PROJECT 1: Preferences Behaviour Research

To get more people to choose Western Sydney University

To achieve this objective, the focus of this research was to gain an in-depth understanding of how students make decisions about course and university - uncovering insights about the triggers and barriers to people choosing Western Sydney University.

These insights are now being used to develop a behavioural strategy for encouraging more people to choose Western Sydney University.
The research approach

Discovery phase
- Review of existing research
- Stakeholder interviews (n = 8)
- Discovery workshop with stakeholders to finalise research design and concepts for testing

Online self-ethnography
with High School and University students in Greater Western Sydney (n = 61)
Self-ethnography conducted over 7 days (1st May – 7th May 2017)
- High school students: 20
- WSU 1st year school leavers: 9
- WSU 1st year non-school leavers: 8
- WSU 2nd year at 1PSQ: 4
- Other university students: 20

Contextual interviews
with High School and University students in Greater Western Sydney (n = 18)
90 minute interviews in home/at university
27th April – 15th May 2017
- High school students: 6
- WSU students: 6
- Other university students: 6

A journey from dreams to economic realities

Thinking about the future takes different forms at different ages as anchors and reference points change.

Early anchoring to an exciting ideal or identity.
Discovery of objectively valued abilities and limitations.
HSC decisions further shape future possibility.

A journey from “who I would like to be” towards “what do I need to do?” – a journey from great certainty to uncertainty before final decisions are made.
Through our exploration of student’s retrospective journeys and prospective students’ hypothetical preferences, we discovered that there is no formula for choosing a course and university.

The decision making process is not sequential and linear.

I found it very confusing. A lot of thought went into it and I talked to a lot of people. But I kind of didn’t know what I was going to choose until I put my preferences down. So I was in the dark the whole time, there wasn’t a clear process. It was very serendipitous, I was just hoping that something would come to me.

M, HS (Gov’t), lower WSU enrolment

Rather, there are a number of key influences that impact their decisions in different ways.

These influences orbit around the individual throughout their decision making journey and have varied influence at different points along their journey.
These factors don’t have equal weight – some are more influential than others

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<td>Existing university students</td>
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<th>Key factors considered</th>
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Reputation of the university and mum were the most influential for students.

Seven factors that contribute to reputation – these factors are both inputs and outputs to reputation

These factors then become levers that can be pulled to shift WSU’s reputation.
Given that students’ current framing for the role of university is to get a job, salience needs to be given to the polished and finished article of students who graduate from WSU.

Looking at the factors that contribute to reputation, the anchors for WSU are of low ATAR, lower quality and easy to get into

High school student first thoughts about each of the universities

Other universities (particularly UNSW and UTS) Western Sydney University

Is planning on being the CEO of Microsoft. M, SL, ATAR >75, MQ

He is seen dressed casually in a pair of jeans and a t-shirt this demonstrates the casual feeling of the university. M, HS (Gov’t), higher WSU enrolment

Looking at the factors that contribute to reputation, the anchors for WSU are of low ATAR, lower quality and easy to get into

High school student first thoughts about each of the universities

Macquarie University Western Sydney University
Once students are at WSU, many of them realise the reputation is not reflective of their actual experiences at university

I don't know how everyone else felt going into WSU in terms of preconceived prejudice but throughout my high school it was always said to be almost like a last resort, so I would encourage year 12 students to ignore that as it is a great university for many different fields... The quality of my classes definitely made me think WSU was a much higher standard than what most of my high school thought and the support systems throughout.

F, SL, ATAR>75, WSU

Now I'm here, at first I decided when I got here, I'd transfer, but now that I've been here I don't want to transfer anymore... I do have friends who go to UTS, and when I asked about where they're up to and what they're doing it seems like we're so much more far ahead and we're going into much more detail than they are and one thing I love about this Uni is it's making sure that by the time we leave we will know everything... when I finally decided to go to western Sydney my goal was that when I finished here I would do something that would make this Uni not be looked at as 'Western Sydney you're lower', but 'wow!'.

F, SL, ATAR>75, WSU

And once you grow that understanding that that this is an institution that caters specifically to what you are after, the whole stigma just dissolves and it's something that you really realise as soon as you enter the campus for the first time... I only go with what I've experienced, what I've been through and everything that I have been through up until this point has only been positive, beyond positive, just has surprised me in a lot of respects on how easy it is that people are there for you and how the institution is there for you...

M, SL, ATAR>75, WSU

For a few students, the support offered by Western Sydney University was valued more than reputation, and this was also a key distinction in the experience of students at WSU

I chose this over my other options because of the support being offered at the university. Things such as free textbooks for the first year, and travel grants and scholarships were being offered which appealed to me.

F, SL, ATAR>75, WSU

I read that in previous years students conducted a survey about what they wanted changed in the Uni and from there, the Uni found that students complained about textbooks being another expense for students. As a result my first year textbooks are all completely free. This is probably the best example of what I mean when I say student centred learning. WSU understands the struggles of the average Uni student. Students have extremely updated facilities, free textbooks for the first year and I think the ability to download Microsoft Office for several devices all of which WSU isn’t required to do, but it really enriches the experience, compared to Uni’s that don’t do the same things.

M, SL, ATAR>75, WSU

No other students at any of the other universities talked about the support they receive at university.
Similarly, the new Parramatta CBD campus creates pride in WSU

The campus is honestly amazing! My primary campus is Parramatta City Campus, and it’s so inspiring, the design and facilities that are state of the art. The class structure including the screens and the collaborative learning spaces make it such a rewarding experience that can’t be appreciated at Parramatta South Campus from my experience.

F, SL, ATAR > 75, WSU

Amazing - it’s actually amazing! I had Uni this evening actually and I thought to myself how much more convenient it is and how much I loved going there. The technology is NEXT LEVEL. The design is fantastic… I actually feel a lot less stressed going to uni part-time now because of the ease of access and I plan to do more units next semester because of this.

F, NCSL, ATAR > 75, WSU

“this is spot on. The campus IS amazing and is conducive to learning and teaching and collaborating. Use this!”

F, NCSL, ATAR > 75, WSU

“I would really like to go WSU.” A ‘flexible and responsive learning experience’ really stood out for me.

F, HS (Ind), higher WSU enrolment

A behavioural strategy for attracting more students to Western Sydney University

Build new anchors for WSU

Build a positive image and frame the identity of the WSU student

Making Western Sydney University memorable for different and more positive things

Target communications through the right channels

Make it easy for people to choose and go to Western Sydney University
Western Sydney University Builds Success
Western Sydney University will take you to a successful future

- Better than 97% of universities in the world
- 45,000 students choose Western Sydney University
- Achievable, aspirational jobs visible after university
- Positive image of WSU student
- Industry Links with reputable organisations

Before university
Communicate things about the University that motivates people to go there

At university
Reinforcing and building advocacy for the University through existing students

Building Western Sydney University’s Reputation

DEFINING THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE
Insights by Journey Stage
PROJECT 2: Defining the Student Experience

To define the optimum Student Experience

To define the ideal WSU Student Experience (SX) ensuring that WSU attracts, engages, educates and retains the right students. A key focus is on understanding the significant moments of truth where key decisions around Institution selection, course choice and continuance are made.

These insights are now being used to inform design of the target state Student Experience.

The research approach

Discovery phase
- Review of existing research
- Stakeholder interviews
- Initiation workshop with stakeholders to finalise research design

Contextual interviews
with Western Sydney University students, parents, agents and Careers Advisors (n = 140)
60 minute interviews in home/at university
24 April to 27 May 2017
- WSU students: 108 (Dom/Intl/UG/PG/College)
- Parents: 12
- Agents: 2
- Careers Advisors: 18
A campus close to home is a defining consideration.

A campus that is close to home has a significant impact on student’s decision about where to attend university. A sense that “people like me” go there is also an important factor.

I just looked at universities close by that offered high school teaching.

WSU is close to home, I didn’t even consider going anywhere else.

I considered going to Macquarie, but WSU is closer to home.
The whole ‘you need to go to a sandstone uni to get a good job’ thing is looking a bit fragile.

There is a ‘WSU as a fall back’ sentiment that is driven by a history of low entry requirements. But it is not a primary consideration. Having another family member or friend endorse WSU after studying here helps build confidence in the choice.

A major influencer was my cousin who had studied here. She said it was just as good to go to WSU.

I can’t see how WSU would disadvantage me in any way. UNSW boasts good internship connections, but WSU is really involved in developing those business and community networks.

WSU doesn’t have a reputation or legacy like the sandstone Universities, and that’s a good thing.

How do we leverage our differences to increase our attractiveness?

The College pathway is not a speed bump. It gives students an edge.

Beyond access to uni for low or no ATAR students, College helps them build the clarity and commitment they need to succeed. By instilling discipline and focus through course load and teacher attention, it is much more than a wayside stop.

I thought what am I going to do now? A gap year was an option. TAFE was too but its courses that suited me were limited.

It was an extremely good experience at College. Going straight to uni would have been more daunting.

How do we help low ATAR students in high school? And succeed at uni?
Once students have applied, they enter a tense waiting game. The anxiety about what they will do if they don’t get a place is wiped out by the offer. An early offer is a golden ticket giving students a head start to prepare for university.

It was nerve wracking. Just getting an offer made me happy.

I was so excited when it sunk in. I got no offers from anywhere else, so it felt like winning the lottery.

UAC is fairly straightforward. I waited for a while, I didn’t realise I got in. I didn’t get a letter so I called and found out 2 weeks before the start.
The complexity of the enrolment process means students need to seek help.

Students find enrolment complicated and they need help to complete it. An online system laden with jargon, confusing subject and unit selections and the number of choices and steps all combine to overwhelm them. But it gets easier.

I couldn’t do it after 3 times on my own so I asked my brother to help and he just did it for me.

I had to call Student Central to understand how. There were so many links and the process was back and forward.

It was not very clear when I had actually finished Enrolling or not. There were 7-8 steps and you had to go back and forward.

How do we simplify enrolment and retain flexibility?
ENROL | ALL STUDENTS

It’s hard to balance the timetable against other commitments.

When students select their classes they prefer to consolidate their time on campus. This desire is motivated by their need to work, commitments to family and other interests and their preference to minimise the commute time.

I travel more than two hours to get to uni on class days. I don’t want to come in more than I have to.

I really wanted to fit work into my week, even though Uni was the priority.

When I was putting my timetable together I didn’t want to shake up my life too much.

It’s hard to balance the timetable against other commitments.

ENROL | ALL STUDENTS

When students are overwhelmed, Student Central is a welcome lifeline.

While getting to know university systems Student Central is a valued lifeline. Online chat and step-by-step guides help, but there is no replacing a friendly and helpful voice for those who feel lost in unfamiliar terrain.

The help staff that I called, they were the best, they knew exactly what I was asking them.

Lots of personal assistance available, from people who knew what they were doing.

I was frustrated with the process. Student Central are very helpful but everyone was calling them at the same time so it was hard to get through.

How do we provide single point personalised service at scale?
For many students university is now transactional.

University holds a specific place in student’s lives. Like a job, they commute, study and go home. They treat the course they buy more as a service to be consumed.

I go to class then leave. We are all busy with work as well so everyone leaves.

Here in the the CBD campus you come for lectures and leave. But I think it is actually easier to learn here, more teaching interactions and longer tutorials.

The corporate campus looks like work, but will that just make the school-university transition more difficult?

Careers Advisor

How do we make university more than transactional?
STUDY | ALL STUDENTS

Technology is not considered a replacement for face-to-face classes.

Students expect recordings of lectures and value them as a safety net and study aid. However, face-to-face classes are essential to help them learn and for engagement with their professors and other classmates.

In class you hear different student views and perspectives. Really helps to get to know what other people think.

The whole course is online, so I setup a facebook group to organise face-to-face study time with classmates.

How do we create a high-tech, high-touch, high-quality student experience?

STUDY | INTERNATIONAL

Failure is scary for everyone but even more so for international students.

No one sets out to fail their course. However international students face additional barriers. In particular, convincing their parents to fund moving countries to study and the potential visa impact of failure amp up the pressure.

How do we set students up for success?
STUDY | DISCONTINUED

‘Didn’t fit’ is the number one reason students discontinue their course.

On the student side, the decision to discontinue a course is not taken on a whim.

The most commonly cited reason is “fit” – the commute was too long, the course wasn’t what they thought it would be, or they had a change of heart about their career direction.

I just couldn’t see myself doing it. And I am not going to waste time and money on something I am not really interested in.

I got an idea of what was in the course but I just wasn’t ready. My parents really wanted me to go to uni but it was overwhelming.

I’d already enrolled for the masters and then the day came to start and just decided I really didn’t want it.

OPPORTUNITY AREAS

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<tr>
<th>How do we make it easy to apply if you don’t know what you want to study?</th>
<th>How do we help students avoid limiting poor study choices if they don’t know what to study?</th>
<th>How do we make ATAR irrelevant?</th>
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<td>How do we partner with local families to promote WSU to overseas relatives?</td>
<td>How do we ease the path for international students? (uni, visa, PR)</td>
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<td>How do we reposition College from a backdoor to a valid entry option?</td>
<td>How do we make it easier for post graduate students to fit study in with different stages of family life?</td>
<td>How do we deliver exceptional graduate outcomes?</td>
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**TURNING INSIGHTS INTO INNOVATION**

Building on strengths with a future state student experience that has students firmly at its centre.

**CREATING ADVOCACY DRIVEN REPUTATION**

Delivering differentiated offerings and outstanding, best in sector student experience will enable advocacy-driven reputation build to occur.