UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA

Background and Context

The University of Melbourne is a high ranking institution and with a strong brand both domestically and internationally. The growing reputation has resulted in a sharp growth in enrolments over the past five years. The estate's properties and facilities are expanding to accommodate new students and staff. Recent additions include the new Arts West Building, the Melbourne School of Design, the Life Sciences Building, and currently in development, a new student hub.

The nationally run student experience survey (Quality in Learning and Teaching Indicators) showed that since enrolments have increased, some elements of student experience at the University have been on a slow but consistent decline. With so many projects and developments occurring across the campus, the executive realised the need for better tracking and management of student experience. They wanted to ensure that all students have an outstanding experience as part of the university community.

What was apparent with this project is a common issue across campuses, properties and facilities. Planning occurs in pockets. Buildings and precincts are designed well, but don't always consider the campus as a whole ecosystem. The university could see, however, that gathering feedback systematically and across the whole campus, would lead to better-informed planning. This is a co-creation approach that enables the student voice to be integrated into the campus design (rather than a dominant faculty).

"First life, then spaces, then buildings - the other way around never works"

Jan Gehl

Project and methodology

This project was designed to:

- Inform capital budget allocation for campus improvements
- Understand how experience varies between faculties and campus locations
- Expand how consultation occurs on the campus and facility upgrades from small project-specific groups to the whole campus
- Reinforce assumptions on what is needed to create a vibrant campus experience with empirical evidence
- Create metrics that can be used to benchmark and monitor experience across the different University of Melbourne campuses
- Develop specific projects and KPIs that can integrate into existing campus strategies

The Arts West building at Parkville

Starting with the main Parkville campus and extending to include the performing arts campus at Southbank, the project engaged 1000 students to give feedback about the physical campus environments.

The online Campus Experience Index (sample on following page) was the main tool for data collection. To complement this on both campuses a small group of students were recruited for an experience mapping project.

At Parkville we undertook additional analysis to understand what students liked and disliked across informal study spaces, and their decision making process when choosing a space to study. At Southbank the focus turned to the whole experience, from arrival to departure. Both of these smaller projects gave rich insights with over a hundred images and comments sent in which were analysed.

Our steps in creating an experience centric campus

Step 1: Experience evaluation
Using our trademark tools and processes, we rate and assess the experience of users across your campus or campuses.

Step 2: Gap analysis and benchmark
We analyse the thousands of data points collected, and make comparisons to others campuses. This helps us determine key performance gaps.

Step 3: Campus uplift strategy
The data tells a story from which we advise where you should be spending money on campus to deliver a better experience.

Step 4: Check in
We help you stay in touch with changes year on year, monitor the return from your investments and adjust planning to remain experience centric.

Results

The image on the following page is a sample of some data from the Campus Experience Index which was used at the University of Melbourne to determine how students rate and perceive the following:

- Journey and arrival to campus
- Teaching and learning spaces
- Informal study spaces
- Social, relax and rejuvenate spaces
- Wayfinding and accessibility
- Information technology on campus
- Community and belonging
- Eating experience
- Safety on campus
- Student support service facilities
- Fitness and recreation facilities

Comparisons were made between the campus to understand experience deficits. Post-Covid recovery this work will expand to the other Melbourne campuses to establish an institutional benchmark for campus experience which can be monitored annually.

To communicate this information, we delivered a scorecard of results and then more detailed breakdowns of the results in each area. Wherever possible, we provide very site specific feedback (down to a particular room). This approach enables clients to integrate findings into capital planning and maintenance.

Campus Experience Index - data sample

	Campus yr 1	Benchmark
Teaching spaces	73%	🟢
Library areas	71%	🟢
Informal Study spaces	59%	🔴
Eating experience	61%	🟠
Safety on campus	58%	🔴
Community & belonging	75%	🟢
Information technology	34%	🔴
Wayfinding & accessibility	46%	🟠
Journey & arrival	60%	🔴
Rest & relaxation spaces	80%	🟢

Student feedback by buildings (negative and positive)

Building 213
Building 345
Building 212
Building 206
Building 423
Building 327
Building 501
Building 123
Building 127
Building 301

-80 — +170

Safety perception: Variation between groups

Males
Females
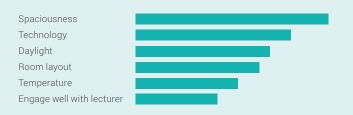International
Domestic

What adds or detracts from safety on campus? (313 comments)
+ Security presence and clear protocols
+ Security phones and signage around campus
+/- Security escorts, but not always available
- Low lighting on thoroughfares between library, Car Parks A-C and walkway to park east of campus

Characteristics of high-quality teaching stock on campus

Spaciousness
Technology
Daylight
Room layout
Temperature
Engage well with lecturer

The rich data from students included thousands of comments which were analysed to understand what adds to, and detracts from their student experience. Some of these results included:

» Variations across buildings and teaching spaces, highlighting specific teaching spaces requiring priority upgrades as well as small tweaks to elevate the learning experience
» Over-crowding in informal study spaces and considerations for the design of new spaces to attract students and alleviate load on the library facilities
» Changes to ease the wayfinding experience, in particular around the many construction sites currently on campus
» Emerging safety themes to consider on opening of the new rail stop at the south of the campus
» Deficits in eating experience across both campuses, including kitchen amenity, cafés and other eating venues
» Barriers preventing students from spending longer on campus, and forming stronger bonds with their fellow students (these included spatial but also social barriers)
» Areas of over and under supply for casual seating indoors and outdoors, and which types of furniture are needed in these areas
» Barriers and enablers in the use of sport and recreation facilities
» Where students are travelling from, how long it takes them to get to campus, and how this travel and arrival process impacts their overall experience

Outcomes and application

The findings of the first stages of the project resulted in:

• Allocation of 6.5 million in capital at targeted campus uplift activities, including refurbishment of spaces identified by students
• Review of design guidelines to integrate student experience data, ensuring spaces are human centric supporting the best possible learning and campus experience
• Development of 10 campus experience objectives for use within properties and facilities, and in corporate strategy to set targeted and consistent projects across campuses
• Agreement to expand and benchmark all Melbourne campuses to ensure a high and consistent level of experience

"Being an exchange student, I wasn't sure what to expect, but I have met so many people, and am treated no differently than any other student. I love the atmosphere on campus, and really feel like I belong here."

"This is probably my favourite study place! Its quiet, not too full, toilet and water fountain nearby. It can get a little warm though but it is winter right now"

"I love this place because I can sit, eat and talk with my friends. We are on a break between intense learning sessions. I can also buy food outside and bring here to eat before studying. I wish there was a small kitchenette here to heat up my food"

CAMPUS INTUITION