administration strategy

New opportunities

- Cross-institutional benchmarking
- Cross-national comparison
- Data on the support provided by institutions for student learning
- Information for attracting, engaging and retaining students

Australasian Survey of Student Engagement (AUSSE)

Overview of the AUSSE

The Australasian Survey of Student Engagement (AUSSE) provides data that Australian and New Zealand higher education institutions can use to attract, engage and retain students. The AUSSE reports on the time and effort students devote to educationally purposeful activities and on students' perceptions of the quality of other aspects of their university experience.

The AUSSE is a new quality enhancement activity managed for Australasian higher education institutions by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER). It builds on foundations laid by the North American National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). The AUSSE was conducted for the second time in 2008 with 29 higher education institutions in Australia and New Zealand. By providing information that is generalisable and sensitive to institutional diversity, and with multiple points of reference, the AUSSE plays an important role in helping institutions monitor and enhance the quality of education.

The AUSSE measures student engagement through administration of the Student Engagement Questionnaire (SEQ) to a representative sample of first- and later-year

students at each institution. With formative links to the NSSE which has been deployed at more than 1,300 universities and colleges across the United States and Canada, the AUSSE provides data that complement and extend current collections of data that focus on satisfaction with the quality of teaching and the learning environment. It thereby makes available to higher education institutions a new means for measuring and monitoring the effectiveness of learning and teaching.

The AUSSE was developed to bring together existing work in the field and to leverage benefits from a collaborative, multi-institutional approach. It is critical that surveys involve validated instruments and processes so that they provide the kind of high-quality data that can be used to improve practice. Information on validation of the SEQ is summarised below. It is also critical to have meaningful points of reference such as cross-institutional and cross-national benchmarks to get the most value from reports, along with well-tested strategies for interpreting results and improving practice.

The cross-national comparisons facilitated by the AUSSE are important. While higher education is an increasingly internationalised activity, data limitations have to date constrained comparative analyses. Specifically, very little student-level and process-or outcomes-focused data is available. Through its links with the NSSE, the AUSSE represents a trend towards developing more educationally nuanced cross-national collections and interpretations.

The AUSSE is conducted by, for and with participating Australasian institutions. The intention is to provide institutions with new and significant perspectives for managing and enhancing the quality of education. Each participating institution is given an AUSSE Institution Report of its own results. The Australasian Student Engagement Report (ASER) provides a broader cross-institutional and cross-national perspective of the results.

Student Engagement Questionnaire (SEQ)

The AUSSE survey instrument is called the Student Engagement Questionnaire (SEQ). The SEQ is based on the College Student Report, the instrument used with over 1,300 institutions in the NSSE in North America. Links between these two instruments provide a basis for international benchmarking.

The SEQ is designed for administration to undergraduate students in under 15 minutes online or in paper form. The same SEQ content is provided to all students. To manage and reduce levels of item-level non-response, sampled students were randomly distributed one of three different online versions, each containing different orderings of the items. All students who submit an online form are presented with an overview of student engagement and summary of key findings (see: http://www.acer.edu.au/ausse/findings.html).

The survey instrument contains items that tap a range of key educational phenomena. A selection of these items are grouped together to measure the six summary scales:

Academic Extent to which expectations and

Challenge assessments challenge students to learn

Active Students' efforts to actively construct their

Learning knowledge

Student and Level and nature of students' contact with

Staff Interactions teaching staff

Enriching Educational Participation in broadening educational

Experiences activities

Supportive Learning Feelings of legitimation within the

Environment university community

Work Integrated Integration of employment-focused work

Learning experiences into study

The SEQ also provides measurement of six outcome measures. The measure of average grade is captured through a single item on the SEQ. The other five measures are composite measures which reflect responses to a group of items.

Higher-order Participation in higher-order forms of

Thinking thinking

General Learning Development of general competencies

Outcomes

General Development Development of general forms of individual

Outcomes and social development

Average Average overall grade so far in course

Overall Grade

DepartureNon-graduating students' intentions on not returning to study in the following year

Overall Students' overall satisfaction with their

Satisfaction educational experience

ACER further developed and validated the College Student Report before deploying it in Australia and New Zealand as the Student Engagement Questionnaire (SEQ). A range of new and redesigned items were included in the SEQ. Validation included focus groups, cognitive interviews, pilot testing and expert review. A range of psychometric and conceptual analyses were conducted. This work builds on the extensive validation in the USA of the College Student Report.

A critical feature of the SEQ is its foundation in empirically based theories of student learning. Items in the SEQ are based on findings from decades of research on the activities and conditions linked with high-quality learning. This foundation helps assure the educational importance of the phenomena measured by the instrument.

The SEQ will grow with further development of the AUSSE. Evolution of the instrument depends on evidence of the kinds of engagement that are linked with high-quality learning outcomes.

Staff Student Engagement Survey (SSES)

Overview of the SSES

The Staff Student Engagement Survey (SSES) complements the Australasian Survey of Student Engagement (AUSSE). In 2008, all institutions that participated in the AUSSE were invited to take part in the SSES. The SSES measures academics' expectations for student engagement in educational practices that have been linked empirically with high quality learning and development.

The SSES is a survey of academic staff about students. Technically, while academic staff are the respondents, the 'typical student' that they teach remains the 'unit of analysis'. The SSES focuses on:

- academics' perceptions of how often students engage in different activities
- the importance staff place on various areas of learning and development
- the nature and frequency of staff-student interactions
- how academics organise their time, both in and out of the classroom.

The SSES builds directly on the Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE), a survey that has been run by Indiana University's Center for Postsecondary Research since 2004. To date, around 100,000 academics from more than 485 universities have taken part in the FSSE.

Compared with student feedback, relatively little information from academic staff is collected in Australasian higher education. Such information can help:

- identify gaps between student engagement and staff expectations
- engage staff in discussions about student engagement
- provide information on staff awareness and perceptions of student learning
- enable benchmarking of staff responses across institutions.

The SSES is run as an online survey only. Emails inviting staff to take part in the survey are sent by each institution to their academic staff. Responses to the online survey are returned directly to ACER.

SSES reports follow those produced for the AUSSE. In summary, institutions are provided with a customised institution report containing staff response and norms (if possible given response characteristics), and a de-identified unit-record data file containing staff responses.

Ensuring the confidentiality of responses plays a critical role in assuring the validity of survey outcomes. Only de-identified data and reports are provided to institutions. Where respondent numbers are very small, the data are made anonymous, which includes the removal of demographic data.

The SSES adds a new student-focused perspective to the data available for evidence-based quality enhancement of university education in Australasia. SSES data can be used in a range of ways to enhance educational practice, some of which are summarised in the AUSSE Enhancement Guides.

Staff Student Engagement Questionnaire (SSEQ)

The SSES survey instrument is called the Staff Student Engagement Questionnaire (SSEQ). The SSEQ is based on the instrument used for the Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE) that has been run since 2004 by the Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research. Links between the two instruments, and between the SSEQ and the SEQ, provide a basis for benchmarking.

The structure and content of the SSEQ closely mirrors the Student Engagement Questionnaire (SEQ) that is used for the AUSSE. Results for most of the SSEQ items can be compared directly to those for the SEQ. Participating staff are to respond to questions about student engagement based on a 'typical first-year' or 'typical later-year' student that they have taught in the last two academic years.

The SSEQ is designed for online administration to academic staff in under 15 minutes. This same SSEQ form is used for all academic staff. The instrument contains items that tap a range of key educational phenomena. A selection of these items are grouped together to measure the six summary scales.

Academic Extent to which expectations and

Challenge assessments challenge students to learn

Active Students' efforts to actively construct their

Learning knowledge

Student and Level and nature of students' contact with

Staff Interactions teaching staff

Enriching Educational Participation in broadening educational

Experiences activities

Supportive Learning Feelings of legitimation within the

Environment university community

Work Integrated Integration of employment-focused work

Learning experiences into study

The SSEQ also captures staff perceptions on student outcomes, including higherorder thinking, general learning outcomes, general development outcomes and overall satisfaction.

The SSEQ was administered for the first time in 2008, prior to its deployment in Australia and New Zealand, ACER further developed and validated the FSSE instrument. A range of new and redesigned items were included. Validation has included pilot testing and expert review. A range of psychometric and conceptual analyses were conducted. This work builds on the extensive validation in the USA of the FSSE instrument.

A quality-assured approach

The research and enhancement cycle

The AUSSE survey methodology is designed to be valid, efficient and innovative. It deploys approaches which hitherto have been rarely, if ever, used in Australasian higher education research.

The AUSSE reflects a collaboration between participating institutions and ACER. While largely centrally managed by ACER, key activities are conducted by institutions.

Preparation for the AUSSE is led by ACER. It involves refining instruments and systems, securing any necessary approvals, liaising with participating institutions, drawing the student sample, and despatching materials to institutions. Participating institutions and the AUSSE Advisory Group play an important role in shaping key aspects of survey design and management.

The AUSSE is conducted according to the 2007 National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research¹ and the Australian Council for Educational Research Code of Ethics. ACER routinely collects sensitive test, evaluation and other data and has well established and tested procedures for protecting sensitive materials. Participating institutions are responsible for securing internal human research ethics or other approvals.

AUSSE fieldwork is designed to be efficient and produce valid results. It involves an iterative and multimodal approach, which is sequenced to maintain the momentum of student participation and survey returns. From late July to late August, materials are sent from institutions to students and staff, and completed responses are returned directly to ACER (paper forms via NZCER for New Zealand institutions). ACER prepares and analyses the AUSSE data, and produces the institutional and cross-institutional reports.

Interpreting, analysing and acting on survey results are the most significant components of the AUSSE. This institution report provides ideas for how institutions might use the data for quality enhancement and improvement. As with all data collections, it is important that AUSSE results are used in technically and educationally appropriate ways. The AUSSE is intended to provide a source of evidence for each institution's conversations about engagement.

A valid and efficient sample

Rather than a census of all students, efficient and robust sampling strategies are used to identify students and staff who are invited to take part in the AUSSE and SSES. Stratified systematic sampling strategies are deployed to produce powerful, generalisable and representative estimates of first- and later-year student engagement. These sampling strategy are important, as they reduce the number of

¹ National Health and Medical Research Council, Australian Research Council, Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee (NHMRC, ARC, AVCC) (2007). *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research*. Canberra: Australian Government.

students and staff that need to be approached, and build in scientific techniques that help ensure the quality of results.

ACER's management of the sample provides assurance of the validity of AUSSE results. In summary, institutions supply ACER with a de-identified list of students in the target population. ACER validates this list, draws the sample, and returns the sampled list to institutions. Institutions re-attach student contact details to the list and prepare it for survey distribution. This same sampling process is repeated for the staff survey. This sample verification process, and the conversations that surround it, is a major form of quality assurance in the survey design and fieldwork. In 2008 it prevented administrative errors at participating institutions.

The target population for the AUSSE is not the same as the total Australasian higher education student population. In 2008, the target population included 83,720 first-year students and 83,735 later-year students, giving 167,455 students in total across the 29 institutions. In broad terms, this population consisted of:

- on-shore students in their first year of an undergraduate qualification who have not previously been involved in or completed a higher education qualification
- on-shore students in their third year of an undergraduate qualification who have completed around five full-time equivalent semesters of an undergraduate degree.

In 2008, different sample sizes were defined for different sizes of institution. Institution size was based on the number of domestic first-year students. Up to 2,500 first-year and later-year students were surveyed at institutions with 1,500 or less domestic first-year students. Up to 3,000 students were surveyed at institutions with between 1,500 and 5,000 domestic first-year students. Up to 3,500 students were surveyed at institutions with more than 5,000 domestic first-year students. A certain amount of oversampling is built into these specifications to reduce the need for complex follow-up of replacement samples. In addition, an oversampling option was provided in 2008 to assist with the generation of estimates for specific subgroups within the student population.

A total of 101,141 students at 29 institutions were invited to take part in the 2008 AUSSE. A small number of mail and email surveys were undeliverable and returned to ACER and institutions. The actual target population might be conservatively estimated to be around 100,500. A link to the online survey form was sent to all sampled students. The ACER sample design allowed for 69,100 students to also be sent a paper survey form.

For the AUSSE in 2008, a total of 25,633 usable responses were received prior to production of the final data file. This included 8,040 paper and 17,593 online responses. The random allocation of the three versions of the online instrument to sampled students ensured that roughly equal numbers completed each version (5,799, 5,685 and 6,109), reducing the impact of fatigue on data quality.

The sample design for the student collection included a target response rate of 20 per cent. The secured Australasian response rate, not adjusted for undeliverable

contacts, was 25.3 per cent. The response rate varied from around 11.8 per cent at one institution to 52.6 per cent at another. In total, 20 of the 29 institutions secured over the 20 per cent target response rate. The middle 70 per cent of institutions received response rates ranging between 18 and 31 per cent.

By way of comparison, the average institutional response rate in USA was 35 per cent for institutions using the same mix of online and paper surveying as in the AUSSE, with 70 per cent achieving response rates between 24 per cent and 49 per cent. Forty-seven Canadian institutions from nine provinces participated in NSSE 2008. The average Canadian institutional response rate for NSSE 2008 was 39 per cent, ranging between 17 per cent and 56 per cent for all institutions.

Post-stratification weighting is used to ensure that responses represent the target population. As possible given available information, AUSSE weights account for year level, attendance type, and respondent sex.

The target population for the SSES is not the same as the total Australasian higher education population of academic staff. In broad terms, it consists of: on-shore academic staff working in faculties with the exception of adjunct, casual or honorary staff. In 2008 the target population used for sampling purposes included 10,286 staff. Given complexities associated with the definition of staff roles within the population frame, it was necessary at one institution to supplement their population once fieldwork had commenced.

The sample size for the SSES was calculated by taking account of technical considerations, institutional requirements, analysis and reporting processes, and survey response contexts. In summary, depending on the number of staff to be surveyed, the design sought to secure responses from either 225 staff (based on a survey of 750) or 450 staff (based on a survey of 1,500 staff). These yields assume a 30 per cent response rate. It is preferable to secure responses from at least 50 per cent of academic staff if there are fewer than 750 at an institution.

The sample design for the SSES included a target response rate of 30 per cent. The secured Australasian response rate, not adjusted for undeliverable contacts, was 28.4 per cent. The response rate varied from around 11.5 per cent at one institution to 44.8 per cent at another. In total, responses were secured from 30 per cent of sampled staff at five of the ten participating institutions.

Like the student collection, post-stratification weighting is used to ensure that responses represent the target population. As possible given available information, the SSES data is weighted by level and sex.

As with all large-scale surveys, the AUSSE offers indicative rather than definitive evidence of the phenomena being measured. Results should be treated with caution, especially when respondent sample sizes are small.





Overview

It is critical that AUSSE results are interpreted in educationally and technically appropriate ways. The AUSSE makes use of weights to help ensure the representativeness of sample estimates. These weights adjust, as appropriate given data constraints, for year level, attendance type and respondent sex. Six key reports summarise different aspects of students' perceptions of their engagement with university education.

Key reports

Executive summary

A high-level overview of key institutional results – included in the

front of this report.

Respondent characteristics

Summary information on response, student and course

characteristics.

Response categories

The weighted per cent of responses to the different response categories of all survey items on the Student Engagement Questionnaire (SEQ) and the Staff Student Engagement

Questionnaire (SSEQ), where applicable. Results are provided for first-year and later-year students at your institution, and for several

comparison groups.

Item statistics

Weighted means that summarise item results. Results are provided for first-year and later-year students at your institution and for several comparison groups. Staff results are shown where applicable. This report includes a 'traffic light' report that summarises results that are above or below average.

Scale statistics

Weighted means that summarise scale results. Results are provided for first-year and later-year students at your institution, for staff where applicable, and for several comparison groups.

Subgroup statistics

Weighted means are reported of summary AUSSE scale statistics for key student subgroups and comparison groups. It is important to note that the 2008 AUSSE has been designed to provide results that represent the engagement of first-year and later-year students. While results for subgroups are presented, they may not be as reliable as the year level estimates and should be treated with caution.

Further information

This selection of reports presents key survey results. AUSSE data can be analysed and reported in many different ways. Data files are provided to institutions via a secure ACER website to facilitate further analysis and reporting.















Evidence-based quality improvement

As experience in the USA has shown, 'student engagement' provides a practical lens for addressing the significant dynamics, constraints and opportunities facing higher education institutions. The lens provides key insights into what students are actually doing, a structure for framing conversations about quality, and a stimulus for guiding new thinking into practice.

Developing strategies to use engagement data for continuous quality improvement is an important part of the AUSSE. Information about student engagement can play a valuable role in enhancing the quality of higher education, if only by stimulating conversations about how students engage in high-quality learning or exposing students and teaching staff to lists of good learning practices.

Institutions must make informed, professional decisions about what particular student engagement data they will act on and about how to take necessary action. The following AUSSE Enhancement Guides present a range of ideas to help institutions make the most use of their AUSSE data and results.

As these AUSSE Enhancement Guides suggest, student engagement information can be used to provide information to potential students, for internal and external quality assurance activities, to help academic staff target their teaching, to understand how students are interacting with institutional resources, to inform employers about student characteristics and growth, and to manage particular student cohorts. Most importantly, understanding student involvement can be used to attract, engage and retain students in university education.

A growing resource

Collecting and documenting information about how institutions are using student engagement information is a new and ongoing process. We would very much like to hear about how you are using your AUSSE data so that we can share best practice across Australia and New Zealand.

If you would like to send us specific examples of reports or brochures highlighting AUSSE data, usage strategies, and particular activities you have undertaken in relation to improving student engagement, please use our contact details below. These examples will form a free, shared resource for universities and assist in our continuing efforts to improve the quality of the undergraduate experience for all students.

Please email <u>ausse@acer.edu.au</u> or send hard copy material to the following postal address: AUSSE, ACER, Private Bag 55, Camberwell, 3124, Victoria, Australia.







Australasian Survey of Student Engagement



